M.A. Semester – II
HISTORY

Course Code: HIST 221
Course Credit: 06 (Core)

History of Early India
(up to c. AD 1200)

Units: 1 to 20

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New CBCS Syllabus
History of Early India (up to *c.* AD 1200)
Core Course-HIST 221
Semester Second

Course Description

The course will analyse and evaluate the historiography and sources used for writing history of ancient and early medieval India. Particularly, the key interpretations stemming from historians' use of such sources shall be studied. The course will provide a detailed study and analysis of the institutional and political aspects of the subcontinent during ancient past of India. It is aimed to bring out a comprehensive idea of the period in terms of what forces formed the state and polity of the time as a phenomenon across the subcontinent. The proliferation of state society, and political and administrative structures will also be discussed. Understanding of the trans-regional political connections of the subcontinent with Central and South East Asia will also be focused upon. The course also intends to give a brief idea about the different sources and the changing interpretations of ancient & early medieval Indian history.

Course Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to

a. Conceptualize the historical processes through which different forms of political systems in ancient and early medieval India formed
b. Appreciate the evolution of the State in Indian history
c. Demonstrate broad knowledge of historical events of the period and its significance
d. Assess the emergence of regional political entities and powers in early medieval India
e. Assess the transition from early historical to early medieval and the nature of polity and state during early medieval period.
f. Use of the primary literary sources for historical and political interpretation

Unit-I

1. Geographical background, survey of sources: Literary, archaeology and foreign accounts

2. State and polity: Vedic and later-Vedic phase, transition to State/Mahajanapadas, Mauryan political structure and administration, state and statecraft in Kautilya's Arthusastra, nature of dhamma, decline

3. History in the deep south: Sangam literature, new notion of kingship, Chola, Pandya and Chera in Tamilakam

Unit-II

4. Central Asian contact and mutual impact: Political setting in the north-west India, rise of the power of Indo-Greeks, Shakas, Parthians and Kushan empire

5. Sunga, Kanav and Satavahana dynasties; nature of Satavahana state: Administrative structure of the state during Satavahana

6. Imperial Guptas: Political background, expansion, consolidation, administration and the disintegration/invasion of Humas

Unit-III

7. Vakatakas of Deccan and their administration, Maukharis and Yasodharman of Kanauj, and Karkota of Kashmir

8. Harshavardhan and changing political scenario in north India, literary activities of Harshavardhan, relation with Pulakeshin II, decline of Harsh's empire

9. Kingdoms in the Deccan and south: Political situation, rise of the Chalukyas, Pallavas and Pandyas, conflicts, administration and polity

Unit-IV

10. Transition to early medieval India: Changing perspectives, emergence of Rajputs: Debates on origin, proliferation of Rajput clans and their political & military system

11. Rise of the Gurjara-Pratiharas, tripartite struggle, emergence of Rashtrakutas: Administration and polity 12. Cholas in Southeast Asia, state and administration

Essential Readings

English:

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- Thapar, Romila. *The Past Before Us: Historical Traditions of Early North India*. Ranikhet: Permanent Black & Ashoka University, 2016.
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- Hindi:
- Alankar, Jaichandra. *Bharatiya Itihas ki Roop-rekha*. Allahabad: Hindustani Academy, 1949. .
- Chatterjee, Gaurishankar. *Harshvardhan*. Allahabad: Hindustani Academy, 1938.
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Unit-1

Geographical Background, Survey of Sources: Literary, Archeology and Foreign Accounts

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1.1 Introduction

History is the study of human actions that have brought significant changes to human life. It explores various aspects of human existence. To understand the history of human life, we rely on different sources, which are categorized into two types: primary and secondary.

Primary sources provide direct information about past events, such as the *Arthashastra* and *Ashtadhyayi*. Secondary sources, on the other hand, are interpretations or analyses based on primary sources. While there are numerous sources for ancient Indian history, it is essential to use them carefully, as they may contain some unreliable information alongside valuable historical insights.

The *Rajatarangini* by Kalhana is considered the first chronological history of the Indian subcontinent. In this unit, we will explore the various types of historical sources.

1.2 Learning Objectives

After studying this unit, the learner will be able to:

● Understand about the Geographical background of India

● Understand the various types of sources.

● Discuss about the changing interpretation of Ancient Indian History.

1.3 Geographical Background

The Indian subcontinent took shape as a distinct geographical entity around 40 million years ago. Initially, peninsular India was part of the southern supercontinent, Gondwanaland, alongside Antarctica, Africa, Arabia, and South America. Earlier, Gondwanaland, together with Laurisia—the northern supercontinent comprising North America, Greenland, Europe, and much of Asia north of the Himalayas—formed a single landmass known as Pangaea. As tectonic activity increased, Gondwanaland and Laurisia separated. Over time, various regions, including peninsular India, broke away from Gondwanaland, a process that began approximately 225 million years ago. By around 40 million years ago, India had become an independent landmass and continued moving northward to merge with the Eurasian continent between 58 and 37 million years ago.

India's northern boundary, the Himalayas, is relatively young in geological terms. The formation of the Himalayas occurred in four distinct phases, with the final uplift taking place during the Pleistocene epoch, around 2 million to 12,000 BCE. These towering mountains played a crucial role in shaping the Indo-Gangetic plains, as their rivers deposited alluvial soil across the region. Covering an area of approximately 4,202,500 square kilometers, the Indian subcontinent is comparable in size to Europe, excluding Russia. It comprises five countries: India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, and Pakistan. India itself, home to nearly one billion people, consists of 28 states and 7 union territories, including the National Capital Territory of Delhi. Several Indian states surpass many European countries in size.

Role of the Monsoon

The Indian subcontinent, largely located within the tropical zone, is significantly influenced by the monsoon, which has shaped its history and agriculture. The southwest monsoon, active from June to October, brings varying amounts of rainfall across the region. In ancient times, agriculture primarily depended on monsoon rains rather than irrigation systems. The modern-day *kharif* crop in northern India originally relied on the southwest monsoon. During winter, western disturbances bring rainfall to northern India, supporting the cultivation of wheat, barley, and similar crops. Additionally, the coastal regions of Tamil Nadu receive most of their rainfall from the northeast monsoon, which occurs between mid-October and mid-December.

The discovery of monsoon wind patterns around the first century AD revolutionized trade. Traders from western Asia and the Mediterranean sailed to India and Southeast Asia using the southwest monsoon and returned with the northeast monsoon. This understanding of monsoon patterns facilitated cultural exchanges and trade between India, western Asia, the Mediterranean, and Southeast Asia.

Northern Boundaries

India's northern boundary is defined by the Himalayas, while seas border the country on the other three sides. The Himalayas act as a natural barrier, shielding northern India from the cold arctic winds originating from Siberia. This protection ensures a relatively warm climate throughout the year. The moderate winter conditions in the northern plains reduced the need for heavy clothing, allowing people to spend more time outdoors.

The Himalayas also served as a defense against invasions from the north, especially in pre-industrial times when communication and transportation were challenging. However, the northwestern region was accessible through the Sulaiman Mountain ranges, a southern extension of the Himalayas. These ranges could be crossed via the Khyber, Bolan, and Gomal passes. Southward, the Sulaiman ranges connected with the Kiarthar ranges in Baluchistan, traversable through the Bolan pass. These routes facilitated trade and cultural exchanges between India and Central Asia from prehistoric times onward.

Despite their formidable height, the Himalayas did not entirely isolate India. The Hindu Kush, an extension of the Himalayan system, did not form an impassable barrier between the Indus and Oxus river systems. These mountain passes enabled the movement of people, goods, and ideas between India, Central Asia, and West Asia.

Nestled within the Himalayas are the Kashmir and Nepal valleys, both of which developed unique cultural identities due to their geographical isolation. However, they remained accessible through multiple passes. Kashmir's cold winters led some inhabitants to migrate to the plains, while its pleasant summers attracted shepherds from the lowlands. This seasonal movement fostered economic and cultural exchanges between the plains and the valley.

Similarly, the Nepal valley, though smaller, maintained connections with the Gangetic plains through several passes. Both Kashmir and Nepal became significant centers of Sanskrit learning, preserving the largest collections of Sanskrit manuscripts.

The foothills of the Himalayas were easier to clear than the dense forests of the alluvial plains. Rivers in these regions were narrower, making them easier to cross. As a result, early agricultural settlements emerged along the foothills, and trade routes followed the *terai* region.

Rivers

India's historical heartland is defined by its major river systems, nourished by tropical monsoon rains. These include the Indus basin, the Indo-Gangetic divide, the Gangetic plains, and the Brahmaputra basin. Rainfall increases gradually from west to east, ranging from 25 cm to over 250 cm annually.

The vegetation in the Indus basin, sustained by 25 to 37 cm of rainfall, and the western Gangetic plains, receiving 37 to 60 cm of rainfall, could be cleared using stone and copper tools. However, the mid-Gangetic region, with 60 to 125 cm of rainfall, and the lower Gangetic and Brahmaputra regions, receiving 125 to 250 cm, required iron implements for land clearance. Consequently, early human settlements emerged in the less rainy western regions before expanding eastward.

Once cultivated, the Indo-Gangetic plains yielded abundant crops, supporting successive civilizations. The Indus and western Gangetic plains primarily produced wheat and barley, while the middle and lower Gangetic plains were known for rice cultivation, which later became a staple in Gujarat and southern India.

Key cultural developments followed the river systems. The Harappan civilization thrived in the Indus Valley, while Vedic culture originated in the northwestern region, including the Punjab and the western Gangetic basin. The post-Vedic culture, driven by the use of iron tools, flourished in the mid-Gangetic plains. The lower Gangetic valley and north Bengal gained prominence during the Gupta period, while the Brahmaputra valley in Assam rose to significance in early medieval times.

These fertile river valleys attracted powerful rulers, leading to frequent conflicts over their control. The Ganga-Yamuna *doab* was particularly contested due to its agricultural productivity and strategic importance.

Rivers also served as vital channels for trade and transportation. In ancient times, building roads was challenging, making waterways the primary means of moving goods and people. For instance, the stone pillars erected by Ashoka were transported across the country via rivers. This reliance on river transport continued well into the colonial period under the East India Company.

Beyond transportation, rivers enriched surrounding lands through periodic flooding, which deposited fertile alluvium. However, these floods also caused significant damage, destroying towns and villages and washing away ancient structures. Despite the risks, important cities such as Hastinapur, Prayag, Varanasi, and Pataliputra were established along riverbanks.

While modern cities often develop around railway junctions, industrial hubs, or mining zones, ancient towns primarily emerged along riverbanks and confluences.

Additionally, rivers and mountains often defined political and cultural boundaries. For example, the coastal region of Kalinga (modern Odisha) lay between the Mahanadi to the north and the Godavari to the south. Similarly, Andhra Pradesh was situated between the Godavari and Krishna rivers.

The deltaic plains formed by the Godavari and Krishna gained prominence during the early centuries of the Christian era, flourishing under the Satavahanas and their successors. Tamil Nadu was similarly demarcated, with the Krishna River to the north and the Kaveri to the south. The Kaveri valley extended southward to the Vaigai River and northward to the South Pennar River, forming a distinct geographical zone that became the heartland of Chola power around the beginning of the Christian era.

In contrast, northern Tamil Nadu, characterized by uplands, rose to prominence under the Pallavas between the fourth and sixth centuries. The eastern peninsula is bordered by the Coromandel Coast. Though flanked by the Eastern Ghats, these hills are relatively low, with multiple river-fed openings leading to the Bay of Bengal. Consequently, communication between the eastern coast and the interior regions of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu was relatively easy. Prominent port cities like Arikamedu, Mahabalipuram, and Kaveripattanam were located along the Coromandel Coast.

Western Peninsula and Central India

The western part of the peninsula lacks such well-defined geographical divisions. However, Maharashtra can be roughly delineated between the Tapi (or Damanganga) River to the north and the Bhima River to the south. Karnataka lies between the Bhima and the upper reaches of the Krishna River to the north and the Tungabhadra River to the south.

The Tungabhadra River historically served as a natural boundary between northern and southern powers. The Chalukyas of Badami and the Rashtrakutas struggled to extend their dominance south of the Tungabhadra, while the Pallavas and Cholas faced challenges in expanding northward.

The extreme southwestern coastal region, corresponding to modern Kerala, is bordered by the Malabar Coast. Despite the presence of several ports and small kingdoms, the Western Ghats, with their challenging passes, hindered communication between the coast and the interior regions of Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Kerala.

Between the Indus and Gangetic plains to the north and the Vindhya Mountains to the south lies a vast expanse of land divided by the Aravalli range. West of the Aravallis lies the Thar Desert, which rendered large-scale human settlement difficult in ancient times? However, scattered fertile oases supported small settlements, and camels facilitated desert crossings.

The southeastern part of Rajasthan, comparatively more fertile, became significant during the Chalcolithic period due to the presence of the Khetri copper mines. Rajasthan transitions into the fertile plains of Gujarat, nourished by the Narmada, Tapi, Mahi, and Sabarmati rivers.

Gujarat, located at the northwestern edge of the Deccan Plateau, includes the relatively arid Kathiawar Peninsula. Its indented coastline, ideal for harbors,

facilitated vibrant coastal and foreign trade. Consequently, Gujarat gained renown for its enterprising traders.

Central India

South of the Ganga-Yamuna *doab*, and bordered by the Chambal River to the west, the Son River to the east, the Vindhya Mountains, and the Narmada River to the south, lies the region corresponding to modern Madhya Pradesh. Its northern part consists of fertile plains, while the Vindhya-covered eastern region gained historical prominence during the Gupta period (4th–5th centuries).

Western Madhya Pradesh includes Malwa, a region of historical significance since the 6th century BCE. Malwa served as an essential hinterland for Gujarat's ports, leading to frequent conflicts between northern and Deccan powers for control over Malwa and Gujarat. The Shakas and the Satavahanas, for instance, clashed repeatedly over these territories.

Minerals and Other Resources

India's natural resources have significantly shaped its history. Before large-scale human settlements, heavy rainfall led to dense forests in the Indian plains, providing game, forage, fuel, and timber. In early times, timber was commonly used for constructing houses and palisades, as evidenced by findings in Pataliputra, India's first major capital. For construction and tool-making, India offered a variety of stones, including sandstone. The earliest human settlements naturally emerged in hilly regions and river valleys.

Historically, more temples and sculptures were crafted from stone in the Deccan and South India than in the northern plains. Copper, widely available in India, is richest in the Chhotanagpur plateau, especially in Singhbhum district, where a 130 km copper belt shows signs of ancient mining. The earliest users of copper implements in Bihar sourced copper from Singhbhum and Hazaribagh, with many copper tools found in south Bihar and parts of Madhya Pradesh. Rajasthan's Khetri mines also held rich copper deposits, exploited by both pre-Vedic and Vedic communities, with evidence dating back to around 1000 BC. Since copper was the first metal used, it became associated with purity, and copper utensils were commonly used in religious rituals.

Tin was scarce in ancient India and remains so today. Though traces were once found in Rajasthan, southern Madhya Pradesh, and Bihar, these deposits were nearly exhausted.   Since bronze is an alloy of copper and tin, prehistoric India saw limited bronze usage. The Harappans sourced some tin from Rajasthan but primarily relied on Afghanistan, resulting in fewer bronze tools than in Western Asia, Egypt, and Crete, with a lower tin content. Consequently, most of India did not experience a distinct Bronze Age. However, during the early centuries AD, trade with Myanmar and the Malay Peninsula, rich in tin, facilitated extensive bronze use, especially for South Indian religious statues. Tin for Pala-period bronzes in Bihar possibly came from Gaya, Hazaribagh, and Ranchi, where tin ores were smelted until the mid-19th century.

India has abundant iron ore deposits, especially in southern Bihar, eastern Madhya Pradesh, and Karnataka. Mastery of smelting techniques using bellows led to steel production, making iron essential for warfare, jungle clearance, and deep plowing. The rise of the first empire in Magadha (6th–4th centuries BC) was significantly driven by the region's iron availability. Iron also contributed to Avanti's emergence as a major kingdom, with Ujjain as its capital, during the 6th and 5th centuries BC. The Satavahanas and other southern dynasties likely used the iron ores of Andhra and Karnataka. Andhra was also rich in lead, explaining the abundance of lead coins during the Satavahana rule in Andhra and Maharashtra during the first two centuries AD, with possible additional lead sources in Rajasthan.

Silver, though scarce, was used for the earliest punch-marked coins. Ancient silver mines existed, particularly in the Kharagpur hills of Monghyr district, mentioned as late as Akbar's reign. This explains the white metal found in early punch-marked coins from Bihar.

Gold dust, carried by Himalayan river streams, was collected from placer deposits in river channels. Gold was also found in Karnataka's Kolar goldfields, with traces dating back to around 1800 BC. However, its large-scale exploitation began only in the second century AD. Kolar later became the earliest capital of the Gangas of south Karnataka. In early times, much of India's gold came from Central Asia and the Roman Empire, leading to regular use of gold coins during the first five centuries AD. Once external supplies dwindled, local resources proved insufficient, causing gold coins to become rare.

India also produced various precious stones, including pearls, especially in central India, Orissa, and southern India. These gemstones were highly valued in trade and were eagerly sought by the Romans in the early Christian era.

Self-Check Exercise-1

Q.1   What natural barrier protects India from the cold Arctic winds blowing from Siberia?

Q.2   Where did we find the first known instance of the use of

Iron in India?

Q.3   What type of crop is mainly produced in the mid-ganetic plains and the lower Gangetic plains?

1.4 Sources of Ancient Indian History

Ancient Indian History is richly documented through a variety of sources that provide insights into its cultural, social, political, and economic developments. These sources can broadly be categorized into literary, archaeological, and numismatic sources.

1.4.1 Literary/written Sorces

The literary/written sources store construct Ancient Indian history can be among three categories, (i) Religious, (ii) Secular and (iii) Scientific. It also comprised of some different kinds of sources like (iv) Sangam Literature and (v) travelogues of foreign travellers.

1.4.2 Religious Sources

Religion was the foundation of ancient societies, and India was no exception. Consequently, a vast collection of religious literature from various faiths flourished in ancient India. These texts not only provide insight into religious beliefs but also shed light on the socio-economic aspects, political thought, and ideology of the period. However, historians must approach these sources with caution. Many religious texts were preserved through oral traditions before being transcribed centuries after their original composition. Additionally, the versions available today are often edited adaptations of the original writings. Furthermore, religious literature was primarily composed with an idealistic perspective, serving as guides on moral conduct rather than as records of historical events. Works like the Puranas, despite being written from the 4th century AD onwards, often present themselves as having been composed a thousand years earlier and make predictions extending far into the future. Through internal and external criticism, historians can critically analyze these texts to reconstruct the history of ancient India.

Vedic/Hindu Canonical Literature

The religious texts of Vedic/Hindu traditions include the four Vedas, Brahmanas, Aranyakas, Upanishads, Shad-darshanas, Shad-angas, Sutras, Smritis, and Puranas. These texts serve as valuable sources for understanding the religious and cultural developments of ancient India, particularly from the 8th to 6th centuries BC.

(a) The Vedas

The Aryans composed four Vedas: Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda, and Atharvaveda. The term "Veda" originates from the Sanskrit root "Vid," meaning "to know," and these texts were primarily collections of prayers dedicated to nature-based deities. Aryans believed the Vedas were not created by humans but were "heard" by sages, hence termed "Shrutis" and "A-pourusheya" (not of human origin). The Vedas are also called "Samhitas."

    Rigveda: The oldest of the four Vedas, it consists of 10 mandalas and 1,028 hymns (suktas) addressed to deities like Indra, Varuna, Agni, Parjanya, Vayu,

and Marut. It provides significant insights into the socio-economic, religious, and political life of early Aryans in the Sapta-Sindhu region. The Purushsukta hymn in the 10th mandala describes the origin of the Varna system.

- **Yajurveda:** This Veda contains prayers recited during sacrificial rituals (yajnas), with much of its content drawn from the Rigveda. It is categorized into two sections: Shukla and Krishna, along with six additional samhitas. The Vajasaneyi Samhita provides detailed explanations of various Vedic sacrifices.
- **Samaveda:** Focusing on the correct recitation of hymns during rituals, the Samaveda draws extensively from the Rigveda and serves as the foundation of Indian classical music.
- **Atharvaveda:** This Veda covers diverse subjects, including spells, charms, superstitions, early medical practices, botany, and surgery. It offers valuable insights into the evolving lifestyle of the Vedic Aryans as they expanded eastward and interacted with other communities.

(b) Brahmanas

The Brahmanas explain the rituals and procedures for Vedic sacrifices. Each Veda has an associated Brahmana:

- **Rigveda:** Aitareya Brahmana
- **Samaveda:** Jaiminiya Brahmana
- **Yajurveda:** Shatapatha Brahmana
- **Atharvaveda:** Gopath Brahmana
  These texts also discuss social institutions like the four Varnas, Ashramas, and philosophical ideas.

(c) Aranyakas

Known as "forest texts," the Aranyakas emphasize the philosophical and mystical aspects of Vedic teachings, particularly sacrifices. The Aitareya Aranyaka is linked with the Rigveda, while the Taittiriya Aranyaka corresponds to the Yajurveda.

(d) Upanishads

The term "Upanishad" means "to sit near the teacher," symbolizing the transmission of spiritual knowledge. These texts explore themes such as self-realization, God, the universe, and human existence. Traditionally, there are 108 Upanishads, with prominent ones including the Kena, Katha, Prashna, Aitareya, and Chandogya Upanishads. Since they form the concluding part of the Vedas, they are collectively called "Vedanta" and serve as the philosophical core of Indian religious thought.

(e) Vedangas

The Vedangas were composed to aid in the understanding of the Vedas. They include:

- **Shiksha:** Focuses on the correct pronunciation of Vedic hymns.

- **Kalpa:** Ritualistic guidelines for sacrifices

- **Vyakarana:** Sanskrit grammar
- **Nirukta:** Etymology of Vedic words
- **Chandas:** Poetic meters, including the Gayatri and Anushtubha meters
- **Jyotisha:** Astronomical and astrological principles, including the movement of celestial bodies and seasonal cycles

(f) Shad-Darshanas

These six schools of philosophy interpret Vedic teachings:

- **Vaisheshika (Kanada):** Atomism
- **Nyaya (Gautama):** Logic
- **Sankhya (Kapila):** Dualism
- **Yoga (Patanjali):** Union of self and God
- **Mimansa (Jaimini):** Vedic rituals
- **Uttara Mimansa (Badarayana):** Vedanta philosophy these texts discuss topics such as cosmology, metaphysics, and the unity of the soul with the divine.

(g) Sutras

The 6th century BC marked a transformative period in Indian history, witnessing the rise of early states, economic growth, and the spread of heterodox religions like Buddhism and Jainism. In response, Vedic scholars compiled the Sutras to reinforce religious norms. These texts, categorized as Dharmsutras, Shrautasutras, and Grihyasutras, provided guidelines on rituals, law, and social customs.

(h) Smritis

Between the last centuries BC and the early AD period, India experienced rapid socio-economic and cultural changes, including increased trade with the Roman world and the rise of regional empires. To adapt, Vedic scholars composed the Smritis, which established religious codes and regulations. Notable Smritis include the Manusmriti, Narad-smriti, Parashar-smriti, and Yajnavalkya-smriti.

(i) Puranas

By the 3rd–4th century AD, Buddhism had gained immense popularity, especially with Mahayana Buddhism's emphasis on Buddha worship. To counter this, Vedic scholars created the Puranas, a genre of literature aimed at making religious knowledge accessible to the masses. There are 18 major Puranas, categorized based on different sectarian traditions:

- **Shaivite Puranas:** Shiva Purana, Vayu Purana, Skanda Purana

- **Vaishnavite Puranas:** Vishnu Purana, Garuda Purana, Matsya Purana, Varaha Purana
- **Shakti and Ganapatya Puranas** dedicated to goddess worship Puranas cover various themes, including cosmology, genealogy, mythology, geography, and political history, making them invaluable for understanding 3rd–6th century AD India.

(j) Epics

The great epics, Mahabharata (by Vyasa) and Ramayana (by Valmiki), provide insights into the movement of Aryans, their interactions with indigenous communities, political institutions, social customs, and economic structures. They also depict long-term processes such as the Aryanization of India, early urbanization, and the shift from pastoralism to agriculture.

These canonical texts, despite their religious nature, remain essential sources for reconstructing the history of ancient India.

1.4.2 Archaeological Sources – Here's a rephrased version of your text with improved clarity and flow:

Material and Archaeological Sources

The material and archaeological sources consist of:

1. Inscriptions

2. Coins

3. Ancient Monuments

4. Paintings

5. Archaeological Remains

Inscriptions

Following contact between Persia and India, the significance of 'art in stone' became apparent. Due to its durability, stone was commonly used for engraving royal decrees, policies, and public messages, ensuring their preservation for eternity. Inscriptions were also used for land grants, while court poets carved eulogies to immortalize their compositions. These engravings, found on rocks or pillars, are called epigraphs or edicts.

The earliest known Indian inscriptions are those of Ashoka, the Mauryan emperor. To promote his dhamma and policies, he issued 14 edicts, inscribing them on rocks (e.g., Junagadh in Gujarat) and pillars erected in public spaces for maximum visibility. To facilitate understanding, he used Brahmi script and Prakrit language, while in Northwestern India; inscriptions were in Kharoshthi script, familiar to the local population.

Ashokan epigraphs, including rock edicts and pillar edicts, provide valuable insights into his reign, detailing:

- His early life and the Kalinga war

- His subsequent remorse and conversion to Buddhism

- His philosophy of dhamma, religious tolerance, and moral governance

- His strategies for propagation and emphasis on civic ethics and universal values

Other notable inscriptions include:

- **Naganika's inscription at Naneghat** – Describes the sacrifices performed by Satavahana king Satakarni I.

- **Gautami Balashri's and Yadnya Satkarni's inscriptions at Nasik caves** – Highlight the conquests of Gautamiputra Satakarni.

- **Kharavela's Hathigumpa inscription** – Chronicles the achievements of the Kalinga ruler.

- **Harisena's Allahabad pillar inscription (Prayag Prashasti)** – Documents the military campaigns of Gupta emperor Samudragupta.

- **Ravikirti's Aihole inscription** – Details the exploits of Chalukya ruler Pulakesin II.

Inscriptions related to land grants provide significant historical data, including the issuer's lineage, kingdom extent, grantee's lineage, land dimensions, rights, privileges, and penalties for violations. These records serve as immovable testimonies to a ruler's domain and governance.

Copper Plates

For land grants, copper plates were commonly used, typically comprising three plates fastened together with a copper ring. The top and bottom sections were left blank to prevent wear over time. These plates contain the same details as stone inscriptions but also offer insights into socio-economic conditions.

For instance, the Sauhagaura copper plate describes a severe drought and the administrative measures taken to address food shortages.

Coins

Coin usage in India dates back to the 6th century BCE, with the earliest examples being crude punch-marked silver coins. The arrival of foreign rulers such as the Greeks, Kushanas, and Parthians led to the introduction of round, cast coins featuring kingly busts, deities, and titles. Indian dynasties adopted these innovations, culminating in the highly refined coinage of the Guptas.

Coins help reconstruct history in various ways:

- Identifying lesser-known dynasties omitted from literary records.

- Assessing metallurgy, based on the metal composition of coins.

- Economic conditions, inferred from the purity of metals. For instance, Kushana and Gupta gold coins had a high gold content, but later Gupta coinage saw a decline, reflecting economic deterioration.

- Trade relations, such as the discovery of northern punch-marked coins in the Deccan or Roman coins found in Satavahana territories, indicating Indo-Roman trade.

- Religious affiliations, seen in deities and symbols on coins (e.g., Gupta coins with Vishnu's Garuda-dhvaja suggest Vaishnavism).

- Royal imagery, such as Chandragupta II's lion-slaying depiction symbolizing bravery, or Samudragupta's harp-playing figure reflecting his artistic inclination.

- Chronology, as some coins bear dates, aiding in the dating of rulers and archaeological layers.

Ancient Architecture and Monuments

During the Stone Age, humans lived in caves, but with the advent of agriculture, permanent settlements emerged. Initially, homes were built from perishable materials, but from the Chalcolithic period, the use of burnt bricks became widespread, marking the beginning of monumental architecture. Ancient Indian architecture evolved into two broad categories:

1. Secular Architecture (Public/Civic Monuments)

2. Religious Monuments

Secular Architecture

The first major instances of public architecture are from the Harappan Civilization, marking India's first urbanization. Key structures included:

- Wide roads, granaries, warehouses, drainage systems, dockyards, and religious sites (e.g., the Great Bath of Mohenjo-Daro).

- A canal and bund at Inamgaon during the Chalcolithic period.

- Mauryan and post-Mauryan constructions, such as fortifications and palaces in Pataliputra, stadiums and riverfront steps in Nagarjunakonda, and standardized housing layouts.

These structures provide insights into urban planning, civic life, and hygiene standards of ancient India.

Religious Architecture

Religious monuments began appearing during the Mauryan period, with early examples being the Ajivika caves at Barabar and Nagarjuni Hills (Bihar).

Buddhist Architecture

Buddhist religious structures include:

- **Stupas** – Built over Buddha's relics, adorned with intricately carved gateways (toranas), as seen at Sanchi, Barhut, Amaravati, and Sannati.

- **Chaityas (Prayer Halls)** – Buddhist chapels with a stupa at one end. The oldest cave chaitya is at Bhaja, followed by Bedsa, Karle, and Ajanta.

- **Viharas (Monastic Residences)** – Large halls surrounded by monks' quarters, commonly found in Kanheri, Nasik, and Junnar.

With the rise of the Mahayana school, stupas in chaityas were replaced by Buddha's statues, a transformation evident in Ajanta.

Hindu Temple Architecture

Hindu temples first appeared during the Gupta period, influenced by Buddhist cave architecture but later evolving into freestanding structures.

- The earliest temple prototype, Temple No.7 at Sanchi, featured a basic sanctum (garbhagriha) and front porch (mukhamandapa).

- More complex temples developed at Tigawa, Nachna, and Deogarh, incorporating pradakshina paths (circumambulatory paths) and ornate carvings.

- The Nagara style, characterized by towering curvilinear spires (shikhara), became prevalent in North India.

In South India and the Deccan, temple architecture followed a different trajectory:

- The Chalukyas transitioned from rock-cut (Badami) to structural temples (Pattadakal, Aihole).

- The Pallavas developed Ratha temples (Mahabalipuram).

- The Cholas built monumental temples, while the Rashtrakutas created masterpieces like the Kailasa Temple at Ellora.

Southern temple towers, built with layered stone slabs, had a pyramidal appearance, defining the Dravida style. By the 6th-7th centuries CE, regional styles flourished, marking India's transformation into a hub of temple architecture.

Ancient temples adorned with intricate sculptures and elaborate architectural designs serve as silent yet powerful testimonies to India's rich history. These monuments provide invaluable insights into the evolution of religious beliefs and ideologies over time.

Sculptures and Paintings

Sculptural art in India dates back to the Harappan period, with evidence of statues and figurines made from a variety of materials such as stone, steatite, clay, terracotta, lime, bronze, ivory, and wood. Some sculptures functioned as idols in shrines, while others adorned temple walls or served everyday purposes, such as toys and entertainment.

The bronze statuette of a dancer from the Harappan civilization and the toy artifacts from Daimabad (Chalcolithic period) highlight both artistic skill and advanced metallurgical techniques. Other sculptures from this era provide insights into entertainment spaces, hairstyles, ornaments, and attire of the time. Similarly, terracotta toys from the Shunga period and the Mauryan-era Didarganj Yakshi reflect contemporary prosperity and aesthetic sensibilities.

The sculptural reliefs on stupas like those at Sanchi and Barhut illustrate not only the evolution of Buddhist ideology but also depict flora, fauna, and civic architecture. The statue of Emperor Kanishka showcases his foreign origins through his attire, such as high boots and overcoats. Meanwhile, artifacts like the Pose Idol and bronze reliefs from Kolhapur suggest Indo-Roman trade relations during the Satavahana period, a connection further supported by the ivory figurine of Goddess Lakshmi found in Pompeii, Rome.

During the Gupta period, Indian sculpture attained a classical form and remarkable artistic refinement. Subsequent sculptures adhered to these established norms. The evolution of religious icons—depicted with specific poses and attributes—demonstrates the fusion of various religious traditions. This process is studied under a specialized field known as Iconography.

In terms of painting, the earliest examples can be seen in the Mesolithic rock shelters of Bhimbetka (Madhya Pradesh), where prehistoric cave dwellers used natural pigments to illustrate their lifestyle, hunting techniques, and surrounding flora and fauna. Later, the magnificent frescoes of Ajanta and Bagh provide valuable insights into religious thought, spiritual themes, clothing, jewelry, and even interactions with foreign visitors. The Chola-era temple murals in Tamil Nadu depict the concept of divine kingship, reflecting the socio-political ideology of the time.

Archaeological Remains

Human settlements naturally undergo cycles of habitation and abandonment, leading to the formation of archaeological mounds—layers of accumulated soil covering the material remnants of past societies. Archaeologists excavate these mounds to uncover the hidden history of civilizations. Excavated artifacts offer a crucial perspective on the lives of common people, often overlooked in written records. They also supplement historical narratives from textual sources and provide insights into pre-literate societies.

Key Archaeological Findings

- **Pottery:** Pottery served as essential household equipment from the Protohistoric period to the Early Medieval era. Variations in shape, fabric, color, design, and production techniques help archaeologists date and categorize cultural phases. Hence, pottery is often referred to as the "alphabet of archaeology."

- **Beads:** India has a long-standing tradition of bead-making, using materials such as agate, chalcedony, crystal, turquoise, lapis lazuli, glass, gold, copper, terracotta, ivory, and shell. The intricate techniques used in bead-making reveal the technological advancements and artistic sensibilities of different periods.

- **Faunal and Floral Remains:** Animal bones and plant remains provide insights into the diet, ecology, and environment of past civilizations.

- **Architectural Foundations:** Excavations often reveal foundations of structures such as houses, palaces, assembly halls, warehouses, and sanitation systems. These remains help reconstruct urban layouts, social divisions, economic activities, and technological progress. Defensive structures like fortifications and moats indicate the affluence and security concerns of ancient settlements.

- **Domestic and Occupational Artifacts:** Everyday objects such as kitchenware, ornaments, toys, and tools offer insights into the daily lives and occupations of ancient people. Items related to trade, such as seals, coins, and measuring weights, shed light on economic activities.

- **Charcoal Analysis**: The discovery of burnt organic material, or charcoal, enables archaeologists to date artifacts through Carbon-14 dating, a crucial method for establishing historical timelines.

1.4.3 Buddhist Canonical Literature

Buddhism, as a religion of the masses, produced an extensive literary tradition in languages such as Pali, Prakrit, Sanskrit, Tibetan, Chinese, and Sinhala. Key Buddhist texts include:

- **The Pitakas:** The Tripitaka (Three Baskets) consists of:

  - **Vinaya Pitaka (compiled by Upali) –** Rules for monastic life, ethical conduct, and monastery regulations.

  - **Sutta Pitaka (compiled by Ananda) –** Teachings of Buddha conveyed through parables, lectures, and examples, making them accessible to common people. It includes five collections: Digha Nikaya, Majjhima Nikaya, Samyutta Nikaya, Anguttara Nikaya, and Khuddaka Nikaya. The latter contains works like the Dhammapada, Sutta Nipata, and Theragatha.

- **The Jatakas**: A compilation of stories recounting the Buddha's previous lives, illustrating moral and philosophical lessons. These texts provide a glimpse into 6th-century BCE India.

- **Dipavamsa and Mahavamsa:** Chronicles from Sri Lanka that provide information on Emperor Ashoka and prominent Buddhist scholars.

1.4.4 Buddhist Literature

(d) Divyavadana:
The *Divyavadana*, a Buddhist text from Nepal, features a collection of stories highlighting northern dynasties, including the Mauryan and Shunga periods. Other significant Buddhist works include:

- *Milindapanha*: A dialogue between Bhikkhu Nagasena and Indo-Greek King Menander (Milinda), who embraced Buddhism.
- *Buddhacharita*: A biography of Buddha by Ashvaghosha.
- *Mahavastu*, *Lalitavistara*, and *Manjushri-Mulakalpa*: These texts provide further insights into Buddhist traditions and history.

1.4.5 Jain Canonical Literature

Ancient Jain texts were composed in Prakrit (Ardhamagadhi, Shauraseni), Tamil, and Sanskrit. They are broadly categorized into two groups:

(a) Anga and Agama:
These texts preserve Mahavira's teachings. The *Acharanga Sutra* explains Jain monastic ethics, while the *Bhagavati Sutra* offers insights into Mahavira's life and achievements.

(b) Philosophical Works:
Prominent texts by Acharya Kundakunda, such as *Samayasara* and *Pravachanasara*, delve into Jain spirituality.

(c) Jain Puranas:
These follow the style of Hindu epics but focus on Jain philosophy. Notable examples include the *Harivamsha Purana*, *Maha-Purana*, and *Padmacharita*.

(d) Biographical Texts:
Important biographical works include *Bhadrabahu-Charita*, *Jasahar-Chariu*, and *Naykumar-Chariu*, with *Bhadrabahu-Charita* detailing the lives of Chandragupta Maurya and his Jain mentor Bhadrabahu.

Other significant Jain texts include:

- *Kathakosh* by Harisen
- *Parishishta-Parva* by Hemchandra Suri
- *Dhananjay-Mala* (thesaurus)
- *Alankar-Chintamani* (literature)
- *Mahavir-Ganit-Sarsamgraha* (mathematics)
- *Niti-Vakya-Mrita* by Somadeva (political science)

1.4.6 Secular Literary Sources

While ancient Indian literature is often viewed as religious, numerous secular works also emerged.

(a) Historical Writings:

- *Rajatarangini*: Written by Kalhana in the 12th century AD, this Sanskrit chronicle documents Kashmir's history from the Mahabharata period to the 12th century. It contains eight books (Khandas) and 7,826 verses (Shlokas). Kalhana emphasized objectivity, advocating for impartial historical writing.

(b) Eulogies (Prashastis):
These compositions, often written by court poets, celebrated rulers and their accomplishments. While typically biased, they provide valuable historical insights. Notable examples include:

- *Vikramank-Deva-Charita* by Bilhana, praising Chalukya King Vikramaditya.
- *Gaudavaho* by Vakpati, commemorating Yashovarman's victory over Bengal.
- *Harsha-Charita* by Banabhatta, depicting Harshavardhana's life.

- *Kumarpala-Charita* by Hemachandra and *Hammir-Mad-Mardana* by Jaychand Suri.

(c) Epics:

The *Mahabharata* by Vyasa and the *Ramayana* by Valmiki offer extensive insights into Aryan migration, social customs, political structures, and the shift from pastoralism to agriculture between the 8th and 6th centuries BCE.

(a) Dramatic Literatur

Ancient India also produced significant dramatic works, starting with Ashvaghosha's *Sariputta-Prakaran*. Bharata's *Natya Shastra* remains the foundational text on dramaturgy. Key plays include:

- *Mudrarakshasa* by Vishakhadatta: Depicts Chanakya's strategies in establishing the Mauryan Empire.
- *Mrichchhakatika* by Shudraka: Explores the love story of Charudatta and Vasantasena, reflecting socio-economic conditions.
- *Malavikagnimitra* by Kalidasa: Portrays the romance of Malavika and Shunga King Agnimitra. Kalidasa also authored *Vikramorvashiya* and *Abhijnana-Shakuntalam*.
- *Nagananda*, *Ratnavali*, and *Priyadarshika* by Harshavardhana, illustrating socio-economic conditions during his reign.
- Other significant plays include *Uttar-Rama-Charita* and *Malati-Madhava* by Bhavabhuti, and *Svapnavasavadatta* by Bhasa.

(b) Poetry

Classical Sanskrit poetry thrived during the Gupta period, with key works including:

- *Raghuvamsa*, *Kumarasambhava*, *Ritusamhara*, and *Meghaduta* by Kalidasa. *Meghaduta* and *Ritusamhara* vividly depict nature and the seasonal cycles.
- *Dashakumaracharita* by Dandin.
- *Kiratarjuniya* by Bharavi.
- *Ravanavadha* by Bhatti.
- *Vasavadatta* by Subandhu.
- *Gathasaptashati*: A collection of 700 folk-inspired verses compiled by Satavahana King Hala, reflecting everyday life in the Godavari Valley.

1.4.7 Scientific Treatises

Ancient Indian scholars contributed significantly to diverse fields such as political science, grammar, medicine, mathematics, astronomy, and architecture.

(a) Arthashastra:

Composed by Chanakya (Kautilya), the *Arthashastra* is a treatise on statecraft, covering administration, taxation, espionage, and military strategy. It consists of 15 sections (Pradhikaranas), 150 chapters, 180 topics, and 6,000 verses. Key topics

include ministerial appointments, legal systems, internal security, foreign relations, warfare, and economic regulations.

(b) Grammar and Linguistics:

- *Ashtadhyayi*: Written by Panini, this text explores Sanskrit grammar while shedding light on the social dynamics of the 6th century BCE, coinciding with India's second wave of urbanization.
- *Mahabhashya*: Authored by Patanjali, it provides insights into early historic social conditions.

(c) Medical Sciences:

- *Charaka-Samhita*: Focuses on general medicine, forming the basis of Ayurveda.
- *Sushruta-Samhita*: Emphasizes surgery and advanced medical procedures.

(d) Astronomy and Mathematics:

- *Brihat-Samhita*: Authored by Varahamihira, this encyclopedic work covers agriculture, crop patterns, earthquake prediction, astronomy, and astrology. His *Pancha-Siddhantika* further explores eclipses, planetary movements, and constellations.
- *Aryabhatiya*: Aryabhatta's seminal work on mathematics and astronomy.
- *Brahma-Sphuta-Siddhanta*: Authored by Brahmagupta, this text advances astronomical knowledge.

1.4.8 Sangam Literature

Sangam literature offers valuable insights into early historic and classical Southern India. The term *Sangam* refers to a literary assembly, and the corpus of Sangam literature comprises poems presented in three such assemblies by Tamil poets. These works were compiled from various ecological regions of Southern India, essentially transforming regional folklore into refined poetry by urban poets. Prominent works from this period include *Shilappadikaram*, *Manimekhalai*, and *Pattupattu*.

The Tamil landscape is traditionally categorized into five ecological regions known as *Tinai*, collectively referred to as *Ain-Tinai*. Each *Tinai* represents a specific ecological zone, which naturally influenced the themes and emotions reflected in the poetry. For example, poems from the hilly regions portray concerns distinct from those of the coastal areas. However, the central themes of these compositions typically revolve around two broad aspects—love (*Akam*) and war (*Puram*). One poem, for instance, depicts a woman's anxiety as she awaits her lover's return from a fishing expedition, while another narrates the fear of wild animal attacks faced by lovers in the hills.

Sangam literature is predominantly secular, offering an authentic portrayal of the daily lives, relationships, and hardships of common people. It serves as a rich

historical source for understanding the socio-economic conditions of early South India.

Foreign Accounts

Following the Persian and Greek invasions, India reconnected with the broader ancient world. While the invasions themselves were notable, the continuous movement of people facilitated significant cultural exchanges. Many foreign travelers documented their experiences, providing valuable firsthand insights. Since these travelers were not aligned with any Indian ruler, their accounts are generally considered impartial. However, as outsiders, they sometimes misinterpreted the complexities of Indian society, economy, and politics.

Greek and Roman Sources

- **Herodotus** – Known as the "Father of History," Herodotus mentions Indian soldiers serving alongside the Persians during the Greco-Persian Wars.
- **Megasthenes** – As the ambassador of Seleucus Nicator to Chandragupta Maurya's court, Megasthenes documented his observations in *Indica*. He described Pataliputra as an expansive city, approximately 14 km long and 2 km wide, fortified with 570 bastions and 67 gateways, and adorned with a magnificent royal palace. His account also provides insights into the caste system and societal structure. Although the original *Indica* is lost, its content survives through citations by later writers.
- **Periplus of the Erythraean Sea** – This anonymous travelogue, believed to be written by an Egyptian merchant, offers an objective and detailed account of Indo-Roman trade during the Early Historic period. It describes Indian ports, trade centers, routes, distances between hubs, the nature of goods exchanged, trade volumes, prices, and ship types.

Chinese Accounts

- **Fa-Hien (Fa Xian) (337–422 AD)** – A Chinese Buddhist monk, Fa-Hien visited India during the Gupta period, aiming to study Buddhist scriptures and visit sacred sites. His observations, compiled in *Records of Buddhist Kingdoms*, provide valuable insights into North Indian society, culture, and the Gupta administration.
- **Hiuen-Tsiang (Xuan Zang) (602–664 AD)** – Another Chinese Buddhist monk, Hiuen-Tsiang traveled to India during Harshavardhana's reign. Departing from Gansu in 629 AD, he journeyed through the Gobi Desert, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Samarkand, and Balkh, arriving in India in 630 AD. During his stay, he visited Buddhist pilgrimage sites, studied at Nalanda University, copied manuscripts, and participated in Harsha's grand assembly. After spending 15 years in India, he returned to China in 645 AD, documenting his experiences in *Si-Yu-Ki* (*Great Tang Records on the Western Regions*). His writings offer detailed accounts of Harsha's administration, regional customs, societal norms, and even the characteristics of the people of Maharashtra.

Other significant accounts include the works of the Tibetan Buddhist monk *Taranath*, such as *Kangyur* and *Tangyur*, which shed light on Indian history up to the medieval period.

Self-Check Exercise -2

Q-1   What are Jatakas in Buddhism?

Q-2   Who wrote Harsh Charit?

Q-3   On which Subject Panini Ashtadhyayi based?

Q-4   What are 6 Vedang?

1.5 Changing Interpretations of Early Indian History

Although the nationalist historians did attempt to refute the latter, they rather overlooked the question of the divinity of the king. This has come into prominence in recent work on the nature of kingship and the distribution of political power and status in early Indian society. The question of the distribution of political power is being re-examined in the framework of the functioning of a caste society and concerning the existing evidence on institutions of local control, such as village councils. The work on the land grants, particularly from the sixth century onward, suggests a different type of power structure for the bureaucracy than was previously assumed based on the theory of despotism.

The exclusion of straight political history is not for all time. There are indications of a more meaningful return to political history now that the background of social and economic history is being gradually filled in. The nationalist phase of historical interpretation led for obvious reasons to the overwhelming participation of Indian historians in writing their history. This seemed to coincide with an appreciable decline of interesting ancient Indian history by European Indologists, except in France. Recent analyses of ancient Indian history have proposed various approaches to analysis that can be used by historians of any nationality and can circumvent national and ideological bias, by the use of which a greater degree of objectivity in interpretation can be achieved. Even if history is based on selected data, the data selected need not be tiredly arbitrary. These methods work within the framework of certain hypotheses. They assume that all societies change and that in a period stretching from 2500 B.C.toA.D.1000 Indian society and its institutions have

undoubtedly evolved, and it is the historian's role to examine the nature of this transformation.

Self- Check Exercise -3

Q-1   Who wrote the Mricchkatikam?

Q-2   On which subject Charak and Susruta is based?

Q-3   From which Harapan site the evidence of lipstick have been reported?

1.6 Summary

India boasts a rich cultural heritage, with Ancient India representing a remarkable era in its history. However, as we delve further into the past, the scarcity of written records poses a challenge in reconstructing its history. The few available texts are primarily religious and must be used with caution, as they were either authored by a limited group or served as societal guidelines rather than factual accounts. Nevertheless, significant literary works, including epics, anthologies, and dramas, offer valuable insights. Additionally, treatises on subjects such as politics, astrology, astronomy, medicine, irrigation, and architecture reflect the scientific advancements of the time. Artistic and architectural evidence further contributes to our understanding of Ancient India. Another crucial source is archaeology, which aids in comprehending pre-literate societies, shedding light on the everyday lives of common people, and providing scientifically dated evidence.

1.7 Glossary

Jatak: the stories of the early births of mahatama Buddha.

Veda: Veda means to know, there are four Vedas; Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samveda, Atharvaveda

Fa-hien: A Chinese traveller who came to India in the 5th cen. A.D.

Chaitya: The Buddhist place of worship

Rajtarangini: The first chronological history in India by kalhana.

1.8 Answers to Self-Check Exercise

Self- Check Exercise-1

Ans.1: The Himalayas act as a barrier for moisture-laden monsoon winds. It also protects the Indian Subcontinent from cold winds from Central Asia and Siberia.

Ans.2: The earliest evidence of iron usage can be traced to Atranjikhera, a prehistoric archaeological site located along the Kali Nadi, a tributary of the Ganga.

Ans.3: Rice and wheat are the primary crops cultivated in rotation. The lower Gangetic plain experiences a humid climate with consistently high temperatures throughout the year.

Self-Check Exercise-2

Ans.1: The Jatakas are a collection of stories depicting the previous births of Buddha, portraying him in both animal and human forms. These narratives are highly popular and hold significant value across all branches of Buddhism.

Ans.2: Banbhatta wrote Harshacharita, the biography of King Harsha in the seventh century. It gives us a glimpse of the social, economic, political, religious and cultural life during his time.

Ans.3: The Six Vedangas are Siksha, Chhanda, Vyakarana, Nirukta, Jyotish and Kalpa.

Ans.4: Ashtadhyayi, Sanskrit treatise on Grammer written in the 6th to 5th century by Panini. This work set the linguistic standards for classical Sanskrit.

Self -Check Exercise-3

Ans1: Mrichchhakatikam is a Sanskrit drama written by Shudraka. It is about a young man named Charudatta, and his love for Vasantsena, a rich courtesan.

Ans. 2: It is founded on medicine. It is one of the two foundational texts of this field that have survived from ancient India.

Ans. 3: The Indus Valley site Chahundaro indicates the use of lipstick.

1.9 Suggested Readings

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- Kosambi, D.D. *Myth and Reality*, New Delhi, 2001.
- Sharma, R.S. *Indian Feudalism*, New Delhi, 1965.
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1.10 Terminal Questions

1. Provide a detailed account of India's geographical features.
2. Highlight the significance of religious sources in Ancient Indian history.

3. Discuss the role and importance of archaeological sources in understanding Ancient Indian history.
4. Explain why the study of Ancient Indian history is significant.
5. Elaborate on the various interpretations of Ancient Indian history.
6. Describe in detail the geographical features of India.

Unit-2

State and Polity: Vedic and Later-Vedic Phase

Structure:

2.1 Introduction

The *Rigveda* is regarded as the earliest collection of hymns, making it the starting point for understanding the Early Vedic period before exploring other Vedas and related texts, which came later. This approach is necessary for two key reasons. Firstly, the Vedas are traditionally attributed to the Aryans, who were long believed to have played a significant role in shaping Indian civilization. However, a careful analysis of the *Rigveda* does not suggest an advanced material culture. Instead, many of the defining traits of Indian civilization were already present in non-Vedic archaeological cultures across different regions of India. Secondly, comparing the *Rigveda* with later Vedas and related texts reveals substantial changes within Vedic

society itself. This indicates that there was no singular cultural pattern that could be strictly defined as Vedic or Aryan culture.

The core geographical region associated with the *Rigveda* was *Sapta-Sindhava*, or the land of seven rivers. This corresponds to present-day Punjab and Haryana, but Rigvedic geography also extended to the Gomal plains, southern Afghanistan, and southern Jammu and Kashmir.

2.2 Learning Objectives

From this unit, we will be able to understand:

- The Vedic people and debates regarding their original home.
- Two parts of the Vedic period and reasons behind periodization.
- Life in the early Vedic Period. Life in the Later Vedic Period.
- Position of Women in the Vedic Period

2.3 Sources of Vedic Period

The study of Early Vedic society relies on two main types of sources: Literary and Archaeological. Let's first examine the literary sources for this period.

Literary Sources

Among the literary sources, the four Vedas—*Rigveda, Samaveda, Yajurveda,* and *Atharvaveda*—hold primary importance. Of these, the *Rigveda* is the oldest. The term *Veda* is derived from the Sanskrit root *Vid*, meaning "to know." These texts are essentially compilations of prayers and hymns composed by different families of poets and sages, dedicated to various deities.

The Vedas are also classified as *Samhitas*, as they represent the oral traditions of their time. Since they were meant to be memorized, recited, and passed down orally, they were not written at the time of their composition. As a result, none of the *Samhitas* can be dated with absolute certainty. Each *Samhita* is a compilation formed over several centuries. Based on relative dating methods, the period represented in the *Rigveda* is estimated to be between 1500 BCE and 1000 BCE.

The *Rigveda Samhita* consists of 10 books or Mandalas. Among them, Books II to VII are considered the oldest and specifically belong to the Early Vedic period. In contrast, Books I, VIII, IX, and X are regarded as later additions.

Archaeological Sources

Excavations conducted over the last 40 years in Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, and Northern Rajasthan, particularly along the Indus and Ghaggar rivers, have revealed numerous post-Harappan chalcolithic settlements dating from 1700 BCE to 600 BCE. These cultures are identified as Late Harappan, OCP (Ochre Coloured Pottery), BRW (Black & Red Ware), and PGW (Painted Grey Ware) cultures.

However, it is important to note that pottery types alone do not fully define a culture. Different types of pottery do not necessarily indicate that the people using them were culturally distinct. Instead, pottery analysis helps identify specific characteristics of cultural assemblages. Scholars have attempted to compare the archaeological evidence from northwestern and northern India with information derived from Vedic texts.

2.3.1 Early Vedic Period

Early Vedic society was predominantly pastoral, with cattle rearing as the primary occupation. In such a society, economic dependence was more on livestock than agricultural produce. Pastoralism is a subsistence strategy adopted in areas where large-scale farming is difficult due to environmental and, to some extent, cultural constraints.

The *Rigveda* provides ample linguistic evidence of the significance of cattle in Early Vedic society. Several terms in the text are associated with cows (*gau*). Cattle were the primary measure of wealth, and a prosperous man was called *gomat* (one who owns many cows). The conflicts and battles of this period were often described using terms such as *gavishti, gavesana,* and *gavyat*, all of which relate to the search or possession of cows. These references suggest that disputes over cattle often led to inter-tribal conflicts.

The *Panis*, described as enemies of the Vedic people, are said to have hidden their wealth—primarily cows—in mountains and forests. The Vedic god Indra was invoked to recover these stolen cattle, indicating that cattle raids were a common feature of the time. The raja (tribal chief) was referred to as *gopati*—the protector of cows. Even time and distance were measured with references to cows, as seen in the terms *Godhuli* (time measurement) and *Gavyuti* (distance measurement). A

daughter was called *duhitr* (one who milks the cows), and kinship units were labeled *gotra*, both derived from *gau* (cow). These linguistic traces show that cattle rearing was central to economic, social, and religious life in Early Vedic society.

While references to cattle are extensive, agriculture finds relatively little mention in the *Rigveda*, with most references being from a later period. The only grain explicitly named is *Yava* (barley). The Early Vedic people lacked iron technology, and although they were familiar with copper, it was not as effective as iron for farming. Stone tools, such as axes, were in use and are mentioned in the *Rigveda*. Shifting agriculture was practiced, where forests were burned to clear land for cultivation. Given the low rainfall in the region and the tendency of major rivers (such as the Satluj, Indus, Ghaggar, and Ravi) to change course frequently, large-scale irrigation was not feasible. As a result, agriculture remained secondary to pastoralism.

The presence of pastoralism and shifting cultivation suggests that Early Vedic people were nomadic or semi-nomadic. They moved seasonally with their herds in search of grazing lands. The term *vis* (settlement) reflects this mobility, as it was often modified with prefixes such as *Punar* (again), *Upa* (near), and *Pra* (forward), indicating movement between settlements.

Economic exchanges were based on gift-giving and redistribution. Tribal conflicts resulted in tribute payments (bali) from defeated groups to victorious chiefs. The spoils of war were shared among clan members, and the chief, to maintain prestige, distributed gifts and food to his clansmen during important ceremonies. Trade and commerce were minimal, and there was no concept of private land ownership.

2.3.2 Society

Early Vedic society was tribal, with kinship-based social structures. Caste divisions were not rigid, and roles were fluid—kings (*rajas*), priests (*purohitas*), and artisans were all part of clan networks. The term *Jana* was used for tribes, and the *Rigveda* frequently mentions various tribes, including the Bharatas, Purus, Yadus, Druhyus, Anus, and Turvasus. Inter-tribal conflicts were frequent, as seen in the famous Battle of the Ten Kings (*Dasarajna*), where multiple tribes fought for dominance.

The tribal chief (*raja* or *gopati*) led the tribe in battle and ensured its protection. Leadership was not hereditary—the chief was chosen from among the clansmen. The warrior class was called *Rajanya*. A tribe (*Jana*) consisted of multiple clans (vis), which settled in villages (grama). The basic social unit was the family (kula), and the head of the family (kulapa) was typically the eldest male.

- Tribe (Jana) → Clans (Vis) → Villages (Grama) → Families (Kula) → Head of Family (Kulapa)

Society was patriarchal, and the birth of a son was highly desired. Many hymns in the *Rigveda* contain prayers for male offspring. However, despite the patriarchal structure, women held a respected position. They had access to education and assemblies, and some women were even composers of hymns. Women also had the freedom to choose their partners and could marry later in life. However, they were generally considered dependent on their fathers, brothers, or husbands.

Education during this period was oral, but the tradition of structured learning was not yet fully developed.

Self Check Exercise-1

Q.1.   Which inscription mentions the migration of the Aryans from Iran to India?

Q.2.   What was the smallest administrative unit during the Vedic Period?

Q.3.   Who were the Panis during the Vedic Period?

2.4 Early Vedic Polity

The tribal political system during the Early Vedic period was not entirely egalitarian. The Rigveda itself mentions a distinction between two groups: the Rajanyas, who were responsible for warfare and belonged to the senior lineage, and the Vis, the common clansmen who formed the junior lineage. While there was no rigid social hierarchy, ongoing inter-tribal conflicts and battles gradually led to divisions within society. The need for expanded pasturelands, protection of cattle, and security of settlements likely contributed to these frequent clashes.

Large sacrificial rituals (yajnas) were conducted by clans to support warrior groups in battles. The purohita (priest), acting as an intermediary between the tribe

and the gods, played a crucial role in these ceremonies, invoking divine blessings for the tribal chief's success in warfare. Initially, all clan members participated equally in these rituals, receiving an equal share of wealth and food distributed during the sacrifices. However, as conflicts increased, the significance of yajnas grew, elevating the status of the purohita. By the later part of the period, priests began receiving substantial gifts from the rajas and assumed a position of prominence over other clan members.

2.4.1 Early Vedic Religion

The religious beliefs of the Vedic people, as reflected in the hymns of the Rigveda, were centered on the veneration of natural forces such as wind, water, rain, thunder, and fire. Unable to control these elements, they personified them as deities, primarily male, reinforcing the patriarchal nature of their society. Female deities were relatively rare. The religion, therefore, was largely based on primitive animism.

Indra, the most prominent deity, was the god of strength and war. He was invoked to defeat enemies and was believed to control thunder and rain, bringing water to the land. His persona mirrored that of a tribal chieftain, embodying the qualities of a victorious warlord.

Agni, the god of fire, was second in importance. He was considered an intermediary between gods and humans and played a crucial role in domestic and ritual life. Marriages were solemnized in his presence, and sacrificial offerings were believed to reach the gods through the flames. Fire, known for its purifying nature, was highly revered. The significance of Agni corresponded with the growing importance of yajnas in Early Vedic society.

Varuna, another important deity, personified water and was regarded as the upholder of cosmic order. Yama, the god of death, also held a prominent position. Other deities included Surya (the Sun), Soma (associated with a ritual drink), Savitri, Rudra, and celestial beings like the Gandharvas, Apsaras, and Maruts.

Vedic religion was deeply sacrificial in nature. Yajnas were performed to invoke divine blessings, often seeking victories in battles or material prosperity. Some hymns were dedicated to sacrificial instruments, including altars, stones used for pressing the Soma plant, weapons, drums, and mortars. Priests conducted these

rituals, and their growing influence paralleled the increasing importance of sacrifices in society.

Sacrificial rituals also contributed to advancements in knowledge. The need for precise calculations in performing yajnas led to developments in mathematics, while frequent animal sacrifices enhanced understanding of animal anatomy. The Vedic worldview held that the universe itself emerged from a great cosmic sacrifice and was sustained through ritual offerings.

The focus of Vedic religion was not on mystical or philosophical enlightenment but on practical, materialistic goals. Gods were worshipped to ensure prosperity rather than spiritual growth. The prevalence of animal sacrifices was characteristic of a pastoral society, where older, non-productive livestock were ritually slaughtered to reduce economic burdens. In contrast, agrarian societies valued older animals for labor, leading to a shift in attitudes toward animal sacrifice. This reflects how the Early Vedic religion was shaped by the patriarchal and pastoral nature of its society.

Self Check Exercise-2

Q.1.   Who Composed Gayatri Manta?

Q.2.   What is the total number of Sanskar?

Q.3.   From where was Satyameva Jayate taken?

Q.4   In which Vedic text the term 'Varna' is found for the first time?

2.5 Later Vedic Period

The period following the Rig Vedic Age is referred to as the Later Vedic Age. During this time, the compilation of three additional Veda Samhitas—Sama Veda, Yajur Veda, and Atharva Veda—took place, along with the Brahmanas and Upanishads associated with all four Vedas. Later, two great epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, also emerged. These Later Vedic texts were composed in the Upper Gangetic region between 1000 and 600 BCE.

By this period, the Aryans had expanded across Northern India, from the Himalayas to the Vindhyas. Their expansion into the entire Indian subcontinent was largely complete by 400 BCE. In the east, significant new kingdoms arose, including the Kurus, Panchalas, Kasis, Kosalas, and Videhas. Gradually, the Aryans moved

southward, a migration believed to have begun around 1000 BCE during the Brahmana period and continued steadily until they reached the southernmost part of the peninsula by the 4th century BCE. The renowned grammarian Katyayana, who lived in the 4th century BCE, was aware of southern regions such as Pandya, Chola, and Kerala. However, Aryan influence in the south was not as extensive as in the north. As the Aryans expanded in Northern India, their cultural and political focus shifted eastward, with the region between the Saraswati and Ganga rivers emerging as the center of Aryan civilization.

2.5.1 Political Organization

Rise of Large States

As Aryan settlements expanded into eastern and southern India, the smaller tribal states of the Rig Vedic period gave way to larger political entities. Many of the prominent tribes of the Rig Vedic era, such as the Bharatas, Purus, Tritsus, and Turvasas, faded into obscurity, while new tribes like the Kurus and Panchalas gained prominence. The fertile lands between the Yamuna and Ganga rivers became the new heartland of Aryan civilization.

Growth of Imperialism

The Later Vedic Age saw the emergence of powerful kingdoms, leading to frequent conflicts among states for dominance. The ideal of *Sarbabhauma* (universal empire) became a significant political ambition. Rulers conducted grand sacrificial rituals like the *Rajasuya* and *Ashvamedha* to assert their supremacy over rival kings. These ceremonies enhanced the king's reputation and reinforced his power. The simple Rig Vedic title of *Rajan* was replaced by grander titles such as *Samrat*, *Ekrat*, *Virat*, and *Bhoja*, marking the rise of imperial ambitions and feudal structures.

Origin of Kingship

Two primary theories explained the origin of kingship. The *Aitareya Brahmana* presented a rational perspective, suggesting that kingship emerged through the collective consent of the people. In contrast, the *Taittiriya Brahmana* proposed a divine origin, describing how Indra, despite being of lower rank among the gods, was made their ruler by Prajapati.

Expansion of Royal Authority

The king wielded absolute power and became the supreme authority over his subjects. He levied taxes such as *Bali*, *Sulka*, and *Bhaga*. The *Satapatha Brahmana* depicted the king as a figure above punishment. While the *Sabha* (assembly) of the Rig Vedic period declined, the king still sought guidance from the *Samiti* on matters of war, peace, and economic policies. There are references to the *Samiti* playing a role in selecting or re-electing rulers.

Administrative Structure

The growing royal power was reflected in the expansion of the king's administrative machinery. He was assisted by a council of officials known as *Ratnins* (Jewels), which included:

- *Bhagadugha* (tax collector)

- *Suta* (charioteer)

- *Akshavapa* (supervisor of gambling)

- *Kshatriya* (chamberlain)

- *Govikartana* (royal hunting companion)

- *Takshan* (carpenter)

- *Rathakara* (chariot maker)
  Additionally, there were key military and religious officials such as the *Purohita* (priest), *Senani* (army commander), and *Gramani* (village leader and military officer).

In the Later Vedic period, the *Gramani* played both civil and military roles, acting as the medium through which royal authority was exercised in villages. According to the *Prasna Upanishad*, the *Adhikrita* was the lowest-ranking village official. The king served as the chief justice but could delegate judicial authority to *Adhyakshas*. In villages, disputes were resolved by the *Gramyavadin* (village judge) and the *Sabha* (local court), and punishments for crimes were severe.

Property laws followed the principle of primogeniture, where the eldest son inherited his deceased father's property. Women and Shudras were denied inheritance rights.

2.5.2 Social Structure

Varna System

One of the most significant changes in Later Vedic society was the consolidation of the caste system. Alongside the traditional four *varnas*, numerous sub-castes emerged. The Brahmanas and Kshatriyas became the dominant social groups, while the Vaisyas, though superior to the Shudras, experienced a decline in status. The *Aitareya Brahmana* highlights the increasing subordination of Vaisyas to the higher castes. The Shudras were considered inferior and were treated with disdain.

- **Brahmanas**: The intellectual and religious elite, responsible for conducting rituals and preserving sacred knowledge.

- **Kshatriyas**: The warrior class, entrusted with governance, military leadership, and territorial expansion. Some Kshatriyas, such as King Janaka and Sage Vishwamitra, elevated themselves to the status of Brahmanas through their scholarly pursuits.

- **Vaisyas**: Engaged in trade, agriculture, and animal husbandry but were excluded from privileges enjoyed by the upper castes. Wealthy Vaisyas (*Sresthins*) held influence in royal courts.

- **Shudras**: The lowest caste, tasked with serving the other three classes. They were denied access to Vedic rituals, sacred texts, and even proper cremation rites. The caste system became hereditary and rigid.

Education

The Later Vedic period witnessed a highly developed education system. Students were taught the Vedas, Upanishads, grammar, prosody, law, mathematics, and language. Following the *Upanayana* (sacred thread ceremony), they lived in *Gurukulas*, where they followed a disciplined life of study and service to their teachers. Upon completing their education, they paid *Guru Dakshina* (a token of gratitude) to their mentors.

Status of Women

Women lost much of the respect and freedom they had enjoyed in the Rig Vedic period. They were denied the right to undergo *Upanayana* and participate in

most religious rituals except marriage. Polygamy was prevalent, and many ceremonies previously performed by wives were now conducted by priests. Women were excluded from political assemblies, and the birth of a daughter was considered undesirable. Child marriage and *sati* (wife's self-immolation) began to emerge, further diminishing women's status.

Food and Clothing

Rice became the staple food, and the consumption of meat gradually declined. Cow slaughter was increasingly frowned upon. Woolen garments were worn alongside cotton clothing.

2.5.3 Economic Developments

Agriculture

The Later Vedic economy remained predominantly agrarian. Small landowners were gradually replaced by large landlords who controlled entire villages. Agricultural techniques improved, with deep plowing, manuring, and better seed selection becoming common. Multiple crops, including rice, barley, wheat, maize, and oilseeds, were cultivated. However, natural disasters like hailstorms and pest infestations frequently forced migration.

Trade and Commerce

Trade expanded significantly, both within India and beyond. Inland trade flourished with the Kiratas, who inhabited mountainous regions, exchanging medicinal herbs for textiles and other goods. Maritime trade was also known, though regular coinage had not yet developed. The coins which were available for use were "Nishka", "Satamana" and "Krishnala". The unit estimation of merchandise was a gold bar called "nishka" measuring three hundred and twenty ratis, which was likewise the heaviness of a satamana. A 'Krishnala' measured one rati, i.e. 1.8 grams. There was a class of shippers called 'Pani' who controlled the exchange. References to "ganas" or organizations and the "sreshthins" unmistakably talk about the arrangement of societies or enterprises for encouraging exchange and trade. Usuary and cash loaning were likewise rehearsed in this period.

Occupation- The development of the station framework brought assortments of methods for vocation. There are references for cash loan specialists, chariot producers, dyers, weavers, stylists, goldsmiths, press smiths, washermen, bow creators, craftsmen, artists, and so forth. The specialty of composing was presumably created in this period. The utilization of silver was expanded and adornments were made out of it.

House Building and Transport - The house had numerous rooms with a unique place for the 'Grahapatha' fire which was constantly consuming. Houses were made of wood. The TaittiriyaAranyakas allude to an exceptional kind of house known as 'Dhandhani' (treasure house). The Atharvaveda says about 'PatninamSadan' (ladies' loft). The methods for transport and correspondence were created with the development of exchange and trade. Transport might be made of wagons drawn by bulls, chariots for war and game, and harsh vehicles known as 'bipatha' for transporting products. Elephants and steeds were likewise utilized. Ships and vessels were additionally utilized as methods of transport.

2.5.4 Religious Condition - Amid the later Vedic period the religious soul experienced an incredible change. Religion was eclipsed with customs and ceremonies. New divine beings and goddesses developed during this period.

New Gods- The Rig Vedic divine beings, Varun, Indra, Agni, Surya, Usha, lost their appeal. The general population revered them with less enthusiasm. New divine beings like Siva, Rupa, Vishnu, Brahma, and so on showed up in the religious atmosphere of the Later Vedic Period. The magnificence of the Rigvedic divine beings goes into blankness, however we find in Atharvaveda the omniscience of Varuna or the advantage of the Earth goddess. Certain fewer imperative obligations of the Rigvedic Period now wound up prominent with the Common People. One of them was Rudra who as of now bore the sobriquet of Siva. Soon Rudra came to be loved as 'Mahadeva' (incredible god) and the ruler of enlivened creatures (Pasupati) Vishnu, the preserver ascended into Prominence amid this period. He possessed the place of Varuna, as the most glorious among the celestials. To accomplish his "Paramapada" (most astounding advance) turned into the objective of the rishis. The love of Vasudeva was likewise begun. He was viewed as Krishna Vasudev, the incarnation of Vishnu. Semi divinities like Apsara, Nagas, Gandharbas, Vidyadharas,

and so on likewise appeared. This age likewise saw the start of the love of Durga and Ganesh.

Ceremonies and Sacrifices - During this period the customs and services of Vedic religion were expounded and ended up complex. In the Rig Vedic age Yanjas were a straightforward undertaking that each householder could do. Be that as it may, in the later Vedic age forfeit turned into something essential in love. Presently the religious class gave their vitality to discover the covered up and spiritualist importance of the rituals and functions. Individuals had a firm conviction that divine beings must submit to the forfeit if legitimately performed. Vedic songs were viewed as charms to be utilized as a part of forfeit. The conviction that divine beings were fulfilled by Yanjas prompted an ascent in the number and assortment of penances that were recommended for each householder. Truth be told each Aryan played out various forfeits under the supervision of the Brahmana cleric.

Ethical Values and Duties

The Later Vedic Period emphasized a code of ideal leadership rooted in ethical conduct. During this time, the Brahmins propagated the belief that every individual is born with certain *rinas* (obligations) that must be fulfilled within their lifetime. These obligations extend toward the gods, rishis, munis, fellow humans, ancestors, and even lower animals. To discharge these duties, one was expected to worship the gods, perform yajnas, study the Vedas, conduct funeral rites, observe *Shraddha*, and more. These tasks were to be carried out with selflessness and sincerity. The foundation of a virtuous life rested on prayer and good deeds, while individuals were encouraged to abstain from sins such as theft, adultery, and murder.

Religious Philosophy

The Later Vedic period also witnessed the emergence of advanced philosophical thought. People began to contemplate the mysteries of creation, life, and death, eventually concluding that there exists a single, unchanging principle known as *Brahman*, the ultimate creator and ruler of the universe. This supreme soul, often referred to as the *Inner Guide* or the *Immortal*, resides within all beings and governs them from within.

The belief in the transmigration of souls became prominent during this era. According to this doctrine, after death, a soul transitions into a new body, continuing this cycle until it achieves perfection and merges with the Universal Soul. The concept of *Karma* further reinforced this belief, asserting that every action, whether good or bad, inevitably leads to corresponding consequences.

Additionally, the Later Vedic people embraced the idea of *Moksha*, a state of liberation from the cycle of birth and death. Moksha signifies the ultimate freedom, where the soul transcends worldly existence and unites with the Universal Soul. This spiritual journey, culminating in liberation, was considered the highest goal of human life. The core principles of these philosophies were preserved in the *Upanishads*, composed during the Later Vedic Period.

Parsimonious Life- The later Vedic Aryans built up the idea of parsimonious perfect of life as the rituals and functions were by all accounts not the only methods for achieving accomplishment in this world or happiness in paradise. So there built up the thoughts of Tapas and Brahmacharya (chastity) prompting the same or considerably more imperative outcomes. Tapa implies reflection, joined by physical torments. A self-denying individual revoked the common life resigned to isolation and practiced all the self-denying rehearses with the conviction that they would acquire paradise, as well as create, "spiritualist, additional standard and superhuman resources." This religious austerity was broadly honed in the Epic Age the Aryans of the Vedic age had achieved the most elevated phase of human advancement. This age had exceeded expectations in each stroll of life. All the significant things throughout man's life—theory, religion, science, and a set of accepted rules were altogether created in the Vedic age. Truth be told Aryans filled in as the light bearers of Indian human progress all through the ages.

Self -Check Exercise-3

Q.1.   Who were Ratnins?

Q.2.   Who were weknat?

Q.3.   On which river the war of the ten kings was fought?

2.6 Summary

We have regarded our nation as our Motherland "Bharat Mata" and our patriotism has grown from the seed Mantra "Vande Mataram". Pastoralism is a subsistence strategy adopted by people who live in areas where large-scale agriculture is not feasible due to some environmental and to a certain extent, cultural constraints. With the advance of Aryan settlements in the eastern and southern pieces of India, the little ancestral conditions of the Rig Vedic period were supplanted by affective states. The position of ladies in modern India has changed significantly. Her position in present-day India is equivalent to that of men, socially, financially,

instructively, politically, and legitimately. Her sufferings from Sati, the Pardah System, the Dowry System, and Child Marriage never again exist.

2.7 Glossary

Gramyavadin: Village judge

"Nishka", "Satamana" and "Krishnala: Terms used for Coins.

Govikartana: Ruler's buddy in the pursuit

Kulapa: Head of the family.

2.8 Answered to Self-Check Exercise

Self-Check Exercise-1

Ans.1 The Boghaz-koi inscription provides evidence of Aryan migration from Iran to India. Dating back to 1400 BCE, it documents a peace treaty between the Hittites and the Mitanni rulers, mentioning Vedic deities such as Indra, Mitra, Nasatya, and Varuna.

Ans.2 The *Kula* served as the core unit of both social and political organization. The hierarchy progressed from *Grama* (village) to *Vis*, *Jana* (tribe), and finally *Rashtra* (kingdom).

Ans.3 In the Rigveda, the *Panis* are depicted as a class of traders. They were wealthy and enterprising merchants who engaged in long-distance trade. Maharshi Yaska refers to them as *Varthaka* (business-class people) who traded goods for profit.

Self-Check Exercise-2

Ans.1 The third *Mandal* of the Rigveda contains the *Gayatri Mantra*, dedicated to the Sun God (*Savitar*). It was composed by Sage Vishwamitra.

Ans.2 There are 16 significant rites known as *Shodasha Samskaras*, which mark various stages of life in Hindu tradition.

Ans.3 The *Mundaka Upanishad*, a Vedic text associated with the *Atharva Veda*, is the source of the phrase *Satyameva Jayate*, India's national motto.

Ans.4 The first reference to the *Varna* system appears in the 10th *Mandal* of the Rigveda, specifically in the *Purusha Sukta*, a hymn describing the cosmic creation.

Self-Check Exercise-3

Ans.1 The *12 Ratnis* (jewel bearers) were key officials who assisted the king in administrative matters. In addition, the *Purohita* (priest), *Senani* (army chief), and *Gramani* (village head) remained prominent royal officers.

Ans.2 The *Vanik* (merchant class) was responsible for trade and commerce.

Ans.3 The *Battle of Ten Kings* took place on the banks of the *Parushni* River, now known as the *Ravi* River.

2.9 Suggested Readings

- Altekar, A.S. *Position of Women in Hindu Civilization*, Delhi, 1969.
- Basham, A.L. *The Wonder That Was India*, New Delhi, 1967.
- Ghosh, A. *An Encyclopedia of Indian Archaeology*, New Delhi, 1989.
- Kosambi, D.D. *Myth and Reality*, New Delhi, 2001.
- Devamitra Swami. *Vedic India*, Bhakti Vedanta Book Trust, 2011.
- *The Vedic Age*, Bhartiya Vidya Bhawan, Mumbai, 2015.

2.10 Terminal Questions

1. Discuss the political conditions during the early Vedic Period.

2. Write about the starting of the formation of the state which culminated in sixteen mahajanpad.

3. Write a note on the position of women during the Vedic Period.

4. What were the religious changes during the later Vedic Period?

Unit – 3

Transition to State/Mahajanpadas

Structure:

3.1 Introduction

3.2 Learning Objectives

3.3 Mahajanapadas in Early Literature

       3.3.1 Mahajanapadas in Jain Literature

       3.3.2 Mahajanapadas in Epigraphic records

       3.3.3 Mahajanapadas in Old Pali records

Self Check Exercise-1

3.4 Description of the Mahajanapadas

       3.4.1 Anga

       3.4.2 Magdha

       3.4.3 Kasi

       3.4.4 Kosal

       3.4.5 Vajji

       3.4.6 Malla

       3.4.7 Chedi

       3.4.8 Vatsa

       3.4.9 Kurus

       3.4.10 Panchala

       3.4.11 Matsya

       3.4.12 Surasena

       3.4.13 Assaka

       3.4.14 Avanti

       3.4.15 Kamboja

       3.4.16 Gandhara

Self Check Exercise-2

3.5 Gana/Sangha

Self- Check Exercise-3

3.6 Summary

3.7 Glossary

3.1 Introduction

The age of Mahajanpada or 6th century B.C. refers to the second urbanization in ancient Indian history. The terms Janapada and Mahajanapada occur very frequently in Buddhist literature. The latter marks the political divisions of ancient India. The conception of the term 'Janapada*was very ancient. The Janapadas were homogenous, political, cultural, and geographical units. Panini used this term in a sense in which its culture counted more than its geography. We do not find the term Janapada in the Vedic Samhitas. It occurs only in the last phase of the Brahmana period. The concept of Janapada is found in its full development in the Astadhyayi of Panini. The Janapadas of ancient India can very well be compared with the Greek city-states. Both flourished at about the same period. The Jana evolved into distinct units known as families or Kula (similar to Greek Phratries). These families collectively formed ruling Kshatriya tribes, which held political authority and are referred to as Janapadas in Pāṇini's work.

The Kasika says that the Janapadins were the ruling class inJanapadas or states. Thus, there were four stages in the evolution of a full-fledged Janapada or city-state. It Is very interesting to note that the Buddhist texts, in most cases do not use the term Janapada, which was very commonly used in those days, to denote the political divisions of India. Instead, they coined the term Mahajanapada, i.e. Great States for this purpose. The early Buddhist canonical text Ahguttara Nikaya informs us that during this period there were sixteen states of considerable extent and power, known as "SodasaMahajanapada" in Jambudipa. This period in Indian history refers to the formation of the state which we see in Mahajanpadas. The sixteen Mahajanapadas enumerated in the Chedi, (8) Vatsa, (9) Kuru, (10) Pancala, (11) Maccha, (12) Surasena, (13) Assaka, (14) Avanti, (I5) Gandhara and (16) Kamboja. According to Rhys Davids, the list is very suggestive geographically, because no placesouth to Avanti (about 23°N) occur in it; and it is only atoned place that the list goes even so far to the south as that. The whole of South India, Ceylon, Orissa, Bengal east of the Ganges, and even Deccan are completely ignored in it.

3.2 Learning objectives

After reading this unit, you will be able

- To know about the process of state formation in 6th century B.C.
- To know about the political systems in ancient India and republicand monarchy.

3.3 Mahajanapad as in early literature

3.3.1Mahajanapadas in Jain literature

The Jaina Bhagavati Sutra gives a slightly different list of the sixteen Mahajanapadas, viz. (1) Inga, (2) Banga(Vanga), (3) Magaha (Magadha), (4) Malaya, (5) Malava(ka), (6) Accha,(7) Yaccha (Yatsa), (8) Koccha (Kaccha), (9) Ladha (lata or Radha), (10) Padha (Pandya or Paundra), (11) Bajji (Yajgi),(12) Moll (Maila), (13) Kasi, (14) Kosala, (15) Avaha,(16) Sambhuttara. It is seen that Anga, Magadha, vatsa, Vajji, Kasi, and Koslla are common to both the Anguttara and Bhagavati lists. Malava of the Bhagavatisutra is probably identical to Avanti of the Anguttara list. Moll is probably a corruption of Malla. The other states of the Jain list are comparatively new and display knowledge of the Far East and far south of India. This characteristic of the Jain list proves that it was later in date than the one in the AnguttaraNikaya.

3.3.2Mahajanapadas in Epigraphic Records

Names of some of the countries mentioned in the list of Mahajanapadas are found in epigraphic records also. Thus, the Nasik Cave Inscription of Vasisthiputra Pulumavl (Regnal year 19) of 149 A.D. mentions Asika, as aka, Mulaka, Suratha, Kukura, Aparanta, Anupa, Yidabha, Akara and Avanti. The Junagadh Inscription of Rudradaman'h (150 A.D. mentions eastern and western Akaravanti, Champa, anart, Surastra, Svabhra, Maru, Kaccha, Sindhu-Sauvira, Kukura, Aparanta and Nisada countries as those gained by the Valour of Rudradaman. The Allahabad Pillar, Inscription of Samudragupta (4th century A.D.) mentions some countries and kings of India among which we find the name of the Kosala country. This Kosala was the South Kosala or Kosala in Daksinapatha as it has been compounded with the names of other southern countries. The Inscription also mentions territories of eastern India like Samatata, Kamarupa, Nepala, Kartrpur and Davaka. The Khalimpur Inscription of Dharmapala (c. 8[th]century A.D.) speaks of Bhojas, Matsyas, Madras, Kurus,

Tadus, Yavanas, Gandharas- and Kiras. Thus, we find that many of the Great States retained their prominence in later times also as becomes evident from the epigraphic records.

3.3.3 Mahajanapadas in Pali literature

The oldest Pali records mention some republics. Jambudipa which may be referred to here. They were the Sakiyas of Kapilavatthu, the Bulis of Allakappa, the Kalamas of Kesaputta, the Bhaggas of Sumsumaragiri, the Koliyas of Ramagama, the Mallas of Pava and Kusinara, the Moriyas of Pipphalivana, the Videhas of Mithila and the licchavis of Vesali. These republics held great power in the political history of India at that time. Now we may take up the description of the sixteen great states or Mahajanapadas one after another.

Self Check Exercise-1

Q1.   Which text gives the list of Mahajanapadas?

Q2.   What was the name of the ruler of Kosala in Samudragupta's "Prayag Prashasti"?

Q3.   What was the ancient name of Ujjain?

3.4 Description of the Mahajanapadas

3.4.1 Anga -Anga country was very ancient as is evident from the reference made to it in the ancient Brahmanical works like the Aitreya Brahmana, the Mahabharata, the Puranas, and the Ramayana. It seems that Anga was a powerful kingdom before the time of the Buddha. In the Buddhist literature alsoAnga has been given a prominent place. Anga country was to the east of Magadha and west of the chieftains who lived in the Rajmahal hills (Parvatavasinah). Between Anga and Magadha flew either river Champa (probably the modern Chandan). From the Vidhura Pandit a Jataka which describes Rajagaha as a city of Anga it seems that at one time it included the Magadha dominions and stretched up to the sea. Anga was considered so important that it is mentioned with Champa as its capital in The Mahāgovinda Suttanta of the Dīgha Nikāya mentions a list of seven kingdoms or political divisions into which India was divided.

It is said that once Magadhacame under the sway of Anga. But in Buddha's time, Anga lost her political power for good. " In Buddha's time, Anga and Magadha were constantly at war with each other. About the middle of the 6th century B.C. BimbisaraSrenika (Sreniya), the crown prince of Magadha is said to have killed Brahmadatta the last independent ruler of ancient Anga. He took Campa the capital and resided there as his father's viceroy. Prom this time Angabecame an integral part of the growing empire of Magadha. The Dighanikaya also suggests that Anga became subject to Sreniya Bimbisara.

3.4.2 Magdha-The Magadha country also goes back to a great antiquity. Though the name Magadha is not mentioned in the Rigveda, the name of the country of Elk which in later works is given as a synonym of Magadha is found in the Rgveda. The name Magadha first appears in the Atharvaveda. The bards of Magadha are, However, Magadha is mentioned as early as the Yajurveda. During the Vedic, Brahmana, and Sutra periods, it was regarded as being outside the sphere of Aryan and Brahmanical culture.

But Magadha has always been included in the Madhyadesathe Buddhist holy land. It was an important center of Buddhism and a kingdom of the greatest political interest in the history of ancient and medieval India. Once again in later history, Magadha became the center of a great empire under the 63Gupta dynasty. During the early Buddhist period, Magadha was an important political and commercial center and the people from all parts of Northern India flocked here for trade and commerce. Magadhhad the republic of the Licchavis a neighbor and Ganges65formed the boundary between these two countries. During the reign of Ajatasattu Magadha also came in conflict with the Mallas, of the Vajjis. It was under the rulership of BimbisaraandAjatasattu that Magadha rose to great prominence and to speak the truth, centuries later till Asoka's Kalinga war. history5 66 of Northern India is practically the history of Magadha. Girivraja or ancient Rajagrha was the earliest capital, of Magadha. Later in Asoka's time, Pataliputra became the capital. At the ancient site of Pataliputra was Pataligamawhere the ministers of Ajatasattu built a fort to repel the 68Yajjjis. The ancient city of Giribraja was encircled by the five hills of fame — viz. Isigili, Vepulla, Yebhara, Pandava. During the reign of Bimbisara Magadha contained 6980,000 villages.

3.4.3 Kasi-The earliest mention of the Kasls as a tribal people seems to, he met within the Paippalada recension of the Atharvaveda. Patanjali in his Mahabhasya refers to Kasi6cloth. Of the sixteen Mahsganapadas Kasi was probably at first the most powerful. Prom several Jatakas we come to know of the superiority of its capital Benaras over other cities and the imperial ambition of its rulers. according to. the GuttilaJatakawas the chief city of India. Several Kasi monarchs are described as aspirants for the dignity of the chief kings of all kings (Sabbarajanamaggarajja) and/or lord of the whole of India. The country of Kasi was noted as a great center of trade, most populous, and prosperous at the same time. One highway connected it with Rajagaha and another with Savatthi. Kasi was noted for silk cloth and perfumes. Kasi covered an area of 86300 leagues. The capital of Kasi was Baranasi. It was known by various other names, namely Surundhana, Sudassana, Brahma, Pupphavati, Rama and Mohini. It was twelve yojanas in extent. Varanasi was situated on the bank of the river Parana. Other notable places in Kasi were Vasabhagama,' Macchikasanda, Kitagiri, Dhanapalag'ama, etc. The most significant Buddhist site near Benares is the Deer Park at Sarnath (ancient Sipatana or Rsipatana), located a few leagues from Uruvela.

3.4.4 Kosala-The kingdom of Kosala during the time of early Buddhism was a mighty one and important too. From theAvadanasatska, it appears that the ancient kingdom of Kosala was divided into two broad divisions, namely, the Uttara or North Kosala and the Daksina or South Kosala. The river Sarayu served as a wedge between them. We are told that there were 92 fights between the kings of these divisions. The king of Kosala, Pasenadi, was an important historical figure. The kingdom of Kosala was bounded on the west by the Gomti, on the south by the Sarpika or Syandika (Sai) river as becomes evident from the Ramayana, and on the east, it was bounded by the separated from Videha, and on the north by the Nepal hills. It appears from the Sutta Nipata that Kosala also included the territory of the Sakyas of Kapilavastu. The MajjhimaNikayadescribes the Buddha as a Kosalan. The political subjection of the Sakyas to the king of Kosala in the latter half of the sixth century B.C. is clear from the evidence of the Agganna98Suttanta and the introductory portion of the Bhaddasala Jataka.

3.4.5 Vajji-The Vajji territory was situated north of the Ganges, stretching up to the Nepal hills. To the west, the Gandak River likely marked its boundary with the Malas

and possibly the Kosalas, while to the east, it may have extended toward the forested regions, that skirted the river Kosi and the Mahananda. The Yajji territory appears to have comprised the principalities of eight or nine allied clans. Of these Confederate clans the old Yidehas, the Licchavis, the Jnatrkas, and the Vrjis are the most important.

3.4.6 Malla - The Mallas a powerful people of East India, at the time of the Buddha had a Samgharajya. They are often mentioned in the Buddhist texts as well as in the Jaina works. The country of the mall as. stated, to be nine in the Jaina canonical texts, comprised in theory nine territories, one of each of the confederate clans. But the Pali canonical texts bring into prominence the territories at Pava and the other with headquarters at Kusinara. The river Kakuttha, theCacouthes of the classical writers, identified with the modem Kuru probably formed the dividing line. Scholars are not unanimous on the point of the exact site of ancient Kusinara.In the MahaparinibbanaSuttanta it is stated that the SalaGrove of the Mallas, the Upavattana of Kusinaralay near the river Hirannavati. CunninghamidentifiesKusinara with the village of Kasia in the east of the Gorakhpur district. Pava was identified by Cunningham with the village of Padaraona or Padraona 12 miles to the north-north-east of Kasia and separated from it by the Badhi or Bandhi126 Bala (identified with the ancient Kakuttha). However, proposes to identify Pava with Pazilpurmiles southeast of Kasia and separated from it by the Kuru.

3.4.7 Chedi - The Chedis formed one of the most ancient tribes among the Ksatriyas in early Yedic times. The country of the Chetis or Cedis lay near the Yamuna, contiguous to that of the Kurus. It was closely connected with the Matsyasbeyond the Chambal, the Kasis of Benares, and the Karushas resided in the Son River valley and were distinct from the Dasarnas, who inhabited the banks of the Dhasan River.

In ancient times it corresponded roughly to the eastern part of modern Bundelkhand and some adjoining tracts. Pargiter places Cedi along the south bank of the Jumna from the Chambal on the northwest as far as Karwi on the southeast; its limits southwards may have been, according to him, the plateau of Malva, and the hills of Bundelkhand. In the medieval period, however, the southern frontiers of Cedi extended to the banks of the Narmada. We learn from the Cetiya Jit aka that the

metropolis was Satthivatinagara. The Mahabharata gives its Sanskrit name Suktimati or Suktisahvaya. We learn from the Yedabbha Jataka that the road from Kasi to Cedi was unsafe being infested with rovingbands of marauders. It is stated in the VessantaraJatakathatCetarattha was 30 yojanas distant from Jetuttaranagara, the birthplace of King Yessantara. It may have been a different country as hinted by B.C. law; in India, as described in Early Texts of Buddhism and JainismAccordingtoB.C. Law this Ceti country may be identified with the territory covered by the kingdom of Nepal.

3.4.8 Vatsa- The Pali AnguttaraNikaya mentions the land oftheVatsas as one of the sixteen Mahajanapadas as we have already seen. According toDr. H.C. Raychandhuri, the identification of Vamsas with the Vasas of the Aitareya Brahmana is not conclusive as it lacks proof. It seems from the evidence of the Vedic literature that the Yasas had a connection with the Kurus, v 145Pancalas, Usinaras, and Matsyas. But the JanavasabhaSuttanta of the DighaNikaya associates the Yamsas rather with the Cedis than with the Usinaras and mentions the powerful ruling peoples of the time in such groups as Kasi-Kosala, Vajji-Malla, Cedi-Vatsa, Kuru-Pancala, and Maecha-Surasena.In the Pali Buddhist canon, King Udena of the Yamsasis Bald to have been a contemporary of the Buddha, and to have 'survived him.

3.4.9 Kurus - The Kurus formed one of the most ancient and prominent of the Indo-Aryan Ksatriyatribes. Right from the Vedic age down to the age of the (Epics and the Puranas the156 Kurus occupy a position of honour and glory. According to the Mahabharata, the Kuru kingdom which extended from the Sarasvati to the Ganges consisted of three parts: Kurujahgala, the Kuruland proper, and Kurukshetra. The Kuru realm according to the Mahasutssoma Jataka was 300 leagues long. The ancient Kuru country may be said to have comprisedKuruksetra and Thaneswar. The district includes Sonapat, Min, Kamal, and Panipat and is situated between the Sarasvatl in the north and the Drsadvati in the south.

3.4.10 Panchala - The Pancalas like the Kurus, are most Intimately connected with the Yedic civilization of the Brahmana period. It continued to be one of the great and powerful countries of Northern India down to the time when the Buddha lived. We are told that it had an abundance of the seven kinds of gems etc. It had a large army

consisting of footsoldiers, men skillful in fight and in the use of steel weapons. The Pancala country was divided into two regions, northern Pancala and southern Pancala. The Mahabharata, theDivyavadana, and the Jatakas bear testimony to this fact.

3.4.11Matsya - The Matsyas seem to have been one of the prominent Kshatriya tribes that formed part of the Vedic Aryan people during their earliest period in India. A hymn in the Rigveda mentions the Matsyas being attacked by Turvasa a famous king. According to the Vedic literature the country of the Matsyas lay to the south or southwest of Indraprastha and to the south of Surasena. The Satapatha Brahmana, the Kausitaki Upanisad, the Mahabharata, the Padma Purana, the visnudharmottaraMahapurana, and other183texts mention the Matsyas or the Matsyakingdom. Among references to Matsya in the Buddhist literature, leaving side the AnguttaraUikaya which mentions the sixteenMahajanapadas, we may speak of the Janavasabha Suttanta of the Digha Nikaya which refers to the Macchas (together with the Kasis and Surasenas) in connection with the account of theBuddha's stay in Nadika. The Matsya country embraced the extensive territory between the hills near the Chambal and the forests that skirtedtheSarasvatl of which the center was Viratanagara or Bairatinthe modern Jaipur state. It included the whole of the modern185territory of Alwar with a portion of Bhagalpur.

3.4.12 Surasena - The Surasenas are not mentioned in the Vedic literature. They are referred to in the ManavadharmaSastra which speaks in very high terms of the Surasenasasbelonging to the Brahmarsidesa or the country of the great Brahmanical seers. The Mahabharata enumerates a number/of peoples in a list that includes the Surasenas along with the Salvas, Kuru-Pancalas, and other neighboring tribes. The Ramayana places Surasena among the northern countries. The Buddhist texts speak of Madhura or Mathura which was the capital of Surasena. It was on the right bank of the Jumna. It has been a great city from the early times of Indo-Aryan history down to the present day. According to Cambridge History of India, the Surasenas must have occupied the Muttra district and possibly some of the territory still further south.

3.4.13 Assaka - The Asmakas or Assakas formed one of the199 Kshatriya tribes of ancient India. They are not mentioned in the Vedic literature, but we find them

referred to in the Epics and Puranas. The Buddhist texts contain occasional references to this country. The Anguttara Nikaya says that it had an abundance of food and gems and was wealthy and prosperous. The TheMahagovindasuttanta of the DighaNikaya says that Potanawas is the (capital) city of the Assakas. The Sutta Nipat one of the oldest works of thePali Buddhist literature associates the Assakacountrywiththat of Mulaka with its capital Patitthana (Paithan) and is placed on the bank of the Godhavari, immediately to the south of Patitthana. Rhys Davids points out that the country is mentioned together with Avanti, in the same way as Anga is with Magadha, and its position in the list of Mahajanapadas, betweenSurasena, and Avanti, makes it appear probable that when the list drawn up, Asmaka was situated immediately northwest of Avanti. In that case, the settlement on the Godavari was a larger colony, and this is confirmed by the fact that there is no mention of Potana (or Potali) in the country on that list. Further, as Anga in his Sutralahkara mentions an Asmaka country at the basin of the Indus. It is also to be noted that the Greek writers knew of a people called the Assakenoi in eastern Afghanistan.

3.4.14 Avanti - In the age of the Mahabharata the Avantis were one of the most powerful Ksatriya clans. The Puranas also refer to them in different contexts. Prom the Vana- parvan of the Mahabharata we come to know that Avanti was a place of pilgrimage in west India and the sacred river Narmada was situated therein. It was one of the four principal monarchies in India at the emergence of Buddhism and was later incorporated into the Mauryan Empire. Rhys Davids notes that the region of Avanti, much of which was fertile land, had been settled or conquered by Aryan tribes who migrated down the Indus Valley and then turned west from the Gulf of Kutch. The name Avanti continued to be used at least until the second century A.D. but from the seventh or eighth century onwards, it was called Malava. /Avanti was one of the most flourishing kingdoms in India. Prom the first, it became an important center of Buddhism and may have been the scene of elaboration of Pali, the sacred language of the Buddhists. About the political history of Avanti, we may refer to King CandapajjotaorPradyota who was a contemporary of the Buddha and under whom the new faith bee erne the state religion of Avanti. The ancient kingdom of Avanti was divided by the Vindhyas into two parts as rightly pointed out by D.R. Bhandarkar, viz., the northern and the southern. The northern part had its capital at

Ujjenl or Ujjayinl, and the southern part called Avanti Daksinapatha had its capital at Mahismati. According to the MahagoyindaSuttanta of the DighaNikayaMahisati was the capital of Avanti with Yessabhu as its king. This refers to the Avanti country in Dakkhinapatha. In the Mahabharatahowever, Avanti and Mahismati (Mandhata, the rocky island), are stated to be two different countries. The northern Avantikingdom was drained by the Sipra and other streams and the southern by the Narmada.

3.4.15 Kamboja - Kamboja is constantly associated with Gandhara246in literature and inscriptions. The Kambojas appear to be one of the early Tedic tribes. They are referred to in Yaska'sNirukta.like Gandhara, the Kamboja country is included intheUttarapatha or Northwest India. Asoka's edicts refer to Kamboja along with Yona as frontier provinces. The Kamboja country must not be confused with Kambuja in the Trans Gangetic Peninsula (i.e. Cambodia) and should be located in some part of North West Indo-Pakistan close to Gandhara. The Kambojas occupied roughly the province round about Rajaori or ancient Rajapura including the Hazara district of the North Western Frontier Province. The horses of Eamboja were famous throughout all periods of Indian history. Sumahgalavilasini describes Kamboja as the home for horses.

3.4.16 Gandhara - Gandhara has been an essential part of India since the earliest days of Indo-Aryan civilization and stands out among Indian regions for its history, which can be traced in an unbroken continuum from Rigvedic times to the present day.

The Buddhist literature contains numerous references to the country of Gandharas and its capital Taksas'ilaTakkhasila in Pali). The Jatakas testify to the existence of trade relations between the KashmiraGandhara kingdom and the northeastern kingdom of Videha. Horse dealers figure prominently amongst the Gandharan traders. We find references to the production of 'Valuable blankets or woolen shawls (Kambala) in the Vessantara Jataka and also in the Sutta Nipata commentary. Gandhara was on the northwest frontiers of India in the neighborhood of the Kambojas, Madras, and similar other 232 tribes, but there are differences of opinion among scholars on its exact boundaries.

Self Check Exercise-2

Q1.   What was Taxila famous for?

Q2. Who were Yaudheyas?

Q3. Which of the Mahajanapadas, was given as a dowery to Magdha?

Q4. Who was Bimbisar?

3.4 Gana /Sangha - In the sixth century B.C., we find a large number of states in northern India, and many of these were not ruled by kings but formed petty republics or oligarchies. That was the age of the Buddha and therefore, the republican states of this period have been called 'Republics of the age of the Buddha'. These were the most ancient existing states not only of India but of the world and, so India is also one of those countries that can feel proud of having experimented with the republican form of constitution in ancient times.

Dr. Jayaswal maintains that these republics were divided into the following three categories:

a. Democracies or pure Gana, wherein the total adult population participated in the administration;

b. Aristocracies or pure Kula, where in only some selected families participated in the administration; and

c. Mixed aristocracies and democracies or a mixture of Kula and Gana, wherein the administration was the mixture of the two.

According to Dr Bhandarkar, the republics were divided into two types, viz., pure republics and Kshatriya aristocracies. Then each of them was further divided into two parts. Both the republics and the aristocracies were of two types, viz., unitary and federal. The republican states which had a unitary character were called City-republics or Nigamas, while the republics having a federal character were called State-republics or Janapadas.

The most ancient republics in India were those of the sixth century B.C. These were as follows:

The Sakyas of Kapilavastu - This was an important republican state of that time. It was situated near the border of Nepal in the Terai region of the Himalayas. Mahatma Buddha belonged to the family of the Sakyas. The republican state of the Sakyas had a federal constitution. Its head was elected and was given the title of King. Every

Sakya adult participated in its administration and all-important matters were decided by the assembly of all. Attendance of a fixed number of members was necessary to complete the quorum. The Sakya Republic had eighty thousand families living within its territories and had several cities as well. It was ultimately occupied by the state of Kosala near the end of the sixth century B.C.

The Lichchavis of Vaisali -It was the largest and the most powerful republican state of that time. It included nine republican states of Mallas and eighteen republican states of Kasi and Kosala. Vaisali was the capital of the Lichchhavis, where in lived nearly 42,000 families and was a beautiful and prosperous city. The head of the state was elected and was titled King. It had another 2,202 Rajans who were, probably, the chief officers of their territories. It was such a powerful state that Ajatasatru, the ruler of the powerful state of Magadha, had to make military and diplomatic preparations for years before he could succeed in annexing it and that, too, could be achieved when his diplomacy succeeded in dividing the Lichchhavis.

The Mallas of Pava - It was a republican state of the Kshatriyas, the capital of which was Pava.

The Mallas of Kushinara - This was another branch of the Mallas.

The Koliya of Ramagrama - This state was in the east of the state of the Sakyas and its capital was Ramagrama. The Koliyas and the Sakyas constantly fought against each other on the use of the water of the river Rohini. However, permanent peace was arranged between the two states by the mediation of Mahatma Buddha.

The Bhaggas of Sunsumargiri - This state belonged to Aitreya Brahmanas. It was near the territories of modern Mirzapur district and its capital was Sunsamagiri.

The Mauryas of Piphalivana - This state was in the foothills of the Himalayas. Probably, Emperor Chandra Gupta Maurya of Magadha belonged to this family.

The Kalama of kesputa - Its capital was Suputa.

The Videhas of Mithila -It was situated at the boundary of Nepal state and its capital was Mithila.

The Ghvatrikas of Kollanga - This state was also situated in the Terai region of the Himalayas near the boundary of Nepal and its capital was Kollanga.

These were the important republican states in India at that time. Each of them drew their name from the name of its ruling family. These included both great and small states. A few of them were aristocracies, a few others were pure republicans while a few had federal-republican constitutions and were called Janapadas. Most of them brought about their ruin because of their mutual conflicts and the rest of it was completed by the rising power of Magadha which was able to annex them all.

Self- Check Exercise-3

Q1.   What was the largest Gana in the 6th Century?

Q2.   Which 'Gana' did Mahatma Buddha belong to?

Q3.   Name the river that creates a dispute between Sakyas and Koliya Gana.

3.6 Summary

The age of Mahajanpada or 6th century B.C. refers to the second urbanization in ancient Indian history. The terms Janapada and Mahajanapada occur very frequently in Buddhist literature. The latter marks the political divisions of ancient India. The conception of the term 'Janapada*was very ancient. The Janapadas were homogenous, political, cultural, and geographical units.

3.7 Glossary

Chanda Pradyot Mahasena: A famous ruler of Avanti

Rajaori: Capital of kamboja

Assak: the only mahajanpad in south

Patliputa: Capital of Magdha

3.8 Answers to Self-Check Exercise

Self Check Exercise-1

Ans.1   Sixteen states or Mahajanpadas are mentioned in the Buddhist Jatakas, Anguttara Nikaya. The Anguttara Nikayas is a Buddhist scripture, the fourth of the five Nikayas, or collection, in the Sutta Pitaka, which is one of the "three baskets" that comprise the Pali Tipitaka of Thervada Buddhism.

Ans.2   Kosala has been mentioned in Allahabad stone Pillar inscription of Samudragupta. In the 4th Century A.D., the Samudragupta's Prayag Prashasshti mentions, Mahendra as the ruler of Kosala.

Ans.3   Ujjain, historically known as *Avantika*, served as the capital of the Avanti kingdom. During the 2nd century BCE, it was the seat of Emperor Ashoka. The city is also renowned as one of the prominent sites for the famous Hindu festival, *Kumbh Mela*.

Self Check Exercise-2

Ans. 1   Taxila became a noted centre of learning including the religious teaching of Historical Vedic religion and Buddhism. It contributed to attracting students from around the world until its destruction in the 5th century CE.

Ans.2   The Yaudheya is the part between the Jhelum and the Indus River, where the Yodheya Gana ruled in ancient times. According to Cunningham, the Youdheya was spread on both the banks of the Satluj. The Youdheyas are also mentioned in Prayag Prashashti of Samudragupta.

Ans.3   The ruler of Avanti was Prasenjit, who strengthened his position by making a matrimonial alliance with Magadha. While marrying his sister Kosala Devi to Bimbisara, he gifted Kasi as the dowry

Ans.4   Bimbisara was the King of Maghda Kingdom and his father's successor, King Bhattiya. Bimbisara belonged to the Haryanka dynasty.

Self Check Exercise-3

Ans.1   Vajji, the world's first republic was founded by Licchavi, the largest Gana in the 6th century. It comprised several smaller republics and clans, including the Licchavis, and was noted for its democratic form of government.

Ans.2   Buddha was a native of Sakya Gana, a small 'Gana'. He was born as *Kshatriya.* He is often referred to as Siddartha Gautam of the Shakya clan or simply Shakyamuni Buddha. The term "Shakyamuni" means 'Sage of the Shakyas', highlighting his lineage from the Sakya clan

Ans.3   The river that caused a dispute between the Sakya and Koliya clans was the Rohini River. This conflict arose over the distribution of the river's water for irrigation purposes. Buddha intervened to prevent the conflict from escalating into a full-blown war.

3.9 Suggested Reading

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3.10 Terminal Questions

1. Describe the political condition in ancient India in the 6th century B.C.

2. Discuss the process of state formation in ancient India.

3. Throw light on the political system of the Gana or Sangha systems of state.

Unit – 4

Mauryan Political Structure and Administration

Structure:

4.1 Introduction

The Mauryan Empire, in ancient India, was a state-centered at Pataliputra (later Patna) near the junction of the Son and Ganges (Ganga) rivers. It lasted from about 321 to 185 BCE and was the first empire to encompass most of the Indian subcontinent. The Mauryan empire was an efficient and highly organized autocracy with a standing army and civil service. That bureaucracy and its operation were the model for the Artha-shastra (The Science of Material Gain), a work of political economy similar in tone and scope to Niccolò Machiavelli's The Prince. In the wake of the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BCE, Chandragupta (or Chandragupta Maurya), founder of the Mauryan dynasty, conquered the Punjab region from the southeastern edges of Alexander's former empire. The Seleucids, a contending dynasty for Alexander's legacy, attempted to advance into India in 305 BCE. They were defeated and, after the conclusion of a treaty, the Seleucids and the Mauryans maintained friendly relations. Now enjoying peace along the western border, Chandragupta was free to focus his military exploits to the east and the south. By the end of his reign, he had extended his empire across northern India. His son, Bindusara, continued the empire's expansion well into the Deccan, stopping around the region known today as Karnataka. Bindusara's son, Ashoka (reigned c. 265–238 BCE or c. 223–232 BCE), added Kalinga to the already vast empire.

4.2 Learning Objectives

After reading this unit you will be able to learn about:

- The Mauryan dynasty founded the earliest empire in the 4th century. B.C.
- The nature of administration under the Mauryas.
- Economy during the Mauryan period. Development of Art and architecture.

4.3 Mauryan State and the Administration- The rise of the Mauryan Empire, unlike the earlier smaller kingdoms, introduced a new model of governance—a centralized empire.

The Mauryan Empire indicates the triumph of monarchy as a political system over the tribal republic. A study of the Arthasastra in conjunction with the edicts provides information regarding the administrative structure. At the centre of the structure was the king who had the power to enact laws. Kautilya advises the King to promulgate dharma when the social order based on the varnas and ashramas (stages in life) perishes. The king is called by him dharmapravartaka or promulgator

of the social order. There was a council of ministers or mantri-parishad to advise the king and at times this may have acted as a political check. The Mauryan centralized monarchy became a paternal despotism under Ashoka. Ashoka in his 1st separate Edict (Dhauli and Jauguda) says "Savve Munisse Paja Mama". (All men are my children). The Mauryan king did not claim any divine origin yet they attempted to emphasize the connection between kinship and divine power.

4.3.1 Council of Ministers

The *Mantri-Parishad*, or council of ministers, provided guidance to the king and occasionally acted as a check on his power.

However, the powers of the council were limited because it was the king who appointed the ministers in the first instance. Three qualities of a minister that the Arthasastra stresses are those of birth, integrity, and intelligence. There was no fixed number for the members of the council and it varied according to the need. The Arthasastra lists the Chief Minister or the Maha Mantri and also distinguishes between the ministers and the assembly of ministers (mantrinomantriparisadamIt appears that the Mantri-Parishad, consisting of a small group of three or four councilors along with the Chief Minister, functioned as an inner council or a close advisory body.

Its important members included the Purohita, Senapati (Commander-in-chief), the Mahamantri and the Yuvaraja.

4.3.2 Amatyas - Amatyas were some sort of administrative personnel or civil servants who filled the highest admin-istrative and judicial appointments. Their pay scales, service rules, and method of payment were laid down. Their role and functions were very important, for all governmental work proceeded from them.

4.3.3 Superintendent or Adhyaksha - The central administration was managed by highly proficient Superintendents, or Adhyakshas, who oversaw various departments.

Kautilya in the second book of his Arthasastra, Adhyakshaprachara, gives an account of the working of nearly 22 adhyaksas. Some of the important officials are mentioned below. The Akshapataladhyaksha was the accountant-general who was in charge of the two offices of currency and accounts. The Sitadhyaksha was the

superintendent of the agriculture of crown lands or government agricultural farms. The Akaradhyaksha was the superintendent of mining and possessed scientific knowledge of mines, metallurgy, gems, and precious stones. Lavananyadhyaksha was the salt superintendent, as the manufacture of salt was a government monopoly. Navadhyaksha was the Superintendent of Ports who controlled traffic and transit by waterways. The Panyadhyaksha was the controller of commerce who was in charge of the control of the supply, purchase, and sale of commodities.

The Sulkadhyaksa was the collector of customs and tolls. The Suradhyaksha was the Superin-tendent of Excise who controlled the manufacture and sale of liquor. Pautavadhyaksha was the super-intendent of weights and measures. The Lakshanadhyaksha was the superintendent of the mint, etc.

4.3.4 Military and Espionage Department- The army was often led by the king himself. It was only in the days of the last Maurya that we find a Senapati overshadowing the king and transferring the allegiance of the troops to himself. The army of Chandragupta, according to Pliny, included 6,00,000foot soldiers, 30,000 cavalry, and 9,000 elephants, besides chariots. It was under the control of the Senapati under whom there were several adhyakshas of different wings and units of the army such as those of infantry (Padadhyaksha), cavalry (asvadhyaksha), war elephants (hastyadhyaksha), navy (navadhyaksha), chariots (rathadhyaksha), and armoury (ayudhagaradhyaksha). Kautilya classifies troops into the hereditary ones (Maula), the hired troops (bhritakas), troops supplied by forest tribes (atavivala), and those furnished by the allies (mitravala).

4.3.5 Revenue Department - The central administration operated through multiple offices, primarily overseeing revenue control, each managed by a designated officer.

Sannidhata - The treasurer was responsible for the storage of royal treasure, and of the state income both in cash and kind.

Samaharta He was responsible for collecting revenue from different regions of the kingdom and overseeing income and expenditure by supervising the Akshapataladhyaksha (Accountant General).

The Rummindei Edict records that the village of Lumbini, where the Buddha was born, was exempted from bali and was to pay only one-eighth of the bhaga. Bhaga

was levied on agricultural produce and cattle at the rate of one-sixth (Shadabhaga) whereas Bali was a religious tribute. According to the Arthasastra, the Brahmins, women, children, armorers, sons, and the king's men were exempted from the tax.

4.3.6 Judicial and Police Departments- The King was the head of justice – the fountainhead of law and all matters of grave consequences were decided by him. Kautilya refers to the existence of two kinds of courts – dharmasthiyas (dealing with civil matters) and kantakasodhanas (dealing with criminal cases). There were special courts in the cities and villages presided over by the pradesika, mahamatras and rajukas. Kautilya mentions the four sources of law. They are dharma (sacred law), vyavahara (Usage), charitam (customs and precedents) and rajasasana (royal proclamations). The Pradesika were the principal police officers, whose duty was to investigate the crimes com-mitted in the region within their jurisdiction. Police headquarters were found in all principal centers. There was a sthaniya in 800 villages, a dronamukha in 400 villages, a kharvatika in 200 villages, and a sangrahana in 4 villages. The jail proper bandhanagara was different from the police lock-up called Charaka.

Self Check Exercise-1

Q1.   Who was Sulkadhyaksha?

Q2.   Who were Rajjukas?

Q3.   Who was the last ruler of the Mauryan Dynasty?

4.4 Provincial and Local Administration - Apart from the metropolitan area which was directly governed, the empire was divided into four provinces, each under a prince or member of the royal family (Kumara and Aryaputra). Under Asoka, there were four provinces: the Northern Province (Uttarapatha) with the capital at Taxila, the western prov-ince (Avantiratha) with the headquarters at Ujjain, the eastern province (Prachyapatha) with the center at Tosali and the southern province (Dakshinapatha) with its capital as Suvarnagiri. The central province Magadha, with its capital at Pataliputra, was also the headquarters of the entire kingdom. The viceroy had the power to appoint some of his officials such as the Mahamattas, who went on tour every five years. The most important provinces such as Taxila and Ujjain were directly under the command of the princes (Kumaras). Provinces were

subdivided into districts for purposes of administration and groups of officials were in charge of a district. The three major officials of the provinces were the pradesika, the rajuka, and the yukta. The Pradesika was responsible for the overall administration of a district, overseeing revenue collection and ensuring law and order in both rural areas and towns within his jurisdiction.

The *Rajuka* was responsible for land surveying and assessment. Megasthenes likely referred to them as agronomists, as they formed the backbone of rural administration. The *Yuktas* were subordinate officials primarily handling secretarial tasks and accounting.

An intermediate level of administration existed between the district and village levels, comprising a unit of five or ten villages. Two key officials managed this unit: the *Gopa* and the *Sthanika*. The *Gopa* served as the accountant, responsible for defining village boundaries, maintaining a population census based on tax capacity, recording professions and ages, and documenting village livestock.

The *Sthanika* collected taxes and operated directly under the *Pradesika*.

Village (grama) was the smallest unit of administration and enjoyed autonomy to a great extent. Individual villages must have had their own set of officials who were directly responsible to the gopas. The head of the village was called Gramika who was assisted by gram-viddhas or village elders. Gramika was not a paid servant; he was chosen from among the village eldersHe likely oversaw village tax collection and managed other responsibilities, including discipline and defense.

4.4.1 Municipal Administration - The Arthasastra mentions the nagaraka or city superintendent who was responsible for the main-tenance of law and order in the city. He was assisted by two subordinate officials, the gopa and the sthanika. Asokan inscriptions mention the nagalaviyohalakamahamattas and refer to them largely in their judicial capacity. In describing city administration, Megasthenesoutlines a more elaborate sys-tem. According to him, the officials were divided into six committees each with a membership of five. The first committee was concerned with matters relating to industrial arts.

The second occupied it with the facilities to the foreigners. The third kept a register of births and deaths both by way of a census and for purposes of taxation. The fourth committee was in charge of matters of trade and commerce. The fifth

committee supervised the public sale of manufactured articles. The sixth commit-tee collected the tax on the articles sold, this being one-tenth of the purchase price.

Self Check Exercise-2

Q1.   Who built India's first hospital and herbal garden?

Q2.   In which inscriptions the name of 'Ashoka' has been mentioned?

Q3.   What were 'Bhaga' and 'Bali'?

Q4.   Why is Kalsi famous?

4.5 Asoka's Dhamma

Asoka Maurya ascended the Mauryan throne around 269 B.C. and is widely regarded by historians as one of the greatest rulers of the ancient world. His policy of Dhamma has been the subject of extensive scholarly discussion. The term "Dhamma" is the Prakrit form of the Sanskrit word "Dharma," which has been interpreted in various ways, including piety, moral conduct, and righteousness. However, the best way to comprehend Asoka's concept of Dhamma is by examining his edicts, which were issued to communicate his principles to the people of his empire. These inscriptions repeatedly emphasize his commitment to ensuring that both his subjects and the state administration adhered to the principles of Dhamma.

To ensure that Dhamma was widely understood, Asoka had edicts inscribed at prominent locations across the empire and even sent messengers beyond its borders. Importantly, Dhamma was not associated with any particular religious doctrine or ritualistic practice. It was not merely a royal policy but rather a set of ethical and social guidelines aimed at fostering harmony in society. Asoka's approach sought to integrate prevailing social norms from different traditions of his time. To fully understand his formulation of Dhamma, it is essential to examine the socio-political and religious conditions of his era, drawing insights from Buddhist, Brahmanical, and other contemporary texts that outline moral and social principles. The following sections provide the historical background that shaped Asoka's policy of Dhamma.

4.5.1 Background

During the Mauryan period, significant economic transformations took place. The widespread use of iron led to surplus agricultural production, facilitating a shift from a predominantly rural economy to one that also included urban centers. The presence of Northern Black Polished Ware pottery is considered an indicator of the material prosperity of the time. The circulation of punch-marked silver coins and other currency types, the state's involvement in securing trade routes, and the emergence of urban hubs all point to structural economic changes that required social adaptation.

The rise of commerce brought the merchant class into greater prominence. The integration of tribal groups and frontier populations into the social fabric posed challenges to traditional social structures. The Brahmanical social order, rooted in the four-fold Varna system, responded by reinforcing caste distinctions and restricting upward mobility, particularly for the commercial class. This rigidity exacerbated social divisions, leading lower social groups to seek refuge in heterodox religious sects, thereby intensifying societal tensions. Asoka inherited these challenges upon ascending the throne.

4.5.2 Religious Conditions

The Brahmanical dominance, which had been systematically reinforced during the later Vedic period, faced increasing opposition. Many questioned the privileges of the priestly class, the rigidity of the caste system, and the elaborate ritualistic practices. The lower social classes, as well as the Vaisyas—who, despite being part of the upper three varnas, were regarded as subordinate to the Brahmanas and Kshatriyas—gravitated towards alternative religious movements.

Buddhism emerged as a significant challenge to Brahmanism. Originating as a reformist movement, it rejected the caste-based hierarchy, the authority of the Brahmanas, and ritual sacrifices. Instead, it emphasized ethical conduct, the "Middle Path," and the alleviation of suffering. These principles appealed to the lower strata of society and the rising commercial class. Buddhism's emphasis on compassion and social harmony further contributed to its growing influence.

4.5.3 Polity

The emergence of the Mahajanapadas in the sixth century B.C. marked the beginning of organized state systems in India. These polities were dominated by

ruling elites, with governance either under monarchies—where the king held supreme authority—or under *gana-samghas*, where hereditary Kshatriya clans collectively managed affairs.

By the time Asoka ascended the throne, the state system had advanced into a complex structure. Key features included:

- **Political Supremacy of Magadha:** Magadha emerged as the dominant power, encompassing former kingdoms, *gana-samghas*, and previously ungoverned regions.
- **Diverse Population:** The Empire comprised people from varied geographical, cultural, and religious backgrounds.
- **Ruling Elite:** Political authority was concentrated among the emperor and his close associates.
- **Revenue Collection:** A structured system extracted surplus from agriculture, trade, and other economic activities.
- **Organized Administration:** A well-established bureaucratic framework facilitated governance.

Given the empire's vastness and diversity, Asoka realized that military force alone could not ensure stability. Instead, he turned to an ideological solution—his policy of *Dhamma*—to unify the empire.

4.5.4 Dissemination of Dhamma

To promote his *Dhamma*, Asoka used inscriptions engraved on rocks and pillars across the empire. These edicts, strategically placed in accessible locations, served as public declarations. They can be categorized into two types:

1. **Edicts for the Buddhist Sangha:** These affirmed Asoka's personal commitment to Buddhism and referenced specific scriptures he encouraged followers to study.
2. **General Edicts:** Comprising the Major and Minor Rock Edicts and the Pillar Edicts, these conveyed his broader vision of *Dhamma* for the general public.

4.5.5 Causes behind the Policy of Dhamma

Several factors prompted Asoka to formulate his *Dhamma*:

- **Imperial Diversity:** The Mauryan Empire encompassed diverse cultures, traditions, and social structures. A unifying ideology was needed to bridge these differences.
- **Rise of Heterodox Sects:** The growing popularity of Buddhism, Jainism, and Ajivikism challenged Brahmanical dominance, causing social tensions. *Dhamma* aimed to promote harmony among all communities.
- **Regional Traditions:** Many regions had indigenous customs distinct from Brahmanical and heterodox systems. A common ethical framework was required to integrate these groups.

Thus, *Dhamma* emerged as an inclusive moral code rather than a rigid religious doctrine.

4.5.6 Principles of Dhamma

Asoka's *Dhamma* was flexible and designed to appeal to people from diverse backgrounds. Its core principles included:

- **Tolerance:** Respect for all religious beliefs and traditions.
- **Ethical Conduct:** Compassion toward servants and slaves, obedience to elders, and generosity toward the needy, Brahmanas, and Sramanas.
- **Religious Harmony:** Promoting peaceful coexistence among various sects.
- **Non-Violence:** Discouraging war and animal sacrifice, while maintaining military strength as a deterrent.
- **Public Welfare:** Initiatives like planting trees, digging wells, and promoting social welfare projects.
- **Critique of Ritualism:** Rejecting extravagant ceremonies as meaningless.

To implement these ideals, Asoka appointed *Dhamma-Mahamattas*, officials tasked with spreading *Dhamma* and ensuring its adoption across the empire. Over time, they evolved into a distinct bureaucratic entity.

4.5.7 Asoka's Dhamma and the Mauryan State

Asoka's *Dhamma* was not merely a philosophical ideal but an integral part of state policy. Viewing his subjects as his children, Asoka emphasized welfare and compassion over coercion. This marked a departure from the *Arthashastra's* pragmatic, power-centric model of kingship.

Key initiatives under Asoka's *Dhamma* included:

- **Renunciation of War:** Following the Kalinga War, Asoka abandoned aggressive conquests, promoting *Dhamma-vijaya* (conquest through righteousness).
- **Social Welfare:** Hospitals for humans and animals, shady groves, wells, and rest houses were established for public benefit.
- **Ban on Sacrifices:** Extravagant sacrifices and superstitious rituals were discouraged.
- **Dhamma-Mahamattas:** Special officials ensured fair treatment across communities and monitored prisoners' welfare.
- **Dhamma-Yatras:** Asoka replaced royal hunting expeditions with *Dhamma* tours, allowing him to engage directly with the people.

This approach earned Asoka the description of "a monk in a king's garb" by some modern scholars, such as Kern.

4.5.8 Interpretations of Dhamma

Scholars have interpreted Asoka's *Dhamma* in various ways:

- **Buddhist Perspective:** Some believe *Dhamma* reflected core Buddhist teachings, with the Kalinga War as a turning point for Asoka's conversion to Buddhism.
- **Secular and Inclusive View:** Others argue that *Dhamma* transcended religious boundaries, emphasizing moral conduct and social harmony. The creation of *Dhamma-Mahamattas*, independent of the Buddhist Sangha, supports this interpretation.
- **Political Strategy:** Romila Thapar contends that *Dhamma* was both a humanitarian vision and a pragmatic response to the socio-political complexities of the Mauryan Empire.

Critics suggest that Asoka's emphasis on non-violence and reduced military activity weakened the empire, contributing to its decline after his death. However, Thapar counters this by highlighting Asoka's continued emphasis on state security and his strategic diplomacy with neighboring kingdoms like the Cholas, Pandyas, and Sri Lanka.

4.5.9 Legacy of Asoka's Dhamma

While Asoka's *Dhamma* represented a visionary approach to governance, it did not survive long after his reign. The subsequent Mauryan rulers did not maintain the same emphasis on ethical governance, and the empire eventually fragmented.

However, Asoka's legacy endures in the form of his inscriptions, which provide valuable insights into ancient Indian polity, society, and culture. His emphasis on compassion, tolerance, and welfare remains an inspiring model of ethical leadership.

Self -Check Exercise-3

Q1.   What is a stupa?

Q2.   Who was the Naukadhyaksha in the Mauryan administration?

Q3.   Who was Aakradhyaksha?

4.6 Summary

In 321 BC, Chandragupta Maurya, with the help of Chanakya (author of Arthashasthra) founded the Mauryan dynasty after overthrowing the Nanda Dynasty. The Mauryan Empire was the first dominant Indian empire to unify the entire Indian subcontinent under a single rule. Under Chandragupta Maurya, its territorial expansion extended into Central Asia and Persia. As one of the most significant

empires in ancient Indian history, it marked remarkable advancements in polity, religion, culture, economy, and architecture.

4.7 Glossary

Jatak: The stories of the early births of Mahatma Buddha.

Harmika: A square-shaped railing situated at the summit of the mound.

Chhatra: A central pillar that supports a triple-tiered umbrella structure.

Sannidhata: The treasurer was responsible for the storage of royal treasure

Samaharta: He was in charge of the collection of revenue from various parts of the kingdom

4.8 Answers to Self-Check Exercise

Self Check Exercise-1

Ans.1   The 'Sulkadhyaksha' was an official in the Mauryan administration responsible for overseeing the collection of tolls and customs duties. This role was crucial in managing trade and commerce, ensuring that goods entering and leaving the kingdom were appropriately taxed.

Ans.2   In the Mauryan administration, the Rajjukas were officials responsible for land management, surveying, and revenue collection. They played a crucial role in maintaining records related to agriculture and land ownership. The Rajjukas ensured that the land was properly measured and that taxes were collected fairly and accurately. They also performed judicial functions, addressing disputes related to land and taxation.

Ans.3   The last ruler of the Mauryan dynasty was Brihadratha. He was assassinated in 185 BCE by his general, Pushyamitra Shunga, who subsequently founded the Shunga dynasty. This event marked the end of the Mauryan dynasty.

Self Check Exercise-2

Ans.1   The first hospital and herbal garden in ancient India were built by Ashoka, the third emperor of the Mauryan dynasty. Ashoka, after embracing Buddhism, focused on welfare measures and public health. He established hospitals for humans and animals and promoted the planting of medicinal herbs and trees throughout his empire to ensure the availability of herbal treatment.

Ans.2   The name of the Ashoka is explicitly mentioned in the Maski edict. This edict, found in Maski, Karnataka, is significant because it is one of the few inscriptions that directly names him as "Ashoka" whereas most of his other edicts refer to him as "Devanampriya" (Beloved of the God) and "Priadarshi" (who looks on with affection).

Ans.3   In the context of ancient Indian administration and economy, particularly during the Mauryan period. 'Bhag' and 'Bali' were forms of taxation. Both forms were essential for the maintenance of the state's administrative functions and public works.

Ans.4   Kalsi, located in the Dehradun district of Uttrakhand, India, is famous for its rock edicts of Ashoka. This edict is one of the major edicts of emperor Ashoka and is inscribed on a large rock in the Kalsi area. The Kalsi edict is significant because it contains inscriptions in the Brahmi script, which detail Ashoka's policies and his efforts to propagate Buddhism.

Self-check Exercise-3

Ans.1   A stupa is a dome-shaped monument that functions as a Buddhist shrine. It is a significant architectural and religious element in Buddhism, representing the Buddha's burial mound. Stupas are designed to house sacred relics, typically the remains of the Buddha or other important Buddhist figures. They are also used as places for meditation and worship.

Ans.2   In the Mauryan administration, the Navakdhyaksha was an official for overseeing the naval forces and managing activities related to maritime affairs. The term is derived from 'nava' meaning ship or boat, and 'adhyaksha' meaning superintendent. The Navakadhyaksha's duties would have invluded the supervision of shipbuilding, maintenance of the naval fleet, and regulation of maritime trade and commerce.

Ans.3   Aakaradhyaksha was the superintendent of mines. This official was responsible for overseeing mining activities, including the extraction of minerals and metals such as gold, silver, copper, and iron. The Aakradhyaksha's duties included ensuring the efficient and effective management of mines, maintaining records of production, and regulating the mining workforce.

4.9 Suggested Readings

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4.10 Terminal Questions

1. Discuss the Development of the MauryanEmpire.

2. Describe the nature of administration under the Mauryas.

3. Discuss about the nature of Asokan Dhamma.

4. Write down the features of the Asokan Dhamma policy.

Unit -5

State and Statecraft in the Arthsastra of Kautilya

Structure:

5. 1Introduction

5.2 Learning Objectives

5.3 State and Statecraft in Kautilya's Arthasastra

Self-Check Exercise-1

5.4 Summary

5.5 Glossary

5.6 Answer to the Self-Check Exercise

5.7 Suggested Readings

5.8 Terminal Questions

5.1 Introduction

The republican system of governance was well established in ancient India. By the time Alexander of Macedonia invaded in the 4th century B.C., numerous independent republics (Ganas) thrived, such as the Agrasrenies in the Indus Valley, Kamboj in the west, and Panchals in the north (Sen, 1920: Ch.3; Ghoshal, 1923:2). Kautilya, the author of *Arthashastra*, emerged during this period and played a crucial role in resisting Alexander's forces. He believed that Alexander's partial conquest of India was primarily due to the lack of a strong, centralized empire. Determined to prevent history from repeating itself, Kautilya was instrumental in establishing the Mauryan Empire, which was significantly more centralized than the republican structures of the time. His treatise, *Arthashastra*, therefore, focuses exclusively on governance within a monarchical state. Kautilya was a professor of Political Science at the renowned Gurukul (university) of Takshashila (now in Afghanistan) and later became both the mentor and Chief Minister of Chandragupta Maurya, the founder of the Mauryan Empire.

5. 2 Learning Objectives

After studying this lesson, the learner will be able:

- To know about the political considerations in ancient India.
- To understand the Mauryan state.
- To know about the importance of Arthsastra.

5.3 Statecraft in Kautilya's Arthashastra

Framework of Arthashastra

The term *Arthashastra* translates to the science (*shastra*) of wealth, governance, and polity (*artha*). This treatise, divided into sixteen books, provides an extensive guide on state administration, covering taxation, law, diplomacy, military strategy, economics, and bureaucracy. It emphasizes rational ethics in governance, advocating for the codification and uniformity of law across the empire.

At the core of good governance is knowledge, which *Arthashastra* classifies into four categories:

1. **Anvikshiki (Philosophy) –** Regarded as the "lamp of all sciences," it provides a foundation for rational thought.

2. **Trayi (The Three Vedas – Sama, Rig, and Yajur) –** These texts define the four social classes (*varnas*) and life stages (*ashrams*). While *Varna* was originally flexible—allowing occupational shifts—over time, it became hereditary and rigid, evolving into the caste system. The concept of *Sanskritization* (Srinivas, 1966) explains how lower castes adopted upper-caste customs, such as vegetarianism, to improve social status. Despite the Brahmins' position at the top of the hierarchy, the monarch traditionally belonged to the Kshatriya class, illustrating a separation between religious and secular power—an institutionalized distinction that Western Europe only established through the Papal Revolution (1026-**1122 AD).**

3. **Varta (Economics) –** Encompasses agriculture, cattle breeding, and trade.

4. **Dandaniti** (Science of Governance and Politics) – Focuses on law enforcement and political administration.

Concept of the State

According to *Arthashastra*, the state exists to enable individuals to fulfill their *dharma* (duty), facilitating spiritual progress and liberation from the cycle of rebirth.

The absence of governance (*arajaka*) is considered chaotic, as illustrated by the concept of *Matsyanyaya* ("Law of the Fish"), where the strong prey on the weak in a lawless society. This disorder is seen as a state of moral and legal collapse, emphasizing the necessity of a just and structured administration.

The four stages of life (*ashrams*)—Brahmacharya (studenthood), Grihastha (householder), Vanaprastha (hermitage), and Sanyas (renunciation)—define the social order. Unlike Buddhism, which promoted asceticism for all, Kautilya opposed premature renunciation, considering it socially destabilizing. He imposed strict penalties for those who abandoned familial responsibilities for asceticism.

In *Arthashastra*, *dharma* is interpreted not only as religious conduct but also as law, virtue, duty, and justice. The *Mahabharata* outlines ten virtues of *dharma*, including truth (*satya*), self-discipline (*dama*), and charity (*dana*). Kautilya viewed governance as a mechanism to enforce *dharma* and prevent social disorder, akin to Hobbes' assertion that coercive power is essential for maintaining societal order.

Kautilya recognized that moral principles alone were insufficient to curb lawlessness and introduced the concept of *danda* (coercive authority) as a necessary means to enforce order. This aligns with Weber's definition of the state as a seat of legitimized violence. In Vedic thought, *danda* was justified by its role in upholding *dharma*.

Polycentric Governance and Checks on Power

The state functioned through a system of guilds, associations, and councils, each maintaining a degree of autonomy. The King could not infringe upon their customs and traditions. To ensure that neither the King nor these bodies overstepped their limits, the Superintendent of Accounts was tasked with codifying the history and traditions of each association (Rao, 1968). Moreover, a Department of Commissioners (*Pradeshtarah*) safeguarded individual rights within associations, preventing the "tyranny of the majority."

Unlike Western monarchies, where the ruler was often seen as the ultimate authority, the Vedic King was not the sole interpreter of *dharma*. Instead, every individual had the right to interpret and question the King's actions if they

contradicted *dharma*. This decentralized, polycentric structure—akin to Elinor Ostrom's (1991) theory of self-governance—prevented absolutism.

However, while *dharma* served as an ideological framework for governance, it did not fully account for coordination and transaction costs, much like the limitations of Walrasian general equilibrium models (Eggertsson). The Vedic state was not a federation or confederation of guilds, as guilds were social rather than purely political entities. Citizens could belong to multiple associations, preventing a rigid contractual relationship between the state and subunits.

The Seven Pillars of the State

Kautilya identified seven key components of the state:

1. Swami (Monarch)

2. Amatya (Officials/Bureaucracy)

3. Janapada (Territory and Population)

4. Durga (Fortifications/Defense Infrastructure)

5. Kosa (Treasury/Financial Resources)

6. Bala (Military Strength)

7. Surhit (Allies)

The King derived power from three sources:

- Prabhushakti (Military and Financial Power)

- Mantrashakti (Council of Ministers' Advice, considered most critical)

- Utsahshakti (Personal Charisma)

Unlike Hobbes' Leviathan, Kautilya's monarch was not an absolute ruler but a custodian of *dharma*, constrained by the Council of Ministers and autonomous associations. A strong standing army, directly financed by the treasury, was a key instrument of centralization, reducing the King's reliance on subunits for military support.

The Mantri Parishad (Council of Ministers) was vital to governance, consisting of an Inner Cabinet with four key members—the Chief Minister, Chief Priest, Military Commander, and Crown Prince—ensuring administrative continuity. The Outer Cabinet included prominent guild leaders, reflecting broader societal interests.

Kautilya glorified the state, considering kingship an institution of legal and moral authority. However, he rejected the divine right of kings, viewing monarchy as a human institution with the ruler acting as a servant of the people (*dasyatva*).

Taxation and Economic Policy

Kautilya envisioned a "dharmic social contract" between the King and citizens, where taxes were justified as a means of maintaining order and welfare. If the King failed to protect his subjects, they could demand tax remission. His taxation system prioritized stability and predictability, ensuring economic prosperity and supporting a large standing army.

The ancient Vedic saying *"Yatha Raja, Tatha Praja"* (As the King, so are the people) underscores the ruler's influence on society. The King's daily schedule reflected his commitment to governance, allocating time for public grievances, administrative affairs, military inspections, and consultations with ministers.

Legal and Bureaucratic System

Kautilya's legal system was not based on popular sovereignty but derived from four sources:

1. Dharma (Sacred Law)

2. Vyavahara (Legal Precedents and Evidence)

3. Charita (History and Customs)

4. Rajasasana (Royal Decrees)

In case of conflicts, *dharma* was considered supreme. Bureaucracy played a vital role in administration, with thirty divisions led by *Adhyakshas* (Chiefs), ensuring a structured governance framework.

Recognizing the importance of trade, Kautilya implemented state regulations to ensure quality control, currency stability, and standardization of weights and measures. Merchandise had to bear the state's *Abhigyan Mudra* (seal of approval),

with strict penalties for counterfeiting—a revolutionary concept for that era, indicating a well-developed commercial sector

The *Arthashastra* represents a sophisticated model of governance, blending realism with ethical considerations. Kautilya's pragmatic approach, emphasizing a centralized yet accountable administration, has led many Western scholars to compare him to Machiavelli. However, unlike Machiavelli's *The Prince*, which prioritizes power for its own sake, *Arthashastra* anchors statecraft in *dharma*, creating a balance between authority and moral responsibility.

Self-Check Exercise-1

Q1.   What do you know about the political considerations in ancient India?

Q2.   Explain the Importance of Arthashastra in the present context.

5.4 Summary

The *Arthashastra* is an extensive treatise on governance in a monarchical Vedic state. Kautilya approached governance and statecraft with a rational perspective, viewing both the state and kingship as human constructs. His model of human nature was pragmatic, yet he envisioned a king possessing near-superhuman qualities. While rulers like Chandragupta, Bindusara, and Ashoka embodied this ideal, their successors failed to do so.

The system of checks and balances among the king, associations, and citizens functioned effectively only as long as the king was willing to uphold it. The ideal society envisioned in the *Arthashastra* persisted for a few centuries, but the successful Muslim invasions in the 8th century exposed a significant military weakness within Hindu society. Kautilya's vision aimed at establishing a strong and prosperous Vedic order capable of repelling foreign invasions, such as that of Alexander. However, the success of the Muslim conquest suggested that either Hindu rulers had strayed from the tenets of the *Arthashastra* or that its principles had become outdated—likely both.

Kings had undoubtedly deviated from the Vedic ideal of a *dharmic* ruler—one who serves the people and upholds the *dharmic* order. The *varna* system had deteriorated into a rigid caste structure, and the once rational and *dharmic*

governance of the *Arthashastra* had faded into a mere remnant of its former self. As a result, the Muslim invaders likely encountered a weakened and decaying social order, making their conquest easier.

5.5 Glossary

Sevenfold theory: it is also known as the saptang theory. Here seven important elements of state have been described by the Kautilya'sArthashastra.

Arthashastra: A treaty written by Kautilya on statecraft, political, economic, and military strategy of the Mauryan period.

5.6 Answer to the Self-Check Exercise

Self-Check Exercise-1

Ans.1 Political considerations in ancient India were characterized by a complex interplay of various dynasties, regional powers, and religious influences. The concept of kingship was central, with rulers often legitimizing their authority through divine sanction and adherence to dharma (moral law). The Maurya and Gupta empires are notable for their administrative efficiency and centralized governance, while smaller kingdoms operated with more localized and oftesn feudal systems. The Arthashastra, an ancient Indian treatise attributed to Chanakya (Kautilya), provides extensive insight into statecraft, including espionage, economic policy, and military strategy. Religion, particularly Hinduism and Buddhism, played a significant role, in influencing laws and ethical standards.

Ans.2 The Arthashastra, an ancient Indian treatise on statecraft, economic policy, and military strategy attributed to Chanakya (Kautilya), remains highly relevant in the present context. Its emphasis on pragmatic governance, strategic thinking, and realpolitik provides valuable insights for contemporary policymakers and leaders. The text's detailed analysis of economic management, including taxation, trade, and resource allocation, offers timeless principles applicable to modern economic policies. Additionally, its discussions on diplomacy, espionage, and military tactics can inform current geopolitical strategies and security measures. The Arthashastra's focus on ethical State governance and public welfare underscores the importance of balancing power with responsibility, a concept crucial for today's leaders navigating complex global challenges.

5.7 Suggested Readings

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5.8 Terminal Questions

1. Write down the note on the statecraft in the Arthsastra of Kautilya.
2. Throw light on the seven-fold state policy in Arthsastra.
3. Throw light on the nature of the state in Arthsastra.

Unit - 6

Disintegration of the Mauryan Empire

Structure:

6.1 Introduction

6.2 Learning Objectives

6.3 Successors of Asoka

    6.3.1 Other Political Factors behind Disintegration

Self-Check Exercise -1

6.4 Asoka and His Policies

Self-Check Exercise- 2

6.5 Economic Challenges

    6.5.1 Rise of Local Polities

    6.5.2 Prominent Kingdoms

    6.5.3 Regional Kingdoms

Self-Check Exercise -3

6.6 Summary

6.7 Glossary

6.8 Answers to Self-Check Exercises

6.9 Suggested Readings

6.10 Terminal Questions

6.1 Introduction

The Mauryan Empire marked India's first experience with centralized imperial governance under Chandragupta Maurya, Bindusara, and Asoka. These rulers effectively extended Mauryan authority over numerous Janapadas (kingdoms), establishing an innovative administrative framework for governing a vast territory. However, the empire's stability began to wane following Asoka's death in 232 B.C., eventually collapsing by 180 B.C.

The decline of the Mauryan Empire was not driven by a single cause but resulted from multiple interconnected factors. This section explores the role played by Asoka's successors, the impact of his policies, the economic challenges faced by the empire, and the weakening of central administration. Additionally, it examines how the rise of regional powers further accelerated the empire's disintegration.

6.2 Learning Objectives

Upon completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- Analyze the extent to which Asoka's successors contributed to the empire's decline.
- Examine other political factors that led to the weakening of the Mauryan state.
- Evaluate how Asoka's policies may have indirectly contributed to the empire's downfall.

6.3 Successors of Asoka

Asoka is believed to have died in 232 B.C., but the Mauryan dynasty persisted for nearly fifty years after his passing. Various literary sources, including the Puranas, Avadanas, and Jain texts, provide inconsistent accounts of his successors. These texts suggest that following Asoka's death, the empire was divided among his surviving sons.

Prominent successors mentioned in these sources include Kunala, Dasharatha, Samprati, Salishuka, Devavarman, Satadhanvan, and Brihadratha. However, determining their precise reign periods remains difficult. What is clear, though, is that the empire gradually fragmented under their rule, with frequent changes in leadership leading to instability.

6.3.1 Other Political Factors Behind Disintegration

The political instability following Asoka's death played a crucial role in the empire's decline. One of the primary challenges his successors faced was deciding whether to continue his policy of *Dhamma* as a guiding principle of governance. Asoka's administrative approach, deeply rooted in moral and ethical values, demanded both vision and strong leadership. While Asoka skillfully balanced governance with the propagation of *Dhamma*, it remains uncertain whether his successors shared the same commitment.

The *Dhammamahamattas*, a body of officials appointed to enforce *Dhamma*, further complicated matters. Some historians believe these officials gained excessive influence, even becoming oppressive during the later part of Asoka's reign. In his First Separate Edict, addressed to the Mahamattas at Dhauli and Jaugada, Asoka urged them to exercise their power with justice and compassion. While he maintained firm administrative control, his successors struggled to do the same.

Another significant challenge lay in managing the expansive Mauryan bureaucracy. The empire's highly centralized administration revolved around the king's authority. This system required strong leadership, as officials were primarily loyal to the ruler rather than the state. When weaker monarchs ascended the throne,

the administrative structure began to collapse. As central authority eroded, provincial leaders asserted greater autonomy.

Since Mauryan officials were personally appointed by the king, their loyalty was often limited to the reigning monarch. Frequent changes in leadership led to the continuous appointment of new officials, each loyal only to their respective rulers. This system of personal allegiance fueled instability, as officials could either support or resist the ruling king.

As central authority weakened, regional governors and traditional power structures gained strength. Consequently, provincial leaders began to challenge the Mauryan administration, further accelerating the empire's fragmentation. Ultimately, the rise of regional powers and the failure to maintain a unified administration marked the final stages of the Mauryan Empire's disintegration.

Self- Check Exercise-1

Q1.   Which battle led to Ashoka's conversion to Buddhism?

Q2.   Which symbol from Ashoka's reign is now part of India's national emblem?

Q3.   What is the main theme of Ashoka's edicts?

6.4 Asoka and His Policies

Many scholars believe that Asoka's political decisions and their outcomes significantly contributed to the decline of the Mauryan Empire, particularly highlighting the perceived shortcomings of his religious policies.

Brahmanical Reaction: Some scholars suggest that Pushyamitra Sunga, who deposed the last Mauryan emperor, led a strong Brahmanical resurgence against Asoka's pro-Buddhist policies and the pro-Jain inclinations of some of his successors. The emergence of the Satavahanas in the Deccan, a Brahmanical dynasty, is often cited as further evidence of this reaction.

Cultural Tensions: Asoka's measures, such as the prohibition of animal sacrifices, are believed to have alienated the Brahmanical community, especially since the Mauryas were regarded as Shudras according to the Puranas.

Role of Dhammamahamattas: The appointment of Dhammamahamattas—officials tasked with promoting Dhamma—may have further strained relations with Brahmanical authorities by curbing their traditional practices and legal frameworks.

However, there is no direct evidence to substantiate these claims, making them largely speculative. Asokan inscriptions explicitly state that Dhammamahamattas were instructed to respect both Brahmanas and Sramanas. While it is possible that

these officials became unpopular over time, as suggested by Buddhist sources, their power primarily distanced Asoka from direct contact with the people rather than specifically targeting the Brahmanas. If his policies had truly harmed Brahmanical interests, a rebellion would likely have occurred immediately after his death rather than much later under Pushyamitra Sunga.

Self- Check Exercise-2

Q-1   Who constructed the 'Sanchi Stupa'?

Q-2   In which inscriptions, Ashoka's edicts are also found?

Q-3   Why Rummindei pillar famous?

6.5 Economic Challenges

D.D. Kosambi highlighted the economic difficulties faced by the Mauryan Empire, which played a significant role in its decline. His arguments focus on two primary aspects that suggest financial constraints within the Mauryan economy:

a) The state imposed excessive taxes on various commodities to generate revenue.

b) The punch-marked coins from this period indicate signs of debasement.

In a highly centralized administrative system, revenue shortages led to multiple challenges. The Arthashastra recommended imposing taxes on actors, prostitutes, and other sources to increase state income. This tendency to tax everything that could be taxed stemmed from either a depleted treasury or currency debasement due to inflation. The emergency fiscal measures prescribed in the Arthashastra are interpreted in this light. Moreover, the decreasing silver content in later Mauryan punch-marked coins suggests that debasement was actively used to address the financial crisis.

Expenditures also increased substantially, particularly under Ashoka, who spent vast sums on public works, official tours, and religious activities, depleting available reserves. This shift from strict financial controls to a more relaxed approach started during Ashoka's reign.

Romila Thapar offered additional insights into these economic issues. She argued that the debasement of coins did not necessarily indicate an overall economic decline. The exact time and location of currency debasement remain uncertain. Thapar suggested that, in many regions of India, material evidence points to economic improvement, including the use of higher-quality materials indicating

technological advancement. She attributed coin debasement not to economic deterioration but to extreme political instability, particularly in the Ganges Valley, which likely led merchants to hoard money, exacerbating the crisis.

6.5.1 Rise of Local Polities

Despite the Mauryan decline, material and technological progress continued, allowing local polities to emerge with renewed strength in the post-Mauryan period. The Mauryan Empire directly controlled only key regions, mainly centered around Magadha. Many governors and officials administering these areas were likely selected from local populations. These officials often wielded significant power, acting as a counterbalance to the Viceroy or king's representatives.

Political loyalty among these officials was crucial for maintaining imperial stability. Frequent changes in rulers, as seen in the post-Ashokan period, resulted in shifting loyalties, which undermined governance. The succession of multiple rulers after Ashoka without significant administrative reforms further weakened the empire. Some scholars suggest that different Mauryan rulers governed separate regions concurrently, implying segmentation of the empire even before its official disintegration.

6.5.2 Emergence of Major Kingdoms

Following the Mauryan collapse, numerous regional kingdoms rose to power across India. Immediately after the Mauryas, Pushyamitra established the Sunga dynasty, which controlled only a portion of the former empire. The Sungas, originally Mauryan viceroys in Ujjain and Vidisha, sought to restore Vedic traditions and rituals, possibly as a response to foreign invasions, particularly by the Greeks. The Sunga rule was short-lived, eventually succeeded by the Kanvas.

In northwestern India, the Greeks, known as Indo-Greeks, successfully expanded their influence. Their dominance was later challenged by the Sakas, who settled along the Indus. The Parthians (Pahlavas) also made inroads into the region, but the most significant foreign incursions came with the Kushana Empire, established in the first century AD.

In the Ganges Valley, Rajasthan, Eastern India, and the Deccan, various ruling families emerged. Under Mauryan rule, village settlements were concentrated primarily in the Ganges Valley, while regions like Assam, Bengal, and South India were less developed agriculturally. After the Mauryan decline, many local rulers took control in areas such as Vidarbha, Eastern Deccan, Karnataka, and Western

Maharashtra. Over time, the Satavahanas consolidated power in the Deccan, integrating multiple smaller polities.

Around the same time, Kharavela of Kalinga emerged as a formidable ruler in the Mahanadi region. His Hathigumpha inscription, found in Udayagiri near Bhubaneswar, describes him as the third ruler of the Mahameghavana dynasty, linked to the ancient Chedi lineage. Kharavela conducted military campaigns across India, raiding Magadha and the territories of the Satavahanas and Pandyas. He was also a devout patron of Jainism.

In South India, the three dominant kingdoms—Chera, Chola, and Pandya—continued to assert their influence. The Sangam literature from this period provides rich insights into the society, ecology, governance, and economy of these Tamil kingdoms.

6.5.3 Local Kingdoms and Tribal Powers

Several local and sub-regional powers also emerged during this period, often stimulated by expanding agrarian economies or trade. Indian literary sources, such as the Puranas, mention various ruling tribes, including the Nagas, Gardabhilas, and Abhiras.

- **Nagas:** Four Naga kings are recorded in historical sources.
- **Gardabhilas:** Possibly originating from the Bhils, a major tribal group in Central and Western India.
- **Abhiras:** Some evolved into the Ahir caste, known for pastoralism.

Numerous regional rulers minted their own coins, signifying autonomy. The Yaudheyas, renowned warriors since Panini's time, were suppressed by Rudradaman, a Saka ruler. Other notable tribal states included the Arjunayanas (near Mathura), Audumbaras (between the Ravi and Beas rivers), and Kunindas (near the foothills of the Shivalik range).

Independent principalities such as Ayodhya, Kaushambi, Mathura, and Ahichchhatra also regained prominence after the Mauryan decline.

In the Deccan, inscriptions and coins provide evidence of minor ruling families, such as the Maharathis, Kuras, and Anardas, who were eventually absorbed into the Satavahana empire. Many local chiefs in Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh issued their own currency, highlighting their semi-independent status.

In South India, the three major Tamil chiefdoms—Chera, Chola, and Pandya—constantly clashed with minor rulers from less developed regions. The Velir

chieftains, for instance, controlled key ports involved in Roman trade along the southeastern coast.

Self- Check Exercise-3

Q1. To what extent are Ashoka's successors held accountable for the disintegration of the empire?

Q2. Analyze how different political factors are considered to have contributed to the decline of the empire.

Q3. Emphasize Ashoka's policies in general, as they are often regarded as contributing to the empire's decline.

Q4. Highlight the economic challenges that the Mauryan Empire is believed to have encountered.

6.6 Summary

In this unit, we have examined the various factors contributing to the disintegration of the Mauryan Empire and the emergence of regional polities. Ashoka's successors were unable to preserve the empire's unity, which they had inherited from him. The division of the empire following Ashoka's reign, along with a rapid succession of rulers, undoubtedly weakened its foundation. However, a more significant factor was the inherent contradictions within the Mauryan imperial structure, which deepened the crisis. The highly centralized bureaucracy, whose loyalty was to the king rather than the state, made governance heavily dependent on individual rulers. Consequently, each change in leadership resulted in administrative instability, further weakening the empire after Ashoka's reign.

6.7 Glossary

Bureaucracy: A system of governance where officials are accountable to **a** higher authority.

Coup d'état: A sudden and unlawful overthrow of a government, often through force.

Erring: Individuals deviating from the correct or moral path.

Pacifist: A Pacifist is someone who opposes war and believes that all forms of warfare are unjustifiable.

6.8 Answer to the Self-Check Exercise

Self Check Exercise-1

Ans.1   The battle of Kalinga led to Ashoka's conversion to Buddhism. This war, which took place around 261 BCE, was extremely brutal and resulted in a high number of casualties and great suffering. The

widespread destruction and death profoundly impacted Ashoka, leading him to embrace Buddhism and its principles of non-violence and compassion.

Ans.2   The Lion Capital of Ashoka, which was originally erected by emperor Ashoka at Sarnath around 250 BCE, is now part of India's national emblem. The emblem features four Asiatic lions standing back-to-back, symbolizing power, courage, confidence, and pride. The emblem also includes a horse, a bull, and the Dharma Chakra (wheel of law).

Ans.3   The main theme of Ashoka's edicts is the promation of Dharma (moral law), which encompasses principles such as non-violence (Ahimsa), tolerance of all religion, respect for all life forms, truthfulness, and compassion towards others. These edicts emphasize ethical and moral conduct, social welfare, and the importance of justice. Ashoka sought to spread these values throughout his empire as a means to create a just and harmonious society.

Self Check Exerercise-2

Ans.1   The Sanchi Stupa, one of India's oldest stone structures, was initially commissioned by Emperor Ashoka in the 3rd century BCE to enshrine the relics of the Buddha.

The structure was expanded and emblished over the centuries, especially during the rule of the Shunga and Satvahana dynasties

Ans.2   The Junagarh inscription is one of the inscriptions that feature Ashoka's edicts. The Girnar Rock inscriptions from emperor Ashoka. The girnar rock also has inscriptions from later periods, including those by the Saka ruler Rudradaman and the Gupta emperor Skandgupta.

Ans.3   Rummindei, also known as Lumbini in present- day Nepal, is famous because it is the birthplace of Siddhartha Gautama, who later became known as the Buddha. Emperor Ashoka visited Lumbini around 249 BCE and erected a pillar commemorate the Buddha's birthplace. The Ashokan pillar at Lumbini, with its inscription, mark this location and attests to its significance during Ashoka's reign.

Self Check Exercise-3

Ans.1   Ashoka's successors are largely held accountable for the decline of the Mauryan Empire for several reasons:

Weak leadership: Ashoka's immediate successors lacked his vision, administrative skills, and strong leadership qualities. This weakness made it difficult to maintain vast and diverse empire he had consolidated.

Administrative Decentralization: Ashoka's policy of decentralizing power to regional governors and local rulers, while initially effective for governance, eventually led to reduced central control.

Economic Strain: The Empire's extensive infrastructure projects and the maintenance of a large standing army put a significant strain on the economy. The successors could not manage these economic challenges effectively.

Lack of Military Focus: Ashoka's emphasis on non-violence and Dharma led to a reduced focus on military expansion and defence. After his death, the lack of a strong military made the empire vulnerable to external invasions and internal rebellions.

Ans.2 The fall of the Mauryan Empire, which dominated much of the Indian subcontinent from around 322 to 185 BCE, is linked to several political factors. Some of the most commonly highlighted reasons by historians include:

Internal Revolts: The Mauryan Empire faced numerous internal revolts and rebellions, both from within the royal family and from provincial leaders. These internal conflicts further destabilized the central authority and weakened the central authority and weakened the empire.

Foreign Invasions: The Mauryan empire also faced threats from external forces, including invasions by the Indo-Greeks in the northwest. These invasions compounded the internal problems and further strained the empire's resources and military capabilities.

Brahmancial Opposition: Ashoka's promotion of Buddhism and his policies of non-violence and religious tolerance faced opposition from the orthodox Brahmanical community. This opposition weakened the social fabric and support for the Mauryan rulers among certain sections of society.

Succession Issues: Frequent disputes over succession weakened the stability of the Mauryan dynasty. The lack of a clear and stable line of succession led to power struggles and political instability.

Ans.3 The decline of the Maurya Empire after the reign of Emperor Ashoka is often attributed to a combination of factors, including administrative, economic, military, and policy-related issues. Ashoka's policies, particularly those focused on Dharma (moral law) and non-violence, had significant impacts that contributed to the empire's eventual decline. Here are some key aspects of Ashoka's policies and their roles in the decline of the Maurya Empire:

1. Emphasis on Non-violence (Ahimsa):

➢ Ashoka's conversion to Buddhism led him to adopt and promote the principle of Ahimsa, or non-violence. He reduced the size and importance of the military and focused on spreading peace and Dharma.

➢ This policy weakened the military strength of the empire, making it more vulnerable to external invasions and internal rebellions. The lack of a strong military deterrent emboldened neighboring states and potential usurpers.

2. Administrative Overhaul:

➢ Ashoka implemented a vast bureaucratic system to govern the empire, with a focus on moral governance and the welfare of his subjects.

➢ While this system initially strengthened the administration, it became overly complex and difficult to manage after Ashoka's death. The centralized control weakened, leading to inefficiencies and corruption.

3. Economic Policies:

➢ Ashoka's focus on Dharma and welfare included extensive public works, such as the construction of stupas, viharas, and roads, and the establishment of hospitals and rest houses.

➢ While these projects improved the quality of life for his subjects, they also drained the empire's treasury. The heavy expenditure on these works, combined with the reduction in military spending, led to economic strains.

4. Religious Policy:

➢ Ashoka's promotion of Buddhism and his support for Buddhist institutions led to the alienation of other religious groups, including Brahmins and followers of Hinduism.

➢ This religious favoritism created social and political tensions within the empire, weakening internal cohesion and support for the central authority.

5. Territorial Overextension:

➢ The Maurya Empire was vast, and governing such a large and diverse territory was challenging. Ashoka's policies of decentralization and appointment of regional governors led to increased autonomy in the provinces.

➢ After his death, these regional governors and local rulers often asserted their independence, leading to the fragmentation of the empire.

6.9 Suggested Readings

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- NilakantaSastri, K.A., Age of the Nandas and Mauryas (Ed.), Delhi, 1962.

6.10 Terminal Questions

1. What were the causes of the decline of the Mauryan Empire?

2. Was Asoka responsible for the Decline of the Mauryan Empire?

History in the Deep South: Sangam Literature, New Notion of Kingship, Chola, Pandya and Chera in Tamilakam

Structure:

7.1 Introduction

The Sangam Age in South India is a landmark in her history. Sangam is the Tamil form of the Sanskrit word Sangha which means a group of persons or an association. The Tamil Sangam was an academy of poets and bards who flourished in three different periods and various locations flourished under the patronage of the Pandyan kings. It is believed that the first Sangam was attended by gods and legendary sages, and its seat was Ten Madurai. All the works of the first Sangam have perished. The seat of the second Sangam was Kapatpuram, another capital of the Pandyas. It was attended by several poets and produced a large mass of literature, but only Tolkappiyam (the early Tamil grammar) has survived. The seat of the third Sangam was the present Madurai. It has also produced vast litera-ture, but only a fraction of it has survived. It is this fraction which constitutes the extant body of Sangam literature. The Age of the Sangam is the age to which the Sangam

literature belonged. The Sangam literature constitutes a mine of information on conditions of life around the beginning of the Christian era.

7.2 Learning Objectives

After studying this lesson, the learner will be able:

- To draw a picture of the society of South India in the early centuries.
- To know the economy, polity, and culture of south India during the Sangam age.
- To trace the exchange of culture between North India and south

7.3 Sangam Literature

Prof. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri describes Sangam literature as a remarkable fusion of idealism and realism, blending classical elegance with indigenous strength and resilience. It is rightly regarded as the golden age of Tamil literature, covering secular themes such as governance, warfare, charity, trade, worship, and agriculture. Prominent poets and scholars of the Sangam period include Tolkappiyar, Tiruvalluvar, Ilango Adigal, Sittalai Sattanar, Nakkirar, Kapilar, Paranar, Auvaiyar, and Mangudi Marudanar.

Sangam literature comprises the earliest Tamil texts like the *Tolkappiyam*, the *Ten Idylls* (*Pattupattu*), the *Eight Anthologies* (*Ettutogai*), the *Eighteen Minor Works* (*Padinenkilkanakku*), and the *Three Epics*. The primary strength of these works lies in their steadfast commitment to literary excellence and strict adherence to established conventions.

Tolkappiyam is the oldest extant Tamil grammar written by Tokkappiyar (one of the 7 disciples of Saint Agastya.) It is divided into three major parts, each consisting of nine iyals (sub-parts), and has a total of 167 sutras. Other earliest Tamil works were the Agattiyam (a work on the grammar of letters and life) by Saint Agattiyar, Pannirupadalam, and the Kakkipadiniyam.

The Epics - The epics Silappadikaram (The Jewelled Anklet) and Manimekalai belong to the early centuries of the Christian era. Silappadikaram was written by Mango Adigal (grandson of Karikala, the great Chola King) in the second century A.D. It is a tragic story of a merchant, Kovalan of Puhar who falls in love with a dancer Madhavi, neglecting his wife, Kannagi, who in the end revenges the death of her husband at the hands of the Pandyan King and becomes a goddess. It marks the beginning of the Kannagi cult or Pattini cult which worshiped Kannagi as the ideal wife. There is also a reference to the Ceylonese king Gajabahu being present on the

occasion of the installation of a Kannagi temple, the Goddess of Chastity, by Chera king Senguttuvan. Jivak Chintamani, written by Tiruttakkadevar a Jaina ascetic, is the story of Sivaga or Jivaka.

Period of Sangam literature: The earliest script that the Tamils used was the Brahmi script. It was only from the late ancient and early medieval period, that they started evolving a new angular script, called the Grantha script, from which the modern Tamil is derived. Some of the contents of the Sangam literature are corrobo-rated by the writings of some Greek and Roman classical writers of the first and second century A. D, leading us to fix the period of Sangam age roughly between from the 3rd century BCE to the 3rd century CE.

So, most of the Sangam literature also must have been produced during this period. The Sangam literature was finally compiled in its present form in circa A.D. 300-600.

Self Check Exercise-1

Q-1   What is the earliest script used in Tamil?

Q-2   On which Tolkapiyam is based?

Q-3   Who wrote Jivak Chintamani?

7.4 Sangam Polity

From the earliest times, Tamilham had known only three major kingdoms – the Cheras, the Cholas, and the Pandyas. The Pandyas were first mentioned by Megasthenes, who says that their kingdom was celebrated for pearls. He also speaks of its being ruled by a woman, which may suggest some matriarchal influence in the Pandya society. In the Major Rock Edict II Asoka mentions of the three kingdoms – Pandyas, Cholas, and Cheras as neighbours. The Hathigumpha inscription of Kharavelea contains the early epigraphic reference to the kingdoms of the Tamil country, where he is said to have destroyed a confederacy of Tamil states – Tramiradesa Sanghatam. However, the chief source for the Sangam period is the Sangam literature.

7.4.1 The Pandyas
The Pandya kingdom occupied the southernmost and southeastern parts of

the Indian peninsula, covering present-day Tinnevelly, Ramnad, and Madurai districts in Tamil Nadu, with Madurai as its capital. The Pandyas are renowned for their patronage of Tamil Sangam poets and scholars. The earliest known Pandya ruler was Mudukudumi, mentioned in Sangam texts as a formidable conqueror.

The most celebrated Pandya king was Nedunjeliyan, a great poet who ruled from Madurai. According to the *Silappadikaram*, in a moment of anger, he ordered the execution of Kovalan without a proper trial after Kovalan was falsely accused of stealing the queen's anklet. Upon realizing Kovalan's innocence, the king was overcome with remorse and died of shock while seated on his throne.

The Pandyas benefited greatly from trade with the Roman Empire and even sent embassies to Emperor Augustus. Their port at Korkai was a significant hub for trade and commerce, alongside another port, Saliyur. Brahmanas held considerable influence during this period, and the Pandya kings performed Vedic sacrifices in the early centuries of the Christian era.

7.4.2 The Cholas
The Chola kingdom, later known as Cholamandalam (Coromandel) in early medieval times, lay northeast of the Pandyan territory, between the Pennar and Velar rivers. Their initial capital was Uraiyur, renowned for its cotton trade, before it was shifted to Puhar (Kaveripattinam).

In the mid-second century BCE, a Chola king named Elara conquered Sri Lanka and ruled it for nearly 50 years. However, the firm historical foundation of the Cholas begins in the second century CE with their prominent ruler, Karikala, whose name means "The man with the charred leg." A contemporary of the Chera king Perunjeral Adan, Karikala was an able administrator and formidable warrior.

One of his notable achievements was his victory at Venni, located 15 miles east of Tanjore, which led to the collapse of a powerful confederacy formed against him. Karikala also founded Puhar and constructed a 160 km embankment along the Kaveri River, using the labor of 7,000 slaves captured from Sri Lanka. Puhar soon became a thriving trade and commercial hub, with archaeological excavations revealing a large dockyard. The Cholas also maintained a well-organized navy.

After Karikala's reign, Chola power declined rapidly. His two sons ruled separately—the elder from Uraiyur and the younger from Puhar.

The last great Chola ruler after Karikala was Nedunjelian who successfully fought against the Pandyas and the Cheras both but was ultimately killed in battle. Their two neighbouring powers, the Cheras and the Pandyas extended at the cost of the Cholas. What remained of the Chola's power was almost wiped out by the attacks of the Pallavas from the north. The fortunes of the Cholas suffered a serious setback, when, according to a tradition recorded in Manimekalaia good part of the

port town of Puhar was engulfed by the sea in terrific tidal waves, during the reign of the later Chola king Killivalavan.

7.4.3 The Cheras

The Chera or the Kerala country was situated to the west and north of the land of the Pandyas. It included the narrow strip of land between the sea and the mountains and covered portions of both Kerala and Tamilnadu. In the early centuries of the Christian era, The Chera kingdom was as significant as the Chola and Pandya territories, primarily due to its thriving trade relations with the Romans.

The Romans set up two regiments at Muziris identical to Cranganore in the Chera country to protect their interests. It is said that they also built there a temple of Augustus. The history of the Cheras was marked by continuous fighting with the Cholas and the Pandyas. One of the earliest and better-known Chera rulers was Udiyanjeral (A.D. 130). The titles Vanavaramban and PerunjaranUdiyan are applied to him by the poet Mudinagarayar in Puram. The son of Udiyanjeral was Nedunjeral Adan who won a naval victory against some local enemy on the Malabar Coast and took captive several Yavana traders. He won victories against seven crowned kings and thus reached the superior rank of the adhiraja. He was called "Imayavaramban", he who had the Himalayas as his boundary'. He fought a war with the contemporary Chola king in which both the monarchs lost their lives and their queens performed Sati. According to the Chera poets, their greatest king was Senguttuvan, the Red or Good Chera. He routed his rivals and established his cousin securely on the throne. It is said that he invaded the north and crossed the Ganga. But all this seems to be exaggerated. Pattini cult, that is the worship of Kannagi as the ideal wife, was started by him.

Senguttuvan and the Decline of Chera Power

Senguttuvan was succeeded by his half-brother Perunjeral Adan around 180 CE, a contemporary of the renowned Chola king Karikala. According to the *Puram* and *Aham* poems, Perunjeral Adan sustained a wound on his back while battling the Cholas at Venni. To atone for the dishonor, he chose to fast unto death on the battlefield.

Following the second century CE, the Chera dynasty experienced a significant decline, with minimal historical records until the eighth century CE. Their legacy is primarily linked to their support for Tamil poets and their promotion of trade with the Roman Empire. The Cheras controlled several important western coastal ports, such as Tondi and Muziris (Musiri), the latter being a major center for Indo-Roman trade. Their capital was Vanji.

Sangam Administration

The king stood at the core of governance and was regarded as the ultimate authority. He was known by various titles, including *Ko, Mannan, Vendan, Korravan*, and *Iraivan*. Although hereditary monarchy was the prevalent system, instances of contested successions and civil conflicts were not uncommon.

The court of the crowned monarch was called Avai. The idea of the 'conquering king' (Vijigishu) was accepted and acted on. The King's birthday (Perunal) was celebrated every year. Kings assumed several titles. For example, the Pandyas were known as Minavar, Kavuriyar, Panchavar, Tennar, Seliyar, Marar, and Valudi. etc the Cholas called them-selves Sennis, Sembiyas, Valavan, and Killi, and the Cheras had titles like Vanavar, Villavar, Kudavar, Kuttuvar, Poraiyar, and so on. The royal emblem of the Pandyas was the carp (fish), the bow of the Cheras, and the Cholas was the tiger. The sabha or manram of the king in the capital was the highest court of justice. The king was assisted by a large body of officials, who were divided into five assem-blies:

(1) Amaichchar or ministers,

(2) Purohitachar or priests,

(3) Senapati or military commanders,

(4) Dutar or envoys and

(5) Arrar or spies.

Provincial and Local Administration

The kingdom was organized into large regions known as *Mandalam*, with the primary divisions being Cholamandalam, Pandya Mandalam, and Cheramandalam. Each mandalam was further divided into provinces called *Nadu*. Towns, referred to as *Ur*, were classified based on size: *Perur* (large village), *Sirur* (small village), and *Mudur* (ancient village). Coastal towns were known as *Pattinam*, while harbor settlements were called *Puhar*. The administration of *Nadus* was usually overseen by hereditary chiefs, while villages, the basic administrative units, were governed by local assemblies known as *Manrams*.

Revenue Administration

The primary source of revenue was the land tax, known as *Karai*, though historical texts do not specify the exact proportion of agricultural produce collected by the king. Land was measured in *Ma* and *Veli*, while grain was quantified using the *Kalam* unit. A fertile, tax-yielding territory was called a *Variyam* (derived from *Vari*, meaning tax), and the official responsible for tax collection in these areas was known as a *Variyar*. Additional sources of royal income included tributes from feudatories and war booty (*Irai*). Trade, both local and long-distance, also contributed significantly through tolls and customs duties known as *Ulgu* or *Sungum*. Taxes paid to the king were generally referred to as *Kadamai* or *Paduvadu*.

Military Administration

The kingdom maintained a standing army, primarily funded through taxes collected from the peasantry. The military comprised chariots drawn by oxen, elephants, cavalry, and infantry, with elephants being particularly significant in warfare. Horses were imported by sea, especially into the Pandyan kingdom. It was

common to commemorate fallen soldiers by erecting hero stones (*Virakkal* or *Nadukkal*), which were often revered. A notable institution was the *Kavalmaram* or *Kadimaram*, a sacred tree symbolizing the ruler's authority, typically planted within the palace premises..

Self Check Exercise-2

Q-1   Define Virakkal?

Q-2   Which sage is believed to have Aryanized South India?

Q-3   Where was the capital of Sangam period Chola located?

7.4 Sangam Society and Economy

The society in the southern kingdoms chiefly consisted of agriculturists or those who depended indirectly on the land. Besides, the peasants there were landless laborers, carpenters, goldsmiths, hunters, and fishermen. The Brahmanas came there much later from northern India. But in ancient times, they followed neither the Varna system nor the Ashram system. Broadly speaking, there were chiefly two classes of people in the early Tamil society – those who tilled the land them-selves and those who got it tilled by others. The latter were wealthier and this very fact introduced inequalities in the social system. Gradually, the Varna System also started. The people lived chiefly in villages. Mostly they were poor and lived in huts and humbler struc-tures. The forest tribes were very poor. The rich lived in houses of bricks and mortar. The town-people were generally rich and they led happy and prosperous life. The towns were surrounded by a wall for protection from invaders. Forts were also built. The women in the Tamil society were free. Polygamy was practiced, though on a limited scale. Prostitutes and dancing girls lived in towns. Dhoti and turban were the chief attire. Women were fond of ornaments. The chief diet consisted of meat and rice. They also drank wine. In the beginning, Brahamanism grew popular in these kingdoms, though its influence was limited. The kings performed Vedic Yajnas and the Brahmanas held discourses with the Jain and the Buddhist scholars. The four chief deities they worshipped were Shiva, Vishnu, Balram, and Krishna. Marugan was the local God. During Chandragupta's reign, Jainism spread in the South. In this period, Buddhism was on the decline. The growing popularity of Shaivism and Vaishnavism, however, caused a setback to

Jainism. The people were tolerant and the followers of the various religions lived together peacefully. The practice of cremating the dead had started.

Sangam Economy - The Sangam economy was simple and mostly self-sufficient. Agriculture was the main occupation and the chief crops were rice, cotton, ragi, sugarcane pepper, ginger, turmeric, cardamom, cinnamon, etc. Weaving, ship-building, metalworking, carpentry, rope-making, ornament-making, making ivory products, tanning, etc were some of the handicrafts, which were widely practiced. The marketplace was known as Avanam. This period also witnessed the emergence of various towns like Puhar, Uraiyur, Vanji, Tondi, Muzuris, Madurai, Kanchi, etc. Industry and crafts were given a fillip by a rising demand in the foreign markets. Trade, both inland and foreign, was well organized and briskly carried out throughout the period Internal trade was brisk, caravans of merchants with carts and pack animals carried their merchandise from place to place, Barter played a large part in all transactions and salt was an important commodity of trade. The Sangam period witnessed the rise of maritime activity. External trade was carried on between South India and the Hellenistic kingdom of Egypt and Arabia as well as the Malay Archipelago. The author of the Periplus of the Erythrean Sea (25 A.D.) gives the most valuable information about the trade between India and the Roman Empire. He mentions the port of Naura (Cannanore) Tyndis (Tondi), Muzuris (Musiri, Cranganore), and Nelcynda as the leading ones on the west coast. Other ports of South India were Balita (Varkalai), Comari, Colchi, Puhar (Khaberis of Ptolemy), Saliyur, Poduca (Arikamedu), and Sopatma (Markanam). A landmark in the development of communications was the discovery of the monsoon winds by the Greek sailor Hippalus in around A.D. 46-42. This led to an increase in the volume of trade. Large vessels made up of single logs called Sangara and very large vessels, called Colondia made voyages. The Periplus of the Erythraen Sea, written by an anonymous Greek navigator, gives details of Indian exports to the Roman Empire. The main exports were: pepper, pearls, ivory, silk, spike-nard, malabathrum, diamonds, saffron, precious stones, and tortoise shells.

It also mentions Argaru (Uraiyur) as the place to which were sent all the pearls gathered on the coast and from which were exported muslins called agraritic. Silk, which was supplied by Indian merchants to the Roman Empire, was considered so important that the Roman emperor Aurelian declared it to be worth its weight in

gold. The Roman need for spices could not be met entirely by local supply; this brought Indian traders into contact with Southeast Asia. In return for her exports, India imported from the Roman empire such commodities as topaz, tin cloth, linen, antimony, crude glass, copper, tin, lead, wine, orpiment, and wheat. The Romans also exported to India wine amphorae and red-glazed Arretine ware which have been found at Arikamedu near Pondicherry. They also sent to India a large number of gold and silver coins. Connected with the phenomenon of trade was the growth of the money economy in the early centu-ries. The imported coins were mostly used as bullion. The large quantities of gold and silver coins struck by all the Roman emperors beginning from the reign of Augustus (and that of Tiberius) down to Nero (54-58 A. D.) found in the interior of Tamil land, testify to the extent of the trade and the presence of Roman settlers in the Tamil country.

Self -Check Exercise-3

Q-1   Who was Murugan?

Q-2   How many Sangams were held?

Q-3   Who presided the third council over?

7.6 Summary

The Sangam Age reflects the social, cultural, religious, and political life of early South India. The term *Sangam* is derived from the Sanskrit word *Sangha*, meaning an assembly or association. The Tamil Sangam was a literary academy of poets and bards that thrived across three distinct periods and locations under the patronage of the Pandyan kings. According to tradition, the first Sangam was attended by gods and legendary sages, with *Ten Madurai* as its seat. Unfortunately, no works from the first Sangam have survived.

7.7 Glossary

Hero-stone: It was a practice of erecting monuments for dead soldiers.

Kadamai or Paduvadu: The duties to be paid to the king.

Murugan: Marugan was the local God.

Arikamedu: A famous center of foreign trade, a Roman settlements

7.8 Answers to Self-Check Exercise

Self Check Exercise-1

Ans.1   The oldest script used in Tamil is the Tamil-Brahmi script, dating back to at least the 3rd century BCE. It is an adaptation of the Brahmi script,

which was widely used across ancient India. Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions have been discovered on cave walls, pottery, and coins, primarily in the regions of Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

Ans.2   The Tolkappiyam is an ancient Tamil text that serves as a comprehensive Grammer of the Tamil language. It is traditionally attributed to the scholar Tolkappiyar. The text covers various aspects of Tamil grammer, phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics.

         The Tolkappiyam is considered one of the oldest extant works of Tamil literature and remains a foundational text of understanding classical Tamil language and literature.

Ans. 3   Jivak Chintamani, also known as Civaka Chintamani is a classical Tamil epic poem written by the Jain monk Tirutakkatever in the 10th century. The text is a significant work in Tamil literature and Jainism, detailing the life and adventures of its hero, Jivaka, in a rich and elaborate narrative style.

Self Check Exercise-2

Ans.1 Virakkal refers to hero stones, which are memorial stones erected in honor of warriors who died in battle or in acts of heroism. These stones were commonly used in ancient and medieval South India, particularly in the Tamil region. They often feature inscriptions and carving that describe the valorous deeds of the individuals they commemorate. The virakkal serves as both a tribute to the fallen hero and a historical record of their bravery and the events surrounding their death.

Ans.2 The sage traditionally credited with Aryanizing South India is Agastya. According to legend, Agastya is one of the Saptarishi (Seven great sages) in Hindu tradition and is said to have travelled from North India to the South. He is often attributed with introducing Vedic culture and Sanskrit language to the southern region of India, therby integrating the Dravidian and Aryan cultures. Agastya is also credited with contributing significantly to Tamil literature and grammer.

Ans.3   During the Sangam period, the capital of the Chola dynasty was Uraiyur (also spelled Urayur or Urayoor), located in present-day Tiruchirappalli, Tamil Nadu. Uraiyur served as the political and administrative hub of the early Cholas. It was a prominent urban center and played a vital role in shaping the history and culture of the Chola dynasty during the Sangam era.

Self Check Exercise-3

Ans.1   Murugan, also known as Kartikeya, Skanda, or Subramanya, is a revered Hindu deity, especially in South India. Worshipped as the god of war and victory, he is often depicted as a youthful figure riding a peacock and holding a spear called Vel. In Tamil culture and mythology, he holds a special place and is honored as the "Tamil Kadavul" (Tamil God).

Ans.2   According to Tamil tradition, three Sangams were held. These were assemblies of Tamil poets and scholars that contributed to the rich body of Tamil literature.

Ans.3   The Third Sangam is traditionally believed to have been led by Nakkirar, a renowned Tamil poet and scholar. He is recognized for his significant contributions to Tamil literature and his influential role in the Sangam assembly.

7.9 Suggested Readings

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7.10 Terminal Questions

1. What is Sangam's age and describe its features?
2. Describe the Society of the Sangam Age.
3. Write down the features of polity and administration.
4. Throw light on the economy of the Sangam Age.

Unit-8

Central Asian Contact and Mutual Impact: Political Setting in North-West India, Rise of the Power of Indo-Greek, Sakas, Parthians, and Kushan Empire

Structure:

8.1 Introduction

8.2 Learning Objectives

8.3 Indo-Greeks or Yavana

       8.3.1 A Brief History of Bactrian Greek

       8.3.2 Demetrius Invasion of India

       8.3.3 Rule of Eucratides I

       8.3.4 Reign of Appolodotus

       8.3.5 Reign of Menander

       8.3.6 Antialcidas: Indianisation of Indo-Greeks

       8.3.7 Geo-Political Implications of the Indo-Greek Rule

Self Check Exercise-1

8.4 The Parthians or Pahalava

       8.4.1. Sources

       8.4.2. Indo-Parthian in India

       8.4.3. Gondophares& St. Thomas

       8.4.4. Decline of the Indo-Parthians

Self Check Exercise-2

8.5. The Scythians or Shaka

       8.5.1. Origins of the Scythians

       8.5.2. Settlement in Sakastan

       8.5.3. Indo-Scythian kingdoms

       8.5.4. Western Kshatrapas legacy

       8.5.5. The Indo-Scythians and Buddhism

       8.5.6. Indo-Scythians in Literature

Self- Check Exercise-3

8.6. Summary

8.7. Glossary

8.8. Answer to the Self-Check Exercise

8.9. Suggested Readings

8.10. Terminal Questions

8.1. Introduction

The Mauryas played a crucial role in unifying India by bringing most of the subcontinent under a single rule, defending it against the forces of Alexander and Seleucus, and implementing a standardized administrative system. They promoted Prakrit as the official language and sought to integrate diverse populations through a shared Dharma. However, with the fall of the Mauryan dynasty, India's political unity temporarily disintegrated. A single central authority no longer governed the vast region from the Hindukush mountains to Bengal and Mysore. Invasions from the northwest led to the rise of foreign-ruled kingdoms in Gandhara, Western Malwa, and surrounding areas, while the Punjab fell under foreign control and local dynasties took over the Deccan. As a result, multiple regional power centers emerged, replacing imperial monarchy with regional monarchies and centralized administration with localized bureaucracies. Despite these shifts, the concept of absolute kingship remained strong. Royal inscriptions, or prasastis, glorified rulers with divine attributes. Even monarchs of Central Asian descent eventually embraced traditional Indian ideals of kingship, which had evolved since the late Vedic period and reached their peak under the Mauryas.

8.2. Learning Objectives

After studying this lesson, the learner will be able to:

- Describe the arrival of the Indo-Greeks in northwest India and their political developments.
- Discuss the rise and rule of the Indo-Parthian (Pahalava) dynasty in India.
- Examine the evolution of India's economy, culture, and religion under foreign rule from 200 BCE to 200 CE.

8.3. Indo-Greeks or Yavanas

The rule of the Indo-Greek kings in the northwest, encompassing parts of Central Asia, Afghanistan, and the Indus Valley, is primarily known from scattered references in Greco-Roman literature and the study of numerous coins discovered on the surface. Although king lists have been compiled based on the names inscribed on these coins, the precise nature of their successions and territorial boundaries remains uncertain. The situation is further complicated by contrasting

scholarly perspectives—Western scholars tend to emphasize the influence of Hellenistic civilization on Indian numismatics, art, iconography, and philosophy, whereas Indian scholars focus on the Indianization of these Greek-origin rulers. A substantial body of literature, predominantly consisting of coin catalogues, has accumulated on this subject, often portraying it as an expansion of Western civilization into the northwestern subcontinent.

8.3.1. A Brief History of the Bactrian Greeks

Greeks from Asia Minor were present in India as early as the Achaemenid period, with some serving in Achaemenid armies during their expansion into India in the late sixth century BCE. The Greek presence intensified following Alexander's invasion of India (326–322 BCE) and continued during the Mauryan era, with Greek ambassadors like Megasthenes residing in Pataliputra. Emperor Ashoka's edicts indicate that the Mauryan Empire was familiar with post-Alexander Greek political entities extending as far as North Africa and the Mediterranean.

Alexander established numerous cities, primarily named Alexandria, across Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and modern Pakistan. Among these, Ai-Khanum, located at the confluence of the Kokcha and Oxus rivers, has been excavated, revealing a well-planned Greek city with a temple complex, palace, administrative quarters, theatre, gymnasium, and burial sites. Numerous statues, coin hoards, inscriptions, and pottery fragments suggest that Ai-Khanum, founded in the fourth century BCE, maintained strong links with the Greek world until its decline around the mid-second century BCE. It likely served as a major city of the ancient Bactrian Greek kingdom, whose capital was Bactra (near modern Mazar-i-Sharif). The ruins of Bactra remain largely unexcavated.

Initially, the Bactrian Greek kingdom was a satrapy under the Seleucid Empire, which controlled Alexander's eastern territories and bordered Chandragupta Maurya's domain. Around 305 BCE, after a military engagement, a compromise was reached wherein the Mauryan ruler acquired territory south of the Hindu Kush and married a daughter of Seleucus I in exchange for 500 war elephants. Subsequent Seleucid rulers, Antiochus I Soter and Antiochus II Theos, were preoccupied with conflicts in the west, enabling Parthia (under Arsaces) and Bactria (under Diodotus I) to secede from the Seleucid Empire in the mid-third century BCE.

Antiochus III (223–191 BCE) attempted to restore Seleucid power and laid siege to the Bactrian capital. He also renewed diplomatic ties with an Indian ruler, Sophagasenus of the Kabul Valley, obtaining war elephants. Polybius, a Greek historian (c. 200–118 BCE), recounts that Antiochus III crossed the Caucasus, descended into India, strengthened his alliance with Sophagasenus, and received additional elephants before returning west.

The rise of Parthian power severed Bactria's direct links with the Greek world, prompting both Diodotus I and Diodotus II to ally with the Parthians against the Seleucid rulers. The independent Bactrian kingdom, established by Diodotus I, entered a second phase when Euthydemus overthrew the Diodotid dynasty around 230/220 BCE. Euthydemus expanded Bactrian control into Ferghana and Sogdiana (modern Samarkand). His coins depict a diademed royal portrait and, on the reverse, a seated Heracles or a prancing horse. Despite being attacked by Antiochus III and losing the Battle of the Arius, Euthydemus successfully defended Bactra for three years. The resulting peace agreement included the marriage of Euthydemus' son, Demetrius, to Antiochus III's daughter around 206 BCE.

Bactrian expansion extended into eastern Central Asia, reaching Kashgar and Urumqi in Chinese Turkestan. A unique aspect of Indo-Greek coinage from this period was the use of a copper-nickel alloy (25% copper, 25% nickel), found in issues by Euthydemus, Euthydemus II, Agathocles, and Pantaleon around 120 BCE. The Chinese envoy Zhang Qian's visit to Bactria in 126 BCE facilitated trade, leading to the Silk Route's development by the late second century BCE. Indo-Greek interactions with India date back to the Mauryan era, with Greeks like Dharmarakshita playing roles in the spread of Buddhism. Buddhist communities existed in Bactria, and by the second century CE, Clement of Alexandria noted the presence of Buddhist Sramanas in the region.

8.3.2. Demetrius: Invasion of India

Around 180 BCE, Demetrius, son of Euthydemus, invaded India, advancing to Pataliputra and besieging Saketa and Madhyamika. The Hathigumpha inscription of King Kharavela references a Greek king named Dimitra, who likely retreated to Mathura following the campaign. The Gargi Samhita and Patanjali's Mahabhashya corroborate Greek conquests of Saketa and Madhyamika, with the Greeks reaching

Kusumadhvaja (Pataliputra). Roman historian Strabo (c. 64/63 BCE–24 CE) also noted the Indo-Greeks' penetration into India. Demetrius' coins, some featuring an elephant scalp, likely symbolize his Indian conquests.

8.3.3. Rule of Eucratides

Eucratides overthrew the Euthydemid dynasty around 120 BCE. His reign (c. 121–145 BCE) saw widespread coinage, including a large gold coin depicting his parents. His silver coins feature his bust in a plumed helmet adorned with a bull's ear and horn, while the reverse shows the Dioscuri. Eucratides' defeat by the Parthian king Mithridates I resulted in territorial losses. His successor, Heliocles, retreated to the Kabul Valley as the Yuezhi expansion (126 BCE–30 CE) led to Bactria's decline. The Yuezhi later established the Kushan Empire.

8.3.4. Reign of Apollodotus

Apollodotus I, the first Indo-Greek ruler confined to Indian territories, emerged around 180 BCE. His bilingual coinage, discovered in Punjab, Sind, and Gujarat, features an elephant with a decorative belt and the Greek legend 'of Saviour King Apollodotus,' with the reverse showing a bull and a Kharosthi inscription. He also issued purely Greek coins, including one featuring Pallas Athene holding Nike.

8.3.5. Reign of Menander I

Menander I succeeded Apollodotus and ruled from Sialkot (Sagala) around the mid-second century BCE. He is prominently featured in the Buddhist text *Milinda Panha* (*Questions of Milinda*), where he engages in philosophical discourse with the monk Nagasena, suggesting his conversion to Buddhism. A **reliquary inscription from** Bajaur dated to his reign references the establishment of Buddha's relics. His coins are mentioned in the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* (mid-first century CE).

8.3.6. Antialcidas: Indianization of Indo-Greeks

Menander's affinity for Buddhism parallels another Indo-Greek king's devotion to Vaishnavism, as evidenced by the Heliodorus pillar at Besnagar (Vidisha).

8.3.7. Geo-Political Implications

The Indo-Greek rule played a crucial role in cultural exchanges between the Hellenistic world and India. The shift of Greek rule south of the Hindu Kush resulted

in significant Indian influences on Greek numismatics, art, and religious iconography, which later influenced Gandharan art. The Indo-Greek period thus served as a bridge between Hellenistic and South Asian civilizations.

Self Check Exercise-1

Q-1   Who was the Indo-Greek ruler who issued bilingual coins?

Q-2   What is Indo-Greek called in India?

Q-3   Which Geek ambassador set up a pillar in honor of Vishnu (Vasudev) at Vidisha?

8.4 The Parthians or Pahalava

The Parthians were a rugged and resilient group of horsemen with lifestyles akin to modern Turkomans. They inhabited the arid regions southeast of the Caspian Sea, beyond the Persian deserts. Their territory, alongside those of the Chorasmioi, Sogdioi, and Arioi (modern Khwarizm, Samarkand, and Herat), was part of the sixteenth satrapy under Darius. These tribes, armed similarly to the Bactrians with cane bows and short spears, contributed forces to Xerxes' army. During Alexander's reign and the early Seleucid period, Parthia proper and Hyrkania, located near the Caspian, were consolidated into a single satrapy. Unlike the Bactrians, the Parthians did not assimilate Greek culture. Though they remained obedient to their Persian and Macedonian rulers, they preserved their nomadic traditions as skilled mounted shepherds adept at horseback riding and archery.

8.4.1 Sources

Taxila is believed to have served as the Indo-Parthians' capital. Extensive excavations led by Sir John Marshall uncovered numerous artifacts with Parthian stylistic influences. A nearby structure, the Jandial temple, is commonly interpreted as a Zoroastrian fire temple from this era. Various historical texts mention the Indo-Parthians in the region, including accounts of Saint Thomas the Apostle, who, according to tradition, was recruited as a carpenter to serve at the court of King "Gudnaphar" (likely Gondophares) in India. The *Acts of Thomas* recounts Thomas' journey to King Gudnaphar in northern India in chapter 12, while chapters 2 and 3 describe his sea voyage to India, linking him to the western coast.

The *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, a 1st-century navigational guide for Arabian Sea routes, refers to Parthian rulers engaged in conflicts in Sindh, which was then known as "Scythia" due to prior Indo-Scythian dominance. Additionally, an inscription from Takht-i-Bahi near Hada records two dates—one marking the 26th regnal year of Maharaja Guduvhara (thought to be Gondophares) and the other from an unspecified era, numbered as year 103.

8.4.2 Indo-Parthians in India

Maues (or Mauas), the earliest known Indo-Parthian king, rose to power around 120 BCE in the Kabul Valley and Punjab. He adopted the prestigious title of "Great King of Kings," first used by Mithridates I. His coinage closely resembles that of Mithridates and an influential Parthian frontier chief who referred to himself as Arsaces Theos. The Taxila satrap was likely subordinate to King Moga, whose name appears as Mauou in numismatic records. Other Indo-Parthian rulers, such as Vonones and Gondophares, are primarily known through their coinage.

8.4.3 Gondophares & St. Thomas

Gondophares, who ascended to power around 21 CE, ruled for approximately thirty years. His coinage exhibits strong Parthian influences. Unlike his predecessors, who primarily ruled the Kabul Valley and Punjab, Gondophares is particularly significant due to his association with Saint Thomas. Early Christian tradition holds that the Parthians were designated as Thomas' missionary domain. This belief dates back to Origen (who died in the mid-3rd century) and appears in the *Clementine Recognitions*, another early Christian text.

Several Christian sources mention an Indian king named Gundaphar (or Gudnaphar) and his brother Gad, who are said to have converted to Christianity through Thomas' teachings in the 1st century CE. Although there is no independent verification of this story, the *Takht-i-Bahi* inscription from the year 103 (of an unspecified era) confirms the presence of a ruler named Guduvhara (Gondophares) in the Peshawar region. Scholars like Dr. Fleet have linked this inscription to the Vikrama era, dating it to 42 CE—aligning well with the Christian tradition that portrays Gondophares as a contemporary of Saint Thomas.

Initially, Gondophares' authority did not extend to Gandhara, but he managed to annex the Peshawar district before his 26th regnal year. While there is no epigraphic evidence confirming his conquest of Eastern Gandhara (Taxila), numismatic records suggest he overthrew the Azes dynasty in parts of the region. Coins indicate that Aspavarman, originally a vassal of Azes II, later recognized Gondophares' supremacy.

The *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* (circa 60–80 CE) describes ongoing power struggles among Parthian rulers in the Lower Indus Valley. Additionally, scholars such as Sten Konow and Sir John Marshall suggest that if the names Aja-Aya or Azes appear in the Kalawan Inscription (134 CE) and the Taxila Inscription (136 CE), it could indicate that remnants of Saka rule persisted in Eastern Gandhara while the Parthians dominated Peshawar and the Lower Indus Valley.

According to historian Justin, the Parthians played a key role in toppling Bactrian Greek rule. Marshall also suggests that the Kabul Valley became a contested region between the Parthians and the Kushans. Philostratos, writing about 43–44 CE, references persistent conflicts between "barbarians" and a Parthian king ruling in India's borderlands. Gondophares' administration included subordinate rulers such as his nephew Abdagases (who controlled southern Afghanistan), generals Aspavarman and Sasa (n), and governors Sapedana and Satavastra (likely of Taxila).

8.4.4 Decline of the Indo-Parthians

Following the death of Gondophares, the Indo-Parthian kingdom fragmented into smaller states. One of these, likely in Sistan, was ruled by Sanabares, while Pakores governed another, encompassing Kandahar and western Punjab. Other minor rulers are known through coins excavated by Marshall at Taxila, including Sasa(n), who acknowledged Pakores' nominal authority.

The *Periplus* describes the instability among Parthian rulers, stating:
"Before it (Barbaricum) lays a small island, and inland behind it is the metropolis of Scythia, Minnagara; it is subject to Parthian princes who are constantly driving each other out."

Epigraphic and numismatic evidence indicates that the Parthians in Afghanistan, Punjab, and Sindh were eventually displaced by the Kushans. While Gondophares was still ruling Peshawar in 103 CE, an inscription from Panjtar confirms that by 122 CE, a Kushan ruler had taken over. By 136 CE, Kushan authority extended to Taxila, as evidenced by an inscription documenting the enshrinement of Buddhist relics for the "Maharaja Rajatiraja Devaputra Khushana."

Further proof of Kushan expansion in the Lower Indus Valley comes from the *Sui Vihar* and *Mohenjo-Daro* Kharoshthi inscriptions. The Chinese historian Panku, who died in 92 CE, mentioned that the Yue-chi (the Kushans' ancestors) had occupied *Kao-fou* (Kabul). This suggests that the Kushans had already established control over Kabul before Panku's time. Later sources argue that *Kao-fou* may have been mistaken for *Tou-mi*, but historian Kennedy asserts that such an error would not have occurred if the Yue-chi had not already claimed Kabul.

Numismatic evidence implies that the Kushans were active in the Indian borderlands during Gondophares' reign. Kujula Kadphises, the first major Kushan ruler, succeeded Hermaios in the Kabul Valley. Initially an ally of Hermaios, he later turned against the Parthians and ultimately overthrew their rule in northwest India. Coins of Abdagases (Gondophares' nephew) are found in Punjab, while those of Orthagnes appear in Kandahar, Sistan, and Sindh. These findings suggest that as the Kushans advanced, the Indo-Parthians were gradually pushed southward and had lost control of Punjab by the late 1st century CE.

Self Check Exercise-2

Q1.   Who established the Indo-Parthian Kingdom?

Q2.   Who initiated the Saka Era, and in which year?

Q3.   In which inscription is Sudarshan Lake mentioned?

8.5 The Scythians or Shakas

The term *Indo-Scythians* refers to the Scythians (Shakas) who migrated into Central Asia and northwestern South Asia between the mid-2nd century BCE and the 4th century CE. These regions included Sogdiana, Bactria, Arachosia, Gandhara, Kashmir, Punjab, Haryana, Gujarat, and Rajasthan. The first prominent Saka ruler in India was Maues (Moga) during the 1st century BCE, who established Saka authority in Gandhara and gradually expanded control across northwestern

India. Indo-Scythian rule in India concluded in 395 CE with the fall of the last Western Satrap, Rudrasimha III.

The Indo-Scythian invasion significantly impacted South Asia, driven by the movements of nomadic Central Asian tribes fleeing conflicts, particularly with the Xiongnu in the 2nd century BCE. These migrations had far-reaching effects on Bactria, Kabul, Parthia, and even Rome.

8.5.1 Origin of the Scythians

The Indo-Scythians are believed to have originated from the Saka tribes, part of a vast nomadic culture spanning Siberia to the Central Eurasian steppes, including regions from Xinjiang to the Black Sea. Similar to the Scythians described by Herodotus in *Histories* (Book IV), the Sakas were Iranian-speaking horse-riding nomads known for their use of chariots in warfare, horse sacrifices, and mound tombs known as *kurgans*.

A significant wave of nomadic migration in the 2nd century BCE reshaped the histories of Rome, Bactria, Kabul, Parthia, and India. Chinese Han Dynasty records indicate that the Yuezhi, after being defeated by the Xiongnu around 125 BCE, pushed the Sakas southward. This displacement forced the Sakas to migrate from the Ili River region into Ferghana, Sogdiana, Bactria, and Parthia. Around 145 BCE, the Sakas entered the Greco-Bactrian Kingdom, destroying Alexandria on the Oxus.

8.5.2 Settlement in Sakastan

The Sakas eventually settled in eastern Iran in a region known as *Sakastan* (modern Sistan). From there, they gradually expanded into the Indian subcontinent, forming various kingdoms collectively known as the Indo-Scythians. The Arsacid Emperor Mithridates II achieved notable victories against the Scythians, which drove them into Drangiana (modern-day Sistan) by the late 1st century BCE. The Greek geographer Isidore of Charax mentions the Sakas in this region in his work *Parthian Stations*.

8.5.3 Indo-Scythian Kingdoms

The Indo-Scythians established their rule in present-day southern Pakistan, spanning from Abiria (Sindh) to Surastrene (Gujarat) between 110 and 80 BCE. Their expansion continued into Indo-Greek territories, with Maues consolidating power around 80 BCE. The *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* (1st century CE) describes Scythian territories along the Indus River, mentioning key cities such as Minnagara.

The Indo-Scythians eventually established a kingdom centered in Taxila, with significant administrative hubs in Mathura (east) and Surastrene (southwest).

8.5.4 Western Kshatrapas and Legacy

The Indo-Scythians maintained control over Seistan until the reign of Bahram II (226–293 CE). In India, they governed Gujarat and Kathiawar under the Western

Kshatrapas until the 5th century CE when they were defeated by the Gupta Emperor Chandragupta II (Vikramaditya). *Brihat-Katha-Manjari* by Kshemendra recounts Vikramaditya's campaigns against the Shakas, Mlecchas, Kambojas, Yavanas, Tusharas, Parasikas, and Hunas.

8.5.5 Indo-Scythian Coinage

Indo-Scythian coinage was highly artistic, though its quality declined after 20 CE, particularly under Rajuvula. The Western Satraps continued minting coins until the 4th century CE. These coins retained Indo-Greek traditions, with Greek inscriptions on the obverse and Kharosthi script on the reverse. Unlike Indo-Greek coins, Indo-Scythian currency typically depicted rulers on horseback rather than portrait-style images. The reverse side often featured Greek deities and Buddhist symbols like the *triratna*, reflecting their association with Buddhism.

8.5.6 Indo-Scythians and Buddhism

The Indo-Scythians were prominent patrons of Buddhism, as evidenced by inscriptions such as the *Taxila Copper Plate* and the *Mathura Lion Capital Inscription*. Excavations at the *Butkara Stupa* in Swat revealed Buddhist sculptures from the Indo-Scythian period, including Indo-Corinthian capitals with Buddhist motifs. Gandharan reliefs often depict Indo-Scythians in their distinctive tunics and pointed hoods within Buddhist contexts. The *Mathura Lion Capital* also references Indo-Scythian rulers from Maues to Rajuvula and includes Buddhist dedications highlighting the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.

8.5.7 Indo-Scythians in Literature

Ancient texts frequently mention the Shakas in Indian history. They appear in the *Mahabharata*, *Puranas*, *Manusmriti*, *Ramayana*, *Mahabhashya* of Patanjali, *Brihat Samhita*, and other classical works. The *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* and Ptolemy's world map detail Scythian territories along the Indus, identifying Minnagara as a significant center. Roman sources also record conflicts between the Parthians and Indo-Scythians over these territories.

8.5.8 The Kushan Empire and the Indo-Scythians

The Indo-Scythians were closely associated with the rise of the Kushan Empire. The *Panjtar Stone Inscription* (Year 122) and the *Manikyala Inscription* identify rulers as *Kushan Maharajas*. The *Taxila Silver Scroll Inscription* (Year 136) refers to a king titled *Son of Heaven*, the Kushan. While the exact chronology of Kushan rulers remains debated, inscriptions from Surkh Kotal (Year 229) and references to Kujula Kadphises and Vima Kadphises suggest an era beginning around 120 BCE.

Kanishka, one of the most renowned Kushan rulers, is traditionally associated with the Saka Era (78 CE). However, scholars continue to debate whether this marks his accession or another significant event.

8.5.9 Indo-Scythians and the Sasanian Invasions

The rise of the Kushans posed a threat to Parthia, prompting conflicts with the Sasanian dynasty. Ardashir I conquered parts of the Kushan territory, while Shapur I claimed control over Sind and Peshawar. The Kushans were eventually overthrown and replaced by Kushano-Sasanian vassals. A Kushan rebellion during Bahram II's reign (226–293 CE) was suppressed through a marriage alliance with a Kushan princess. Later, Shapur II launched a successful campaign against the Kushans, securing Sasanian dominance.

8.5.10 Northwestern India under Foreign Rule

Between the 2nd century BCE and the 1st century CE, northwestern India witnessed successive invasions by the Greco-Bactrians, Parthians, and Scythians. The Indo-Greeks were the first to establish rule, followed by the Indo-Scythians (Shaka-Pahlavas), who controlled Taxila, Mathura, Malwa, and Kathiawar. These invasions significantly influenced Indian culture, economy, and society. The foreign rulers embraced Indian traditions, supported Buddhism, and introduced artistic and numismatic innovations.

This era marked the fusion of foreign influences with Indian civilization, shaping the historical and cultural landscape of the region for centuries.

Self-Check Exercise-3

Q1.   Write an essay on the Indo-Greek rule in India after the Mauryan period.
Q2.   Discuss the political history of the Saka rule in India.
Q3.   Examine the political history of the Saka rule in India.
Q4.   Analyze the impact of foreign rule in India during the post-Mauryan period.

8.6 Summary

The post-Mauryan period witnessed significant political transformations due to continuous migrations from the northwestern frontiers. The first major groups to establish dominance were the Indo-Greeks, descendants of the Greek rulers of Bactria, who expanded their influence across northwestern India and Afghanistan. The existence of nearly thirty-six Indo-Greek rulers is primarily known through their coinage, while Indian texts referred to them as Yavanas.

Demetrius, the son of Euthydemus, spearheaded the Indo-Greek expansion into the Indian plains, laying the foundation for their rule. His successor, Menander, undertook successful military campaigns, extending control over the Ganga-Yamuna Doab and possibly reaching Pataliputra. These conquests are corroborated by historical accounts such as Strabo's *Geography* and the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*. Menander, the most celebrated Indo-Greek ruler (155–130 BCE), left behind an extensive coinage spread from Kabul to Mathura. The *Milindapanho* recounts philosophical dialogues between Menander and the Buddhist sage Nagasena, showcasing his intellectual engagement with Indian culture.

Following Menander's death, Indo-Greek political dominance gradually waned. However, this period facilitated significant cultural exchange, deeply impacting India's social, religious, and economic fabric. The expansion of the Silk

Route, flourishing Indo-Roman trade, and internal commerce networks brought economic prosperity, while artistic and religious developments reflected foreign influences. Advances in science, literature, and architecture further enriched Indian civilization, shaping its historical trajectory during this transformative era.

8.7. Glossary

Amatya: Minister

Caitya: Sacred sites or small clusters of trees located on the outskirts of a village, sometimes featuring a stupa.

Dandnayaka: Captain in the Army.

Manu Smriti: The final version of the Law Book of Manu was compiled between the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.D.

8.8 Answer to the Self-Check Exercise

Self-Check Exercise-1

Ans.1 Menander I, also known as Milinda, was a prominent Indo-Greek king who ruled from approximately 165 to 130 BCE. He is renowned for his bilingual coinage, featuring inscriptions in both Greek and Kharosthi, an ancient script prevalent in northwestern India. These coins symbolize the cultural fusion between Greek and Indian traditions during his reign.

Ans.2 In ancient India, the Indo-Greeks were commonly referred to as *Yavanas*. This term originated from the word *Ionians*, initially used by Indians to describe the Greeks. Over time, *Yavana* evolved into a broader term for people of Greek origin or those influenced by Greek culture.

Ans.3 The Greek ambassador Heliodorus erected the famous *Heliodorus Pillar* in Vidisha around 113 BCE to honor Vishnu. He served as an envoy from the Indo-Greek king Antialcidas to the court of the Shunga ruler Bhagabhadra. This pillar stands as a testament to the cultural and religious exchanges between the Greeks and Indians during that period.

Self-Check Exercise-2

Ans.1 The Indo-Parthian Kingdom was founded in the 1st century CE by Gondophares (also known as Gondophar), following his secession from the Parthian Empire. His rule extended across regions encompassing modern Afghanistan, Pakistan, and northern India.

Ans.2 The *Saka Era* commenced in 78 CE under the reign of King Kanishka. It follows a 365-day, 12-month cycle, similar to the Gregorian calendar. In 1957, the Government of India officially adopted it as the Indian National Calendar.

Ans.3 *Sudarshan Lake*, an ancient reservoir located in present-day Gujarat, is mentioned in the *Junagarh rock inscription* of Rudradaman I, dating to around 150

CE. This inscription details the lake's restoration after being damaged by heavy rains, marking one of the earliest historical records of its existence.

Self-Check Exercise-3

Ans.1 The Indo-Greek rulers, originally Greco-Bactrian kings, expanded their dominion into northwestern India following the Mauryan Empire's decline. Their rule witnessed a unique blend of Hellenistic and Indian cultures, reflected in art, religion, and governance. Prominent Indo-Greek rulers included Demetrius I (c. 200 BCE), Menander I (c. 160 BCE), and later monarchs like Eucratides I and Heliocles.

Key Aspects of Indo-Greek Rule:

- **Cultural Synthesis:** Indo-Greek rulers promoted the integration of Greek and Indian cultures. They embraced aspects of Indian religions, especially Buddhism, which flourished under their patronage. This cultural fusion influenced art, coinage, and religious practices.
- **Administrative Centers:** Major administrative hubs were established in cities like *Taxila* and *Pushkalavati*, facilitating trade and intellectual exchange between the Mediterranean and South Asia.
- **Art and Architecture:** Indo-Greek patronage significantly contributed to the development of *Gandhara art*, blending Hellenistic styles with Indian motifs. This period saw the emergence of unique sculptures and reliefs.
- **Decline and Successors:** The Indo-Greek rule declined due to internal conflicts, invasions by Central Asian tribes, and the rise of Indian dynasties like the Kushanas. By the 1st century CE, their territories had been assimilated into the broader Indian political landscape.

Ans.2 The *Sakas*, also known as *Scythians*, were nomadic Iranian groups who migrated from Central Asia into South Asia. They played a pivotal role in shaping the region's political landscape by establishing their kingdoms and influencing existing civilizations.

Origin:
The Sakas hailed from the Central Asian steppes, particularly the regions corresponding to modern Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Known for their exceptional horsemanship, archery skills, and distinct cultural practices, they formed part of the broader Indo-European Scythian groups.

Migration to South Asia:
Around the 2nd century BCE, successive waves of Sakas migrated southward into northwestern India, driven by pressure from other Central Asian tribes and the search for better economic opportunities in the fertile plains of South Asia.

Political History:
The Sakas established several independent kingdoms across the subcontinent, particularly in present-day Pakistan and western India. Prominent among these were:

1. The *Western Kshatrapas* in Gujarat and Maharashtra.
2. The *Northern Sakas* in the regions of Punjab and Sindh.
3. The *Indo-Scythian Kingdom* under rulers like *Maues* and *Azes I*, who extended their influence into the Indian heartland.

Indo-Scythian Kingdoms: These kingdoms emerged in northwestern India and parts of Afghanistan, thriving between the 1st century BCE and the 1st century CE. They governed regions like Mathura, Taxila, and Gandhara, where Greek and Indian influences merged, as reflected in their unique coinage and contributions to Gandhara art.

Western Kshatrapas: A prominent branch of the Sakas, the Western Kshatrapas ruled western India, particularly Gujarat and Maharashtra, from the 1st to the 4th century CE. They played a vital role in maritime trade and facilitated cultural interactions between Indian and Roman civilizations.

Legacy and Influence:
The Sakas left a significant mark on South Asia's political and cultural landscape. Their presence encouraged cross-cultural exchanges between Central Asia, Iran, and the Indian subcontinent, impacting art, technology, and governance. Eventually, their territories were absorbed into larger empires like the Kushanas and the Guptas, leaving a lasting legacy in Indian history.

Answer 3: After the decline of the Mauryan Empire around the 2nd century BCE, India experienced successive waves of foreign rule, which profoundly shaped its political, cultural, and social fabric. The importance of this period can be analyzed through several key dimensions.

Self-Check Exercise-1

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Self-Check Exercise-3

Ans.1 The Indo-Greek rulers, originally Greco-Bactrian kings, expanded their rule into northwestern India after the decline of the Mauryan Empire. Their reign marked a fusion of Hellenistic and Indian cultures, evident in their art, religion, and administration. Key Indo-Greek rulers included Demetrius I (c. 200 BCE), Menander I (c. 160 BCE), Eucratides I, and Heliocles.

Key Aspects of Indo-Greek Rule:

- **Cultural Synthesis:** Indo-Greek rulers promoted the integration of Greek and Indian traditions. They embraced Indian religions, particularly Buddhism, influencing art, coinage, and religious practices.
- **Administrative Centers:** Cities like *Taxila* and *Pushkalavati* became major administrative hubs, encouraging trade and intellectual exchange between the Mediterranean and South Asia.
- **Art and Architecture:** Indo-Greek patronage contributed to the development of *Gandhara art*, which combined Hellenistic styles with Indian motifs. This period produced distinctive sculptures and reliefs.
- **Decline and Successors:** Indo-Greek power waned due to internal conflicts, invasions by Central Asian tribes, and the rise of Indian dynasties like the Kushanas. By the 1st century CE, their territories were integrated into the broader Indian political landscape.

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1. The *Western Kshatrapas* in Gujarat and Maharashtra.
2. The *Northern Sakas* in Punjab and Sindh.
3. The *Indo-Scythian Kingdom*, under rulers like *Maues* and *Azes I*, who expanded their influence deeper into the Indian subcontinent.

8.9 Suggested Readings

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- Banerjee, J.N. *The Scythians and Persians in India.* In K.A. Nilakanta Sastri (ed.), *The Mauryas and Satavahanas, 325 BC–AD 300.* Kolkata: Orient Longmans, 1952, pp. 186–221.
- Chattopadhyay, S. *Early History of North India from the Fall of the Mauryas to the Death of Harsha (c. 200 BC – AD 650).* Calcutta: Progressive Publishers, 1958.

8.10 Terminal Questions

Q.1 Write down the achievements of Kushana ruler Kanishka.

Q. Discuss the evolving economic landscape of India under foreign rule.

Unit 9

Sunga, Kanva and Satvahana dynasties

Structure:

9.1 Introduction

9.2 Learning Objectives

9.3 The Successor of the Mauryan Dynasty

       9.3.1 Sungas

       9.3.2 Kanvas (73 B.C.-28 B.C.)

Self Check Exercise-1

9.4 Satvahananas

       9.4.1 Geographical Background

       9.4.2 Outline of the history of Satvahanas

       9.4.3. Settlement Pattern

       9.4.4 Home of Satvahanas

       9.4.5 Ruler of Satvahana dynasty

       9.4.6 Inland Settlements

Self Check Exercise-2

9.5 Administration

Self -Check Exercise-3

9.6 Summary

9.7 Glossary

9.8 Answers to Self-Check Exercise

9.9 Suggested Readings

9.10 Terminal Questions

9.1 Introduction

The political history of this period must be reconstructed by examining various types of sources. For certain regions, the Puranic lists of dynasties and rulers serve as crucial sources of information. Inscriptions are also highly significant and, in some cases, provide supplementary details to what is found in the Puranas. For the period immediately following the fall of the Mauryas, fragmentary information is found in texts such as the Gargi Samhita, Patanjali's Mahabhashya, the Divyavadana, Kalidasa's Malavikagnimitra, and Bana's Harshacharita. Evidence of Sunga history is also found in inscriptions from Ayodhya and Vidisa. During the post-Mauryan period,

political power was not concentrated in a single family. Between 200 and 300 CE, two main trends emerge: one is the succession of rulers in the northwest, starting with the Greeks, followed by the Sakas or Parthians, and later the Yuch-chi. The second trend is the rise of numerous minor local ruling families in northern India. Gana-samghas also spread across various regions. The most significant data for these rulers come from the coins they minted, often bearing their names, making them a major source for this period's political history, though other sources are also necessary. Cultural exchanges with parts of Western and Central Asia became more frequent during this time. For the northwestern region, additional sources like coins, inscriptions in Kharosthi script, and numerous Kharosthi documents found in Central Asia are essential. There are also references to the northwest in Greek and Latin sources. Buddhist texts such as the Pali work *Milinda-Panha* (The Questions of Milinda) discuss the Yavana King Menander and Buddhism during this period. Furthermore, Chinese historical chronicles contain valuable information about contemporary events in Central Asia, Bactria, and northwestern India. For early history regarding the Yuch-chis or Kushanas, we rely heavily on the chronicles of the early and later Han dynasties of China.

9.2 Learning Objectives

After studying this lesson, the learner will be able to:

- Comprehend about historical formation of Satavahans Empire in India.
- Outline the history of satavahanas and their administrative system.
- Study the cultural contacts in various fields, like trade, technology, art, and religion.

Sources- Primary sources for studying the Shunga, Satavahana, and Kanva dynasties include various inscriptions, coins, and ancient texts. The Shunga dynasty (around 185-75 BCE) is documented in Buddhist texts like the *Divyavadana* and the *Ashokavadana*, as well as through archaeological findings such as the Bharhut and Sanchi Stupas. The Satavahana dynasty (circa 1st century BCE to 3rd century CE) is well-known from inscriptions found in places like Nasik, Nanaghat, and Karle, along with accounts by Greek and Roman historians like Ptolemy and Pliny the Elder. The Kanva dynasty (around 75-30 BCE), which followed the Shungas, is primarily known through the Puranas, especially the *Vishnu Purana* and the *Vayu Purana*,

which provide genealogical and historical records. These sources collectively offer a comprehensive view of these significant ancient Indian dynasties.

9.3 The Successors of the Mauryan Dynasty
9.3.1 The Sungas (185-73 BCE)

The immediate successors of the Mauryas in the Ganga heartland of Magadha were the Sungas, a Brahman family that took the throne in Patliputra. In 185 BCE, Brihadratha, the last Mauryan ruler, was assassinated by his commander-in-chief, Pushyamitra Shunga, who belonged to the Shunga family. Buddhist tradition depicts Pushyamitra as a fierce persecutor of Buddhism, although his orthodoxy did not last long, and during the Shunga period, significant Buddhist sanctuaries were established, marking a shift in monumental architecture. Pushyamitra's territories spanned Magadha, extending south to the Narmada and northwest to Jalandhar in the Punjab. The northwestern provinces of the Magadha Empire had been taken by Demetrius, the Greek king of Bactria, around the beginning of the 2nd century BCE. However, internal dissensions among the Greeks led to Pushyamitra reclaiming some lost territories. While the Greeks were engaged in internal strife, Bactria was invaded by Scythian hordes, and Greek sovereignty in the Oxus Valley ended. The Greeks, driven out of Bactria, sought refuge in their Indian dominions in Afghanistan and western Punjab, continuing to rule for another two centuries. This period also saw the emergence of Greek rulers, like King Menander (Millinda), who is famous in Buddhist literature, and Apollodotus, who conquered Kathiawar. The period is marked by political disorder, but it also became a time when Indian monumental art and architecture took on distinctive forms that would endure. The Shunga terracottas, for example, demonstrated superior technique compared to Mauryan art, and they were in harmony with monumental works, reflecting a new artistic expression of "Indian art."

9.3.2 Kanvas (73 BCE – 28 BCE)

Vasudeva, the minister of the last Shunga ruler, established the Kanva dynasty, which consisted of four kings and governed Pataliputra for around forty-five years. Their authority was relatively weak, with control likely confined to the Pataliputra region. The last Kanva ruler was eventually overthrown by an Andhra king.

A prominent contemporary figure was King Kharavela of Kalinga, known primarily through the Hathigumpha Inscription, one of ancient India's most significant epigraphic records. Scholars debate the dating of this inscription, with many placing Kharavela in the 1st century BCE, while others argue for the early 2nd century BCE. Kharavela belonged to the Cheta dynasty, which might have connections to the Chedis.

Following Ashoka's conquest, Kalinga remained relatively obscure until Kharavela's emergence. He ascended the throne at the age of 24 and undertook notable military campaigns, capturing western cities like Musik and securing allegiance from various regions. He also restored an ancient aqueduct that had been out of use for centuries.

Kharavela's military expeditions extended into northern India, where he claimed to have compelled the Magadha king Brihaspatimitra to submit. In the south, his forces advanced as far as Masulipatam, with possible influence reaching the Pandya rulers of the far south.

While renowned as a formidable warrior, Kharavela also prioritized peaceful initiatives, such as irrigation and water management. He is further remembered for his patronage of Jainism.

Self Check Exercise-1

Q-1   Who established the empire of Satvahan?

Q-2   Who was the hero of Kalidasa's drama Malvikangimitram?

Q-3   Who issued coins in which ships were depicted?

9.4 Satavahanas

The names of the Satavahana rulers, also known as the Andhras, appear in the king lists found in the Puranas. However, using these lists as historical sources presents many challenges due to discrepancies in the names of the kings and the duration of their reigns across different Puranas. Additionally, the accounts of the kings are often intertwined with myths and legends, requiring careful analysis to separate factual information from legendary tales. Despite these issues, the Puranas remain valuable when examined alongside other sources, such as coins and inscriptions. The Satavahanas minted numerous coins in lead, silver, and copper alloys, with silver coins depicting the king's portrait and name. Inscriptions, mainly found in Buddhist rock-cut caves, commemorate donations made by Satavahana rulers and citizens alike. By cross-referencing these various sources, scholars generally agree that the Satavahanas began their rule around the first century B.C.

9.4.1 Geographical Background

The Deccan Peninsula is divided into the plateau region and coastal plains by

the Eastern and Western Ghats. The Andhra coast is significantly broader than the Konkan coast to the west. The plateau slopes eastward, causing major rivers like the Mahanadi, Godavari, and Krishna to flow into the Bay of Bengal. The river deltas and valleys offer fertile land for settlements. Notably, the plateau's hill ranges are crossed only via passes, which is an important aspect of the Deccan's geography.

9.4.2 History of the Satavahanas

The Satavahana dynasty was founded by Simuka Satavahana, as mentioned in the Puranas. His brother, Kanha (or Krishna), is known from an inscription found at Nasik. The Nanaghat inscription, commissioned by Queen Nayanika, the widow of Satakarni, lists several Satavahana rulers and details her performance of Vedic sacrifices. Nanaghat, a significant pass linking Junnar to the coast, once featured carved portraits of Satavahana kings, though they have since been destroyed.

Little is known about the rulers who followed Satakarni until the reign of Gautamiputra Satakarni. His mother's Nasik inscription highlights his kingdom's vast extent and achievements, including his victory over the Kshatrapas in western Deccan and Gujarat. He celebrated this triumph by counterstamping Kshatrapa coins with his own symbols. According to the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, the rivalry between the Satavahanas and the Kshatrapas disrupted trade routes, forcing Greek ships bound for Kalyan to divert to Bharuch, indicating that control over foreign trade was a significant source of conflict.

During Gautamiputra's reign, Satavahana authority extended into Andhra. His son, Pulumavi, succeeded him and strengthened their control over the eastern Deccan. This period saw the first Satavahana inscriptions outside the western Deccan, particularly in Amaravati. Yajnasri Satakarni was the last notable ruler of the dynasty, after which the kingdom fragmented, with one branch continuing to rule in Andhra. In the later Satavahana period, coins featured bilingual inscriptions in Prakrit and a South Indian language, likely Tamil or Telugu.

The Satavahanas also faced challenges from Kharavela of Kalinga, who rose to power in the mid-1st century BCE and launched military expeditions into western India, causing setbacks for the Satavahanas. Despite these obstacles, Gautamiputra's reign marked a significant revival of Satavahana power.

One of the key challenges in Satavahana history is the limited information about various Deccan regions. Inscriptions mention relationships with local powers such as the Maharathis and Mahabhojas. The Nanaghat inscriptions emphasize the influence of the Maharathis, highlighting their prominent role in Satavahana history.

9.4.3 Settlement Pattern

The early inscriptions suggest that the Satavahanas initially ruled from the western Deccan. A second-century A.D. inscription from Gautamiputra Satakarni's mother mentions both the Western and Eastern Ghats as part of his empire,

indicating that by this time, Satavahana rule spanned the entire Deccan. The empire was divided into districts, or aharas, including Govardhana-Sahara (centered around Nasik), Soparaka-Ahara on the west coast, Mamala-Sahara in the Pune and Satara districts, Satavahanihara in the Bellary district, and Kapurachara in Gujarat. The west coast had key ports like Bharuch, Kalyan, Sopara, and Chaul, connected to inland centers via passes through the Western Ghats. The *Periplus of the Erythean Sea*, written by a Greek sailor in the first century A.D., provides insight into trade routes and the role of royal fishermen in guiding ships into the narrow Gulf of Cambay to reach Bharuch. The competition between the Satavahanas and Kshatrapas over control of maritime trade and ports like Bharuch and Kalyan further highlights the significance of these routes.

9.4.4 Homeland of the Satavahanas

The exact origin of the Satavahanas remains debated. While the Puranas identify them as Andhras, suggesting a homeland in the Krishna-Godavari delta, other evidence points to Maharashtra. The Andhras were initially located on the outskirts of Aryan settlements, possibly near the Vindhyas, before expanding into the Krishna and Godavari regions. They were a powerful kingdom even before the Mauryan period, boasting 32 major towns and a strong military. After Ashoka's death, the Andhras likely established their independence.

However, many scholars believe the Satavahanas originated in Maharashtra rather than Andhra. Jain traditions mention Paithan in Marathwada as their capital, and numerous Satavahana inscriptions have been discovered in Maharashtra, especially at Naneghat and Nasik. The use of Maharashtri Prakrit as the court language and patronage of local poets further supports this theory.

9.4.5 Satavahana Dynasty Rulers

Key Satavahana settlements were located around Nasik, Junnar, and Karle in the western Deccan, as well as in the upper Krishna basin, including Kolhapur. These agriculturally rich regions supported coastal trade, connecting inland centers to west coast ports. This trade facilitated exchange between India and the Mediterranean.

Paithan, an ancient city on the Godavari River, served as a major hub, with discoveries of coins, molds, terracottas, and pottery. Excavations at Ter, another significant site, revealed wooden fortifications, dyeing vats, and a Brahmanical temple. The transpeninsular trade route linked western centers like Paithan to Andhra and the eastern coast, passing through Vidarbha in central India.

During the Satavahana period, fortified settlements, brick structures, and advanced construction techniques reflected growing prosperity and stability.

9.4.6 Inland Settlements

Inland settlements were concentrated around Nasik, Junnar, Karle, and further south in the upper Krishna basin, including Kolhapur and Bhokardan. These areas, known for their agricultural richness, supported ports that handled first-century trade between India and the Mediterranean.

Trade routes connected Bharuch, Paithan, Ter, and eastern centers in Andhra. The ancient site of Paithan, covering 4 square kilometers along the Godavari, has yielded coins, terracottas, and pottery, though few structural remains from the Satavahana period survive.

Ter, located in a prominent cotton-producing area, revealed wooden fortifications, dyeing vats, and ivory figurines resembling those found at Pompeii. The most significant ruin at Ter is a brick chaitya later converted into a Brahmanical temple.

9.5 Administration

The Satavahana administration was simpler than that of the Mauryas. Inscriptions mention ministers overseeing various functions, including treasury management and land records. While the exact number of ministers is unknown, they were directly appointed by the king rather than inheriting their positions. Their compensation likely came from state revenue collected through taxes on agriculture and trade.

A notable Satavahana practice introduced in the first century CE was the donation of village revenue to Brahmanas or the Buddhist Sangha, a tradition later adopted by the Guptas.

Land revenue was crucial, and land donations followed a meticulous process. Grants were announced in an assembly (*nigama-sabha*), recorded on copper plates or cloth, and handed to the recipient. A designated officer maintained records of these transactions.

The Satavahanas promoted agriculture by granting land ownership to those who cleared forests and cultivated the land. Trade also significantly contributed to state income, with guilds controlling commerce and functioning as bankers. To support trade, the state ensured highway security and constructed rest houses along trade routes.

Self- Check Exercise-3

Q-1   From which phase do Karle caves belong to?

Q-2   Who established the empire of Sunga?

Q-3   What was the capital of Kanishka?

Q-4   Who was the first to issue gold coins in India?

9.6 Summary

The political history of this period has to be pieced together by going through different types of sources. For some regions, the Puranic lists of dynasties and rulers become important sources of information. Inscriptional sources are also very important and, in some cases, they supplement the information that we get from the Puranas. For the period immediately succeeding the overthrow of the Mauryas, Sungas, Satvahanas, ikshwaku, Greek, Sakas, Parthians, kushanas emerged during this period. This period is also very important from the point of view of the religious, cultural, and economic way. Jainism and Buddhism were very [popular. Culture and the development of architecture are very important.

9.7 Glossary

Amfore: A symbol of tilak on the forehead in Mathura art.

Hinyana: A branch of Buddhism

Heliodorous: A Greek embassy to the court of Sunga ruler.

9.8 Answers to Self-Check Exercise

Self-Check Exercise-1

Ans.1
The Satavahana Empire, also referred to as the Andhra Empire, was founded by Simuka around the 1st century BCE. He is recognized as the first ruler of the Satavahana dynasty.

Ans.2
The protagonist of Kalidasa's play *Malavikagnimitra* is King Agnimitra, the second ruler of the Shunga dynasty, who reigned during the 2nd century BCE. The play follows Agnimitra's love for Malavika, weaving together romantic and political intrigues that eventually lead to a happy conclusion.

Ans.3
Coins featuring ship designs were issued by the Satavahana king Yajna Sri Satakarni, who ruled during the late 2nd to early 3rd century CE. These coins highlight the importance of trade and commerce during his reign, emphasizing the dynasty's maritime connections with distant regions.

Self-Check Exercise-2

Ans.1
Queen Naganika, renowned for her administrative abilities, was the wife of King Satakarni I. She played an influential role in the governance of the Satavahana Empire, as evidenced by inscriptions and historical records from that period.

Ans.2
Gautamiputra Satakarni, a prominent Satavahana ruler of the 2nd century CE, is celebrated for his victory over the Sakas. His military prowess and successful

campaigns against foreign invaders, including the Sakas, significantly strengthened the Satavahana Empire's dominance in central and southern India.

Ans.3
The capital of the Satavahana Empire was Pratishthana, located on the banks of the Godavari River. It served as an important center for trade, administration, and culture throughout the Satavahana period.

Self-Check Exercise-3

Ans.1
Pushyamitra Shunga established the Shunga Empire in 185 BCE after overthrowing the last Mauryan ruler, Brihadratha Maurya. He subsequently governed various regions of the Indian subcontinent.

Ans.2
Pushyamitra Shunga founded the Shunga Empire in 185 BCE after deposing Brihadratha Maurya, the final Mauryan emperor. He then ruled over several territories across the Indian subcontinent.

Ans.3
Kanishka, a notable ruler of the Kushan dynasty, established his capital at Purushapura, known today as Peshawar in Pakistan. Under his reign, the Kushan Empire expanded significantly, becoming a major hub for trade, culture, and Buddhism.

Ans.4
The first gold coins in India were introduced by the Indo-Greek king Kadphises II. A significant portion of the gold used for minting these coins is believed to have been sourced through trade with the Roman Empire.

9.9 Suggested Readings

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9.10 Terminal Questions

1. Throw light on the rise and expansion of the Satvahana Empire.

2. Write down the trade and commercial activities during the Kushana period.

3. Describe the features of post-Mauryan art and architecture.

4. What were the basic features of Mathura and Gandhara Ar

Unit -10
Imperial Guptas

Structure:

10.1 Introduction

10.2 Learning Objectives

10.3 The Foundation of the Gupta Empire Chandra Gupta

Self Check Exercise-1

10.4 Samudra Gupta Parakramattka.

    10.4.1 The Allahabad Prasasti

    10.4.2 Conquests of Aryavarta

    10.4.3 The Southern Campaign

    10.4.4 Campaign against the Forest Kingdoms

    10.4.5 Relationship with the Frontier Kingdoms & Tribal States

    10.4.6 The Empire

    10.4.7 The Interaction with Ceylon (Sri Lanka)

    10.4.8 Performance of Asvamedha

    10.4.9 The Emperor

    10.4.10 Governance

Self Check Exercise-2

10.5 Chandra Gupta-II Vikramaditya

    10.5.1 The Story of Devichandraguptam

    10.5.2 Early difficulties

    10.5.3 War against the Saka Ksatrapa

    10.5.4. Gupta Empire under Chandragupta II

    10.5.5 Gupta Empire after Chandragupta II

10.1 Introduction

History rarely repeats itself, yet the rise of two of India's most influential dynasties—the Mauryas and the Guptas—reveals an intriguing parallel. Chandragupta Maurya established the Maurya dynasty in 320 BCE, and precisely six centuries later, another Chandragupta founded the Gupta dynasty in 320 CE. This remarkable coincidence is difficult to ignore.

The Gupta dynasty ruled India for nearly two centuries, with Dr. Barnett likening this period to the "Periclean age" in Greek history. During this era, India was liberated from foreign dominations like the Kushanas and Sassanians and successfully resisted the once-invincible Huns of Asia and Europe. The dynasty is also celebrated for producing the legendary ruler Vikramaditya.

Like many Indian dynasties, the early history of the Imperial Guptas remains obscure. While the identity of the first ruler is known, the origins and initial rise of the dynasty are not well-documented. Despite this, the significance of the Gupta period in Indian history is undeniable. As V.A. Smith observed, "With the accession of the Guptas, light again dawns, the veil of oblivion is lifted, and the history of India regains unity and interest."

This unit will delve into the political history of the Imperial Guptas, tracing their legacy from Chandragupta I to Skanda Gupta.

10.2 Learning Objectives:

After studying this lesson, the students will be able to:

- Explain the historical sources of the Gupta Empire, such as the Allahabad Pillar Inscription, and highlight their significance.

- Discuss the establishment of the Gupta dynasty and its key achievements.

10.3 The Foundation of the Gupta Empire

It is often remarked that Magadha has a history stretching far back into the early centuries before the Christian era, with a legacy that is unique and unparalleled, not only in India but possibly in the entire world. Over time, the region of Magadha experienced various political and cultural shifts, notably under the Mauryas, Sungas, and Kanvas. After the Kanvas were overthrown by a Satavahana king, the Satavahanas ruled Magadha for a brief period of about fifty years. During the time when the early Kushana rulers, Kadphises and Wema, were pushing into northern India, a local Lichchhavi ruler established control over Pataliputra. However, the Lichchhavis were eventually forced to vacate Pataliputra when a minister of Kanishka advanced towards the capital.

Some scholars have proposed that gold coins associated with the Early Gupta series, bearing the name of Kaca, should be linked to Ghatotkaca, the father of Chandragupta I. However, the epithet on the reverse of these coins and the fact that Ghatotkaca, being a vassal Maharaja, was not entitled to mint coins, debunk this theory. Ghatotkaca likely ruled between 300 and 320 A.D.

Chandragupta I – The first independent sovereign (Maharajadhiraja) of the Gupta dynasty was Chandragupta I, the son of Ghatotkaca, who ascended the throne around 320 A.D., marking the beginning of the Gupta Era. Similar to his predecessor Bimbisara, Chandragupta strengthened his position through a matrimonial alliance with the Lichchhavis of Vaisali or Nepal, thus laying the foundation for the second Magadhan Empire. The union with the Lichchhavi princess Kumaradevi is commemorated on a series of coins featuring the figures of Chandragupta and his queen on the obverse, and Lakshmi, the goddess of fortune, with the inscription "Lichchhavayah" on the reverse, symbolizing that his prosperity was attributed to this alliance.

Scholars have differing views on the nature of Chandragupta's control over Pataliputra. While Smith suggests that the Lichchhavis ruled Pataliputra as feudatories of the Kushans, and Chandragupta came to power through his marriage to Kumaradevi, Allan proposes that Pataliputra was under Gupta control even during Sri Gupta's reign. From the accounts of Samudragupta's conquests, it is inferred that his father's domain was limited to Magadha and surrounding areas. The Puranic texts referring to the Gupta dominion appear to focus on the region of Magadha, and

Vaisali is not mentioned as part of Chandragupta I's conquests. The inclusion of North Bihar, including Vaisali, within the Gupta Empire appears under Chandragupta II, who made it a viceroyalty under a prince of the imperial family.

Chandragupta I is also notable for selecting his son, Samudragupta, as his successor before an assembly of councilors and royal princes. This decision played a crucial role in securing the future of the Gupta Empire.

Self Check Exercise-1

Q-1   Who is referred to as the Napoleon of India?

Q-2   Which inscription is found on the pillar that contains the Prayag Prasasti of Samudragupta?

Q-3   Which inscriptions reveal information about the Silk Weavers Guild?

10.4 Samudra Gupta Parakramattka

Samudra Gupta, the fourth ruler of the Gupta dynasty, is regarded as the most prominent of all Gupta emperors. He was designated as the heir apparent by his father, Chandra Gupta I, owing to his demonstrated leadership skills and other royal virtues. The exact date of his succession is unclear, but based on evidence from a possibly dubious Nalanda plate, it may have occurred before the fifth year of the Gupta Era, around 325 A.D. However, this is uncertain. It is evident from both the Allahabad Prasasti and the epithet "Hatpadaparigrihita" in the Riddhapur inscription that Samudra Gupta was chosen by Chandra Gupta I from among his sons due to his exceptional abilities. From the time of his ascension, Samudra Gupta proved to be an ambitious and aggressive monarch, engaging in numerous military campaigns to expand his empire. His remarkable success in these endeavors places him among India's greatest military strategists. Upon completing his conquests, he ordered the engraving of a detailed panegyric on the Asoka pillar at Allahabad, which had been standing for six centuries. This inscription, composed by his court poet Harishena, provides a comprehensive record of his military campaigns. Written in Gupta Brahmi script and a mix of classical Sanskrit prose and poetry, it reveals his numerous victories.

10.4.1 The Allahabad Prasasti – The pillar that bears the Prasasti, now in Allahabad, was originally an Asokan pillar. It initially contained an Asokan edict promoting Buddhist values but was later moved from Kaushambi to Allahabad by Mughal Emperor Akbar in the 16th century. His son, Jahangir, added his inscription to the existing ones, including those of Samudra Gupta. The pillar was later rediscovered in the 18th century and re-erected with a new lion capital. The inscription, dating from around 365-320 A.D. at the end of Samudra Gupta's reign, outlines his major military campaigns, categorizing them into four groups: conquest of nine kings in the Gangetic plain, victories over 12 South Indian kings, subjugation of forest tribes, and the defeat of frontier kingdoms and republics.

10.4.2 Conquests of Aryavarta – Shortly after his ascension, Samudra Gupta launched an offensive against smaller kingdoms to the west of Magadha. He defeated nine kings, including Nagasena of Mathura, Achyuta of Ahichchhata, and others. These kings were either killed in battle or "forcibly uprooted," and their territories annexed to the Gupta Empire. Although the exact locations of some of these kingdoms remain unclear, Ganapati Naga ruled from Padmavati, present-day Narawar, and Madhya Pradesh. Following these victories, Samudra Gupta turned his focus southward.

10.4.3 The Southern Campaign – Conquering South India required boldness, organizational expertise, and military brilliance. Samudra Gupta excelled in all these areas. His strategy combined three key principles: grahana (capture of the enemy king), moksha (liberation), and anugraha (reinstatement of deposed kings). Samudra Gupta's southern campaign, which included battles against various South Indian rulers, was characterized by the restoration of many kings to their thrones, contrasting with his western campaign where defeated rulers were often removed from power.

10.4.4 Campaign against the Forest Kingdoms – Samudra Gupta also defeated numerous forest kingdoms, known as Atavika kingdoms. The Basti king Parvrajaka's copper plate inscription lists 18 such defeated states.

10.4.5 Relations with Frontier Kingdoms and Tribal States

Samudra Gupta's conquests earned him widespread recognition, prompting several frontier kingdoms and tribal states to acknowledge his supremacy. These

included regions like Bengal, Assam, Nepal, and territories in the northern and western parts of India, such as the Malavas and Yaudheyas. Significantly, he also forged diplomatic relations with foreign powers, including the Kushans, Sakas, and even the kingdoms of Sri Lanka.

10.4.6 The Empire

By the end of his reign, Samudra Gupta had established control over Aryavarta, encompassing present-day West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and eastern Rajasthan. His empire stretched from the Hooghly River in the east to the Chambal River in the west, and from the Himalayas in the north to the Narmada River in the south. His influence extended beyond these boundaries, with rulers from Gandhara, Nepal, Ceylon, and other distant regions acknowledging his supremacy.

10.4.7 Interaction with Ceylon (Sri Lanka)

Around 360 A.D., Siri Meghavarna, the King of Ceylon, sent Buddhist monks to visit a monastery at Bodh Gaya, reflecting the diplomatic and cultural ties established between Samudra Gupta and the island kingdom.

10.4.8 Performance of Asvamedha

To assert his imperial authority, Samudra Gupta revived the ancient Asvamedha (horse sacrifice), possibly the first such ceremony since Pushyamitra Shunga. This grand ritual involved lavish offerings and the distribution of coins, some featuring Vishnu and his symbols, underscoring Samudra Gupta's devotion to Vaishnavism.

10.4.9 The Emperor

Samudra Gupta remained relatively unknown until the early 20th century, when archaeological discoveries and inscriptions shed light on his achievements. Renowned for his prowess as a military strategist and patron of the arts, he excelled in music, poetry, and administration. His coins and inscriptions highlight his intellectual brilliance and martial skill. Titles such as *Apratiratha* ("unrivaled chariot-warrior") and *Vyaghra-parakrama* ("possessing the strength of a tiger") reflect his exceptional leadership and valor.

10.4.10 Governance

Samudra Gupta's governance style, though idealized in historical records, reveals a distinctive approach. While he defeated numerous contemporary rulers, he refrained from annexing their territories. Instead, he imposed one-time tributes, reinstated the conquered kings, and withdrew Gupta forces, allowing them to govern with minimal interference. This strategy created a network of vassal states around the Gupta Empire, contrasting with the Mauryan model of centralized administration.

Upon completing the Asvamedha sacrifice, Samudra Gupta was proclaimed a *chakravartin* (universal ruler). This title did not imply direct control over vast

territories but rather symbolic acknowledgment of his supremacy by other rulers, often demonstrated through their presence at his court. This approach reinforced Samudra Gupta's threefold conquest strategy—defeat, reinstatement, and tribute—ensuring the loyalty of subjugated rulers and stability within the empire.

Though the exact date of his death remains uncertain, it is believed that Samudra Gupta ruled for nearly five decades, overseeing a period of prosperity and stability. To secure a smooth transition of power, he appointed his son by Queen Datta Devi as his successor. However, a brief power struggle followed his death, possibly prompting his decision to designate a clear heir. His immediate successor, Rama Gupta, proved weak, as the Saka Satraps forced him into an unfavorable treaty. This indicates that either Samudra Gupta had not fully subdued the Sakas or that their distant territories rebelled soon after his death. The final defeat of the Sakas and the conquest of Malwa and Gujarat were left to his successor.

Samudra Gupta's exquisite gold coins became iconic, solidifying the Gupta dynasty's reputation as the "Golden Age" of Indian history.

Family of Samudra Gupta

Samudra Gupta's devoted wife, likely Datta Devi, is mentioned in an inscription from Eran dating to his reign. While no officially dated documents from his rule survive, some grants attributed to the 5th and 9th years of the Gupta Era are known, though their authenticity remains debated. Historian V.A. Smith suggests that Samudra Gupta ruled from around A.D. 330 to 375. Since his successor ascended the throne around A.D. 380-381, it is plausible that Samudra Gupta passed away sometime after A.D. 375. One of his last significant acts was designating his son, Chandra Gupta, born to Datta Devi, as the next emperor.

Self Check Exercise-2

Q-1   Who was the first ruler of the Gupta dynasty to mint silver coins?

Q-2   What is Aprahata?

Q-3   Who propagated 'Yoga Darshan'?

10.5 Chandra Gupta II Vikramaditya

According to accepted history, Emperor Samudra Gupta, the Chakravartin of Arya-Varta, was succeeded by his son, Chandra Gupta II, the designated heir of Queen Datta Devi. Chandra Gupta II later took the title 'Vikramaditya,' meaning 'the sun of valor.' However, there remains a certain mystery surrounding this seemingly straightforward succession.

10.5.1 The Story of Devichandraguptam

Literature as a historical source is often seen as supplementary to more

reliable epigraphic records. However, sometimes literary works reveal critical historical details not found in inscriptions, which are later corroborated by epigraphic evidence. A prime example is the succession of Samudra Gupta. Gupta inscriptions consistently mention Chandra Gupta II as his immediate successor. However, new insights have emerged from the Sanskrit play *Devichandragupta* by Visakhadatta. The second act of this play reveals that Rama Gupta, initially thought to be Chandra Gupta II's predecessor, agreed to give his queen, Dhruvadevi, to the Sakas to alleviate the fears of his subjects.

10.5.2 Early Difficulties

Samudra Gupta left behind an empire that, while vast, was not entirely unified. It resembled a federation of autonomous states, all subordinated to the Gupta suzerainty but still maintaining a degree of independence. After Samudra Gupta's death, the empire began to fragment. During Rama Gupta's reign, the Kusana king made a bid for power, which was repelled by Chandra Gupta II. Inscriptions, such as the Meharauli iron pillar inscription, mention a successful campaign against the Bhalikas. Chandra Gupta II strengthened his position in the northwest and Punjab, becoming the first Gupta ruler to have records discovered in Mathura. His silver coins are found across the eastern Punjab, indicating his expanding influence. An inscription from Mathura, dated 380 AD, commemorates the building of a Siva temple by Chandra Gupta II, further solidifying his growing power.

10.5.3 War Against the Saka Ksatrapa

By the time Chandra Gupta II ascended the throne, he had already consolidated his authority in the northwest. Following this, he focused on the resurgence of the Ksatrapas, a challenge to his authority in the south-west. Studies of Ksatrapa coins reveal political upheaval between 305 and 348 AD, including invasions by Pravarasena I of the Vakatakas and Samudra Gupta. After Samudra Gupta's victories, the Ksatrapas sought to regain control. Chandra Gupta II's successful campaigns against them gradually diminished their power. Inscriptions from Udayagiri caves, such as one dated 401 AD, suggest the annexation of Malwa and indicate that Chandra Gupta II's expansionist efforts extended beyond the regions previously controlled by the Ksatrapas. He solidified his dominance over Malwa, which is confirmed by later inscriptions and the date of 412-13 AD in the Sanchi pillar inscription.

10.5.4 Gupta Empire under Chandra Gupta II

Chandra Gupta II's reign marked the height of Gupta power. According to the Chinese traveler Fa Hien, Pataliputra was the original capital, but Chandra Gupta II likely made Ujjain his second capital to address the administration of newly acquired territories. His successful campaigns, particularly in Western Malwa and Kathiawar, expanded the Gupta Empire to vast regions, from Kathiawar to Eastern Bengal and from the Himalayas to Narmada. With the defeat of the Scythians and the Vakatakas neutralized through marriage alliances, Chandra Gupta II reigned as the paramount sovereign of India. His reign was marked by relative peace and stability, and his successors, including Kumara Gupta I, continued his legacy. His death, marked between 413-415 AD, was followed by a smooth succession to his son, Kumara Gupta I.

10.5.5 Gupta Empire after Chandra Gupta II

During Chandra Gupta II's reign, the Gupta Empire experienced remarkable growth, marked by national strength, economic prosperity, and stable governance. Trade flourished, internal stability prevailed, and the empire saw no significant revolts, making this era widely recognized as the Golden Age of India.

After Chandra Gupta II, his son Kumara Gupta I (415–455 AD) ascended the throne and ruled for 40 years with minimal challenges. Under his leadership, the empire remained secure, and he further asserted his authority by performing the Asvamedha sacrifice, symbolizing his dominance over the outer provinces.

However, the stability of the Gupta Empire began to wane after 450 AD, following Pushyamitra's invasion and the subsequent arrival of the Huns, which marked the beginning of the empire's gradual decline.

Under Skanda Gupta, who succeeded Kumara Gupta I (455-462 AD), the Huns were successfully repelled. Skanda Gupta's victory over the Huns was commemorated with inscriptions detailing his military exploits. However, despite these successes, the Gupta Empire began to weaken, especially after the death of Kumara Gupta I. The Huns, particularly the Hephtalites under Toramana and Mihirakula, continued to challenge Gupta power, and by the mid-sixth century, the Gupta dynasty began to dissolve.

Self-Check Exercise-3

Q-1   Explain the different types of sources that historians use to reconstruct the history of the Gupta Empire.

Q-2   Provide a detailed account of the life and accomplishments of Chandragupta

Q-3   Write an essay discussing the origin and the original homeland of the Gupta Dynasty.

10.6 Summary

The Gupta Empire, which ruled the Indian subcontinent from 320 to 550 AD, is often regarded as a golden age of Indian civilization. This period is renowned for its remarkable advancements in literature, science, and the arts. The rise of the Gupta family began in the late third century when they took control of the kingship in Magadha, a region covering present-day eastern India and Bengal. The empire is generally considered to have begun in 320 AD with the ascension of Chandragupta I (not to be confused with Chandragupta Maurya, founder of the Mauryan Empire), the third ruler of the dynasty. He soon expanded his kingdom by conquering surrounding areas.

Chandragupta I's son, Samudragupta, ascended the throne and launched an ambitious campaign to expand his empire across the Indian subcontinent. He successfully brought vast territories under his control while allowing local rulers in distant regions to retain power in exchange for their allegiance. Beyond his military achievements, Samudragupta was a distinguished patron of the arts, renowned as both a poet and musician. He surrounded himself with prominent writers, philosophers, and artists. Though a devout follower of Hinduism, he was tolerant of Buddhism, welcoming Buddhist scholars to his court and encouraging the religion's growth within his realm.

Following the brief reign of his eldest son, Ramagupta, the throne passed to Chandragupta II in 380 AD. Known as "the Great," Chandragupta II expanded the empire to its zenith, ushering in the golden age of the Gupta period. However, after his reign, the empire faced a steep decline, largely due to the invasion of the Huna (White Huns), who had been advancing into India. By 500 AD, the Huns had overwhelmed the Gupta Empire, leading to its fragmentation into several independent states.

Despite its political decline, the Gupta Empire's legacy, particularly its cultural renaissance, has continued to inspire India throughout history and remains influential even today.

10.7 Glossary

The Prayaga Prashasti: Also referred to as the Allahabad Pillar Inscription, this was composed by Banabhatta, the court poet of Samudragupta.

Gupta Empire: The Gupta Empire was an ancient Indian empire that spanned from the early 4th century CE to the late 6th century CE. Its peak, roughly between 319 and 467 CE, is regarded by historians as the Golden Age of India.

10.8 Answer to the Self-Check Exercise

Self-Check Exercise-1

Ans.1
Samudragupta, a prominent ruler of the Gupta Empire, is often called the "Napoleon of India" due to his remarkable military prowess and extensive conquests, reminiscent of Napoleon Bonaparte's campaigns in Europe. This comparison was popularized by the historian V.A. Smith.

Ans.2
The *Prayag Prashasti*, which highlights the achievements of Samudragupta, is engraved on the Allahabad Pillar. This pillar also bears inscriptions from the Mauryan emperor Ashoka and the Mughal emperor Jahangir.

The Mandasor inscription from the Gupta period, dating to the 5th century CE, offers significant insights into the silk weavers' guild. This inscription, associated with the reign of Kumaragupta I, mentions that a guild of silk weavers migrated from Lata (modern Gujarat) to Mandasor (present-day Madhya Pradesh) and built a sun temple there.

Self-Check Exercise-2

Ans. 1
Chandragupta II, also known as Chandragupta Vikramaditya, was the first Gupta ruler to issue silver coins. He introduced these coins following his conquest of western Indian territories previously controlled by the Western Kshatrapas, who traditionally minted silver currency.

Ans. 2
Land during the Gupta period was classified into the following categories:

- **Kshetra:** Cultivated land
- **Khila:** Wasteland
- **Aprahata:** Forest or jungle land
- **Vasti:** Habitable land
- **Sarah:** Pastureland

Thus, *Aprahata* refers to uncultivated land covered with dense vegetation and trees.

Ans. 3
Yoga Darshan, commonly known as the Yoga Sutras, was systematized by the sage Patanjali. He compiled the existing knowledge of yoga into concise aphorisms,

outlining both its philosophy and practice. The *Yoga Sutras* remain a foundational text in the yoga tradition.

Self-Check Exercise-3

Ans. 1
Historians rely on various sources to reconstruct the history of the Gupta Empire, an era marked by significant cultural, political, and economic progress. The primary sources include:

Sources of Gupta History
Literary Sources

Contemporary Inscriptions:
Inscriptions on pillars, rocks, and copper plates provide firsthand information about Gupta rulers, highlighting their achievements, administrative practices, and territorial control. These records often include royal decrees, land grants, and religious donations.

Literary Works:
Sanskrit texts like the *Puranas*, *Mahabharata*, and *Ramayana* mention Gupta rulers, their courts, and social conditions. Additionally, Kalidasa's plays and poems offer insights into courtly life and cultural advancements during the Gupta era.

Archaeological Sources

Excavations:
Archaeological sites like Pataliputra (modern Patna), Sarnath, and Nalanda have revealed artifacts, coins, pottery, and architectural remains, shedding light on Gupta urban planning, art, and architecture.

Numismatic Evidence:
Gupta coins, inscribed with rulers' names and titles, help establish the empire's chronology, territorial expansion, and economic policies.

Epigraphical Sources

Copper-Plate Inscriptions:
Known as *Sasanams*, these records issued by Gupta kings document land grants, administrative divisions, and religious endowments, providing valuable insights into political and social structures.

Rock Edicts:
Similar to Ashoka's edicts, Gupta rock inscriptions found at sites like Junagadh (Girnar) and Allahabad (Prayagraj) contain royal proclamations, legal directives, and accounts of military campaigns.

Foreign Accounts

1. **Chinese and Greek Sources:**
   Accounts by Chinese 151ravellers like *Fa Xian* and *Xuanzang*, along with Greek historians such as *Megasthenes* (for the earlier Mauryan period), provide external perspectives on Gupta society, culture, and governance. These writings also offer insights into trade, religion, and administration.

Numismatic Sources

Coins:

Gupta coins, adorned with portraits, titles, and symbolic imagery, reflect the political authority and cultural trends of the period. They play a crucial role in determining the chronology of Gupta rulers and mapping their territorial expansion.

Chandragupta I: Founder of the Gupta Empire

Chandragupta I, also known as Chandragupta the Great, was the founder of the Gupta Empire and a significant figure in ancient Indian history. His leadership laid the foundation for one of India's most prosperous eras. Here's an overview of his life and key achievements:

Early Life:

Chandragupta I was born into the influential Licchavi family of northern India. Though the exact date of his birth remains uncertain, it is generally placed in the early to mid-4th century CE.

Rise to Power:

His ascent began with his marriage to Kumaradevi, a princess of the Licchavi clan. This alliance strengthened his political position, as the Licchavis wielded considerable power in Magadha, providing crucial resources and support for his expansion.

Establishment of the Gupta Empire:

Under Chandragupta I's leadership, the Gupta Empire emerged as a powerful entity. He consolidated control over Magadha (modern-day Bihar) and established a stable, centralized administration, marking the beginning of Gupta supremacy in northern India.

Military Campaigns and Expansion:

Chandragupta I led successful military campaigns, expanding his territory into the fertile region of Uttar Pradesh, setting the stage for further growth under his successors.

Religious Patronage:

A devout follower of Hinduism, especially Vishnu worship, his reign marked the beginning of royal patronage for Hindu religious institutions and the construction of early Hindu temples.

Legacy and Achievements:

- **Political Consolidation:** He laid the groundwork for a strong and centralized empire, which reached its peak under his successors.
- **Cultural Renaissance:** His reign marked the beginning of the Gupta Golden Age, characterized by advancements in literature, art, science, and philosophy.
- **Dynastic Legacy:** By establishing the Gupta dynasty, he set the stage for centuries of influential Gupta rule in northern India.

Origin and Homeland of the Gupta Dynasty

The Gupta dynasty, one of the most influential dynasties in ancient Indian history, rose from modest beginnings to establish a vast empire that significantly shaped India's cultural, political, and economic landscape. Understanding their origin involves examining historical records, archaeological findings, and ancient texts.

Origins and Early History:

The Gupta dynasty's roots trace back to the ancient Vedic period. Traditional accounts suggest that the Gupta clan belonged to the Vaishya varna (merchant class) and claimed descent from the sage Vasishta. The dynasty's founder, Maharaja Sri Gupta, is believed to have established the lineage in the 3rd century CE.

Homeland:

The Guptas are thought to have originated in present-day Uttar Pradesh, particularly around Prayaga (modern Allahabad). This region, strategically located along the Ganges River, provided fertile agricultural land and access to important trade routes, fostering economic prosperity and political expansion.

Rise to Prominence:

The Gupta dynasty gained prominence under Chandragupta I (not to be confused with Chandragupta Maurya). His marriage to Kumaradevi, a princess of the Licchavi clan from Vaishali (modern Bihar), was pivotal. This alliance strengthened political ties and provided resources to consolidate power in northern India.

Expansion and Empire Building:

Under Chandragupta I and his successors, particularly Samudragupta and Chandragupta II (Vikramaditya), the Gupta Empire expanded significantly. Their successful military campaigns extended control over much of northern and central India, marking the height of Gupta power.

Cultural and Intellectual Flourishing:

The Gupta era is celebrated as a Golden Age of Indian history, marked by extraordinary achievements in art, architecture, literature, science, mathematics, and philosophy. Scholars under Gupta patronage made groundbreaking contributions in various fields:

- **Astronomy:** Aryabhata
- **Medicine:** Charaka
- **Mathematics:** Aryabhata and Brahmagupta
- **Literature:** Kalidasa

10.9 Suggested Readings

- Nilakanta Sastri, K. A. et al. (eds.), *A Comprehensive History of India*, Calcutta, 1952.
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- Basham, A. L. (ed.), *A Cultural History of India*, Oxford, 1925.
- Agrawal, A., *Rise and Fall of the Imperial Guptas*, Delhi, 1989.
- Goyal, S. R., *A History of the Imperial Guptas*, Allahabad, 1962.
- Gupta, P. L., *The Imperial Guptas*, 2 vols, Varanasi, 1924–29.
- Maity, S. K., *The Imperial Guptas and their Times (c. AD 300–550)*, Delhi, 1925.
- Majumdar, R. C. and A. S. Altekar (eds.), *The Vakataka-Gupta Age (c. AD 200–550)*, 2nd edn, Benares, 1954.
- Smith, B. L., *Essays on Gupta Culture*, New Delhi, 1983.

10.10 Terminal Questions

Q.1 Write a note on Allahabad Pillar Inscription.

Q. Discuss the Gupta Empire following the reign of Chandragupta II.

Unit-11

Administration and Decline of the Gupta Dynasty

Structure:

11.1 Introduction

11.2 Learning Objectives

11.3 Gupta Administration

      11.3.1 Central Administration

      11.3.2 Administrative Division

      11.3.3 Provincial Administration

      11.3.4 District (Vishaya) Administration

      11.3.5 Urban Administration

      11.3.6 Village Administration

Self-Check Exercise -1

11.4 Revenue Sources

      11.4.1 The Gupta Emperor and Feudal Lords

Self-Check Exercise- 2

11.5 Decline of the Gupta Empire

      11.5.1 Internal Family Conflicts

      11.5.2 Weak Centralized Administration

      11.5.3 Economic Crisis

      11.5.4 Foreign Invasions

      11.5.5 Rise of Yashodharman

      11.5.6 Revolt of Feudatories

      11.5.7 Religious Conflicts

      11.5.8 Nature of the Gupta Empire

Self -Check Exercise-3

11.6 Summary

11.7 Glossary

11.8 Answer to the Self-Check Exercise

11.9 Suggested Readings

11.10 Terminal Questions

11.1 Introduction

The Gupta period is often celebrated as a remarkable phase in Indian history. While many historians consider it the "Golden Age" of ancient India, Dr. Romila Thapar presents a more balanced view, emphasizing that the era's prosperity largely benefited the upper classes and was primarily confined to northern India. Despite these limitations, she acknowledges the overall progress of the time. Dr. V.A. Smith describes the period as one of exceptional advancement in literature, art, and science, with peaceful religious transformations and flourishing cultural achievements.

Though the Gupta Empire was not as expansive as the Mauryan Empire, it brought political unity to northern India for nearly two centuries. The administrative structure, rooted in historical traditions but adapted to contemporary needs, was both effective and benevolent. Many scholars consider Gupta governance superior to that of the Mauryas, marking an era of political and administrative excellence. This chapter explores the administrative achievements of the Gupta Empire and the factors that led to its decline.

11.2 Learning Objectives

After completing this lesson, learners will be able to:

- Understand the historical significance of the Gupta period.
- Evaluate the administrative system established by the Gupta rulers.
- Analyze the structure of provincial administration under the Guptas.
- Identify the factors that led to the decline of the Gupta Empire after Skandagupta's reign.

11.3 Gupta Administration

The Gupta administration represents a crucial stage in the evolution of Indian political traditions. Following the Mauryan era, centralized authority gradually weakened, as seen under the Satavahanas and Kushans, who promoted feudal relationships and land grants. This led to decentralized governance, with autonomous city-states even minting their own coins. Despite this trend, the Gupta rulers preserved centralized authority while incorporating new administrative features.

Chinese traveler Fa-Hien, along with various Gupta inscriptions, provides valuable insights into their governance. Fa-Hien described the administration as mild, benevolent, and efficient, with minimal state interference in daily life. Roads were secure, crime was rare, and punishments were lenient, making Gupta rule more liberal than the Mauryan administration.

11.3.1 Central Administration

The Gupta Empire was a monarchy, with the king as the supreme authority in both state and administration. Gupta rulers assumed grand titles like *Maharajadhiraja* and *Chakravartin*, often portraying themselves as divinely empowered. The king was supported by the *Mantri-Parishad* (Council of Ministers), which advised on governance. Key ministers included:

- *Mahasandhivigrahika* (Foreign Minister)
- *Amatya* (Finance Minister)
- *Mahadandanayaka* (Chief Justice and Law Officer)

Provinces, known as *Bhuktis*, were governed by *Uparikas* and further divided into districts (*Vishayas*) under the supervision of *Vishayapatis*. Other notable officials included the *Mahapratikara* (Chief Chamberlain) and *Senapati* (Military Commander), reflecting a well-structured bureaucratic system.

11.3.2 Administrative Divisions

Gupta inscriptions reveal a hierarchical administrative structure. The empire was divided into:

- Provinces (Bhuktis): Headed by *Uparikas*, often members of the royal family.
- Districts (Vishayas): Managed by *Vishayapatis* with the help of local officials.
- Cities (Nagaras): Governed by *Nagara-Rakshakas*.
- Villages (Gramas): Supervised by *Gramikas* (village headmen).

In northern Bengal, municipal boards (*Adhisthanadhikarana*) oversaw city affairs, while *Vishayadhikarana* and *Takuladhikarana* managed district and rural governance.

11.3.3 Provincial Administration

Provincial administration was overseen by *Uparikas* or *Rajasthaniyas*, sometimes appointed from the royal family. The *Kumaramatya* served as the chief royal minister managing provincial affairs. Other officials included:

- *Baladhikaranika* (Military Commander)
- *Dandapasadhikaranika* (Police Chief)
- *Vinayasthiti-Sthapaka* (Law and Order Officer)

These officials ensured smooth governance and effective law enforcement within the provinces.

11.3.4 District (Vishaya) Administration

Each district (*Vishaya*) was governed by a *Vishayapati*, assisted by village elders (*Mahattaras*) and headmen (*Gramikas*). Local officials managed customs, toll collection, forests, and military matters. Documentation and record-keeping were handled by clerks like *Lekhakas* and *Karanikas*.

11.3.5 City Administration

Urban administration was headed by the *Nagara-Rakshaka* or *Purapala*, who coordinated city governance with municipal councils. The *Avasthika* managed religious institutions, including *dharmashalas* (rest houses for pilgrims).

11.3.6 Village Administration

The village was the smallest administrative unit, led by the *Gramika*, who worked alongside local elders (*Kutumbikas*) and the *Gram-Vridha* (senior village official). Though village assemblies existed, their specific roles remain unclear due to limited historical references.

Self-Check Exercise -1

Q.1   What was a key feature of the Gupta administration?

Q.2   Which title did Gupta rulers use to assert their supreme authority?

Q.3   What was the role of the *Sandhivigrahika* in the Gupta administration?

Q.4   What responsibilities did the *Avasthika* hold?

11.4 Revenue Sources

To sustain the empire, the Gupta rulers imposed various taxes, with land revenue being the primary source. This tax not only boosted agricultural production but also ensured farmers' security. The government promoted the cultivation of wastelands, protected pastures, and expanded irrigation systems to enhance agricultural output. Both central and provincial administrations worked to improve irrigation infrastructure, supporting farming and animal husbandry.

Taxes like the "Uparika" (land tax), which applied to cultivators without property rights, and other taxes such as "Vata," "Bhuta," "Dhanya" (grain), and "Hiranya" (gold), were collected. These taxes were likely about one-sixth of the total produce. Additional sources of income included the surplus income tax known as "Bhaga," customs duties, minting, inheritance taxes, and presents. The state also collected fines ("Dasa-Paradha") from offenders and utilized free labor known as "Vaishtika" for royal projects. Overall, the Gupta administration was well-organized,

fostering peace, prosperity, and progress across various sectors of life. It is notable that the titles of Gupta officials continued to be used even after the fall of the Gupta Empire, influencing the early Kalacuriyas, Chalukyas of Badami, Rashtrakutas of Malkhed, and Western Chalukyas of Kalyani, who adopted the Gupta system.

11.4.1 Gupta Empire and Feudal Lords - Under the Guptas, the scope and functions of royal authority evolved significantly. The Gupta rulers allowed several conquered states to maintain a degree of subordinate independence. Aside from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and parts of Bengal, the empire was governed by feudatories such as Parivrajaka princes who issued land grants. The influence of these feudatories likely limited the Gupta royal authority. Though little is known about the military, it is reasonable to assume that the troops provided by the feudatories made up a significant portion of the Gupta army. The state no longer held a monopoly over horses and elephants, which were also supplied by these feudatories. A notable feature of Gupta bureaucracy was that it was less structured than the Mauryan system (outlined in Kautilya's Arthashastra), allowing multiple offices to be held by the same person, and many positions became hereditary. With limited state supervision, local leaders began managing village affairs independently, conducting land transactions without involving the central government. Similarly, in urban areas, professional guilds enjoyed substantial autonomy, and their functioning was detailed in Gupta legal codes, which also granted them significant roles in administering justice. The period saw the rise of the jatis (social groups), which were organized and legalized during this time, giving them authority over the activities of their members. As a result, the central government had minimal involvement in daily governance. Additionally, the Brahmin donees, who controlled donated villages, held significant administrative power over their inhabitants. Thus, while the Gupta kings remained strong, the institutional forces supporting decentralization were far more influential during this era. The administrative framework established by the Guptas served as the model for governance throughout early medieval India period.

Self Check Exercise-2

Q-1   What was the main source of revenue during the Gupta period?

Q-2   What were the gold coins called in the Gupta period?

Q-3   Which city was a major center of learning and culture during the Gupta period?

11.5 Decline of the Gupta Empire

Following the decline of the Kushanas in the north and the Satavahanas in the south, India fragmented into numerous independent states, constantly competing for dominance. The Gupta Empire succeeded in unifying these scattered republics, establishing a strong and stable political foundation. This period is often referred to as the "Golden Age" of ancient India. However, despite the remarkable achievements under rulers like Samudragupta and Chandragupta II, the empire began to weaken and eventually collapsed by the end of the 6th century AD. Several factors contributed to its downfall.

11.5.1 Internal Discord within the Royal Family

Conflicts within the Gupta royal family significantly weakened the empire. After Kumaragupta I's death, succession disputes arose. Although Skandagupta secured the throne, ongoing family feuds continued to undermine unity. Skandagupta's efforts to defend the empire from the Pushyamitras and Huns further strained the empire's resources. Following his death, the dynasty descended into disorder. The absence of clear succession laws led to power struggles, while rulers like Puru Gupta, Kumara Gupta II, and Budha Gupta lacked the strength to restore stability.

11.5.2 Weakening of Centralized Administration

The decline of centralized governance under the later Gupta rulers hastened the empire's fall. Provincial governors gained significant autonomy, and local authorities began asserting independence. As the royal treasury depleted, the Gupta administration struggled to finance provincial governance. This erosion of central authority led to the fragmentation of the empire.

11.5.3 Economic Decline

Economic instability began during Skandagupta's reign, largely due to continuous warfare. The royal treasury was drained, and the quality of coinage deteriorated. Successive rulers were unable to revive the economy. The loss of western India, a hub of trade, further diminished revenue. The decline of Gujarat's trade and the migration of silk weavers worsened the financial crisis.

11.5.4 Foreign Invasions

Foreign invasions further destabilized the Gupta Empire. While earlier attacks, such as those by the Pushyamitras, had limited impact, the invasions by the White Huns proved devastating. Though Skandagupta repelled the initial Hun incursions, their continued raids severely damaged trade routes and disrupted economic activity. The invasions led by Toramana and Mihirakula further weakened the empire's military and economy.

11.5.5 Rise of Yashodharman

According to Dr. R.C. Majumdar, Yashodharman's rise in Malwa dealt a significant blow to the Gupta Empire. Initially a local chief, Yashodharman expanded his territory at the expense of the Guptas, extending his influence from the Himalayas to the ocean. His defiance of Gupta authority inspired other regional leaders to assert independence, accelerating the empire's fragmentation.

11.5.6 Revolt of Feudal Lords

The weakening of central authority also encouraged feudal lords to declare independence. Prominent revolts included those by the Maitrakas, Panivarajakas, and Maukharis, who eventually established their own kingdoms. These uprisings further destabilized the empire, particularly after the reign of Buddhagupta.

11.5.7 Religious Shifts and Military Weakness

The change in religious policies also contributed to the empire's decline. While early Gupta rulers were strong patrons of Hinduism and military power, later rulers like Budhagupta and Baladitya leaned towards Buddhism. This shift, coupled with pacifism, weakened their military resolve. Hiuen Tsang's account of Baladitya's reluctance to confront Mihirakula highlights this decline in military strength, leaving the empire vulnerable to external threats.

11.5.8 Structural Weakness of the Empire

The decentralized nature of the Gupta Empire further contributed to its fall. Unlike the Mauryan Empire, the Guptas ruled through a system of feudal relationships rather than direct control. As regional leaders gained autonomy, the empire fragmented. The rise of feudalism and the decline in political unity ultimately led to the empire's collapse.

Self-Check Exercise - 3

Q.1   Briefly describe the history of India under the Gupta Empire.

Q.2   Highlight the positive contributions of the Gupta administration.

Q.3   Analyze the key factors that led to the decline and disintegration of the Gupta Empire after Skandagupta's reign.

11.6 Summary

Inscriptions reveal that Gupta kings took titles such as Paramabhattaraka, Maharajadhiraja, Parameswara, Samrat, and Chakravartin. The king's administration was supported by a council, which included a chief minister, a Senapati (commander-in-chief), and other key officials. To maintain communication with

provincial administration, the king relied on officials like Kumaramsatyas and Ayuktas. The Gupta Empire's provinces were known as Bhuktis, governed by Uparikas, who were usually selected from the royal family. Each Bhukti was further divided into Vishyas or districts, each governed by a Vishyapati. City administration was overseen by Nagara Sreshtis, while villages were managed by Gramikas.

Fahien's account provides valuable insight into the Gupta administration, describing it as mild and benevolent. He noted the administration's efficiency in maintaining safe roads for travelers, with minimal fear of theft, and that people were generally prosperous with negligible crime. Fahien also praised the administrative system, which allowed him to travel freely throughout the Gangetic Valley. In comparison to the Mauryas, the Gupta administration was more liberal. However, after Skandagupta's death, the Gupta Empire struggled to withstand the repeated Huna invasions, leading to a rapid decline in central authority. The succession of subsequent kings is unclear, signaling the empire's unstable end.

The Gupta Empire suffered a significant setback in the late 5th century when the Hunas, under King Toramana, invaded and established control over Punjab before advancing further into Gupta territories. Although the Hunas' political influence eventually waned, their invasions accelerated the empire's decline, leading to its collapse by the mid-6th century. Following the fall of the Gupta Empire, the idea of a unified pan-Indian empire vanished, only to be briefly revived under Harshavardhana in the 7th century, before reemerging with the rise of the Turks.

11.7 Glossary

Provincial Administration: is responsible for ensuring that the provincial office can discharge its duties more seamlessly and efficiently, by providing administrative support services to the provincial manager and other officials in the provincial office.

Imperial Family: the term imperial family appropriately describes the family of an emperor or empress, and the term papal family describes the family of a pope.

11.8 Answer to the Self-Check Exercise

Self-Check Exercise-1

Ans.1 Gupta Administration: The Gupta administration was characterized by a decentralized structure and an efficient system of governance. The Gupta Empire (circa 320–550 CE) is often regarded as the "Golden Age" of India due to its remarkable achievements in arts, sciences, and political organization.

Ans.2 Title of 'Maharajadhiraja': The Gupta rulers adopted the title *Maharajadhiraja*, meaning "Great King of Kings." This title symbolized their claim to

supreme authority and dominance over other rulers, reflecting their extensive power and influence across the Indian subcontinent.

Ans.3 Role of Sandhivigrahika: The *Sandhivigrahika* was a key official in the Gupta administration, responsible for overseeing matters related to peace and war, similar to the role of a modern-day foreign minister or diplomat.

Ans.4 Role of Avasthika: The *Avasthika* was an official tasked with supervising economic and commercial activities, particularly trade and market-related affairs.

Self-Check Exercise-2

Ans.1 Primary Source of Revenue: During the Gupta period, land revenue was the primary source of state income. The agrarian economy formed the backbone of the empire, with taxes on agricultural produce being a significant contributor to the treasury.

Ans.2 Gupta Gold Coins (Dinar): The gold coins issued during the Gupta period were known as *Dinar*. These coins were renowned for their purity and intricate designs, often depicting the rulers' military achievements, religious patronage, and cultural interests.

Ans.3 Nalanda University: Nalanda University, located in present-day Bihar, was a prominent center of learning and culture during the Gupta period. It became one of the most esteemed educational institutions of ancient India, symbolizing the intellectual and cultural advancements of the Gupta era.

Self-Check Exercise-3

Ans.1 Gupta Empire Overview: The Gupta Empire (circa 320–550 CE), often termed the "Golden Age of India," witnessed significant achievements across various fields. Key rulers included Chandragupta I, Samudragupta, and Chandragupta II.

Key Aspects:

Foundation and Expansion:

1. *Chandragupta I* (circa 320–335 CE) founded the Gupta Empire, establishing his rule in the Magadha region and expanding through alliances and conquests.
2. *Samudragupta* (circa 335–375 CE), known for his military prowess, conducted extensive campaigns across India. His conquests earned him the title of the "Napoleon of India."
3. *Chandragupta II* (circa 375–415 CE), also called *Vikramaditya*, further expanded the empire and became known for his patronage of arts and culture.

Cultural Achievements:

1. *Literature*: The period saw the rise of classical Sanskrit literature, including Kalidasa's renowned works like *Shakuntala* and *Meghaduta*.
2. *Science and Mathematics*: Scholars like Aryabhata made significant contributions, introducing the concept of zero and the decimal system.
3. *Art and Architecture*: The Gupta era is celebrated for its distinctive temple architecture and sculptures, with the Ajanta and Ellora caves standing as prime examples of their artistic excellence.

Ans.2 Gupta Administration:

The Gupta administration played a crucial role in maintaining stability, prosperity, and cultural growth. It combined centralized authority with local autonomy, ensuring effective governance across the vast empire.

Key Features:

Centralized Monarchy: The emperor was the supreme authority, often regarded as a divinely appointed ruler. A council of ministers (*Mantriparishad*) assisted the king, advising on military, economic, and judicial matters.

Provincial Administration:

The Gupta Empire was divided into provinces known as *Bhuktis*, each governed by an *Uparika*, often a royal prince or a high-ranking noble. These provinces were further subdivided into smaller administrative units called *Vishayas*, managed by officials known as *Vishayapatis*. These local administrators were responsible for law enforcement, tax collection, and overseeing public welfare projects.

Local Administration:

At the village level, administration operated autonomously. Villages were governed by local councils called *Gramika* or *Gram Sabha*, consisting of village elders and representatives. These councils resolved local disputes, managed community resources, and coordinated agricultural activities.

Revenue System:

The primary source of revenue was the land tax (*Bhaga*), which was a share of the agricultural produce. Local officials collected this tax and forwarded it to higher authorities. Additional revenue sources included trade taxes, tolls, fines, and tributes from subordinate states.

Judicial System:

The judicial system operated at multiple levels, from village councils to the king's court. Justice was administered based on *Dharmashastras* (legal texts) and local customs. The king served as the final authority for appeals.

Ans.3 **Factors Leading to the Decline of the Gupta Empire:**

The decline and eventual fall of the Gupta Empire, which flourished during the 4th and 5th centuries CE, resulted from a combination of internal weaknesses and external pressures. The key factors include:

Weak Succession and Dynastic Conflicts:
After the reign of strong rulers like Chandragupta II and Skandagupta, the empire faced succession disputes. The absence of capable leadership undermined central authority and destabilized the empire.

Hunnic Invasions:
The invasions by the *White Huns* (Hephthalites), led by Toramana and Mihirakula in the 5th century CE, significantly weakened the Gupta Empire. These attacks resulted in territorial losses and disrupted trade networks, further straining the economy.

Economic Decline:
The empire faced economic difficulties due to heavy taxation and disrupted trade routes caused by the Hunnic invasions. This led to a decline in state revenue, weakening the empire's ability to maintain control over its territories.

Regional Fragmentation:
Over time, regional governors (*Maharajas*) gained greater autonomy and declared independence from the central authority. This decentralization fractured the empire and left it vulnerable to both internal strife and external invasions.

Social and Cultural Changes:
The rise of regional religious movements and the spread of various Buddhist and Hindu sects created diverse identities within the empire. Occasionally, this diversity led to social unrest, further undermining the central government's authority.

Environmental Factors:
Some historians suggest that climate change and environmental shifts, such as droughts and declining agricultural productivity, may have contributed to the empire's economic and political instability.

Loss of Centralized Authority:
As the Gupta rulers struggled to maintain control over their vast territories, regional kingdoms rose to prominence, further fragmenting political power and hastening the empire's collapse.

11.9 Suggested Readings

- Nilakanta Sastri, K. A. et al. (eds.), *A Comprehensive History of India*, Calcutta, 1952.
- Smith, V. A., *The Oxford History of India*, Oxford, 1919; 3rd rev. ed., 1958.
- Basham, A. L. (ed.), *A Cultural History of India*, Oxford, 1925.
- Agrawal, A., *Rise and Fall of the Imperial Guptas*, Delhi, 1989.

- Chhabra, B. C. et al. (eds.), *Reappraising Gupta History for S. R. Goyal*, New Delhi, 1992.
- Goyal, S. R., *A History of the Imperial Guptas*, Allahabad, 1962.
- Gupta, P. L., *The Imperial Guptas*, 2 vols, Varanasi, 1924–1929.

11.10 Terminal Questions

1. Analyze the key features of the Gupta administration.
2. Discuss the role and authority of Gupta kings. Also, examine the factors behind the empire's decline.
3. Explore the economic factors and foreign invasions that contributed to the disintegration of the Gupta Empire.

Unit- 12

The Vakatakas of Deccan and their Administration

Structure:

12.1 Introduction

The Vakataka dynasty was an Indian ruling family that emerged in the central Deccan during the mid-3rd century CE. The empire is believed to have extended from Malwa and Gujarat in the north to the Tungabhadra River in the south, and from the Arabian Sea in the west to the Bay of Bengal in the east. Like many contemporary Deccan dynasties, the Vakatakas claimed a Brahmanical origin. However, little is known about Vindhyashakti (circa 250–270 CE), the founder of the dynasty. Territorial expansion began during the reign of his son, Pravarasena I, who ascended the throne around 270 CE and expanded the kingdom northward to the Narmada River by annexing the kingdom of Purika.

12.2 Learning Objectives

After studying this lesson, the learner will be able to:

- Know about the Vakatakas of Deccan and their Administration.
- Know about the Kartota dynasty of Kashmir and their Administration.

12.3 Vakataka Dynasty of Deccan

The Vakataka dynasty (IAST: Vākāṭaka) was an ancient Indian dynasty that emerged in the Deccan around the mid-3rd century CE. The Vakataka kingdom is believed to have spanned from the southern parts of Malwa and Gujarat in the north to the Tungabhadra River in the south, and from the Arabian Sea in the west to the borders of Chhattisgarh in the east. They were the prominent successors of the Satavahanas in the Deccan and contemporaneous with the Guptas in northern India. Little is known about Vindhyashakti (circa 250–270 CE), the dynasty's founder. Territorial expansion began under his son, Pravarasena I. The dynasty is generally thought to have split into four branches after Pravarasena I's reign, with two branches being well-known: the Pravarapura-Nandivardhana branch and the Vatsagulma branch, while the other two remain unknown. Gupta Emperor Chandragupta II strengthened his position by marrying his daughter into the Vakataka royal family, and with their support, annexed Gujarat from the Saka Satraps in the 4th century CE. Following the decline of the Vakatakas, the Chalukyas of Badami rose to power in the Deccan.

The Vakatakas are particularly renowned for their patronage of the arts, architecture, and literature. They initiated several public works, with their monuments continuing to stand as a lasting legacy. Notably, the rock-cut Buddhist viharas and chaityas of the Ajanta Caves (now a UNESCO World Heritage Site) were constructed under the patronage of Vakataka emperor Harishena.

After Pravarasena I's death, his kingdom was divided. The main line continued with Rudrasena I (circa 330 CE), his son Prithvisena I (circa 350 CE), and Prithvisena's son Rudrasena II (circa 400 CE). During Prithvisena's reign, the Vakatakas interacted with the powerful Gupta dynasty of northern India, which was expanding westward at the expense of the Western Kshatrapas. The Vakatakas, due to their strategic location, were recognized as valuable allies, leading to Prabhavati Gupta, the daughter of Chandragupta II, marrying Rudrasena II. This period saw significant Gupta influence on Vakataka polity and culture.

Following Rudrasena II's death, his widow, Prabhavati Gupta, acted as regent for their sons, Divakarasena and Damodarasena. As the Guptas became embroiled in conflicts with the Hunas, the Vakatakas were able to expand their influence in central India. Under Narendrasena (circa 450–470 CE), son of Pravarasena II, the Vakatakas extended their power into regions such as Kosala, Mekala, and Malava.

However, this expansion eventually led to conflicts with the Nalas, resulting in a setback for the Vakatakas.

Its power was temporarily revived in the reign of Prithvisena II, the last known king of the line, who acceded to the throne about 470.

Self Check Exercise-1

Q-1   Who founded the Vakataka dynasty?

Q-2   Who is recognized for his matrimonial alliance with the Gupta dynasty?

Q-3   Which other major Indian dynasty was contemporary to the Vakataka dynasty?

12.4 Maukhari Dynasty

The Maukhari dynasty emerged as a significant power in the post-Gupta period, ruling the Ganga-Yamuna plains for over six generations from their capital at Kannauj. Initially serving as vassals under the Gupta Empire and later under Harsha's Vardhana dynasty, they asserted their independence around the mid-6th century, establishing control over much of Uttar Pradesh and Magadha. However, by 606 CE, the Later Guptas reclaimed parts of their territory. According to Hiuen Tsang, the Maukhari domains may have fallen to King Shashanka of the Gauda Kingdom, who declared independence around 600 CE.

The Maukharis were staunch supporters of Hinduism and upheld the traditional social structure, although Buddhism continued to thrive. Under their rule, Kannauj flourished as a prosperous, cosmopolitan hub, later becoming the capital of Harsha's empire. Even after the decline of the Maukharis, Kannauj remained a contested political center.

The first three Maukhari rulers held the title *Maharaja*, but their successors adopted more prestigious titles as their power grew. Ishanavarman, the first to claim the title *Maharajadhiraja*, reorganized the Maukhari military, emphasizing elephant warfare to counter threats from the Hunas and the Later Guptas. The Maukhari army clashed with the Alchon Huns in the Gangetic Doab and Magadha, as evidenced by the Aphsad inscription.

Yashodharman, another prominent ruler, claimed to have expanded his empire from the Brahmaputra River to the Western Ocean and from the Himalayas to the Mahendra Mountains. However, his empire was short-lived and fragmented around 530–540 CE. The Mandsaur inscription, dated 532 CE, highlights Yashodharman's victories over northern and eastern kingdoms, including the Alchon Huns and territories formerly controlled by the Guptas.

Self-Check Exercise -2

Q.1   Who composed the Mandsaur inscription?

Q.2   Who established the Maukhari dynasty?

Q.3   What was the capital of the Maukhari dynasty?

12.5 Karkota Dynasty

The history of the Karkota dynasty is primarily derived from Kalhana's *Rajatarangini*, specifically the fourth book. Additional insights come from literary sources, foreign travelers' accounts, inscriptions, and coins. According to *Rajatarangini*, Durlabhavardhana, the son of Karkotanaga, founded the Karkota dynasty after succeeding Baladitya, the last ruler of the Gonanda dynasty, in 625 CE.

Durlabhavardhana was succeeded by his capable son, Durlabhaka, who adopted the title *Pratapaditya*. Durlabhaka married Narendra Prabha, the wife of Nona, with Nona's consent. They had three sons: Chandrapida, Tarapida, and Muktapida. The youngest, Muktapida, is renowned in history as Lalitaditya Muktapida.

Lalitaditya Muktapida (724–761 CE):

In ancient and medieval times, a king's greatness was often measured by his conquests, and Lalitaditya emerged as one of the most remarkable rulers of 8th-century Kashmir. He ascended the throne in 724 CE during a period of political instability in northern India, marked by the fragmentation of power among small principalities. During this period, the rise of Islam posed a significant threat to Kashmir.

Amidst this turmoil, Lalitaditya launched extensive campaigns, conquering vast regions across northern India and extending his influence into Central Asia. His reign not only strengthened Kashmir but also marked a significant era of cultural and political expansion.

Lalitaditya is remembered not only for his military successes but also as an excellent administrator, a promoter of literary activities, and a patron of art and architecture. Historians believe that under his rule, Kashmir reached the peak of glory and prosperity.

Lalitaditya's Administration – Lalitaditya's achievements in peacetime were as significant as his conquests. His administrative reforms, governance principles, public welfare efforts, and patronage of art and architecture cement his status as Kashmir's most prominent ruler. His religious tolerance reflects his magnanimity.

Reforms in Central Administration – Prior to Lalitaditya's reign, the state's administration were managed by eighteen chief officials known as Karmasthanas. Upon ascending to the throne, Lalitaditya reorganized and streamlined the central administration to handle the growing workload. He created five new positions: Mahapratiharapida (high chamberlain), Mahasandhivigraha (chief minister),

Mahasvasala (master of horses), Mahabhandagara (keeper of the treasury), and Mahasadhanabhaga (an unidentified position). These five positions together formed the Panchamahasabda, a title assumed by the officer who oversaw all of them. Kalhana tells us that Mitrasarman, formerly the foreign minister (Samdhivigrahika), was appointed as the Panchamahasabda.

Self- Check Exercise-3

Q-1   Can you share what you know about the conquests of Lalitaditya Muktapida? Please elaborate.

Q-2   Can you elaborate on the administrative reforms implemented by Lalitaditya of the Karkota dynasty?

12.6 Summary

It is widely believed that after Pravarasena I, the Vakataka dynasty split into four branches, two of which are known and two remain unidentified. The known branches are the Pravarapura-Nandivardhana branch and the Vatsagulma branch. Gupta Emperor Chandragupta II allied with the Vakataka royal family by marrying his daughter into it, and with their support, he annexed Gujarat from the Saka Satraps in the 4th century CE. The Vakatakas were eventually succeeded by the Chalukyas of Badami in the Deccan. The Maukhari kings were notable patrons of poets and writers, and many literary works were produced during their rule. Several seals and inscriptions, such as the Asirgarh seal inscription of Sharvavarman and the Haraha inscription of Isanavarman, discovered near Harara village in Barabanki district, Uttar Pradesh, and dating to Vikrama Samvat 610 (554 CE), document the genealogy of the Maukharis**.**

12.7 Glossary

Damaras - landed aristocrats of early medieval Kashmir.

Sarvvarman- A Maukhari Ruler

Kannauj- capital of Harsha

Vatsgulam branch- a branch of Vakatakas

12.8 Answer to the Self-Check Exercise

Self Check Exercise-1

Ans.1 The Vakataka dynasty was founded by Vindhyashakti (also spelled Vindhyashakti I) around the mid-3rd century CE. He established the dynasty in the Deccan region of India, and it later became known for its patronage of art, architecture, and culture, including the famous Ajanta Caves.

Ans.2 The Vakataka ruler known for his matrimonial alliance with the Gupta dynasty was Rudrasena II. He married Prabhavatigupta, the daughter of the Gupta emperor Chandragupta II (Vikramaditya). This alliance strengthened the ties between the Vakataka and Gupta dynasties and played a significant role in the political landscape of ancient India. After Rudrasena II's death, Prabhavatigupta served as a regent for her minor sons, further cementing the connection between the two powerful dynasties.

Ans.3   The Vakataka dynasty was contemporary with Gupta Dynasty. The Vakatakas were contemporaries of the Guptas, one of the most influential empires in ancient Indian history. The two dynasties had significant political and cultural interactions. For instance, Prabhavati Gupta, a daughter of the Gupta Emperor Chandragupta II, was married to Rudrasena II of the Vakataka dynasty.

Self Check Exercise-2

Ans.1 The Mandsaur inscription, also known as the Mandsaur Prasasti, was composed by the Sanskrit poet Vatsabhatti in 532 CE. This significant historical record highlights the construction of a Sun temple by a guild of silk weavers during the reign of King Kumaragupta I of the Gupta dynasty. It provides valuable insights into the socio-economic and religious landscape of the period, reflecting the region's prosperity, the influential role of guilds, and the patronage of art and religion by both local communities and rulers..

Ans.2 The Maukharis governed a significant portion of present-day Uttar Pradesh. Ishanvarman, the founder of the dynasty, assumed the title *Maharajadhiraja*, symbolizing his claim to supreme authority.

Ans.3 Kannauj (also known as Kanyakubja), located in present-day Uttar Pradesh, served as the capital of the Maukhari dynasty. Under their rule, Kannauj emerged as an important political and cultural hub, retaining its prominence in subsequent periods of Indian history. Its strategic location along the Ganges River made it a crucial center for trade and administration.

Self-Check Exercise-3

Ans.1 Lalitaditya Muktapida, a prominent 8th-century CE ruler of Kashmir, is celebrated for his extensive military campaigns and ambitious construction projects. His reign significantly strengthened the Kashmiri kingdom, extending its influence from Central Asia to the Gangetic plains. Lalitaditya is remembered for his military prowess and strategic vision, which enabled him to expand and consolidate his kingdom's power.

Ans.2 Lalitaditya Muktapida of the Karkota dynasty is known not only for his military achievements but also for his administrative reforms. His reign brought about a more structured and efficient governance system. Key reforms included:

Centralized Administration: Lalitaditya reinforced central authority, ensuring effective governance across the empire by unifying various regions under a single administrative framework.

Taxation Reforms: He introduced changes in the taxation system, promoting fairness and efficiency. This reform likely enhanced the economic prosperity and stability of his kingdom.

Infrastructure Development: Lalitaditya initiated major infrastructure projects, including the construction of roads, bridges, and rest houses (*sarais*), which facilitated trade and improved communication throughout his empire.

Cultural Patronage: A strong supporter of art, culture, and literature, Lalitaditya attracted scholars, poets, and artists to his court, creating a vibrant cultural atmosphere in Kashmir.

Military Organization: In addition to his conquests, Lalitaditya organized a well-structured military system, ensuring not only territorial expansion but also effective control over conquered regions.

12.9 Suggested Readings

- *Kalhana's Rajatarangini*, Vol. I, translated with an introduction, commentary, and appendices by M.A. Stein, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, Reprint, 1989.

12.10 Terminal Questions

1. Describe Lalitaditya of Kashmir's expeditions into Central Asia.
2. What do you know about the Vakatakas of Deccan and their administrative system?
3. Discuss the achievements of Yashodharman of Kannauj.

Unit- 13

Harshavardhana: Sources and Achievements

Structure:

13.1 Introduction

13.2. Learning Objectives

13.3 Sources for the Study of Harsha

13.1 Introduction

The decline of the Gupta Empire in the sixth century A.D. led to the emergence of several smaller kingdoms. While some regions saw the rise of new dynasties, others witnessed the assertion of independence by former Gupta vassals. Prominent among these new powers were rulers like Yasodharman and political entities such as the Maukharis, the Hunas, and the later Magadhan Guptas. Additionally, the Maitrakas of Kanauj, the Pushyabhutis of Thaneswar, the Gaudas under Shashanka, and the Varmans of Kamarupa gained prominence. Amidst this

political fragmentation, the Pushyabhuti dynasty of Thaneswar emerged as the most significant ruling family. Located in the Srikantha Janapada (modern-day Haryana), Thaneswar played a pivotal role in shaping early medieval Indian history. The most illustrious ruler of this dynasty, Harsha Vardhana, ascended the throne around 606 A.D. after the death of his elder brother, Rajyavardhana.

13.2 Learning Objectives

After studying this lesson, learners will be able to:

- Identify the key sources for studying Harsha's reign.
- Describe Harsha's military campaigns.
- Understand Harsha's administration and religious activities.

13.3 Sources for the Study of Harsha

13.3.1 Literary Sources

Compared to many other ancient rulers, abundant information is available about Harsha. Key sources include the travelogue of the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang and the writings of Banabhatta, Harsha's court poet. These literary accounts are supported by epigraphic, numismatic, and archaeological evidence, providing a comprehensive understanding of Harsha's reign.

13.3.2 Harsha Charita by Banabhatta

The *Harsha Charita*, composed by Banabhatta, is the most significant literary source about Harsha's life. Though it does not cover his entire reign, it provides detailed insights into his early life, family background, accession to the throne, and his campaign against Shashanka, though the narrative remains incomplete.

13.3.3 Hiuen Tsang's Account – Si-Yu-Ki

Hiuen Tsang, a Chinese pilgrim, visited India to study Buddhist sites and literature. His detailed observations shed light on the economic, social, and religious conditions of Harsha's era. As a royal guest, he witnessed court life firsthand, making his writings an invaluable historical resource, often regarded as a gazette by historians.

13.3.4 Epigraphical Sources

Several inscriptions provide critical information about Harsha's reign. Key examples include the Banskhera Copper Plate, Nalanda Seals, Sonapat Seals, Madhuvana Copper Plate, and the Aihole inscription. These records highlight administrative practices, land grants, and the social structure under Harsha's rule.

13.3.5 Numismatic Sources

Coins from Harsha's reign, discovered through archaeological excavations, reveal important details about the empire's economic conditions, territorial expansion, and aspects of Harsha's personal life.

13.3.6 Archaeological Sources

Archaeological remains, such as the ruins of Nalanda University, provide insights into the intellectual and cultural environment during Harsha's reign. It is believed that Harsha authored three plays—*Ratnavali*, *Nagananda*, and *Priyadarshika*. While *Ratnavali* and *Priyadarshika* depict themes of love and court intrigue, *Nagananda* highlights Harsha's compassion and generosity.

13.3.7 Ancestry and Early Life of Harsha

Banabhatta traces Harsha's lineage to Pushyabhuti, the dynasty's founder. While the Madhuban Copper Plate omits Pushyabhuti's name, it identifies Naravardhana as the family's progenitor. According to Banabhatta, Pushyabhuti was a devout Shaivite and a disciple of Vairabhacharya. His devotion earned him the favor of the goddess Lakshmi, who blessed his descendants with greatness. Harsha, born on June 4, 590 A.D., was the most celebrated ruler of this dynasty. The Madhuvana Copper Plate further elaborates on the family's genealogy, listing kings such as Naravardhana, Adityavardhana, Prabhakaravardhana, Rajyavardhana, Harsha, and Rajyashree. Astrologers had predicted Harsha's rise to greatness at the time of his birth.

13.3.8 Accession of Harsha to the Throne

Harsha ascended the throne of Thaneswar in 606 A.D. at the age of 16, following the death of his elder brother Rajyavardhana, who was killed by Shashanka, the king of Gauda. Harsha's primary objective was to avenge his brother's death and rescue his sister, Rajyashree, who had been imprisoned by Deva Gupta, an enemy of Grahavarman. After securing his sister's release, Harsha was invited to ascend the throne of Kanauj following Grahavarman's death. Initially acting as regent, Harsha later shifted his capital from Thaneswar to Kanauj, transforming it into the imperial center of his empire. Hiuen Tsang's account corroborates this transition.

13.3.9 Military Campaigns of Harsha
Campaign against Shashanka

Harsha's reign was characterized by significant military activity, particularly his campaign against Shashanka, the ruler of Gauda (North Bengal). Shashanka had murdered Harsha's brother and imprisoned his sister. To avenge this, Harsha assembled a formidable army comprising 50,000 infantry, 5,000 elephants, and 20,000 cavalry. Allied with Bhaskaravarman of Kamarupa, Harsha subdued several regional rulers. Although the exact outcome of his battle with Shashanka remains uncertain, it is believed that Shashanka retreated as Harsha's army advanced toward Kanauj. Some sources suggest that Harsha eventually defeated Shashanka,

extending his authority over Magadha, Bengal, Orissa, and Kongoda, fully consolidating his control by 643 A.D.

Conflict with Pulakesin II

Following his success against Shashanka, Harsha, now the lord of *Uttarapatha*, turned his attention southward toward the *Dakshinapatha*, ruled by Pulakesin II of the Chalukya dynasty. In 642 A.D., Harsha launched a campaign against Pulakesin II, though the exact date remains debated. The conflict stemmed from Harsha's desire for supremacy, lingering hostilities with Vallabhi, and his territorial ambitions. British historian Vincent Smith suggests that the decisive battle occurred near the Narmada River, where Pulakesin successfully defended the passes, compelling Harsha to retreat. Ultimately, Harsha suffered defeat at the hands of Pulakesin II, returning to his capital, Kanauj. This outcome is corroborated by the Aihole inscription and Hiuen Tsang's account. Ravikirti's inscription describes Harsha as "prosperous with unmeasured might," yet acknowledges the disarray caused by the Chalukyan forces. The Rirpana, Kurnool, and Tograsedu plates further confirm Pulakesin II's adoption of the title *Paramesvara* after his victory over Harsha, also known as *Sakalottarapathanatha* (Lord of the North).

Self Check Exercise-1

Q-1   Who wrote Harshcharit?

Q-2   Which Chinese traveller visited during Harshvardhan's reign?

Q-3   What was the main theme of the dramas Ratnavali and Priyadarshika by King Harsha?

13.4 Administration of Harsha

Harshavardhana, known for his efficient rule, maintained a well-organized and systematic administration throughout his reign. The effectiveness of his governance is evident from the observations of the Chinese traveler Hiuen Tsang, who admired Harsha's civil administration based on benevolent principles. Instead of relying solely on a trained bureaucracy, Harsha personally supervised the administration, frequently touring provinces to ensure justice and good governance. His territorial expansion primarily focused eastward, as the strong presence of Pulakeshin II in the south limited his southern ambitions. Eventually, Harsha brought almost the entire Gangetic plain under his control. Some scholars believe his empire stretched from Kamarupa in the east to Kashmir in the northwest and from the Himalayas in the north to the Vindhyas in the south. Hiuen Tsang referred to Harsha as the "lord of North India" (Sakalottarapathanath).

Following traditional Oriental governance practices, Harsha emphasized personal leadership and attention to detail to prevent corruption and inefficiency. Hiuen Tsang noted that Harsha divided his daily routine into three parts: one for administrative affairs and two for religious activities. Despite his busy schedule, Harsha often traveled across urban and rural areas, halting only during the rainy season. These tours, accompanied by music and state processions, allowed him to

address grievances, punish wrongdoers, inspect local administration, and distribute charity, reflecting his concern for public welfare.

To manage his vast empire, Harsha divided it into several administrative units and appointed officials to oversee their functioning. His military strength included 6,000 elephants and 100,000 cavalry, ensuring peace and stability within the empire. Hiuen Tsang also praised Harsha's efficient police force and strict judicial system.

13.4.1 Religious Policy of Harsha

Inscriptions from Sonepat (Haryana), Madhuban (Uttar Pradesh), and Banskhera (Uttar Pradesh) suggest that Harsha's ancestors were devotees of Lord Surya and Shiva, holding titles such as *Paramaditya Bhakta* and *Paramesvara*. According to the *Harshacharita*, Harsha's great-grandfather, Pushyabhuti, was a devout Shaivite. Initially, Harsha himself worshiped Shiva, as indicated by the title *Paramamahesvara* found in the Banskhera and Madhuban plates. However, in his later years, Harsha embraced Mahayana Buddhism while continuing to respect his earlier religious practices.

Kannauj Assembly

After adopting Mahayana Buddhism (without abandoning his previous faith), Harsha organized a significant religious assembly at Kannauj (Kanyakubja) to promote Mahayana teachings. The assembly highlighted the virtues of Mahayana Buddhism and revealed Harsha's slight sectarian preference for this school. The event was attended by 20 kings, 1,000 scholars from Nalanda University, 3,000 Mahayana and Hinayana monks, and 3,000 Brahmins and Jains. The assembly lasted for 23 days, during which Hiuen Tsang delivered discourses on Mahayana philosophy. However, the event was not without turmoil, as an assassination attempt was made on Harsha, though it was swiftly suppressed. On the concluding day, Harsha honored Hiuen Tsang with valuable gifts.

Prayag Assembly

Following the Kannauj Assembly, Harsha organized an annual grand assembly at Prayag (modern-day Allahabad), known as the *Maha Moksha Parishad*, held at the confluence of the Ganga and Yamuna rivers. During this event, Harsha distributed alms to over 500,000 people, including monks, heretics, the poor, orphans, and the destitute. Hiuen Tsang described Harsha's extraordinary generosity, claiming that the emperor emptied the royal treasury and even donated his personal belongings, though this account might be somewhat exaggerated.

13.4.2 Society and Economy under Harsha

Accounts from Banabhatta and Hiuen Tsang provide valuable insights into the social structure during Harsha's reign. The fourfold caste system—Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras—remained prominent. Brahmins enjoyed special privileges and received land grants from the king, while Kshatriyas formed the ruling class, and Vaishyas were primarily engaged in trade. According to Hiuen Tsang, the

Shudras mostly worked in agriculture, with numerous sub-castes existing within each Varna.

The condition of women during this period was generally unfavorable. Widow Remarriage was rare, the *Swayamvara* (self-choice of husband) system had declined, and practices such as dowry and sati were prevalent. Hiuen Tsang also mentioned three funeral practices: cremation, water burial, and exposure of the body in forests.

Economically, Harsha's reign saw a decline in trade and commerce. The reduced number of coins, diminished activity of merchant guilds, and the decline of major trade centers indicated an economic downturn. This economic shift led to the growth of a self-sufficient village economy, contrasting sharply with the prosperity of the Gupta period.

Self-Check Exercise - 2

Q.1   What were the provinces called during Harsha's reign?

Q.2   Who defeated Harshavardhana?

Q.3   Name the assembly held every five years at Prayag.

13.5 Cultural Progress under Harsha

Cultural developments during Harsha's reign were relatively modest and continued the artistic traditions of the Gupta period. Hiuen Tsang praised the grandeur of monasteries and other structures built by Harsha at Nalanda. One notable structure was a copper statue of Buddha, standing eight feet tall. The brick-built Lakshmana Temple at Sirpur, renowned for its intricate architectural design, is also attributed to this period.

Harsha was a significant patron of learning, with Banabhatta, his biographer, being a prominent figure in his court. Banabhatta authored *Harshacharita* and *Kadambari*. Other notable intellectuals included Matanga Divakara and Bhartrihari, a renowned poet, philosopher, and grammarian. Harsha himself composed three Sanskrit plays: *Ratnavali*, *Priyadarsika*, and *Nagananda*.

Nalanda University

Harsha provided generous endowments to Nalanda University, transforming it into a renowned international center of learning. Hiuen Tsang, who studied there for a period, praised the university's academic environment and architectural grandeur.

Self-Check Exercise-3

Q.1   What are the primary literary sources for understanding the Harsha period?

Q.2   Summarize Harsha's key military campaigns.

Q.3   Highlight the significant cultural achievements during Harsha's reign.

13.6 Summary

Harsha Vardhana emerged as a prominent ruler of North India during the 7th century A.D., in the post-Gupta era, preceding the advent of Turko-Afghan dominance. The historical reconstruction of Harsha's political journey and the socio-economic conditions of his time relies on literary sources like *Harshacharita* by Banabhatta and *Si-Yu-Ki*, the travelogue of Hiuen Tsang. Epigraphic evidence includes copper plate grants and seals, such as those from Madhuban, Sonepat, and Banskhera, alongside the Nalanda seal and the Aihole inscription. Additionally, numismatic findings and archaeological discoveries, including coins and ruins across North India, further enrich our understanding of this period. Harsha's own compositions—*Nagananda*, *Priyadarshika*, and *Ratnavali*—also provide valuable insights into his reign.

The Pushyabhuti dynasty, to which Harsha belonged, originally governed from Thanesar, in present-day Haryana. Banabhatta and Hiuen Tsang offer detailed descriptions of Harsha's administration. While Harsha initially worshiped Lord Surya and Shiva, he later embraced Mahayana Buddhism, becoming its prominent patron without abandoning his earlier faith. He convened two significant religious assemblies: one in Kannauj and another in Prayag, both aimed at promoting Mahayana Buddhism.

Harsha not only governed effectively but also contributed to literature. He authored three plays—*Nagananda*, *Priyadarshika*, and *Ratnavali*—and extended patronage to scholars like Banabhatta and Hiuen Tsang. Moreover, he made generous donations to Nalanda University, further elevating its status as a premier center of learning. His reign, marked by peace and prosperity, lasted for 41 years until his death in 642 A.D. With no clear successor, his vast empire fragmented into smaller kingdoms soon after his demise.

13.7 Glossary

- **Hiuen Tsang:** A renowned Chinese traveler who visited India between 627 and 643 A.D. during Harsha's reign. Harsha held him in high regard for his deep commitment to Buddhism.
- **Nalanda University:** Established by Kumaragupta I, Nalanda is considered the world's first residential university. It flourished under the Gupta Empire from 500 to 1300 A.D., boasting 300 lecture halls, numerous laboratories, and vast libraries.

13.8 Answers to Self-Check Exercises
Self-Check Exercise-1

Ans.1: The *Harshacharita*, authored by Banabhatta, serves as an important biographical account of Harsha's life and reign.
Ans.2: The Chinese traveler Xuanzang (Hiuen Tsang) visited India during Harsha's rule and documented his observations in *Great Tang Records on the Western*

Regions, providing valuable insights into the era.

Ans.3: The plays *Ratnavali* and *Priyadarshika*, written by Harsha, focus on themes of love and romance, reflecting the cultural and social milieu of his time.

Self-Check Exercise-2

Ans.1: During Harsha's reign, the empire was divided into administrative units known as *bhuktis* (provinces). These were further subdivided into *vishayas* (districts), with officials appointed to manage them efficiently.

Ans.2: Harsha faced defeat at the hands of the Chalukya king Pulakeshin II, a significant event recorded in inscriptions and historical texts.

Ans.3: The *Prayag Assembly* or *Prayag Mahotsava* was held every five years at the confluence of the Ganga and Yamuna. It served as a platform for religious and intellectual discussions, with Harsha distributing generous alms to participants.

Self-Check Exercise-3

Ans.1: Literary Sources for Studying the Harsha Period
The key literary sources that provide insights into the Harsha period include:

- **Harshacharita:** Written by Banabhatta, a renowned poet and scholar in Harsha's court, this biography details Harsha's life, achievements, and the political environment of his reign.
- **Travel Accounts:** The writings of Chinese pilgrims like Xuanzang (Hiuen Tsang), who visited India during Harsha's reign, offer valuable information about the social, cultural, and political conditions of the era.
- **Inscriptions and Coins:** Epigraphic records and coins from Harsha's period highlight his administrative policies, religious patronage, and the extent of his kingdom.
- **Literary Works:** Besides the *Harshacharita*, Harsha himself composed plays like *Ratnavali* and *Priyadarshika*, which reflect the cultural and courtly life of his time.

Ans.2: Overview of Harsha's Military Activities
Harsha engaged in several significant military campaigns during his reign:

- **Expansion Campaigns:** He initiated military expeditions to expand his empire, beginning from Thanesar (modern Haryana) and extending his rule across northern India.
- **Conflict with the Chalukyas:** Harsha faced strong resistance from Pulakeshin II, the Chalukya king, and suffered a notable defeat, curbing his expansion southward.
- **Military Administration:** To maintain control over his territories, Harsha established an organized military administration, appointing commanders to oversee defense and security.
- **Naval Expeditions:** He also conducted naval campaigns along river routes to strengthen his influence over trade and strategic regions.

Ans.3: Cultural Advancements During Harsha's Reign

Harsha's reign (circa 606–647 CE) witnessed remarkable cultural progress across various fields:

- **Literature and Poetry:** Harsha actively promoted literature and supported scholars like Banabhatta, who wrote *Harshacharita*. He also authored plays such as *Ratnavali*, *Priyadarshika*, and *Nagananda*, reflecting courtly and social life.
- **Art and Architecture:** Architectural advancements during his period included the construction of temples and monasteries that displayed a blend of Gupta and regional styles.
- **Religious Patronage:** Though Harsha embraced Mahayana Buddhism later in life, he continued to support Hinduism and Jainism. He organized grand religious assemblies, such as the Kanauj and Prayag gatherings, promoting interfaith dialogue.
- **Education and Learning:** Harsha's patronage extended to centers of learning like Nalanda University, which flourished under his rule, attracting scholars from across Asia.
- **Social Welfare:** Harsha's administration emphasized public welfare, establishing hospitals, rest houses for travelers, and charitable institutions, reflecting his commitment to compassionate governance.

13.9 Suggested Readings

- Basham, A.L. *The Wonder That Was India*. London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1954.
- Chattopadhyaya, B. *The Making of Early Medieval India*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Jha, D.N. *Early India: A Concise History*. New Delhi: Manohar, 2004.
- Majumdar, R.C., and Pusalker, A.D. (Eds.) *The Age of Imperial Kanauj*. Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1955.
- Majumdar, R.C. *Ancient India*, 6th ed. Delhi, 1921.
- Ray, H.C. *The Dynastic History of Northern India (Early and Medieval Period)*, 2 Vols. Calcutta, 1931.

13.10 Terminal Questions

1. Discuss the cultural advancements during Harsha's reign.
2. Provide a brief overview of Nalanda University.
3. Outline the life and accomplishments of Harshavardhana.
4. Evaluate Harsha's contributions to Buddhism.
5. Explain the administration and society under Harsha, as described by Hiuen Tsang.

Unit-14

Kingdoms in the Deccan and South – Chalukyas of Badami

Structure:

14.1 Introduction
14.2 Learning Objectives
14.3 Sources of Information

14.3.1 Inscriptions

14.3.2 Monuments

14.3.3 Coins

14.3.4 Written Records

14.3.5 Hiuen-Tsang's Accounts

14.3.6 Tabari's Records

Self-Check Exercise-1
14.4 Early Rulers of the Dynasty

14.4.1 Pulakesin II – The Greatest Early Chalukya

14.4.2 Sources of Information

14.4.3 Military Achievements of Pulakesin II

14.4.4 Conflict with Harshavardhana of Kanauj

14.4.5 Chalukya-Pallava Rivalry

14.4.6 Pulakesin II's Administration

14.4.7 Successors of Pulakesin II

14.4.8 Extent of Pulakesin II's Empire

Self-Check Exercise-2

14.5 Overview of the Chalukya Empire

14.5.1 Chalukyan Society

14.5.2 Importance of Trade

14.1 Introduction

After the decline of the Andhra dynasty around 225 CE, peninsular India faced nearly three centuries of political instability. The Chalukya dynasty, emerging in the mid-6th century, marked the beginning of a stable political era in the Deccan. The Chalukyas ruled large parts of South and Central India until their decline in the 12th century.

The dynasty comprised three major branches:

1. **Chalukyas of Vatapi (Badami):** The earliest branch, established in the early 6th century, ruled until their defeat by the Rashtrakutas in 752 CE.
2. **Eastern Chalukyas of Vengi:** They became independent around 625 CE and ruled until external invasions diminished their power by 1020 CE.
3. **Western Chalukyas of Kalyani:** Reviving Chalukyan dominance in the late 10th century, they ruled from 973 to 1200 CE.

This unit focuses primarily on the early Chalukyas, also known as the Chalukyas of Badami.

14.2 Learning Objectives

After studying this unit, learners will:

- Understand the history of the early Chalukya dynasty in South India.
- Recognize the achievements of prominent Chalukyan rulers, particularly Pulakesin II.
- Explore the advancements in art, architecture, and culture under the Chalukyas.

14.3 Sources of Information

Key sources for studying the Chalukya dynasty include inscriptions, monuments, coins, written records, and travel accounts.

14.3.1 Inscriptions

Chalukyan inscriptions, primarily in Sanskrit and Kannada, provide authentic historical records. Around 150 inscriptions have been discovered across temples, caves, and pillars. Significant inscriptions include those at the Kanchi Kailasanatha temple, Mangalesa, and the Virupaksha temple in Pattadakal.

The Aihole Prasasti, inscribed in Kannada by court poet Ravikirtti in 630 CE at the Meguti temple in Aihole, stands out. It details the history of the Badami Chalukyas, particularly the reign of Pulakesin II.

14.3.2 Monuments

Chalukyan architecture reflects their cultural, philosophical, and religious ideals. Major centers of their architectural heritage include Vatapi (Badami), Pattadakal, and Bijapur district. Most temples are Vaishnavite, though Shaivite and Jain structures also exist, indicating religious tolerance.

14.3.3 Coins

Chalukyan coins help establish the dynasty's chronology, trade relations, and cultural symbols. Despite their long reign, relatively few coins have been discovered. They were the first to adopt the Varaha (wild boar) crest, symbolizing devotion to Vishnu's Varaha avatar. Notable coins include the Rupaka, a silver coin commemorating their victory over the Kalachuris.

14.3.4 Written Records

While few Chalukyan literary works survive, court poets like Ravikirtti composed significant texts, often compared to Kalidasa's works. The Pampa Bharata, written in Kannada, narrates the dynasty's genealogy and offers insights into Chalukyan society. Prasastis, or eulogistic inscriptions, praise the rulers' military, administrative, and personal qualities.

14.3.5 Hiuen-Tsang's Accounts

The Chinese traveler Hiuen-Tsang visited the Chalukya kingdom during Pulakesin II's reign, describing it as fertile and well-governed, inhabited by learned and benevolent people. Despite being a supporter of Emperor Harsha, Hiuen-Tsang acknowledged Harsha's defeat in his conflict with Pulakesin II.

14.3.6 Tabari's Records

The Persian historian Tabari noted diplomatic relations between Pulakesin II and Khusru Pervez II of Iran. However, Persian sources provide limited details regarding the nature of this relationship.

Self-Check Exercise-1

Q.1   Who composed the Aihole Prashasti?

Q.2   Which architectural style is linked with the Badami Chalukyas?

Q.3   What was the official language of the Chalukya dynasty?

14.4 The Early Chalukya Rulers

The origins of the Chalukyas remain a topic of debate among historians. A commonly accepted theory suggests that they initially served as minor feudatories under the early Rashtrakutas. This view is supported by the Undikavatika Grant from the 6th century, which records Rashtrakuta King Abhimanyu granting a village to a Shaiva ascetic in the presence of Jayasimha, a Rashtrakuta military leader. This grant, considered authentic, indicates that Jayasimha began his career under the Rashtrakutas before establishing Chalukya rule.

The Rise of Chalukya Power

Pulakesin I, the eldest son of Ranaraga, rose to power as a strong ruler. His name translates to "Great Lion" in Sanskrit, while a hybrid Sanskrit-Kannada interpretation refers to him as "tiger-haired." His reign, commencing around 540 CE, marks the first well-documented period of Chalukyan rule. Pulakesin I assumed grand titles such as *Spiprithvivallabha*, associating himself with Lord Vishnu, along with the title *Maharaja*.

Key inscriptions detailing his reign include the Badami rock inscriptions (the first Chalukyan inscription dated to the Saka Era) and epigraphs highlighting his conquest of the Kadambas. By the time Pulakesin II succeeded to the throne, the Chalukyas had established an empire spanning the Deccan, stretching from coast to coast.

Though primarily followers of Brahminical Hinduism, the Chalukyas maintained religious tolerance but did not actively promote other faiths, contributing to the decline of Buddhism in the Deccan. The rise of Chalukya power also saw the resurgence of Hindu sacrificial practices, with rulers like Pulakesin I, Kirtivarman I, and Mangalesa laying the foundation of a powerful empire that Pulakesin II further expanded.

14.4.1 Pulakesin II: The Greatest Early Chalukya

Pulakesin II faced a civil war after his uncle Mangalesa, acting as regent, refused to cede power. Supported by loyal allies, Pulakesin II assembled an army, defeated his uncle, and ascended the throne between January and July 610 CE. His

early reign was marked by internal unrest and external threats, prompting him to adopt an aggressive military strategy to secure and expand his kingdom.

14.4.2 Sources of Information

Information about Pulakesin II's reign is derived from charters, temple inscriptions, and records from both allies and adversaries. Key inscriptions include:

- **Yekkeri Rock Inscription (1st year):** Reflects Gupta-era style.
- **Hyderabad Copper Plates (3rd year, 612 CE):** Confirms Pulakesin's coronation in 610 CE.
- **Kandalgaon Copper Plate (5th year):** Records a land grant in Goa.
- **Maruthuru Grant (8th year):** Mentions the conquest of Pishtapura.
- **Lohner Inscription (20th year, 630 CE):** Documents a village gift to a Brahmin.

14.4.3 Military Achievements of Pulakesin II

Pulakesin II first quelled rebellions by Appayika and Govinda, rulers north of the Bhima River. Using diplomacy, he divided their forces and achieved victory. He also formed a strategic alliance with the Gangas to strengthen his position against the Pallavas. The Chalukyas further subdued the Vishnukundins, extending their territory from Visakhapatnam to southern Nellore.

14.4.4 Conflict with Harshavardhana

Pulakesin II's most notable military success was his defeat of Harshavardhana. Though the precise cause of this conflict remains unclear, it likely stemmed from Chalukya support for buffer states opposing Harsha's expansion. The battle, fought north of the Narmada River, ended in a decisive victory for the Chalukyas. Following this defeat, Harsha abandoned his southern ambitions.

14.4.5 Chalukya-Pallava Rivalry

The conquest of the Vishnukundin kingdom, a former Pallava ally, brought the Chalukyas into direct conflict with the Pallavas. This rivalry, rooted in a struggle for regional supremacy, initially led to minor skirmishes but soon escalated into larger battles.

Pulakesin II initiated the conflict, which became a prolonged struggle between two powerful dynasties. The situation deteriorated further when the Pallavas eventually sacked the Chalukya capital. Pulakesin II, once a formidable leader who had expanded the Chalukya Empire and defeated Harsha, met his downfall during this conflict. His death in battle marked the end of an era and demonstrated the vulnerability of even the most powerful rulers.

14.4.6 Pulakesin II's Administration

Recognizing the challenge of directly governing a vast empire, Pulakesin II divided his territory into administrative zones, appointing trusted family members and loyal feudatories as governors. Some former rulers were reinstated as vassals to maintain stability.

Key appointments included:

- **Vishnuvardhan:** Pulakesin's younger brother, who initially governed Velvola (southern Maratha region) and later Vengi. After serving as governor for 18 years, Vishnuvardhan declared independence around 642 CE, following Pulakesin's death.
- **Vijayavarman:** Governor of Gujarat (Lata), who also declared independence, forming another Chalukya sub-branch.

Pulakesin II's influence extended beyond India. The Chinese traveler Hieun Tsang noted his powerful rule, while Persian historian Tabari mentioned a Chalukyan envoy at the Persian court. The Ajanta cave paintings also depict diplomatic exchanges between Pulakesin II and the Persian ruler Khusru Perviz II.

However, Pulakesin II's downfall resulted from overextension. His second invasion of the Pallavas proved disastrous, leading to his death and the sacking of the Chalukya capital.

14.4.7 Successors of Pulakesin II

After Pulakesin II's death and the destruction of Badami by the Pallavas, the Chalukya dynasty faced a period of instability. From 643 to 655 CE, little is known about the dynasty's activities.

However, Vikramaditya I restored Chalukya power in 655 CE, reclaiming Badami and consolidating the kingdom. Subsequent rulers included:

- **Vinayaditya (681–696 CE):** Expanded Chalukya influence through campaigns against the Cholas, Pandyas, Pallavas, and Aluvas.
- **Vijayaditya (696–733 CE):** Enjoyed a long and peaceful reign.
- **Vikramaditya II (733–745 CE):** Continued military campaigns, defeating the Pallavas and acquiring significant treasures.
- **Kirtivarman II (745–756 CE):** Struggled to maintain power amid rising Rashtrakuta dominance.

Eventually, Rashtrakuta leader Dantidurga overthrew the Chalukyas, ending their reign. Although Kirtivarman II attempted to regain control, his efforts were unsuccessful. The Rashtrakutas ruled for the next two centuries, until the emergence of the later Western Chalukyas of Kalyani.

14.4.8 Decline of the Dynasty

The decline of the Chalukyas followed a familiar pattern seen in many powerful dynasties: internal conflicts, mismanagement, overextension, and external

threats. Weak leadership, costly military campaigns, and the rise of rival powers, such as the Rashtrakutas, further accelerated their downfall.

14.4.9 The Vast Chalukya Empire

At its peak, the Chalukya Empire extended from the Narmada and Mahi rivers in the north to the Pallava border in the south, encompassing both the western and eastern coasts of India. Governing such a vast territory from Badami posed significant challenges, particularly with limited communication infrastructure.

Efforts to establish regional administrative centers largely failed, leading later rulers to adopt a more centralized approach. This inability to maintain control over distant regions ultimately contributed to the dynasty's decline.

As a result, border regions remained unstable, requiring constant military intervention. The Chalukyas relied on loyal feudatories to suppress revolts, but this system had its limitations. Frequent conflicts with neighboring dynasties further strained their resources. Over time, these challenges contributed to the decline of Chalukya power in the Deccan.

Self-Check Exercise-2

Q1: What was a significant feature of Chalukya administration?

Q2: What was the term used for a province?

Q3: Who was Mahadandanayaka?

14.5 The Chalukya Empire: An Overview

The Chalukya dynasty ruled the Deccan Plateau and surrounding regions for over six centuries before fading from historical records, much like many other dynasties before and after them. The central Chalukya family established their rule in Badami in the early 6th century. Ambitious and capable, they built a vast empire within a little over a century. Their confidence is evident in their governance, as they appointed their brothers as viceroys in newly conquered territories and even allowed them to establish independent sibling dynasties. These offshoots emerged on the empire's periphery, with the eastern branch centered around Vengi and the western branch later based in Kalyani. The Kalyani branch only gained prominence toward the end of the Badami Chalukyas' rule, remaining dormant for nearly 200 years.

Throughout their reign, the Chalukyas experienced cycles of victories, defeats, civil wars, and other challenges, but they were never entirely conquered or annexed by another dynasty. They remained resilient for six centuries before ultimately fading due to the exhaustion of continuous warfare and the strain of maintaining a vast

empire. Unlike many other dynasties, the Chalukyas did not decline due to arrogance or overextension.

14.5.1 Chalukyan Society

The Chalukya Empire, like most contemporary kingdoms, was primarily agrarian. The majority of the population lived in villages and engaged in agriculture. Rice and pulses were the staple crops, while cotton thrived in drier regions and sugarcane in areas with moderate rainfall. Interestingly, the region's monsoon patterns have remained relatively consistent for over 1,500 years, resulting in agricultural practices that closely resemble modern ones.

Laborers often migrated to other territories if they were dissatisfied with their treatment, potentially causing difficulties for landlords, especially during crucial phases of the agricultural cycle. This possibility likely motivated landowners to treat laborers fairly, as no significant labor revolts are recorded during Chalukya rule. The state appointed tax collectors, known as Praja Gavundas (later known as Gaundas), who also acted as representatives of the people, particularly during natural disasters. Senior officials, known as Prabhu Gavundas, supervised multiple Gavundas. This dual role of tax collection and representation sometimes led to conflicts of interest and corruption among junior officials.

14.5.2 The Importance of Trade

Trade played a crucial role in the Chalukya Empire, facilitated by powerful merchant guilds that operated across political boundaries. These guilds ensured that trade continued even during times of war and rebellion. The most influential merchant guild in South India was the 'Ainnuruvar' or 'the five hundred,' also known as the Aihole Svamis. Their descendants still reside in Aihole today. The Ainnuruvar engaged in extensive trade by land and sea, dealing in precious stones, spices, and perfumes with regions like Malaya (Malaysia), Parasa (Persia), Kambhoja (Cambodia), Nepal, and Magadha.

The Western Chalukyas maintained significant trade relations with the Chinese Tang Empire in the 10th century and also traded with the Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad. Indian ships were reported in Dhofar, Aden, and Siraf, an important Persian Gulf port. The presence of Indian merchants in Siraf was so significant that local eateries maintained separate utensils for them due to dietary differences.

14.5.3 Religious Practices

During the Chalukya period, Jainism and Hinduism coexisted peacefully, with Jainism being more prominent in the empire's western regions. However, Jainism faced challenges after the fall of the Rashtrakutas and Gangas to the Chalukyas and the expanding Chola dynasty. Despite this, Chalukya rulers upheld religious tolerance, allowing Jainism to persist, though in a diminished form.

By the late 2nd century, Hindu reform movements, such as Adi Shankara's Advaita philosophy, had already contributed to Buddhism's decline. Vaishnavism gained prominence, particularly through the Lingayatism movement championed by

Basavanna, who promoted direct worship of God through simple Kannada poetry known as Vachanas. His famous saying, "Kayakave Kailasa" (Work is Worship), remains popular today. Ramanuja, another influential figure, led the Vaishnava monastery in Srirangam and advocated the Bhakti Marga (Path of Devotion). He authored the *Sribhasya*, a critique of Advaita philosophy. These religious movements significantly shaped South Indian culture, literature, and architecture.

14.5.4 Literary Achievements

The Chalukya Empire witnessed significant literary growth in both Kannada and Sanskrit, supported by generous royal patronage. Over 200 Vachana poets, including 30 women, emerged during this period. Ranna, the court poet of King Satyashraya, was honored with the title "Kavi Chakravarti" (Emperor among Poets) and authored five major works, the most notable being *Sahasabhimavijayam* (also called *Gadayuddham*), written in 982 CE.

Nagavarma II, the poet laureate of King Jagadhekamalla, composed significant works on Kannada grammar and vocabulary, including *Karnataka Bhashabhushana* and *Vastukosha*. King Somesvara II authored the Sanskrit encyclopedia *Manasollasa* around 1129 CE, covering diverse subjects such as medicine, fortifications, gemstones, music, and painting. Another influential work, *Mitakshara*, was written by Sanskrit scholar Vijnaneshwara during Vikramaditya I's reign. This legal treatise later influenced British inheritance laws in India.

14.5.5 Art and Architecture under the Chalukyas

The Chalukyan period witnessed remarkable cultural development, particularly in art and architecture, driven by political stability, economic prosperity, and religious tolerance. This era marked a significant advancement in South Indian religious architecture, with innovations in both rock-cut and structural temple designs. Architectural experimentation flourished in Aihole, Badami, and Pattadakal, blending indigenous styles with northern and southern influences. The Chalukyas pioneered two distinct temple styles: the Southern Dravida Vimana and the Northern Rekha Nagara Prasada.

The Chalukya-Pallava conflicts facilitated the exchange and refinement of architectural and sculptural styles, benefiting both dynasties.

14.5.6 Temples at Aihole

Aihole, the Chalukyas' first capital, houses over seventy temples, predominantly Brahminical, alongside a few Jain shrines. These structures date from 450 to 650 CE.

Mandapa Temples: Resembling cave temples, these structures featured a simple sanctum with an open verandah, later evolving into the mature *prasada* and *vimana* styles with added *mandapas*.

Konti-Gudi Group: This group includes three temples with varying layouts, including square and oblong plans, pillared verandahs, and sanctums at the rear.

Lad Khan Temple: One of Aihole's oldest Hindu temples, this 5th-century structure was initially dedicated to Vishnu but later housed a Shiva Linga. Built in the Panchayatana style, it combines square and rectangular plans with influences from wooden construction.

Durga Temple: This unique structure blends Dravidian architecture with a northern-style superstructure. Built on a high plinth, it features an apsidal layout and a surrounding colonnade.

The **Meguti Temple**, or Meganagudi, is a Jain shrine built in the Dravidian style and enclosed by a stone wall. It features a pillared hall, an *antarala*, and a sanctum with a circumambulatory path (*pradakshinapatha*). The famous Aihole inscription, dated 634 CE, is found on one of its outer walls. This inscription composed by Ravikeerti, a commander and minister of Pulikeshi II, mentions poets Kalidasa and Bharavi. To the southeast of Meguti is a small Jaina cave housing a five-foot Bahubali figure along with other Tirthankara engravings?

14.5.7 Temples at Badami

Badami, or Vatapi, served as the Chalukya Empire's second capital from 540 to 752 CE. Situated at the foot of cliffs beside a small lake, Badami is known for its early Dravidian temples. The first known *vimana* temples here include the Upper Shivalaya, Lower Shivalaya, and Malegitti Shivalaya, constructed during the reign of Mangalesa, son of Pulakeshin I.

Badami is also renowned for its rock-cut architecture. The North Fort, located opposite the town, features canyon-like crevices with a straight path leading upward. Along this path are two multi-storeyed *mandapas*, possibly remnants of an early ceremonial complex. The Lower Shivalaya stands on a rocky terrace overlooking the town, while the Upper Shivalaya sits majestically at the summit of the North Fort. Both structures, likely erected in the early 12th century, were partially dismantled by Pallava forces and later occupants who repurposed the building materials.

The Malegitti Shivalaya, located on an isolated boulder beneath the North Fort's western flank, dates to the early 7th century and is notable for its well-preserved carvings. The Lower Shivalaya now consists only of the towered sanctuary, with outer walls dismantled. The temple's doorway features lotus ornamentation, while the interior contains an unusual elliptical-shaped pedestal that is now empty.

14.5.8 Temples at Muktesvara and Pattadakal

Muktesvara, near Badami, features typical early Chalukyan temples. Within a walled enclosure, northern and southern-style temples stand side by side. Notable examples include the Mahakutesvara and Sangamesvara temples, built by the early Western Chalukyas.

Pattadakal, the third capital of the early Chalukyas, marked the third stage of Chalukyan architectural development. The site houses ten temples, eight clustered

together, one located half a kilometer north, and another about 1.5 kilometers northwest. These temples represent two distinct architectural styles:

Dravida Vimana Type: Represented by the Virupaksha, Mallikarjuna, and Sangamesvara temples.

Rekha Nagara Prasada Type: Represented by the Kadasiddeswara, Jambulinga, Galaganatha, Kasivisweswara, and Papanatha temples.

The **Sangamesvara Temple**, the oldest structure in the group, exemplifies the Dravida Vimana style. The **Virupaksha Temple**, built by Lokamahadevi, the chief queen of Vikramaditya II (733–745 CE), showcases all canonical elements of Chalukyan architecture. Its exterior walls feature sculptures of Hindu deities, while the interior pillars are adorned with narrative panels depicting epic scenes.

The adjoining **Mallikarjuna Temple** is another exemplary structure. The **Galaganatha Temple** illustrates the fully developed Rekha Nagara Prasada form and shares architectural features with the contemporary temples of Alampur in Andhra Pradesh.

14.5.9 Decline of the Dynasty

The rise and fall of great dynasties often follow a common pattern: dynamic and capable founders are succeeded by less resilient rulers, whose indulgence in luxury weakens the empire. Strong leadership requires a degree of ruthlessness, but hereditary monarchies often see this quality diminish over generations, leading to complacency and ineffective governance.

For the Badami Chalukyas, Kirtivarman's defeat by the Pandyan king provided Dantidurga with an opportunity to assert independence. Kirtivarman, preoccupied with southern conflicts and weakened by defeat, failed to respond swiftly. By the later years of his reign, he had become indecisive and lethargic. Although he attempted to reclaim lost territories after Dantidurga's death, his uncoordinated efforts led to his own defeat and demise.

14.5.10 Military Expeditions and Their Consequences

Warfare in ancient times demanded substantial financial and human resources. Victorious rulers often replenished their treasuries through plunder and tribute, but prolonged conflicts drained resources and destabilized governance. The Chalukya dynasty's decline was hastened by internal conflicts, external invasions, and weakened leadership, ultimately leading to the rise of the Rashtrakutas and other regional powers.

The Chalukyas' southern campaigns, though initially aimed at containing the Pallavas, proved largely fruitless. Despite multiple captures of the Pallava capital, they never attempted to annex the kingdom, recognizing that such an endeavor would be unsustainable. Historically, the Pallava territories and regions further south

had proven difficult for northern rulers to dominate for extended periods. No northern power had ever maintained a lasting hold over these lands. Thus, the repeated wars against the Pallavas became costly and unproductive ventures, steadily depleting Chalukya resources.

Later Chalukya rulers, overconfident in their military strength, extended their campaigns beyond the Pallava kingdom, stretching their communication lines and making reckless conquests. This overextension weakened the empire, making it vulnerable to both internal and external threats.

Fragmentation and the Rise of Collateral Branches

During the later years of Badami Chalukya rule, two collateral branches emerged, ruling independently from Vengi in the east and Kalyani in the west. Dynastic records mention these developments, sometimes even suggesting they occurred with the tacit approval of the ruling monarch. However, in the turbulent political landscape of medieval India, such power shifts rarely occurred without internal strife.

Breakaway factions always weaken the central authority from which they originate, and tensions inevitably persist. When Pulakesin II emerged victorious in a civil war, he had to pacify the Vengi branch by granting them autonomy and additional territory. Notably, when Pulakesin II was later defeated by the Pallavas and Badami was overrun, the Chalukyas of Vengi remained passive, offering no assistance to their embattled core dynasty. Similarly, the incompetence of the Lata branch enabled the rise of the Rashtrakutas, ultimately leading to the Chalukyas' downfall.

Granting autonomy to these sub-branches proved to be a shortsighted policy, weakening the centralized administration and accelerating the decline of the dynasty.

The Rise of Regional Powers

By the 8th century, powerful rulers had emerged across North India, including Lalitaditya of Kashmir, Yasovarman, and rising Rajput clans such as the Paramaras. These forces vied for political influence, placing increasing pressure on the northern territories of the Chalukya Empire. Meanwhile, in the south, persistent opposition from the Cholas, Pandyas, and Cheras challenged Chalukya dominance. Though the Chalukyas had repeatedly defeated these southern kingdoms and extracted tribute, resistance remained strong. Over time, the empire found itself squeezed by adversaries on both fronts, with its capacity to counter these threats steadily eroding.

After two centuries of dominance, the Chalukyas became complacent, believing in the invincibility of their power. By the reign of the last monarch, Kirtivarman, the empire had lost its ability to repel even temporary southern coalitions formed to oppose Chalukya rule. A perceptive and politically astute king would have recognized the warning signs, but Kirtivarman failed to do so.

The decline of the Chalukyas was not the result of a single catastrophic event but rather the culmination of long-standing weaknesses. By the mid-8th century, their power had undeniably waned. The Rashtrakuta rebellion, led by Dantidurga, was not an isolated event that abruptly ended Chalukya rule; rather, it served as the final catalyst in a series of missteps that had long been eroding the dynasty's strength.

Self-Check Exercise-3

Q.1   Discuss the military achievements of Pulakeshin II.

Q.2   Explain the Chalukya-Pallava rivalry.

Q.3   Analyze the fall of the Chalukya kingdom of Badami.

14.6 Summary

Some sources suggest that the Chalukya rulers generated limited revenue from land and taxation. However, this claim appears unlikely given the grandeur of their reign, the strength of their well-maintained standing army, the execution of expensive military campaigns, and evidence of extensive domestic and international trade. The Chalukyas are portrayed as devout, principled, and pragmatic rulers, driven by military ambitions and willing to adopt ruthless strategies when required. Their survival hinged on decisive leadership and strength, crucial for sustaining their rule. Remarkably, no Chalukya king has ever faced allegations of moral corruption.

The dynasty eventually declined due to prolonged conflicts with the Pallavas and later the Cholas. Sustained warfare is inherently unsustainable, and it speaks to the Chalukyas' resilience that they maintained military readiness for such an extended period before eventually succumbing to both military and financial exhaustion. Their rule marked the golden age of the Deccan, representing one of the last significant medieval empires in India. This achievement is especially noteworthy, as North India was experiencing turmoil during the same period. Unlike many other dynasties, the Chalukyas were not overthrown by external invaders but collapsed under the strain of governing a vast and challenging empire. Their downfall ultimately paved the way for Islamic incursions into the Gujarat region.

14.7 Glossary

- **Chalukya of Badami:** A prominent Indian dynasty that ruled significant parts of southern and central India from the 6th to 12th centuries CE.

- **Pulakeshin II:** The most renowned ruler of the Chalukya dynasty of Vatapi, under whose leadership the kingdom expanded extensively, covering much of the Deccan region in peninsular India.

14.8 Answers to the Self-Check Exercise
Self-Check Exercise-1

Ans.1: The *Aihole Prashasti*, composed by Ravikirti, the court poet of Pulakeshin II, holds significant historical value. It provides detailed insights into Pulakeshin II's reign, including his remarkable victory over Harsha, the prominent northern ruler, around 612–615 CE.

Ans.2: The Badami Chalukya architectural style, flourishing between the 6th and 8th centuries CE in the Deccan region, is known for its unique rock-cut temples. This style blended Dravidian (South Indian) and Nagara (North Indian) elements, reflecting cultural and artistic synthesis. Notable examples include the cave temples at Badami, Aihole, and Pattadakal, featuring intricately carved facades, detailed relief sculptures, and monolithic structures adorned with mythological figures. The structural temples of Pattadakal further highlight the architects' mastery, showcasing elaborate pillars, finely carved ceilings, and harmonious integration of local and external architectural traditions.

Ans.3: During the Chalukya reign (6th to 8th centuries CE), Sanskrit served as the official language for administration, court affairs, and literature. Like other ancient Indian dynasties, the Chalukyas promoted Sanskrit as a medium for governance, cultural expression, and religious discourse.

Self-Check Exercise-2

Ans.1: The Chalukya administration featured a decentralized governance system. The empire was divided into provinces, known as *bhuktis*, each governed by appointed officials responsible for local administration, tax collection, and law enforcement. This structure ensured efficient management and responsive governance across the vast empire. The Chalukyas maintained a sophisticated bureaucracy, supported by inscriptions and grants, enabling effective communication and enforcement of royal policies.

Ans.2: In the Chalukya administration, a province or territorial division was referred to as a *bhukti*. Each *bhukti* was governed by officials responsible for administration, taxation, and maintaining law and order. This system played a crucial role in the decentralized governance of the Chalukya empire.

Ans.3: The term *Mahadandanayaka* in the Chalukya administration referred to a high-ranking official who served as the Chief Military Commander or General. This official oversaw military operations, strategic planning, and defense across the empire. Appointed directly by the king, the *Mahadandanayaka* played a vital role in military administration and defense policy.

Self-Check Exercise-3

Ans.1: Pulakeshin II, the most celebrated ruler of the Chalukya dynasty during the 7th century CE, achieved remarkable military successes that significantly expanded and consolidated the Chalukya Empire. His major accomplishments include:

- **Victory over Harsha:** One of Pulakeshin II's most notable achievements was his defeat of Harsha, the powerful northern ruler, around 612–615 CE. This victory reinforced Chalukya dominance in southern India.
- **Southern Campaigns:** He led successful campaigns across the southern Deccan, subduing rival dynasties such as the Kadambas, Gangas, and Pallavas, thereby expanding Chalukya territorial control.
- **Fortification and Defense:** Pulakeshin II strengthened the fortifications of key cities like Badami and Vatapi, ensuring their resilience against external threats.
- **Naval Expeditions:** He initiated naval expeditions along the western coast, securing maritime trade routes and extending Chalukya influence over coastal regions.
- **Military Administration:** His success was underpinned by a well-organized military administration, with capable generals and officials ensuring efficient logistics and supply chains.

Ans.2: The Chalukya-Pallava conflict was a prolonged geopolitical and military struggle between the Chalukyas of the Deccan and the Pallavas of northern Tamil Nadu during the 6th to 8th centuries CE. This rivalry stemmed from both dynasties' ambitions to control strategic territories, including key trade routes and religious centers. Under Pulakeshin II, the Chalukyas attempted to extend their dominance into Pallava territories, while the Pallavas, renowned for their architectural and cultural achievements, fiercely defended their domain. These continuous conflicts not only shaped regional power dynamics but also influenced cultural and artistic developments in southern India.

Ans.3: The decline of the Chalukya kingdom of Badami, centered around Vatapi (modern-day Badami), occurred due to multiple factors between the 8th and 12th centuries CE:

- **Succession Struggles:** Following Pulakeshin II's death, internal conflicts and succession disputes weakened central authority.
- **Rashtrakuta Invasion:** The rise of the Rashtrakutas, under leaders like Dantidurga and Krishna I, posed a significant military threat. Successful Rashtrakuta campaigns gradually eroded Chalukya control.
- **Regional Fragmentation:** The empire fragmented as local governors asserted autonomy, undermining central authority.
- **Economic Decline:** Loss of key trade routes and economic centers, coupled with internal instability and external invasions, weakened the economy.
- **Cultural and Religious Shifts:** Changing cultural and religious patronage further destabilized the empire.

Ultimately, the combination of sustained military pressures, economic challenges, and administrative fragmentation led to the Chalukya kingdom's collapse.

14.9 Suggested Readings

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14.10 Terminal Questions

1. Summarize the key achievements of Pulakeshin II.
2. Explain the evolution of Chalukyan art and architecture.
3. Evaluate the cultural contributions of the Early Chalukyas.
4. Analyze the causes, progression, and significance of the Harsha-Pulakeshin conflict.

Unit 15

Pallavas Polity and Administration

Structure:

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15.3 Historical Sources of the Pallavas

Self-Check Exercise-1

15.4 Origin of the Pallavas

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    15.4.2 Mahendravarman I (600–630 CE)

    15.4.3 Narasimhavarman I (630–668 CE)

    15.4.4 Paramesvaravarman I (620–695 CE)

    15.4.5 Narasimhavarman II (Rajasimha) (695–722 CE)

    15.4.6 Nandivarman II (730–780 CE)

    15.4.7 Successors of Nandivarman

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Self-Check Exercise-2

15.5 Society during Pallava Rule

    15.5.1 Social Structure

    15.5.2 Status of Women

    15.5.3 Food, Clothing, and Jewelry

    15.5.4 Education and Literature

    15.5.5 Pallava Art and Architecture

Self-Check Exercise-3

15.6 Summary

15.7 Glossary

15.1 Introduction

Following the end of the Sangam Age in Tamil Nadu, the Kalabhras ruled for nearly 250 years. Subsequently, the Pallavas established their kingdom in the Tondaimandalam region, with Kanchipuram as their capital. Their reign continued until the early 10th century CE, when the Imperial Cholas conquered and annexed Tondaimandalam.

The period from the mid-6th century to the early 10th century CE—spanning approximately four centuries—was a significant era in South Indian history and culture. During this time, three major dynasties rose to power: the Chalukyas of Badami, the Pallavas of Kanchi, and the Pandyas of Madurai. These dynasties not only exercised political dominance but also played a crucial role in the revival of Hinduism.

Their patronage significantly influenced the development of art and architecture, with each dynasty making unique contributions in their respective regions. Despite their rivalry, their competition fostered artistic innovation, resulting in the construction of magnificent stone monuments.

Among these dynasties, the Pallavas of Kanchi occupied a central position in terms of geography, politics, and culture. They were pioneers in rock-cut architecture and hard-stone sculpture, distinguishing themselves from the Chalukyas and Rashtrakutas, who continued the earlier rock-cut traditions. The Pallavas introduced a distinct artistic style characterized by innovative materials and techniques, shaping the evolution of South Indian art.

This unit explores the historical significance and contributions of the Pallavas to South Indian culture.

15.2 Learning Objectives

Upon completing this lesson, learners will be able to:

- Understand various theories regarding the origin of the Pallavas.
- Examine the political, military, and administrative history of the Pallavas, along with their cultural contributions.

15.3 Sources of Pallava History

The historical sources for studying the Pallavas can be categorized into indigenous and foreign sources. Indigenous sources are further divided into literary and archaeological records.

1. Literary Sources

Tamil Literature: Tamil literary works, particularly devotional songs by the Alvars and Nayanmars, provide valuable insights into the Pallava period. The Alvars' hymns are compiled in the *Nalayira Divya Prabandham*, while the Nayanmars' songs are found in the *Panniru Thirumurais*. These texts highlight the social and religious conditions of the era. Additionally, Sekizhar's *Periyapuranam* offers further details about the Pallava period.

Sanskrit Literature: Several Sanskrit texts also shed light on Pallava history. Dandin's *Avanti Sundari Katha* and Sarva Nandi's *Loga Vibagam* emphasize the significance of Simhavishnu's reign. Furthermore, Mahendravarman I, a prominent Pallava ruler, authored the Sanskrit play *Mathavilasa Prakasanam*, providing insights into the socio-religious landscape of the time.

2. Foreign Sources

Foreign records also provide significant information about the Pallavas:

- **Sri Lankan Chronicles:** The *Deepavamsa* and *Mahavamsa*, written in Pali, discuss the relationship between Pallava King Narasimhavarman I and Sri Lankan King Manavarman.
- **Chinese Accounts:** The Chinese traveler Hiuen Tsang visited the Pallava kingdom and recorded his observations in *Siyuki*. His writings offer a detailed description of Kanchipuram, along with references to Buddhist monasteries and the kingdom's social and economic conditions.

3. Archaeological Sources

Important archaeological sources related to the Pallavas include copper plates, inscriptions, monuments, and coins:

- The **Allahabad Pillar Inscription** of Samudragupta mentions Pallava King Vishnugopa.
- The **Aihole Inscription** of Pulakesin II, a Chalukyan ruler, details the conflict between the Chalukyas and Pallavas.
- The **Kenthoor Stone Carving** of Keethivarman belongs to the Pallava period.
- Numerous **Pallava inscriptions** found across South India describe their military achievements, as well as their social and economic conditions.
- **Copper Plates** issued by Pallava rulers, such as the **Kuram Copper Plates** of Parameshvaravarman and the **Velurpalayam Copper Plates** of Nandivarman III, document their military successes.
- **Temples, sculptures, and monuments** from the Pallava period provide crucial historical insights.
- **Pallava coins** offer information about the economic conditions of their time.

These diverse sources collectively help reconstruct the political, administrative, and cultural history of the Pallavas.

Self Check Exercise-1

Q.1   Who established the Pallava dynasty?

Q.2   Who adopted the title 'Vatapikonda' after defeating Pulakesin II?

Q.3   Who wrote 'Avantsundari katha'?

15.4 Origin of the Pallavas

The origins of the Pallavas remain uncertain due to limited reliable evidence. Early sources like Katyayana's writings (4th century BCE) and Ashoka's edicts (3rd century BCE) mention the Cholas, Pandyas, and Keralas but make no reference to the Pallavas. Some scholars, such as Father Heras, speculated that the Pallavas were connected to the Pahleves (Parthians), but there is no concrete proof supporting this migration theory. Another view suggests that they were an indigenous dynasty that rose to prominence after the decline of the Andhra empire, possibly uniting local tribal groups like the Kurumbas and Moravars.

Srinivas Aiyangar proposed that the Pallavas descended from the ancient Naga people, a blend of Negrito, Australoid, and other mixed ethnic groups. Initially based in the Tondaimandalam region around modern-day Chennai, they later expanded into the Tanjore and Trichinopoly districts. The Pallavas often recruited troops from martial tribes like the Pallis and Kurumbas and remained long-standing rivals of the Tamil kings. Interestingly, the term "Pallava" still carries a connotation of "rogue" in Tamil, while Pallavas who settled in Chola and Pandya territories became known as Kallar (thieves), reinforcing their possible Naga ancestry.

Another theory suggests that the Pallavas descended from the union of a Chola prince and a Naga princess from Manipallavam, an island near Sri Lanka. According to this belief, their descendants were granted control over Tondaimandalam, with the dynasty deriving its name from the maternal homeland. Dr. Krishnaswamy Aiyangar associated the Pallavas with the Tondaiyar mentioned in Sangam literature, suggesting they were Naga chieftains loyal to the Satavahanas. However, this theory is contested, given the Pallavas' frequent conflicts with the Cholas and their northern cultural influences.

Dr. K.P. Jayaswal suggested that the Pallavas were a branch of the Brahmin Vakataka dynasty from the Deccan. Their early copperplate inscriptions were in Prakrit, while later ones were in Sanskrit. The Chinese traveler Hiuen-Tsang noted that Pallava language and literature closely resembled northern Indian traditions. Additionally, the Talagunda inscription describes the Pallavas as Kshatriyas, further complicating their origins.

Among the various theories, the most widely accepted view is that the Pallavas were indigenous to Tondaimandalam. Some scholars link them to the Pulindas mentioned in Ashoka's inscriptions. Initially, they served as feudatories of the Satavahanas, but after the latter's collapse in the 3rd century CE, the Pallavas established their independence. Their early inscriptions in Prakrit and later ones in Sanskrit reflect their Satavahana connections and their support for Brahmanism.

15.4.1 Early Pallava Political History

The history of the Pallavas can be divided into two phases: pre-600 CE (Early Pallavas) and post-600 CE (Imperial Pallavas). The term "Imperial" denotes their dominance over a vast territory. The Early Pallavas are further classified into two groups—those issuing Prakrit charters and those issuing Sanskrit charters.

The earliest known Pallava ruler was Sivaskandavarman, mentioned in Prakrit inscriptions from the Guntur district. His father, likely Simhavarman, was also a ruler. Sivaskandavarman's records mention his son Buddhavarman and grandson Buddhyankura, who also ruled. Another prominent early ruler was Vishnugopa, known from the Allahabad Pillar Inscription, which records his defeat by Samudragupta. However, there is no evidence linking Vishnugopa to Sivaskandavarman's lineage.

The later Early Pallavas issued Sanskrit charters, such as the Ongodu grants of Skandavarman, the Uruvapalle and Singarayakonda plates of Yuva Maharaja Vishnugopa, and the Udayendiram plates of Nandivarman I. These records mainly detail royal lineages and religious grants, providing little insight into political events.

Thus, while the origins of the Pallavas remain debated, their emergence as rulers of Tondaimandalam and their significant role in South Indian history are well established. Their inscriptions, literature, and foreign accounts highlight their rule and cultural contributions.

15.4.2 Rise and Expansion of the Pallavas

The Pallavas rose to prominence during the mid-6th century and maintained dominance for nearly two centuries, surpassing the Cholas, Pandyas, and Cheras. Simhavishnu Pallava, around the last quarter of the 6th century, boasted of having vanquished the Cholas, Pandyas, Cheras, and the ruler of Ceylon. At the height of their power, the Pallava kingdom stretched from the Orissa frontier in the north to the Pennar River in the south, encompassing the districts of Arcot, Chinglepet, Madras, Trichinopoly, and Tanjore. Its eastern boundary was the Bay of Bengal, while its western border ran through Salem, Bangalore, and Berar. The 7th century marked the zenith of Pallava power, though they lost the Vengi province to the Chalukyas during this period, a loss they never recovered.

Key Pallava Rulers and Their Contributions
Mahendravarman I (600–630 CE): The Pallava-Chalukya Conflict

The long-standing conflict between the Pallavas and Chalukyas began under Mahendravarman I. Pulakesin II invaded Pallava territory, capturing its northern regions. While Pallava inscriptions claim Mahendravarman I's victory at Pullalur, he could not recover the lost territories. Initially a Jain, Mahendravarman I converted to Saivism under the influence of the saint Thirunavukkarasar (Appar). He built the Shiva temple at Tiruvadi and assumed titles such as Gunabhara, Satyasandha, Chettakari (temple builder), Vichitrachitta, and Mattavilasa. Renowned for his rock-cut temples, he constructed shrines at Mandagappattu, Vallam, Mahendravadi, Dalavanur, Pallavaram, and Tiruchirappalli. The Mandagappattu inscription hails him as Vichitrachitta for building a temple for Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva without using bricks, timber, metal, or mortar. He also authored the Sanskrit play *Mattavilasa*

Prahasanam and was skilled in painting and music, with the Kudumianmalai music inscription attributed to him.

Mahendravarman I was a notable military leader who resisted Chalukya advances, a key figure in Pallava religious transformation, a patron of the arts, and a pioneer of rock-cut temple architecture. His innovations in temple construction, originating from the Krishna River region, spread to the Palar and Kaveri riverbanks, shaping what is now known as Pallava art.

Narasimhavarman I (630–668 CE): The Pallava Resurgence

Narasimhavarman I, also known as Mamalla ('great wrestler'), sought to avenge his father's defeat by Pulakesin II. He defeated Pulakesin II at the Battle of Manimangalam near Kanchi, as recorded in the Kuram copper plates. Under his general Paranjothi, the Pallava army stormed Vatapi, destroyed the city, and earned Narasimhavarman the title *Vatapikonda*. He also launched a naval expedition to Sri Lanka, reinstating his ally, Prince Manavarma, to the throne. During his reign, the Chinese traveler Hiuen-Tsang visited Kanchipuram, describing it as a grand city with a thriving Buddhist community and the famous Ghatika learning center. He also founded Mamallapuram (Mahabalipuram), where he constructed monolithic rathas and cave temples.

Paramesvaravarman I (670–695 CE)

After Mahendravarman II's brief rule, his son Paramesvaravarman I ascended the throne. Though he initially repelled Chalukya invasions, he suffered a significant defeat in 624 CE, leading to the Chalukyan occupation of Kanchi. However, he later triumphed over Vikramaditya in the Battle of Peruvallanattar, forcing the Chalukya king to retreat. Pallava inscriptions honor him as *Ugradanda*, the "destroyer of Ranarasika" (Vikramaditya).

Narasimhavarman II (695–722 CE): The Golden Age of Pallava Architecture

Narasimhavarman II, also known as Rajasimha, ruled during a peaceful period, focusing on art, architecture, and diplomacy. He built the Shore Temple at Mamallapuram and the Kailasanatha Temple at Kanchipuram, masterpieces of Pallava architecture. A patron of literature, his court hosted the famous Sanskrit scholar Dandin. His reign saw flourishing maritime trade and diplomatic relations with China. Rajasimha adopted titles like *Sankarabhakta*, *Vadhyavidyadhara*, and *Agamapriya*, reflecting his devotion to Shaivism and the arts.

Nandivarman II (730–780 CE): Struggles and Decline

Nandivarman II ascended the throne at the age of 12. Facing a surprise Chalukya invasion, he initially retreated, allowing the enemy to occupy Kanchi. After the Chalukyas withdrew, possibly leaving a loyalist in charge, Nandivarman regained control but could not launch a counteroffensive due to continuous Pandya threats and internal instability. This marked the beginning of Pallava decline.

15.4.3 The Decline of the Pallavas

After Nandivarman II, weaker rulers led to the gradual decline of the Pallavas. Dantivarman (795–846 CE) lost southern territories to the Pandyas, while Nandivarman III (846–869 CE) fought but failed to reclaim lost ground. Kampavarman (820–885 CE) left little historical impact, and the last known Pallava ruler, Aparajitavarman (888–903 CE), was defeated by Aditya Chola, marking the end of the Pallava dynasty. Ironically, Aparajitavarman's name, meaning "the invincible," stood in stark contrast to the dynasty's downfall. The prolonged Pallava-Chalukya conflict weakened both powers, eventually allowing the Rashtrakutas and Pandyas to rise to dominance.

15.4.4 Pallava Administration and Legacy

The Pallavas maintained a well-organized administrative system with the king at its center, assisted by ministers. Kings claimed divine descent from Brahma, and succession was typically hereditary, though one ruler was elected. Many Pallava kings were scholars, including Mahendravarman I, who authored *Mattavilasa Prahasanam*. Their reign saw the rise of Vaishnava Alvars and Saiva Nayanars. Pallava kings adopted grand titles like *Maharajadhiraja* and *Dharma-Maharajadhiraja*, reflecting their imperial ambitions.

The Pallava Empire was divided into:

- **Mandalam (Province)**: Governed by a prince or Yuvaraja to maintain central control.

- **Kottam (District)**: Each Mandalam contained several Kottams, administered by royal officials.

- **Nadu (Subdivision)**: Consisted of multiple villages and was managed by the Naattar council.

- **Oor (Village)**: The smallest unit governed by autonomous village assemblies (Sabhas), which handled local administration, irrigation, crime, and census records.

The judicial system had local courts for minor offenses and royal officials presiding over town and district courts, with the king as the supreme judge. The Pallavas maintained a standing army with foot soldiers, cavalry, and war elephants. They also developed a navy, establishing dockyards at Mahabalipuram and Nagapattinam, facilitating trade with Southeast Asia.

Land and Revenue System

The king theoretically owned all land, with villages categorized as:

- **Inter-caste villages**: Paid taxes to the king.

- **Brahmadeya villages**: Granted to Brahmins and tax-exempt.

- **Agrahara settlements**: Entire villages allocated to Brahmins.

- **Devadana villages**: Revenue dedicated to temple maintenance.
- **Sripatti (Tank land)**: Revenue used for water tank upkeep.

Taxes included land revenue (one-sixth to one-tenth of produce) and additional levies on cattle, marriage parties, and artisans. Government expenditure primarily funded the military.

The Pallavas adapted the Mauryan administrative model to suit Tamil conditions. Their governance ensured stability, peace, and prosperity. Their contributions to temple architecture, literature, and governance remain a significant part of South Indian history.

Self-Check Exercise-2

Q.1   What was the largest administrative unit under the Pallavas?

Q.2   Who assisted the Pallava king in managing the administration?

Q.3   What types of grants did the Pallava king offer to temples?

15.5 Society during the Pallava Period

The Pallava era brought notable changes to Tamil society. The caste system became more rigid, with Brahmins gaining prominence. They received land grants from the king and nobility and were responsible for temple management. During this time, Saivism and Vaishnavism flourished, while Buddhism and Jainism declined.

The Bhakti Movement gained momentum, fueled by the devotional hymns of the Saiva Nayanmars and Vaishnava Alwars, composed in Tamil. These hymns promoted intense devotion (Bhakti) and played a crucial role in the expansion of Saivism and Vaishnavism. The Pallava rulers supported this religious shift by constructing numerous temples.

Moreover, the era witnessed significant socio-economic growth, largely driven by the Bhakti Movement and temple-building initiatives, leading to cultural and social transformation.

15.5.1 Social Structure

Pallava society was primarily divided into four groups: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas, and Sudras. Additionally, several subcastes existed based on occupation. Brahmins, considered the highest in the hierarchy, were learned scholars and temple priests, residing in designated areas called Agraharams. They received extensive land grants known as Brahmadeyas and played an essential role in religious rituals and governance. The Kshatriyas, mainly comprising the ruling and warrior class, held the next position and made generous donations to temples and Brahmins. The

Vaisyas, engaged in agriculture and trade, contributed to societal development by establishing charitable institutions such as mutts and choultries. The Sudras occupied the lowest position and primarily served as laborers. However, some Sudras, due to their deep devotion, attained religious prominence and were venerated as saints.

15.5.2 Status of Women

Women from royal and affluent backgrounds enjoyed a high status, including property rights. They were devout and frequently donated to temples and Brahmins. Chastity was highly valued among women. However, women from middle and lower economic strata had to work to sustain their livelihood, engaging in activities such as spinning and weaving. Additionally, the society had a group of professional dancing girls employed in temples for their expertise in music and dance.

Food, Dress, and Ornaments

Rice was the staple food, along with milk, ghee, and curd. People commonly wore simple cotton garments, while the wealthy preferred silk attire. Sculptures from this period depict various ornaments, including earrings, bangles, necklaces, and anklets.

15.5.3 Education and Literature

The Pallavas were ardent supporters of learning, with their capital, Kanchi, emerging as a prominent educational hub. The Ghatika at Kanchi attracted students from across India and beyond. Prominent scholars associated with Kanchi included Mayurasarman, Dinganaga, and Dharmapala, who later became the head of Nalanda University.

This period saw the rise of eminent Sanskrit scholars like Bharavi and Dandin, while Mahendravarman I authored the Sanskrit play *Mattavilasaprahasanam*. Tamil literature also flourished, with the Nayanmars and Alwars composing devotional hymns. Influential works such as *Thevaram* and *Nalayradivyaprabandam* played a pivotal role in religious expression. Other notable contributions included *Bharathavenba* by Perundevanar and *Nandikkalambagam*.

Music and Dance-The Pallava period witnessed a cultural renaissance, particularly in sacred literature. Both Tamil and Sanskrit literature thrived, with devotional hymns from Shaivite and Vaishnavite saints shaping religious movements. Kanchi remained a significant center for Sanskrit education, producing scholars who later contributed to renowned institutions like Nalanda University.

15.5.4 Pallava Art and Architecture

The Pallavas made significant advancements in architecture, pioneering the Dravidian style. Their architectural contributions are classified into two main types:

cave temples and structural temples. The cave temples are further divided into the Mahendra and Narasimha styles, while structural temples belong to the Rajasimha and Nandivarman styles.

Cave Temple Styles:

- **Mahendra Style:** Introduced by Mahendravarman I, this style was influenced by cave temples in Vijayawada, Sittanavasal, and Undavalli. His cave temples, located in Trichy, Mahendravadi, Mamandur, and Mandagapattu, featured pillared halls with slender, round columns. The first cave temple at Mandagapattu housed shrines dedicated to Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. The Trichy cave temple is especially known for its stone fresco depicting Ganga Dhara Shiva.
- **Narasimha Style:** Narasimhavarman I expanded temple construction using rock-cut and stone structures. His contributions included cave temples, mandapas, and monolithic shrines. Notable mandapas include Tirumurthi Mandapa, Kottikal Mandapa, and Varaha Mandapa. The monolithic shrines, known as rathas, include the famous Panchapandava Rathas in Mahabalipuram, named after the Pandavas.

Structural Temple Styles:

- **Rajasimha Style:** This style gained prominence under Narasimhavarman II (Rajasimha). Key temples from this period include the Kailasanatha Temple and Vaikunta Perumal Temple in Kanchi, as well as the Shore Temple in Mahabalipuram. The Kailasanatha Temple stands out for its intricate carvings and elaborate decoration.
- **Nandivarman or Aparajitha Style:** Later Pallava rulers, like Nandivarman II, built larger versions of earlier temples. Notable examples include the Mukteswara and Mukundiswara temples in Kanchi, the Virathaneswara Temple in Tirutani, and the Vadamalliswara Temple in Orgadam.

Sculpture

Sculptural art flourished during this period, with Mahabalipuram showcasing significant examples. Masterpieces such as *Arjuna's Penance* (also known as *Descent of the Ganges*) and *Bhagiratha's Penance* exemplify Pallava craftsmanship.

Fine Arts

Music, dance, and painting flourished under Pallava patronage. The Mamandur inscription references musical notations, while the Kudumianmalai inscription mentions various musical instruments. The hymns of Alwars and Nayanmars were composed in different musical styles. Dance also evolved, as reflected in numerous sculptures depicting various dance postures. The Sittannavasal paintings from this period showcase Pallava artistry. Mahendravarman

I, known as *Chitrakarapuli*, was an accomplished painter and contributed significantly to painting and dramatic literature. His Sanskrit play *Mattavilasaprahasanam* is an example of Pallava literary excellence.

The Pallava era marked a significant transformation in South Indian society, religion, literature, and art, laying the foundation for the Dravidian architectural tradition that would influence subsequent dynasties.

Self-Check Exercise-3

Q-1   Elaborate political history of early Pallavas.

Q-2   Write a short note on Pallava's Administration.

Q-3   Pallava's development is comprehended by their art and architecture. Comments!

15.6 Summary

The Pallavas ruled northern Tamil Nadu and southern Andhra Pradesh from the 2nd to 9th centuries CE. They emerged as a significant power following the decline of the Satavahanas, under whom they initially served as feudatories. Various legends surround their origins. Throughout their reign, the Pallavas faced conflicts with major kingdoms. Early tensions arose between the Pallavas and the Kadambas, while a prolonged struggle for dominance in peninsular India unfolded between the Pallavas and the Chalukyas of Badami, particularly over the Krishna-Tungabhadra region. This conflict reignited in the early 8th century, leading to several Pallava defeats. Eventually, the Chalukyas overran the Pallavas in 240 CE, ending their supremacy in South India.

Pallava architecture is renowned for its rock-cut temples (610–690 CE) and structural temples (690–900 CE). Several cave temples bear inscriptions from Mahendravarman I and his successors. The most remarkable examples of Pallava architecture are the rock-cut temples of Mahabalipuram, including pillared halls and monolithic shrines known as *rathas*.

15.7 Glossary

- **Pallava Dynasty:** A South Indian dynasty that ruled from the early 4th to late 9th century CE. They initially served as Satavahana subordinates before establishing their rule in Andhra and Tamil Nadu, with Kanchipuram as their capital.
- **Mahendravarman I:** A prominent Pallava ruler of the early 7th century CE, known for his contributions to art, architecture, music, and literature.

15.8 Answers to Self-Check Exercises

Self-Check Exercise-1

A.1   The Pallava dynasty was founded by Simhavishnu in the 3rd century CE. He established their rule in the region corresponding to present-day Tamil Nadu, India.

A.2   The title *Vatapi Konda* ("Conqueror of Vatapi") was assumed by Narasimhavarman I after his victory over Pulakeshin II of the Chalukya dynasty. This triumph marked a significant milestone in South Indian history, strengthening Pallava dominance.

A.3   *Avanti Sundari Katha* ("The Story of Avanti Sundari") is a Sanskrit romance attributed to Dandin, a prominent figure in classical Indian literature known for his other influential works.

Self-Check Exercise-2

A.1   Under Pallava rule, the largest administrative unit was the *mandalam* or province, further divided into smaller units for efficient governance.

A.2   The Pallava administration was supported by several officials:

- o **Maharaja:** Chief minister responsible for policy-making.
- o **Senapati:** Commander-in-chief of the military.
- o **Mahabaladhikrita:** Chief treasurer managing state finances.
- o **Duta:** Ambassadors handling diplomatic affairs.
- o **Rajaguru:** Royal advisor on spiritual matters.
- o **Mantri:** Ministers overseeing specific administrative functions like finance, justice, and agriculture.

A.3   The Pallavas issued several types of grants to support temples and religious institutions:

- o **Devadana:** Land or village donations for temple maintenance and rituals.
- o **Brahmadeya:** Tax-free land grants for temple support.
- o **Shalabhoga:** Revenue from specific taxes or tolls allocated to temples.

Self-Check Exercise-3

A.1   The Pallavas emerged around the 3rd century CE under Simhavishnu, initially serving as Satavahana feudatories before gaining independence. Their influence expanded under Mahendravarman I, extending into northern Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. They faced continuous conflicts with the Cholas and Chalukyas. Narasimhavarman I, known as *Mamalla*, reached the pinnacle of Pallava power by defeating Pulakeshin II and assuming the title *Vatapikonda*, solidifying Pallava dominance in South India.

A.2   The Pallava administration was a centralized monarchy supported by a hierarchical bureaucracy. The king governed with the assistance of officials like the *Maharaja* (prime minister) and *Senapati* (military commander). The kingdom was divided into *mandalams*, administered by governors. They promoted religious patronage through *Devadana* and *Brahmadeya* grants while facilitating trade and economic prosperity through well-maintained roads and ports.

A.3   The Pallavas left an enduring legacy in South Indian art and architecture, characterized by:

- **Monumental Temples:** Grand temples like the Shore Temple (Mahabalipuram) and Kailasanatha Temple (Kanchipuram).
- **Rathas (Chariot Temples):** Monolithic rock-cut temples, such as the Pancha Rathas at Mahabalipuram.
- **Mandapas and Gopurams:** Pillared halls for gatherings and ornate gateways with intricate sculptures.
- **Rock-cut Architecture:** Intricately carved cave temples, especially in Mahabalipuram.
- **Artistic Sculptures:** Detailed stone carvings depicting deities, celestial beings, and narrative panels.

15.9 Suggested Readings

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15.10 Terminal Questions

1. Provide a brief account of the military achievements of Narasimhavarman I.
2. Analyze the administrative structure of the Pallavas.
3. Discuss the political history of the Pallavas, emphasizing the reign of Mahendravarman I.

Unit -16

Transition to Early Medieval India: Emergence of Rajputs

Structure:

16.1 Introduction

The origin of the Rajputs remains a subject of debate, with various theories proposed to explain their ancestry. These include the Agnikula, Tribal, Foreign, Kshatriya, and Mixed Origin theories. Emerging during the early medieval period, the Rajputs played a crucial role in shaping Indian history. The Rajput era, spanning from 647 CE to 1200 CE, began after Harsha's death and saw the rise of numerous Rajput dynasties that dominated India's political landscape.

16.2 Learning Objectives

After completing this lesson, learners will be able to:

- Understand the emergence of Rajput kingdoms in northern India.
- Learn about the tripartite struggle and the rise of the Gurjara-Pratiharas.

16.3 Meaning and Significance of the Term "Rajput"

The term *Rajput* originates from the Sanskrit word *Rajaputra*, meaning "son of the king." Its Prakrit variants include Rawat, Rauta, Raul, and Rawal. Over time, its meaning evolved, and by the 2nd century CE, it began to appear in texts referring to landowners rather than just royal heirs.

In Banabhatta's *Harshacharita* (2nd century CE), *Rajputra* referred to nobles or landowning chiefs. Similarly, in *Kadambari*, it denoted individuals of noble lineage appointed as local rulers. These rulers managed significant landholdings and participated actively in state administration.

In *Rajatarangini*, the term *Rajputra* signified landowners from the thirty-six Rajput clans, highlighting their established presence by the 12th century CE. By this time, the term had gained broader usage.

Bhatta Bhuvanadeva's 12th-century text *Aparajitprachha*, which describes the feudal system, identifies *Rajaputras* as petty chiefs governing multiple villages. The title encompassed a wide range of ranks, from royal sons to lower-ranking landowners within the feudal hierarchy.

16.3.1 Rajputra as a Military Chief

The role of Rajputs as mercenary soldiers dates back to the 2nd century CE, as evidenced by references in the Bakshali manuscript from the North-West Frontier Province and the *Chachnama* from Sindh in the 8th century CE. Bardic traditions of the time often portrayed Rajputs as skilled horsemen.

The Pratiharas, one of the prominent Rajput clans, proudly adopted the title *Haypati* ("lord of horses"). The military character of the Rajputras is further reflected in *Lekhpaddhati* (a collection of model documents from Gujarat and Western Marwar), which mentions land grants provided in exchange for military services.

One charter from *Lekhpaddhati* describes how a *Rajputra* applied to a *Ranaka* (a feudal chief) for a fief. Upon being granted a village, the *Rajputra* was responsible

for maintaining law and order, collecting revenues, and providing 100 foot soldiers and 20 cavalrymen for the *Ranaka*'s service.

The *Rajputras* had limited rights over the land and were prohibited from gifting uncultivated land to temples or Brahmanas. In some cases, they also received cash endowments for supplying soldiers. Besides military obligations, they were required to pay revenue in both cash and kind, strictly adhering to deadlines. Delayed payments incurred interest penalties.

16.3.2 Rajputras as Sons of Kings and Officials

Under the Gahadawalas and Chahamanas, *Rajaputras* primarily referred to the sons of reigning kings, who held significant administrative roles and governed estates granted by the monarchs.

The Gahadawala *Rajaputras* enjoyed the privilege of using distinct seals, separate from the royal insignia. Their active involvement in governance often afforded them royal prerogatives, particularly under the Chahamanas. Some *Rajaputras* managed all royal and administrative affairs and had the authority to grant land, subject to the king's approval.

In the Chahamana kingdom, *Rajaputras* and *Maharajaputras* frequently served as governors. They were assigned fiefs (*seja*) for sustenance, though these estates were not considered personal property. Central authorities retained control over the revenues, and *Rajaputras* could not alienate land from their fiefs. However, they could occasionally allocate small portions for charitable purposes without royal consent.

Not all Chahamana *Rajaputras* were direct royal descendants; some held the title as feudatory chiefs or administrative officials, managing estates under the king's supervision.

16.3.3 The Thirty-Six Rajput Clans

Several historical texts, including *Prithviraj Raso*, *Kumarapalacharita*, *Varnaratnakar*, and an ancient Jain temple inscription from Marwar, reference thirty-six prominent Rajput clans. Col. James Tod extensively researched these sources, compiling a list after refining vernacular inconsistencies. However, comparisons with the original texts reveal that Tod's compilation included some tribal groups of foreign origin alongside Rajput sub-clans that emerged later.

Self-Check Exercise-1

Q.1   How many clans are the Rajputs traditionally divided into?

Q.2   Who founded the Guhilot Dynasty?

Q.3   Who authored *Prithviraj Raso*?

Q.4   Which Rajput dynasty ruled over Gujarat?

16.4 Origin of Rajputs: Theories and Perspectives

The origin of the Rajputs remains a topic of scholarly debate, with various theories attempting to explain their emergence.

1. Agnikula Origin: A Mythical Perspective

According to *Prithviraj Raso* (12th century) by Chand Bardai, the Chalukya, Pratihara, Paramara, and Chahamana Rajputs emerged from a fire pit created by Sage Vashistha at Mount Abu. This legend claims that Vashistha summoned warriors from the sacred fire to combat demonic forces disrupting a sacrificial ritual. While bardic traditions uphold this account, scholars like Watson, Forbes, Campbell, and D. R. Bhandarkar argue that the so-called Agnikula Rajputs were of Gurjara descent. However, historian Pratipal Bhatia challenges this view, suggesting that "Gurjara" was more of a regional identity rather than an ethnic one.

Ancient texts like the *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas* classify the Rajputs under the Solar (Suryavanshi) and Lunar (Chandravanshi) dynasties. For example, Chandella inscriptions trace their lineage to the Lunar race of Kshatriyas. Over time, bardic accounts of Agnikula origin gained prominence, replacing earlier traditions of solar and lunar ancestry in Rajput genealogies.

2. Socio-Political Theories on Rajput Emergence

B. N. S. Yadav's View:
Yadav attributes the rise of Rajput clans in Rajasthan and Gujarat to socio-political instability following foreign invasions and the decline of the Gupta Empire. As feudal structures strengthened, ruling landowning aristocracies gained prominence. Between 650 and 750 CE, clans like the Gurjaras, Guhilots, Chahamanas, and Chapas emerged in northern India, attaining independent rule by the 8th century. The Gurjara-Pratiharas were the first Rajput dynasty to establish political control over Kannauj and other regions.

D. C. Sircar's Perspective:
Drawing from *Rajatarangini* by Kalhana, Sircar suggests that the term *rajputra* initially referred to landowners rather than a distinct warrior caste. By the 12th century CE, Rajput clans had established a distinct identity, with 36 major clans recognized by this time.

3. Processual Theory: A Dynamic Approach by B. D. Chattopadhyaya

B. D. Chattopadhyaya views Rajput emergence as a continuous process shaped by regional and historical contexts rather than a single ancestral lineage. His analysis highlights several key factors:

Agrarian and Territorial Expansion:
Rajput settlements facilitated territorial expansion and economic development. Inscriptions from western and central India document Rajput growth through the suppression of tribal groups like the Bhils, Pulindas, and Sabaras. For instance, the Guhilas established their kingdom on former Bhil settlements in the 2nd century CE,

while the Chahamanas expanded into forested regions like Jangaladesh (modern Rajasthan).

Mobility to Kshatriya Status:
Many Rajput clans originated from diverse backgrounds, including tribal and foreign groups. For instance, the Meds and Hunas were assimilated into the Kshatriya status through upward social mobility. Newly emerging dynasties often transitioned through the Brahma-Kshatra phase, where they first held Brahmanical ties before asserting Kshatriya status.

Political Dominance and Legitimacy:
Ruling Rajput families often crafted genealogies linking them to divine or noble ancestry to enhance their legitimacy. The Gurjara-Pratiharas, for example, claimed descent from Brahma, Surya, or Indra to establish their noble lineage. Thus, Rajput formation was closely tied to political and military success.

Feudatory to Independent Rule:
Several Rajput clans transitioned from vassals to independent rulers. The Guhilas of Mewar, the Gurjaras of Gujarat, and the Chahamanas of Rajasthan initially served as feudatories before asserting independence through military strength and territorial expansion.

Land Distribution System:
Economic power significantly contributed to Rajput consolidation. Unlike other landholders, royal kinsmen among the Pratihara, Chahamana, and Guhila clans held hereditary land rights, distributing land without requiring royal approval, thereby reinforcing their status and autonomy.

Fortifications and Military Strength:
Rajput clans consolidated their power by constructing forts, which not only provided defense but also served as centers of economic and political control. Rajasthan, in particular, became known for its fortified settlements, marking the rise of several Rajput dynasties.

Inter-Clan Relations and Marriage Alliances:
Marital ties among Rajput clans promoted social cohesion and political cooperation. Such alliances played a vital role in consolidating Rajput authority and integrating new clans into the Rajput hierarchy. The movement of Rajput nobles between courts further strengthened their influence.

16.4.1 Major Rajput States after the Gurjara-Pratiharas

After the decline of the Gurjara-Pratiharas, several prominent Rajput dynasties rose to power:

The Gahadawalas:
The Gahadawalas ruled Kannauj from the 11th century, controlling much of the Gangetic Doab between 1090 and 1193 CE. Muslim historians often associated King Jayachandra with Benares due to its strategic and religious significance. The Gahadawalas frequently clashed with the Chahamanas.

The Chahamanas:

Rising to prominence after the Gurjara-Pratiharas' decline, the Chahamanas gained independence by 923 CE. Their main branch, the Chauhans of Sapadalaksha (Jangaladesh), established their capital at Ajayameru (modern Ajmer), founded by King Ajayaraja. Their rule ended with Prithviraj III's defeat in the Second Battle of Tarain (1192 CE). The Chahamanas often engaged in conflicts with the Chalukyas and Chandellas.

The Chandellas:

Once feudatories of the Gurjara-Pratiharas, the Chandellas ruled central India, particularly the Jejakabhukti region (modern Bundelkhand), between the 10th and 13th centuries. Key strongholds included Kalanjar, Khajuraho, Mahoba, and Ajayagarh.

The Paramaras:

Emerging from the power struggle between the Gurjara-Pratiharas and the Rashtrakutas, the Paramaras dominated Gujarat, Malwa, and southern Rajputana, ruling cities like Ujjain, Dhar, Bhojpur, Shergarh, Mandu, and Depalpur.

The Chalukyas (Solankis):

By 950 CE, the Chalukyas controlled Gujarat and Kathiawad, initially as feudatories of the Gurjara-Pratiharas. They capitalized on the political instability following the Rashtrakuta decline to establish an independent kingdom in the Saraswati Valley, ruling Gujarat and Rajasthan between 940 and 1244 CE from their capital at Anhilawada (modern Patan).

The Vaghelas:

In the 13th century, the Vaghelas ruled Gujarat, including Anhilawada, with their capital at Dholka. Their ministers, Vastupala and Tejapala, famously constructed the Dilwara temples at Mount Abu.

The Kalachuris:

Initially serving as Gurjara-Pratihara feudatories, the Kalachuris later established independent rule. Known as the Kalachuris of Chedi or Tripuri, they governed from their capital at Tripuri (modern Tewar, near Jabalpur), expanding eastward to Gorakhpur and later toward Prayagraj and Varanasi.

The Guhilas:

Originally Pratihara vassals, the Guhilas declared independence in Mewar during the late 12th century. Maharana Hammir restored their power by recapturing Chittor from Muslim rule after its loss under Raval Ratnasimha in 1303 CE. This marked the beginning of Sisodia rule in Mewar, extending their influence over Amber, Gwalior, Raisen, Chanderi, and Kalpi.

The Kachhapagatas:

Initially feudatories of the Gurjara-Pratiharas, the Kachhapagatas seized control of Gwalior after defeating the ruler of Kannauj. By the 10th and 11th centuries, they had established independent rule in eastern Rajasthan and the Gwalior region.

The Kachhawahas of Dubkund:
Subordinates of the Chandellas, the Kachhawahas of Dubkund never assumed imperial titles, remaining vassals rather than sovereign rulers.

Each of these dynasties significantly shaped medieval Indian politics, engaging in power struggles and regional conflicts that defined the Rajput era.

16.4.2 Later Rajput States of Western and North-Eastern Rajasthan

After facing defeat by Muslim invaders, several Rajput clans sought refuge in Rajasthan, drawn by its secure terrain, hilly landscapes, and vast deserts, which provided natural defense. Recognizing the region's strategic advantages, clans like the Guhilas, Panwars, Chauhans, Sonigaras, Solankis, Parmaras, and Deoras established small principalities across western Rajasthan, including Khed, Barmer, Sojat, Mandor, Jalor, Bhinmal, Mahewa, Sirohi, and Abu.

Major Rajput Clans of Rajasthan:

Rathors:
Emerging as a major political force, the Rathors initially controlled several villages before annexing Khed from Raja Pratapsi of the Guhilas (1398–1423 CE). Their rule expanded to Pali, Khed, Bhadrajan, Kodana, Mahewa (Mallani), Barmer, Pokharan, Jaitaran, Siwana, parts of Nagaur, and Bikaner. Their dominance lasted until the death of Rao Ganga in 1529 CE.

Bhattis:
The Bhatti Rajputs ruled northeastern Rajasthan, with Jaisalmer as their stronghold from the 12th century onward.

Deora Chauhans:
A branch of the Chauhan dynasty, the Deoras ruled the Sirohi region, similar to the Bhatti dominance in Jaisalmer.

Kachhapagatas:
One branch of the Kachhapagatas established control over Dhundhar (later Amber and Jaipur, including Shekhawati) after displacing the indigenous Minas.

These Rajput clans significantly influenced Rajasthan's political and cultural landscape, leaving an enduring legacy in the region.

Self Check Exercise-2

Q-1   Which Rajput dynasty founded the city Dhilika (Delhi)?

Q-2   Who built 'Vikramsila University?

Q-3   Which Rajput fort is known as Golden Fort and is a UNESCO World Heritage site?

16.5 Expansion of Rajput Clans

Literary and inscriptional evidence from the early medieval period suggests that the Rajput polity developed through a process of clan proliferation. References to individuals from Rajput clans indicate that their political structure expanded gradually. Over time, inter-clan alliances became essential for consolidating power and strengthening the Rajput political system.

This expansion led to the formation of minor clans and sub-divisions within major clans, often due to the migration of certain members to new regions. As Rajput clans settled in various territories, their identity continued to grow, a process commonly referred to as "Rajputization." This process involved incorporating local elements into emerging sub-clans. Established Rajput clans frequently interacted with newly formed ones, integrating them into their social networks and thereby expanding their influence.

16.5.1 Rajput Political and Military System
Political Structure

The Rajput era was marked by continuous struggles for dominance among rival states. The king held supreme authority, overseeing executive, judicial, and military functions. While queens occasionally participated in governance, they were not officially assigned administrative roles, although some were involved in land grants with the king's approval.

The ministerial council acted as an advisory body on significant political issues, with many ministerial positions being hereditary. Officials often held feudal titles such as *rajaputra*, *ranaka*, *thakkura*, *samanta*, *mahasamanta*, and *raut*, alongside administrative titles like *mahasandhivigrahika*, *dutaka*, and *maha-akshapatalika*. The combination of hereditary positions and feudal ranks greatly enhanced their power.

Territorial administration was organized into units like *vishayas* and *bhuktis*, governed by powerful feudatories known as *mandaleshvaras*, *mandalikas*, *samantas*, *thakkuras*, *ranakas*, and *rajaputras*. At the village level, governance was handled by councils known as *panchkulas* (a five-member body similar to a panchayat), along with *mahajanas* and *mahattaras* (village elders). Administrative practices and titles varied across different Rajput clans.

Military Organization

The Rajput military system reflected their feudal political structure. Feudatory chiefs played a crucial role in military campaigns, primarily serving the king or overlord during wartime. Literary sources like *Lekhapaddhati*, *Prithvirajvijaya Mahakavya*, and contemporary inscriptions emphasize these obligations. However, personal conflicts among feudal lords often disrupted administration, and during periods of royal weakness, powerful feudatories frequently asserted their independence.

The Rajput military was organized in a bureaucratic-feudal manner, lacking uniform strategies and standardized troop organization. Each dynasty structured its forces according to its needs. A significant drawback of the Rajput military was its

technological inferiority compared to the Turks, who excelled in mounted archery and strategic warfare. However, the Rajputs used siege machines like *munjaniqs* and *arradas* (stone-hurling devices), similar to those employed by the Arabs and Turks. These machines, inspired by Greek and Roman siege weapons like the mangonel and catapult, were likely adopted from their Muslim adversaries.

16.5.2 Rajput Forts and Strongholds

Forts held immense strategic importance under Rajput rule, serving as critical defensive structures against invasions, particularly from Muslim forces. Their scale and impregnability often made them prime targets for sieges. Recognizing their military significance, Rajput rulers focused on fortifying existing structures and building new ones to enhance their defenses.

The fort of Mandor, believed to have been originally built by the Pratiharas around the 2nd century CE, is one such example. Among Rajput clans, the Chandellas were renowned for constructing numerous formidable forts. The Chauhans and Paramaras were also prominent fort builders in Rajasthan, with many significant fortifications either constructed or renovated by them. The Mandalgarh Fort is thought to have been built by a Chauhan ruler of Ajmer, likely in the 13th century CE. Similarly, the Nagaur Fort, northeast of Jodhpur, is attributed to one of the feudatories of the Chauhan king Someshvara, the father of Prithviraj III.

The Paramaras built several forts, including Achalgarh, constructed by the Paramara chiefs around 900 CE and later reconstructed by Maharana Kumbha in 1442 CE. These forts not only served as military strongholds but also symbolized the power and resilience of Rajput rulers throughout history.

16.6 Rise of Rajput States: Tripartite Struggle and the Emergence of the Gurjara-Pratiharas

The period following Harsha's reign witnessed significant political instability in northern India. Kannauj, the former seat of Harsha's empire, became the center of conflict among several regional powers. This rivalry, known as the Tripartite Struggle, involved three major dynasties—the Gurjara-Pratiharas, the Palas, and the Rashtrakutas. While no single power achieved absolute dominance, the Pratihara king Nagabhatta captured Kannauj in the 8th century CE, establishing his dynasty's supremacy in northern India. His rise was facilitated by internal conflicts within the Rashtrakuta dynasty. However, the rivalry persisted, with successive rulers continuing to battle for control.

During the reign of Bhoja I (c. 836–885 CE), the Pratiharas consolidated their power, reaffirming control over *Gurjaratrabhumi* (modern-day Jodhpur or Marwar). In the early 8th century, the Pratiharas had emerged as a formidable force by establishing their base in Ujjain, a key urban and political center in western Malwa. However, by the 10th century CE, the decline of the Pratihara dynasty allowed their feudatory chiefs to assert independence. Consequently, several Rajput clans, including the Chaulukyas, Chandellas, Chahmanas, Gahadawalas, Paramaras, Kalachuris, and Guhilas, established independent kingdoms across various regions.

Self-Check Exercise-3

Q.1   What is meant by the tripartite struggle?

Q.2   Describe the political and military organization of the Rajputs.

16.6 Summary

The Rajput political landscape from the 7th to 12th centuries reflects a fragmented India following the decline of Harsha's empire. The Gurjara-Pratiharas, originally feudatory chiefs under Harsha in Ujjain, emerged as a significant political and military power, establishing their rule over Kannauj and surrounding regions of northern India. Their rise underscored the increasing role of military strength in the Rajput ascendancy.

Over time, many Gurjara-Pratihara feudatories in central and western India asserted their independence, further reinforcing the dominance of militarily powerful clans. The distribution of land among royal family members, feudatories, and officials played a key role in forming clans and sub-clans. The construction of strategically placed forts across central and western India symbolized the military might of Rajput clans.

Marriage alliances among different clans helped strengthen their social and political standing. The rise of the Rajputs was not rooted in mythical Agnikula, solar, or lunar lineages but was shaped by historical, political, social, and economic factors. B.D. Chattopadhyay supports this view, arguing that Rajputs emerged from various social strata, including Kshatriyas, Brahmanas, and indigenous tribal groups, as evidenced by contemporary inscriptions.

16.7 Glossary

Tripartite Struggle: Also known as the Kannauj Triangle War, this conflict occurred in the 9th century CE among the Pratihara, Pala, and Rashtrakuta dynasties for dominance over northern India.

Rajput: A diverse group of castes, clans, and kinship-based communities in the Indian subcontinent, unified by shared social status and genealogical ideologies.

Rajputra: Derived from the Sanskrit words *"rajan"* (king) and *"putra"* (son), originally meaning "son of a king." During the feudal period, it came to denote a class of feudal chiefs holding estates.

Panchkula: A council of five members responsible for governing towns and villages.

Ranaka: A title used for feudal chiefs in northern India.

16.8 Answers to Self-Check Exercise
Self-Check Exercise-1

Ans.1: The Rajputs, known for their martial traditions and ruling dynasties in medieval India, are traditionally divided into thirty-six major clans, referred to as *"kulas."* These clans form the core of Rajput social and political structure, each tracing their lineage to a common ancestor or mythical origin. Every clan has its unique history, customs, and role within the larger Rajput identity.

Ans.2: The Guhilot dynasty, also known as the Gehlot dynasty, traces its roots to Bappa Rawal, its founder in the 8th century CE. They ruled Mewar, in present-day Rajasthan, and played a crucial role in its defense and governance. The Guhilot lineage continued through successive rulers for centuries, shaping the region's history.

Ans.3: *"Prithviraj Raso"* is an epic poem by Chand Bardai, the court poet of Prithviraj Chauhan, the Rajput ruler of Delhi and Ajmer. It narrates the heroic exploits of Prithviraj Chauhan, blending historical events with folklore. The poem is a significant work of medieval Indian literature, glorifying Rajput valor and chivalry.

Ans.4: The Chaulukya, or Solanki dynasty, was a prominent Rajput lineage that ruled Gujarat from the 10th to 13th centuries CE. Their capital was Anahilapataka (modern-day Patan). They were known for their architectural achievements, including the Sun Temple at Modhera and the intricately carved Rani ki Vav stepwell in Patan.

Self-Check Exercise-2

Ans.1: The Tomara dynasty, a Rajput lineage, is credited with founding Dhilika, the city that later became Delhi. Anangpal Tomar, who ruled in the early 11th century CE, is regarded as its founder. The Tomaras were among the first Rajput dynasties to establish a significant kingdom in northern India, making Delhi an important political and cultural center.

Ans.2: Vikramashila University was founded by King Dharmapala of the Pala dynasty in the late 8th to early 9th century CE. Located in present-day Bihar, it became a renowned center for Buddhist studies, particularly the Vajrayana tradition. The university attracted scholars from across India and played a key role in promoting intellectual and cultural exchange.

Ans.3: Jaisalmer Fort, often called the "Golden Fort," is a UNESCO World Heritage site in Rajasthan. Built by Rawal Jaisal in the 12th century CE, it is one of the world's largest and best-preserved fortified cities. Its golden-yellow sandstone architecture gives it a distinctive glow, especially at sunset. Located along ancient trade routes, the fort remains a vibrant, living community today.

Self-Check Exercise-3

Ans.1: The Tripartite Struggle, or the Three-Way Conflict, was a prolonged power struggle among three major Indian dynasties—the Gurjara-Pratiharas, Rashtrakutas, and Palas—between the 8th and 10th centuries CE.

- **Gurjara-Pratiharas:** A powerful Rajput dynasty ruling northern India, known for their military strength and governance.
- **Rashtrakutas:** A prominent dynasty of Kannada-speaking rulers from southern and central India, famous for their architectural contributions and patronage of the arts.
- **Palas:** A dynasty ruling Bengal and Bihar, renowned for promoting Buddhism and advancing education and culture.

This struggle involved shifting alliances, territorial disputes, and frequent battles as these dynasties vied for supremacy over the Indian subcontinent. It marked an era of political instability, military competition, and cultural exchange across regions.

Ans.2: The Rajputs, renowned for their valor and martial traditions, developed a distinctive political and military structure:

Political System:

- **Feudal Organization:** Rajput society followed a feudal structure, with power decentralized among various clans or dynasties. Each ruled a specific territory, known as a *thikana* or *jagir*.
- **Rajputana:** Rajasthan, historically known as Rajputana, served as the heartland of Rajput power, with different clans governing their respective regions.
- **Confederacies:** At times, Rajput rulers formed alliances to counter external threats, such as the confederation against the Delhi Sultanate during the early medieval period.

Military System:

- **Warrior Culture:** Rajputs were trained from a young age in horse riding, archery, swordsmanship, and combat techniques.
- **Cavalry:** The core of Rajput military strength lay in their heavily armored cavalry, known for swift battlefield maneuvers.
- **Fortifications:** Rajput forts, like Chittorgarh, Jaisalmer, and Mehrangarh, were strategically located and well-defended, serving as administrative and defensive centers.
- **Leadership:** Rajput military leadership was decentralized, with each principality having its commanders (*senapatis*), often chosen based on valor, experience, and lineage.

16.9 Suggested Readings

- Bhatia, Pratipal (1920). *The Paramaras*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manharlal.
- Chattopadhyaya, B. D. (1998). *Origin of the Rajputs: The Political, Economic, and Social Processes in Early Medieval Rajasthan*, in *Making of Early Medieval India*, 2nd ed. Oxford University Press.

- Tod, James (1920). *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, edited by William Gooke, Vol. I. London: Oxford University Press.

16.10 Terminal Questions

1. What are the historical perspectives on the origin of the Rajputs?
2. Describe the later Rajput states in western and northeastern India.
3. Explain the political and military organization of the Rajputs.

Unit-17

The Emergence of Gujjar Pratihar

Structure:

17.1. Introduction

17.2. Learning Objectives

17.3. Emergence of Rajput

      17.3.1. Descendants of the Kshatriyas

      17.3.2. Foreign Origin

      17.3.3. Agnikula Theory

      17.3.4. The Gurjara-Pratihara

      17.3.5. Origin of the Pratiharas

Self Check Exercise-1

17.4 Political History of the Dynasty

      17.4.1. Nagabhatta I

      17.4.2. Vatsaraja

      17.4.3. Nagabhatta II

      17.4.4. Mihirbhoj

      17.4.5. Mahendrapala and his successor

Self Check Exercise-2

17.5 Administration of the Pratihara

 Self- Check Exercise-3

17.6 Summary

17.7 Glossary

17.8 Answer to the Self-Check Exercise

17.9 Suggested Readings

17.10 Terminal Questions

17.1 Introduction

The period from 750 to 1200 C.E. is recognized as the early medieval era of Indian history. During this time, India was fragmented into several regional kingdoms, often engaged in conflicts with one another. Despite these political divisions, the era witnessed remarkable cultural advancements in art, literature, and language.

After the decline of Harshavardhana, three major political powers emerged: the Gurjara-Pratiharas in the north, the Palas in the east, and the Rashtrakutas in the

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south. These dynasties were embroiled in a prolonged struggle for dominance over the Gangetic plains, historically referred to as the *Tripartite Struggle*.

This chapter focuses on the rise of the Rajput clans, with a particular emphasis on the Gurjara-Pratiharas, their influence on Indian polity, and their contributions to various aspects of Indian history.

17.2 Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, learners will be able to:

- Identify the various Rajput clans that emerged after the decline of Harsha's empire.
- Analyze the different theories regarding the origin of the Rajput clans.
- Explain the origin and political significance of the Gurjara-Pratiharas in Indian history.

17.3 Emergence of Rajput

The period following Harsha's death marked a transitional phase in Indian history, characterized by political instability and the rise of the Rajput clans. These clans began to play a prominent role in the political landscape of northern and western India from the 8th century C.E. onward.

The term *Rajput* refers to a group or clan identifying as Kshatriyas, claiming descent from either the Solar (*Suryavansha*) or Lunar (*Chandravansha*) dynasties. Despite extensive research, the origins of the Rajputs remain a topic of scholarly debate, leading historians to propose various theories regarding their ancestry.

17.3.1 Rajputs as Descendants of Kshatriyas

Many scholars believe that the Rajputs descended from Brahmin or Kshatriya lineages. The term *Rajput* is thought to be derived from *Rajaputra*. Ancient inscriptions refute the idea of their foreign origins or emergence from a sacrificial fire ritual.

According to some historians, the founders of prominent Rajput dynasties, such as the Chauhans, Gehlots, Pallavas, Kadambas, Pratiharas, and Parmaras, were originally Brahmins. Literary sources like the Indian Puranas and the writings of Bana identify Rajputs as high-born Kshatriyas.

The period between Harsha's decline and the Turkish invasions saw the dominance of Rajput rulers, leading historians to term it the *Rajput Era*. As a landowning and warrior community, Rajputs played a significant role in shaping northern India's political landscape during this time.

17.3.2 The Theory of Foreign Origin

Some scholars suggest that the Rajputs were descendants of foreign invaders, such as the Sakas, Kushanas, and Huns, who integrated into Indian society and adopted Hindu customs. The elite among these groups are believed to have been recognized as Rajputs.

One hypothesis proposes that the Gurjaras, who entered India through Afghanistan and settled in various regions, became the ancestors of the Rajputs. However, this theory lacks universal acceptance. Similarities in customs, such as horse worship and social practices, between the Rajputs and Scythian tribes further support the argument for a foreign origin.

17.3.3 Agnikula Theory

According to Chand Bardai, the court poet of Prithviraja Chauhan, the Rajputs originated from a sacrificial fire pit (*yajna*). The legend claims that after the sage Parashurama eradicated the Kshatriyas, ancient sages performed a yajna on Mount Abu to create new warriors to protect the Vedic religion.

From this fire emerged four heroes, whose descendants became the Chauhans, Solankis, Parmaras, and Pratiharas—known as the *Agnivanshi Rajputs*.

In contrast, the *Suryavanshi Rajputs* claimed descent from the Sun and ruled regions like Mewar, Marwar, and Amber, while the *Chandravanshi Rajputs* traced their lineage to the Moon and governed areas such as Gujarat and Jaisalmer.

Regardless of their origins, the Rajputs are recognized as one of India's most formidable warrior clans, renowned for their aristocratic status and martial prowess.

17.3.4 The Gurjara-Pratihara Dynasty

Among the prominent Rajput clans, the Pratiharas left a significant legacy. Their influence stretched from Punjab to Central India and from Kathiawar to North Bengal.

For nearly three centuries, they served as a bulwark against Muslim invasions and played a vital role in politically unifying India after the fall of Harsha's empire.

17.3.5 Origins of the Pratiharas

Epigraphic records suggest that the Pratiharas descended from Lakshmana of the Solar dynasty, as mentioned in the *Ramayana*. Some historians believe they were a branch of the Gurjara race, as referenced in the Aihole inscription of Pulakesin II, the writings of the Chinese traveler Hieun Tsang, and Bana's *Harshacharita*.

Rashtrakuta inscriptions also identify the Pratiharas as belonging to the Gurjara lineage. While some theories propose that the Gurjaras were Central Asian nomads who migrated to India alongside the Huns, others argue that they were indigenous to India. Another perspective suggests that the Pratiharas originated from the region of *Gurjaradesa*.

The term *Gurjara-Pratihara* appears in historical records dating back to the reign of Vatsaraja.

Rise and Expansion of the Gurjara-Pratiharas

The Gurjaras rose to prominence during the latter half of the 6th century C.E., leveraging the decline of the Gupta Empire to establish their political authority.

The most notable Pratihara kingdom was founded in Rajputana, near Jodhpur. From there, they expanded southward, seizing control of Avanti and eventually conquering Kannauj. The Avanti branch of the Pratiharas gained fame for their military successes against Arab invaders.

The Gurjara-Pratihara dynasty was founded by Nagabhatta I in the Malwa region during the 8th century C.E. A member of a Rajput clan, Nagabhatta successfully defended his territory against Arab invasions.

His successor, Vatsaraja, extended the kingdom across northern India and made Kannauj his capital. This expansion led to conflicts with the Pala ruler Dharmapala of Bengal and the Rashtrakuta king Dhruva from southern India, igniting the *Tripartite Struggle*—a prolonged power contest among these three dynasties that lasted nearly 150 years.

Legacy of the Gurjara-Pratiharas

Despite facing numerous challenges, the Gurjara-Pratiharas maintained control over Kannauj for an extended period. One of their most notable rulers, Mihirabhoja (9th century C.E.), earned high praise from the Arab traveler Sulaiman for ensuring the safety and stability of his empire.

The Gurjara-Pratiharas' legacy extends beyond their military achievements, as they also made significant contributions to the cultural and political landscape of early medieval India.

Self Check Exercise-1

Q-1   Who founded the Pratihara dynasty?

Q-2   By what other name is the Pratihara dynasty known?

Q-3   Which foreign traveller provided Records of the Pratihara Empire?

17.4 Political History of the Pratihara Dynasty

The Pratihara dynasty ruled from the 6th to the late 11th century CE. It was founded by Harichandra, who established his kingdom near present-day Jodhpur around the mid-6th century CE. Harichandra, a Brahmin, had two wives—one Brahmin and the other Kshatriya. His sons from the Brahmin wife were known as Pratihara Brahmins, while the sons from his Kshatriya wife established the ruling Pratihara lineage. His four sons later founded independent kingdoms in regions like Jodhpur, Nandipura, Broach, Ujjain, and nearby areas.

17.4.1 Nagabhata I (c. 730–756 CE)

Nagabhata I laid the foundation for the Pratihara dynasty's greatness. His reign was marked by successful resistance against Arab invasions, halting their expansion beyond Sindh and establishing an empire stretching from Gujarat to Gwalior. He engaged in conflicts with the Rashtrakuta ruler Dantidurga but faced defeat. Despite this setback, Nagabhata I left a vast empire, including Gujarat, Malwa, and parts of Rajputana, for his successors. He was succeeded by his brother's sons, Kakkuka and Devaraja.

17.4.2 Vatsaraja (c. 775–805 CE)

Vatsaraja, the successor of Nagabhata I, was an influential ruler who expanded the empire and made Ujjain his capital. His ambitions led to the conquest of northern and western India, including Kannauj and central Rajputana, after defeating Bhandi, possibly linked to the Vardhana dynasty. His control of Kannauj brought him into conflict with the Pala ruler Dharmapala and the Rashtrakuta king Dhruva. Although Vatsaraja initially defeated Dharmapala and extended his influence over northern India, he was later defeated by Dhruva, who seized Kannauj. Following his reign, Nagabhata II ascended the throne.

17.4.3 Nagabhata II (c. 805–833 CE)

Nagabhata II sought to restore the Pratihara Empire's lost prestige. After Vatsaraja's defeat by Dhruva, the Pratihara domain was confined to Rajputana. Determined to expand the empire, Nagabhata II launched successful campaigns, conquering Sindh, Andhra, Vidarbha, and Kalinga, while subduing the Matsyas in the north and the Vatsas in the east. He also resisted Turkic incursions in the west.

To reclaim Kannauj, Nagabhata II defeated Chakrayudh, the ruler installed by Dharmapala, and advanced eastward to Munger in Bihar. Though initially defeated by Rashtrakuta ruler Govinda III, he later regained control of Malwa. He also rebuilt the grand Shiva temple at Somnath, previously destroyed during an Arab raid. Under his reign, Kannauj emerged as the political and cultural hub of the Gurjara-Pratihara Empire. After him, his son Ramabhadra assumed the throne but proved ineffective, losing territory to the Pala king Devapala. Eventually, Mihirabhoja succeeded Ramabhadra and revitalized the dynasty.

17.4.4 Mihirabhoja (c. 836–885 CE)

Mihirabhoja ascended the throne in 836 CE, ushering in a golden era for the Pratihara dynasty. He strengthened the empire and achieved notable military successes:

Conquest of Bundelkhand: During his father's reign, Bundelkhand had gained independence. Mihirabhoja reconquered the region, reinstating charitable grants initiated by Nagabhata and securing Jayasakti's acknowledgment of his suzerainty.

Conquest of Rajputana: Inscriptions from Varaha, Daulatpur, and Kahala confirm Mihirabhoja's control over Rajputana. He subdued Kakkata of the Mandsor Pratihara

branch, who had declared independence. The Pratapgarh and Chatasu inscriptions further highlight his dominance over southern Rajputana.

Conquest of Punjab: Kalhana's *Rajatarangini* and the Pahewa inscription suggest Mihirabhoja controlled eastern Punjab. However, during his eastern campaigns, King Sankarvarman of Kashmir seized parts of this region.

Conquest of Western India: A copper plate inscription mentions Mihirabhoja's samanta, Balavarman, who defeated Vishad, expelled the Hunas, and conquered Malwa and Kathiawar. His empire spanned from Kathiawar and Punjab to Malwa and Madhyadesha. The Kalachuris of Bihar and the Chandelas of Bundelkhand accepted his suzerainty.

Beyond military achievements, Mihirabhoja was a patron of art and literature. His court hosted the renowned poet Rajasekhara, symbolizing the cultural prosperity of his reign.

17.4.5 Mahendrapala and His Successors

Mahendrapala succeeded Mihirabhoja and expanded the empire by annexing Magadha and parts of northern Bengal, though he lost some territories to Kashmir's rulers. His empire extended from the Himalayas to the Vindhyas and from the eastern to the western coast.

After Mahendrapala's death, a succession conflict weakened the dynasty. His son Bhoja II briefly ruled before being overthrown by his cousin Mahipala, who faced defeat from the Rashtrakuta ruler Indra III. Though Mahipala restored his rule after Indra III's retreat, the Pala rulers captured eastern territories, including Kalinjar and Chitrakuta. This period marked the beginning of the Pratihara dynasty's decline.

Mahipala was succeeded by his son Mahendrapala II, whose short reign lasted only a year. Over the next fifteen years, four rulers—Devapala, Vinayakapala II, Mahipala II, and Vijayapala—occupied the throne in rapid succession, reflecting internal strife. This instability further fragmented the Pratihara Empire, accelerating its decline, particularly during Devapala's reign

Decline of the Pratihara Dynasty

The decline of the Gurjara-Pratihara dynasty was marked by internal conflicts and external invasions. Several feudatories took advantage of the empire's temporary weakness during a war of succession and declared their independence. Notable among them were the Paramaras of Malwa, the Chandelas of Bundelkhand, and the Kalachuris of Mahakoshal.

The Rashtrakuta emperor Indra III briefly seized Kannauj, and though the Pratiharas managed to reclaim the city, their power continued to decline throughout the 10th century. This was partly due to the strain of simultaneously resisting Turkic

invasions from the west and the advancing Pala dynasty in the east. Over time, the Gurjara-Pratiharas lost control of Rajasthan to their former vassals, while the Chandelas captured the strategic fortress of Gwalior in 950 CE.

By the late 10th century, the Pratihara empire had diminished to a small kingdom centered around Kannauj. In 1018 CE, Mahmud of Ghazni sacked Kannauj, forcing the Pratihara ruler Rajapala to flee. He was later captured and executed by the Chandela ruler Gauda, who installed Rajapala's son, Trilochanpala, as a puppet ruler. The last Gurjara-Pratihara ruler of Kannauj, Jasapala, died in 1036 CE, marking the final disappearance of the dynasty from Indian history..

Self Check Exercise-2

Q-1   Which renowned temple is linked to the Pratihara dynasty?

Q-2   Who is the author of *Ramcharita*?

Q-3   Which Pratihara ruler held the title *Adi Varaha*?

Q-4   What architectural style is associated with the Pratihara dynasty?

17.5 Administration of the Pratiharas

In the Gurjara-Pratihara administration, the king held the highest position in the state and wielded immense power. Rulers adopted grand titles such as *Parameshwara*, *Maharajadhiraja*, and *Parambhattaraka*. The king was responsible for appointing *samantas* (feudatory chiefs) and granting lands and charities. These *samantas* provided military assistance to the king and fought on his behalf. Although high officials played a role in governance, inscriptions from the period do not mention a *mantriparishad* (council of ministers).

The Pratihara administration had eight key officials:

- **Kottapala –** Chief officer of the fort
- **Tantrapala –** Representative of the king in *samanta* territories
- **Dandapashika –** Head of the police
- **Dandanayaka** – In charge of military and justice
- **Dutaka –** Messenger responsible for delivering royal orders and grants
- **Bhangika –** Official who drafted orders for charities and grants
- **Vynaharina** – Likely a legal expert who provided legal counsel
- **Baladhikrita** – Chief of the army

The empire was administratively divided into multiple *bhuktis* (provinces), each consisting of several *mandalas* (districts), which in turn contained numerous cities and villages. The *samantas* were honored with titles like *Mahasamantahipati* or

MahaPratihara. Villages were locally governed by elders called *Mahattaras*, while *Gramapati*, a state-appointed officer, assisted in village administration.

Urban governance was managed by councils referred to in inscriptions as *Goshthi*, *Panchakula*, *Sanviyaka*, and *Uttar Sobha*. The well-structured administration of the Pratiharas played a crucial role in their ability to defend India against Arab invasions.

Self-Check Exercise-3

Q.1   Provide an overview of the political history of the Pratihara dynasty.
Q.2   Discuss the accomplishments of Mahendrapala and his successors.
Q.3   Examine the factors responsible for the decline of the Pratihara dynasty.

17.6 Summary

The Gurjara Pratihara dynasty, often referred to as the Pratihara Empire, was a significant power in northern India from the 6th to the 11th centuries. Kannauj served as the imperial capital of the Gurjara Pratiharas. By the 10th century, their rulers adopted the prestigious title of *Maharajadhiraja of Aryavarta*.

The Pratihara rulers traced their lineage to the Hindu mythological figure Lakshmana, who acted as a guardian (*pratihara*) to his elder brother Rama, thereby associating them with the Suryavansh dynasty in traditional Indology. The dynasty is believed to have been founded by Harichandra in the 6th century CE. Around 550 CE, following the decline of the Gupta Empire, he established a small kingdom at Bhinmal.

The weakening of central authority allowed the empire's feudatories to assert their independence, contributing to its decline. Additionally, repeated Turkish invasions further destabilized the Pratihara kingdom. However, the Pratiharas were known for successfully resisting foreign incursions from the West, beginning with Junaid's invasions, a feat that was openly acknowledged by Arab chroniclers.

17.7 Glossary

Gurjara-Pratihara Dynasty: Was a dynasty that ruled a significant portion of northern India from the mid-8th to 11th Century. They ruled first at Ujjain and later at Kannauj.

Agnikula: The ancestors of these Rajputs, of foreign origin, migrated to India following the decline of the Gupta Empire around the 5th century C.E.

17.8 Answer to the Self-Check Exercise

Self-Check Exercise-1

Ans.1: Nagabhata I established the Pratihara dynasty around the mid-8th century CE, consolidating his rule in present-day Rajasthan, India.

Ans.2: The Pratihara dynasty is also referred to as the Gurjara-Pratihara dynasty, highlighting its association with the Gurjara people, a prominent ethnic group of that period.

Ans.3: The Arab traveler and scholar Al-Biruni documented detailed accounts of the Pratihara Empire. During his visit to India in the 11th century, he extensively described the political and cultural landscape of the time, providing valuable insights into the Pratihara dynasty.

Self-Check Exercise-2

Ans.1: The Khajuraho Group of Monuments, renowned for their intricate sculptures and exquisite architecture depicting various aspects of life, is associated with the Pratihara dynasty. Located in present-day Madhya Pradesh, these temples reflect the cultural and religious heritage of the era, encompassing both Hindu and Jain traditions.

Ans.2: Sandhyakar Nandi was a medieval Indian poet from the Pala Empire, known for his epic poem *Ramacharitam*.

Ans.3: Bhoja I, also known as Mihira Bhoja, was a prominent ruler of the Pratihara dynasty who reigned in the early 9th century CE. He held the title *Adi Varaha*, symbolizing his strength and divine protection.

Ans.4: The Pratihara dynasty is closely associated with the *Nagara* style of temple architecture. This style is characterized by tall, curvilinear spires (*shikharas*), intricate carvings, and multiple shrines within a temple complex. These temples, often reflecting a blend of Hindu and Jain elements, were prominent in regions such as present-day Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.

Self-Check Exercise-3

Ans.1: The Pratihara dynasty, also known as the Gurjara-Pratihara dynasty, played a significant role in shaping medieval Indian politics from the 8th to the 11th centuries CE. Their political history can be traced through their rise, expansion, peak, and eventual decline.

Rise of the Pratiharas
The dynasty emerged in the 8th century CE under Nagabhata I, who established his rule in present-day Rajasthan. Initially local chieftains of Gurjara descent, they rose to prominence through military strength and strategic alliances. Nagabhata I's victories over the Rashtrakutas and other regional powers solidified the Pratiharas' dominance in northern India.

Expansion and Consolidation

Under leaders like Vatsaraja and Nagabhata II, the Pratihara Empire expanded significantly, extending from present-day Gujarat in the west to Uttar Pradesh in the east. This era witnessed advancements in culture and religion, with strong patronage of Brahmanical Hinduism and Jainism. Temple architecture flourished, particularly at Khajuraho and Bateshwar.

Peak under Bhoja I

Bhoja I, also known as Mihira Bhoja, elevated the dynasty to its zenith in the early 9th century. His reign was marked by military successes, administrative efficiency, and cultural patronage. He assumed the title *Adi Varaha*, symbolizing strength and divine protection. Bhoja I's court became a hub for scholars, poets, and intellectuals.

Challenges and Decline

The later phase of the Pratihara dynasty witnessed internal conflicts, weak rulers, and external invasions. Continuous battles with the Rashtrakutas and Ghaznavids drained their resources. Mahmud of Ghazni's invasion in 1018, culminating in the sack of Kannauj, marked a turning point that accelerated their decline.

Cultural Contributions and Legacy

Despite their decline, the Pratiharas made significant contributions to Indian art, architecture, and literature. They played a key role in developing the *Nagara* style of temple architecture and promoted literary works in Sanskrit, Prakrit, and regional languages.

The political history of the Pratihara dynasty reflects a complex narrative of military strength, cultural patronage, and eventual fragmentation. Their enduring contributions to Indian art, architecture, and literature continue to shape India's cultural landscape.

Ans.2: Mahendrapala I, the son and successor of Mihira Bhoja, ruled the Pratihara Empire from around 885 to 910 CE. Under his leadership, the empire reached its greatest territorial extent, encompassing modern-day Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar.

Mahendrapala I was a notable patron of arts and culture, supporting scholars like Rajasekhara, who adorned his court. His efficient administration ensured stability and prosperity, fostering intellectual and cultural growth.

His successor, Mahipala I, continued to uphold the dynasty's influence, though rising regional powers and internal conflicts gradually weakened the empire, ultimately leading to its decline by the 10th and 11th centuries.

Ans.3: Several interconnected factors contributed to the decline of the Pratihara dynasty:

1. **Internal Conflicts and Weak Rulers:** After Mahipala I's reign, succession disputes and internal conflicts weakened the central authority, resulting in territorial fragmentation.

2. **Pressure from Rashtrakutas and Palas:** Continuous conflicts with the Rashtrakutas in the south and the Palas in the east drained resources and diminished military strength.

3. **Invasions by Mahmud of Ghazni:** Repeated invasions by Mahmud of Ghazni in the early 11th century, including the sack of Kannauj, severely undermined the empire.

4. **Loss of Vassal Loyalty:** As central authority weakened, regional governors and vassals asserted independence, further diminishing Pratihara control.

5. **Economic Decline:** Prolonged wars and invasions disrupted trade routes and agriculture, adversely affecting the empire's economy.

6. **Cultural and Administrative Weakness:** The declining administrative structure and inability to manage a vast, diverse empire further contributed to their downfall.

17.9 Suggested Readings

- Chattopadhyaya, B.D. *Origins of the Rajputs: The Political, Economic, and Social Processes in Early Medieval Rajasthan*, *Indian Historical Review*, vol. 3, 1926, pp. 59–82.
- Chattopadhyaya, B.D. *The Making of Early Medieval India*, Oxford University Press, 1994.
- D'Souza, E. *Medieval India*, Manan Prakashan, Mumbai, 2004.
- Kulke, H. (ed.), *The State in India 1000-1200*, New Delhi, 1995.
- Majumdar, R.C. *Ancient India*, 6th ed., Delhi, 1921.
- Puri, B.N. *The History of the Gurjara-Pratihāras*, Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi.1958.

17.10 Terminal Questions

Q.1 Write an essay on India during post Harsa period.

Q.2 Provide an overview of the theories regarding the origin of the Rajputs in early medieval India.

Q.3 Examine the political history of the Gurjara-Pratihara dynasty.

Q.4 Provide a brief note on the art and architecture that thrived during the Gurjara-Pratihara Empire.

Unit -18

Emergence of Rashtrakutas

Structure:

18.1 Introduction

      The Rashtrakuta dynasty ruled over large portions of India from the 8th to 12th century C.E. India at the time was under the threat of invasion from the Arabs,

who conquered Sind in 717 C.E and were looking to expand to the west and control trade routes in the region. A royal family called the Calukyas controlled this territory and successfully resisted Arab attacks. This significantly weakened their power. Seeing an opportunity an official in the Chalukyas 'administration named Dantidurga declared his independence in C.E 753. The dynasty that he and his family formed the core of was called the Rashtrakuta, with their capital based at Manyakheta. Geographically the Rashtrakuta kingdom is located nearly in the middle of India along the top of the Deccan Plateau. This position afforded many expansion opportunities. The Rashtrakutas took advantage of this and frequently interfered with both the northern and southern kingdoms of India. The northern kingdoms were particularly easy to prey on, as there was no one powerful enough to effectively repel the Rashtrakutas.

The Rashtrakutas held control over vast regions along India's western coast. These coastal areas were crucial for trade with West Asia, which significantly contributed to the kingdom's wealth. The Rashtrakutas exported tea and cotton textiles while importing horses for inland trade. They also maintained strong trade relations with the Arabs in Sind, fostering extensive commercial exchanges.

However, by the late 10th century, the geographical advantages that once favored the Rashtrakutas became liabilities as new regional powers emerged. In the south, the Cholas rose to prominence, establishing dominance in the region. Meanwhile, the Chalukyas, whom the Rashtrakutas had once overthrown, were regaining their former strength and territories. This resurgence prevented the Rashtrakutas from retaining control over the northern territories of the Cholas.

Adding to these challenges was the rise of the Shilaharas in the northwestern Deccan, who captured much of the western coastline and key port cities. Ultimately, the Rashtrakuta dynasty came full circle, as they were eventually overthrown by the Chalukyas—the very dynasty from which Dantidurga had originally secured independence centuries earlier.

18.2 Learning Objectives:

After studying this lesson, you will be able to:

- Identify the various theories regarding the origin of the Rashtrakuta dynasty.
- Discuss the political history and significant events of the Rashtrakuta rule.
- Examine the administrative structure and societal conditions under Rashtrakuta governance.

18.3 Origin of the Rashtrakuta

The origin of the dynasty is still a matter of controversy among historians. Several theories are put forward to explain the origin of the RashtrakutasIt is believed that they were the native inhabitants of the region claiming descent from the sacred Yadava family of Epic fame, especially considering their predominance in the Gujarat and Deccan regions. Of the 25 inscriptions and copper grants of the

Rashtrakutas of Deccan and Gujarat that have so far been discovered, only eight mention any connection between the Rashtrakutas and the Yadavas. The earliest one that connects the two dynasties is dated to C.E. 860, with all the earlier ones being completely silent on the issue. However, a copper grant dated 914 C.E states, ‗RashtrakutaDantidurga was born in the line of Yadava Satyaki'. The book Kavirahasya by Halayudha also mentions the Rashtrakutas as being the descendants of Yadava Satyaki. Another opinion is that Rashtrakuta was a title given to governors of provinces by the Chalukya kings and meant ‗head of the region '. Since it was such a governor who established an independent kingdom, the dynasty itself came to be called the Rashtrakutas. On becoming more powerful, they also assumed the title of Prithvi Vallabha with the Vallabha 'getting transliterated into Balharas 'in the Arab chronicles of the time. Irrespective of the vagueness regarding the origins of the dynasty, their rise was rapid and relatively painless by the standards of the day. The earliest reference to the Rashtrakutas is found in the Edicts of Asoka Maurya as Rashtrika and Rathika, who have been used to refer to a tribe at that time resident in the North-Western regions. It has been opined that Rashtrika refers to the same tribe as the Arattas of Punjab. The Arattas are mentioned in the Mahabharata and also in the account of Alexander's invasion of Gandhara. In the Asokan edict, They are referenced without delay after the Kambojas and Gandharas, giving credence to the belief that they were resident in the Punjab. The prominent historian C.V. Vaidya is of the opinion that the Rashtrakutas were initially settlers of Punjab who migrated south and carved out a kingdom in the Deccan, gradually becoming the Kshatriyas of Maharashtra. Dr. A.S. Altekar has pointed out that the Rashtrakutas of Manyakheta originally lived in the Karnataka country and their mother tongue was Kanarese. They used the Kanarese script. Several inscriptions describe them as ―Lord of Lattural. This place is identified with Latur-in Bidar in modern Karnataka. Thus, It is believed that the Rashtrakutas initially functioned as district officers under the Chalukyas of Badami. With time when the early Chalukya lost their power, taking advantage of this situation, the Rashtrakuta overpowered them and established their dynasty.

18.3.1 Sources of Information

The study of the early Rashtrakutas and the Rashtrakutas of Manyakheta has been facilitated by numerous inscriptions found across the Deccan. Most of these inscriptions are in Sanskrit and Kannada, recorded on stone and copper plates.

Additionally, various literary sources contribute to historical knowledge, including ancient Pali texts, Kannada works like *Kavirajamarga* (850 CE) and *Vikramarjuna Vijaya* (941 CE), as well as Sanskrit writings by scholars such as Somadeva, Rajashekara, Gunabhadra, and Jinasena. Accounts from Arab travellers of the time, including Suleiman, Ibn Haukal, Al-Masudi, and Al-Istakhri, also provide valuable insights.

Self Check Exercise-1

Q-1   Who was the founder of the Rashtrakuta dynasty?

Q-2   What was the official language of the Rashtrakuta administration?

Q-3   Which book was written by Amoghavarsha?

18.4 Political History of Rashtrakutas

The Rashtrakutas originally lived in various parts of the Deccan during the 5th century C.E. By the 7th century C.E., they had become feudatories of the Chalukyas. Eventually, one of the Rashtrakuta clans established a powerful kingdom under Indra, who strengthened ties with the Chalukyas through marriage to a Chalukya princess. The dynasty's power further expanded under Indra's son and successor, Dantidurga.

18.4.1 Dantidurga

Dantidurga, the son of Indraraja, is credited with re-establishing Rashtrakuta dominance over most of the Deccan, a legacy that continued for the next 725 years. Between 742 and 753 C.E., he defeated the Chalukya king Kirtivarman II and reclaimed lost territories. His victories are confirmed by inscriptions, copper plate grants, and Sanskrit texts. Two copper grants from 802 and 812 C.E. specifically mention Dantidurga's conquest of the Chalukya kingdom.

Dantidurga further expanded the kingdom by conquering Shri Saila (in Kurnool district), Kalinga, South Kosala, Malwa, and Lata. After his initial victory over the Chalukyas, he assumed the titles *Rajadhiraja* (King of Kings) and *Parameswara* (Supreme Lord). His empire stretched from Gujarat and Malwa in the north to Rameswaram in the south, reaching both the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal. An inscription mentions his suppression of a revolt in Kanchi, further highlighting the extent of his rule. Known for his ferocity and valor, he took the title *Khadagavaloka* (wielder of the sword) and, towards the end of his reign, *Maharajadhiraja* (The Greatest King of Kings).

18.4.2 Krishnaraja I

Krishnaraja I, Dantidurga's uncle, ascended the throne around 760 C.E. There is a disputed claim that he usurped power due to Dantidurga's unpopularity, but inscriptions confirm that Krishnaraja succeeded Dantidurga after his death. Three

stone inscriptions, one copper grant, and 1800 silver coins from his reign provide substantial evidence of his rule.

Krishnaraja I solidified Rashtrakuta power by defeating Kirtivarman II of the Chalukyas in 760 C.E. He assumed the titles *Subhatunga* and *Akalavarsa* and extended his dominance by defeating the Gangas of Mysore, the Eastern Chalukyas of Vengi, and possibly capturing Lata or Gujarat. His empire encompassed modern Maharashtra, parts of Mysore, Andhra Pradesh, and central India.

A great patron of art and architecture, Krishnaraja I constructed the famous Kailashanatha temple at Ellora, a rock-cut marvel depicting epic stories through exquisite sculptures. He also built eighteen more Shiva temples, affirming his devotion to Lord Shiva. Krishnaraja I supported learning by founding the *Kanneshwara* College, where scholars like the Jain author Akalanka Bhatta, who wrote *Rajavartika*, resided. He had two sons, Govindaraja and Dhruvaraja.

18.4.3 Govindaraja II

Govindaraja II, Krishnaraja's elder son, succeeded him. As a prince, he had conquered Vengi, annexing it into the Rashtrakuta kingdom. However, copper plates from his reign only mention his brother Dhruvaraja and his son Karakaraja. The Wardha copper grant indicates that Govindaraja indulged in luxury and entrusted governance to his brother Dhruvaraja, who eventually deposed him.

Govindaraja II unsuccessfully attempted to reclaim the throne with the help of the kings of Malwa and Kanchi but was defeated by Dhruvaraja. The Jain author Jinasena, in his *Harivamsha Purana*, mentions that in 783 C.E. (*Shaka* 705), Indrayudha ruled in the north, Shrivallabha (either Govindaraja or Dhruvaraja) ruled the south, Vatsaraja of Avanti governed the east, and Varaha ruled the west. Later, Pratihara Nagabhatta II defeated Indrayudha's successor, Chakrayudha, and seized Kanauj.

18.4.4 Dhruvaraja

Dhruvaraja, Krishnaraja's second son, dethroned Govindaraja II around 780 C.E. to protect the kingdom from neighboring threats. A brave and wise ruler, Dhruvaraja defeated the Pallavas of Kanchi, the Chera king, and the Pratihara king Vatsaraja, driving the latter towards Marwar. The *Harivamsha Purana* mentions his conquest, where he captured the canopies of defeated kings, symbolizing their complete subjugation.

Dhruvaraja's kingdom possibly stretched from Ayodhya in the north to Rameswaram in the south. Inscriptions found at Pattadakal, Naregal, and Lakshmeshvar support this claim. During his reign, he appointed his son Govindaraja III as ruler of a vast kingdom extending from Konkan to Cambay. There is speculation that Dhruvaraja was fatally wounded while suppressing a rebellion in Gujarat, although this remains unproven. He assumed titles like *Nirupama* (unparalleled), *Kali Vallabha* (fond of war), and *Dharavarsa* (heavy rainer), establishing himself as the paramount ruler of the Deccan and integrating Rashtrakuta history into the broader Indian narrative.

18.4.5 Govindaraja III

Although Dhruvaraja wanted to crown Govindaraja III during his lifetime, the latter refused to accept the title while his father was alive. Nine copper grants dating between 794 and 813 C.E. provide insights into his reign. A succession struggle ensued, as Govindaraja III was not the eldest son. His brother Stambha, possibly Shauchkhamba, allied with twelve kings to challenge him, but Govindaraja III emerged victorious and restored his brother to his previous office, earning his loyalty.

To assert imperial supremacy in the north, Govindaraja III fought Pratihara King Nagabhatta II and Pala King Dharmapala. He defeated Nagabhatta in Bundelkhand, while Dharmapala and his protégé Chakrayudha of Kanauj submitted without resistance. Govindaraja III also humbled the kings of Kalinga, Dahala, Odraka, and Vengi. His campaign against Vengi was significant, as Vijayaditya II, the king of Vengi, acknowledged his supremacy and attended his court.

Further south, Govindaraja III defeated the kings of Dravida, Kerala, the Pandyas, and the Cheras. He overpowered King Dantiga of Kanchi, likely Pallava king Dantivarman, whose son Nandivarman later married Govindaraja's granddaughter, Princess Shankha. He freed the Chera king Ganga, imprisoned by his father, but re-imprisoned him when he rebelled.

18.4.6. Amoghavarsha

Govinda III was succeeded by his minor son, Amoghavarsha, though many scholars believe this name was merely a title. His actual name remains unknown. Over time, the title became synonymous with the name and was adopted by subsequent rulers of the dynasty. Amoghavarsha's reign began amid turmoil, as feudal chiefs revolted during his minority. Taking advantage of the instability, Vijayaditya II of the Eastern Chalukyas of Vengi, in alliance with the Ganga ruler, ousted Amoghavarsha from his ancestral throne, as stated in the Sanjan plates.

However, with the support of his cousin and regent Karkaraja, Amoghavarsha gradually regained power, defeating Vijayaditya in 830 C.E. He consolidated his rule and reclaimed several royal emblems, including the three canopies once held by his ancestor Govinda II. Copper grants from Baroda and Kavi in Broach highlight his charitable nature and mention his suppression of a rebellion in Gujarat by a Rashtrakuta claimant.

Inscriptions from 843 C.E. found in Kanheri (Thane district), Konur, and Shirur provide further insights into his reign. They mention that Pulla Shakti of the Shilahara dynasty governed Konkan as his chief feudatory. Pulla Shakti, a Buddhist, was succeeded by Kapardi II. Another inscription suggests the Rashtrakutas were an offshoot of the Yadavas and had adopted the title "Vira Narayana."

Amoghavarsha ruled for 64 years, marked by frequent revolts and external invasions. Around 850 C.E., Gunaga Vijayaditya of Vengi launched an attack on Kurnool, part of the Rashtrakuta domain. Amoghavarsha decisively defeated him at the Battle of Vingavalli, as recorded in the Sanjan plates. He also clashed repeatedly with the Ganga king of Gangavadi, as detailed in the Konnur inscription. To counter

the Gangas, Amoghavarsha appointed the skilled general Bankesha Sellaketana of the Mukua clan. Bankesha invaded Gangavadi's Vatatavi region, captured the Kedal fort without support, and subdued Nitimarga-Ranavikrama, the Ganga king. He further defeated the ruler of Talavan, crossed the Kaveri, and invaded Saptapada. However, Bankeya had to return when a rebellion erupted in the Deccan. As a reward for his service, Amoghavarsha granted him 30 villages for the upkeep of a Jain temple he was constructing.

Inscriptions also depict Garuda in Amoghavarsha's coat of arms and confirm that the kings of Anga, Banga, Magadha, and Malwa continued to acknowledge Rashtrakuta supremacy. During his 61st regnal year, Amoghavarsha attempted to overthrow the Dravidian rulers of Kerala, Chola, Pandya, and Kalinga, though the outcome remains uncertain, suggesting limited success. He did, however, suppress a revolt instigated by the Ganga ruler, imprisoning him for life while executing the rebellious courtiers.

Amoghavarsha shifted the Rashtrakuta capital from Nasik to Manyakheta (referred to as Mankir in Arab chronicles). His reign was marked by ongoing conflict with the Western Chalukyas over fertile territories. He cemented ties with the Ganga dynasty by marrying his daughter Abbalabba to Gunadattaranga Bhutuga.

A devout patron of Jainism, Amoghavarsha likely followed the Digambara sect. Jain scholar Jinasena, who composed the *Adipurana*—the first part of the *Mahapurana*—mentions the king's religious leanings. Another Jain text, *Jayadhavala*, dated to 832 C.E., was also written during his reign. Although some claim he authored literary works, concrete evidence is lacking. The most compelling proof of his Jain faith lies in his final years: after 65 years of rule, he abdicated in favor of his son and embraced religious meditation, eventually fasting unto death, a practice reflecting Jain beliefs. His unwavering patronage of Jainism is often cited as a key factor in the decline of Buddhism in the region.

18.4.7. Krishna II

Krishna II, the son of Amoghavarsha, ascended the throne around 825 C.E. while his father was still alive. Insights into his reign come from four inscriptions and two copper grants. Three inscriptions, dated between 900 and 903 C.E., were found in Bijapur, Ardeshhalli, and Mulgund (Dharwar district), while the fourth, dated to 912 C.E., and was discovered at Aihole near Bijapur. One copper plate details the Rashtrakuta genealogy from Krishna I to Krishna II. Several references identify him as "Krishnavallabha," confirming that "Vallabha" was a traditional Rashtrakuta title symbolizing status and power.

Krishna II married Mahadevi, the princess of the Chedi dynasty and daughter of King Kokkala of the Kalachuri (Haihaya) dynasty. She was also his maternal cousin, reflecting the Rashtrakuta custom of marrying the maternal uncle's daughter, a practice still observed in some South Indian communities.

His reign was marked by continued conflict with the Western Chalukyas, characterized by intermittent battles. He also overthrew the Rashtrakuta ruler of the

Lata offshoot dynasty and annexed the territory, though the annexation was likely temporary, as the Lata Rashtrakutas soon regained independence.

Legend credits Krishna II's son, Jagattunga, with numerous military victories that expanded the kingdom's territory. However, firm evidence is lacking, especially as Jagattunga predeceased his father and never ascended the throne. Though some accounts claim the Rashtrakuta empire under Krishna II extended from the Ganges in the north to Cape Comorin (Kanyakumari) in the south, this seems exaggerated and likely reflects poetic license. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that the Rashtrakutas held considerable power across the Indian subcontinent during this period. Krishna II died around 911 C.E. and was succeeded by his grandson, Indraraja III.

18.4.8. Indraraja III

Indraraja III, son of Jagattunga and Lakshmi (a Kalachuri princess), was crowned at Kurundaka, located at the confluence of the Krishna and Panchganga rivers, rather than the traditional capital. The reason for this deviation remains unclear. A copper plate from his reign claims the Rashtrakutas descended from Satyaki Yadava, though this ancestral link remains unverified.

According to the same copper plate, Indraraja III devastated the kingdom of Meru, ruled by Pratihara Mahipala—possibly referring to Mahodaya, another name for Kanauj. During his reign, the scholar Trivikrama Bhatta composed *Damayanti Katha* and *Madalasa Champu*. Indraraja III died in 916 C.E. after ruling for only six years. He had two sons, the elder of whom, Amoghavarsha II, succeeded him but died within a year of accession.

18.4.9. Govindaraja IV

Following the death of Amoghavarsha II, his younger brother Govindaraja IV assumed the throne. Some speculate foul play in Amoghavarsha's untimely death and Govindaraja's involvement, though evidence is lacking. During his reign, conflict resumed with the Eastern Chalukyas of Vengi, but his attempts to annex their territory proved unsuccessful. Copper plates also refer to him as a Yaduvanshi of the lunar lineage. His reign was short-lived, and he died at an early age.

18.4.10. Baddiga (Amoghavarsha III)

Govindaraja IV's death plunged the Rashtrakuta kingdom into further instability. To restore order, the feudatories elevated Amoghavarsha III, commonly known as Baddiga, to the throne around 935 C.E. He was the son of Jagattunga by another queen, making him the stepbrother of Indraraja III. Baddiga proved to be an effective ruler, reversing the kingdom's decline through wise governance.

Baddiga married Kundakadevi, daughter of Yuvaraja I of the Kalachuri dynasty, while his own daughter married Satyavakya Bhutuga II of the Ganga dynasty. These alliances reinforced traditional bonds between the Rashtrakutas, Kalachuris, and Gangas, ensuring political stability. His reign, though effective, was brief, likely due to his late accession. Baddiga had four sons, who sequentially ascended the throne after his demise.

18.4.11. Krishnaraja III

Krishnaraja, the eldest son of Baddiga, ascended the throne around 939 CE. Even as Crown Prince, he played a significant role in governing the kingdom during his father's brief reign. Upon becoming king, he proved to be an effective and powerful ruler. He engaged in a successful battle against the Chola dynasty in 949–50 CE at Takkola. An inscription commemorating this victory claims that Krishnaraja personally killed the Chola king Rajaditya. However, historical accounts indicate that Rajaditya was actually assassinated through treachery by Satyavakya Bhutuga II, the husband of Krishnaraja's elder sister, Revakanimmadi.

Details about Krishnaraja's reign are derived from sixteen inscriptions and two copper grants, though some ambiguity remains regarding the dates of specific events. Only seven inscriptions provide Shaka Era dates, while the rest mention only his regnal years, leading to varying calculations of his reign's timeline.

Krishnaraja III was a brilliant military strategist who launched campaigns in multiple directions. He first defeated the Gurjara king with the assistance of Rashtrakuta feudatories. He then waged wars in South India, conquering and destroying Kanchi, defeating King Dantiga, and subjugating the Pandya territory and the ruler of Sri Lanka. He also defeated Antiga of the Pallava dynasty and protected the Kalachuris from Gurjara invasions. His inscriptions describe him as the conqueror of Kanchi and Tanjore and as a force of destruction for the Chola kings. By 949 CE, he had assumed the title of Chakravarti and had feudatories spanning from the Himalayas to Sri Lanka and both coasts of the Indian subcontinent.

Krishnaraja was not hesitant to challenge allies and relatives. He dethroned Rachmala I of the Ganga dynasty and placed his brother-in-law, Bhutuga II, on the throne, who later orchestrated Rachmala's assassination. He also defeated Shasrarjuna, the Kalachuri king of Chedi, though it remains uncertain whether the kingdom was annexed.

Apart from his military prowess, Krishnaraja was a patron of learning, arts, and literature. In 945 CE, he supported an educational institution founded by his minister, Narayana, where scholars from across the kingdom and its feudatories studied under esteemed masters. He was a devoted follower of Shiva, adopting the title Parama Maheshvara.

His court was home to prominent literary figures, including Somadeva, who authored *Yashastilaka Champu* in 959 CE, detailing Krishnaraja's conquests in the Chera, Chola, Pandya, and Simhala regions. Another notable work by Somadeva,

Nitivakyamrita, is referenced in later Jain literary sources. The Jain poet Ponna wrote *Shanti Purana* in Kannada and was honored with the title "Ubhayabhasa Chakravarti" by the king. Poet Pushpadanta, a resident of the Rashtrakuta capital Manyakheta, began composing the *Jain Mahapurana* in the Apabhramsha language, which was completed during Krishnaraja's successor's reign.

Krishnaraja III is confirmed to have ruled at least until 966 CE. His reign was marked by military successes, cultural patronage, and intellectual advancements, leaving a lasting impact on the history of the Rashtrakuta dynasty.

18.4.12 Khottiga

Krishnaraja's immediate younger brother Jagattunga having predeceased him, the next brother Khottiga inherited the throne. In C.E 922, the powerful king of Malwa, Siyaka II of the Paramara dynasty, attacked and defeated Khottiga, going on to plunder the capital Manyakheta. In this battle, Khottiga was killed, a fact confirmed in Pushpadanta's book. This was the beginning of the end of the Deccan Rashtrakutas and they never recovered from this defeat. From this point it did not take long for the dynasty to collapse and rapidly go into oblivion. Khottiga died without any male heirs, leaving the succession path clear for the son of his younger brother Nirupama to ascend to the throne. An An inscription from that period of Paramara king Udayaditya, found at Udaipur (Gwalior), contains the following lines: i.e. Shri Harsha (Siyaka II of the Paramara dynasty of Malwa) had seized the kingdom from Khottigadeva.

18.4.13

Karakaraja II ascended the throne around 922 CE following the death of his uncle Khottiga, who was killed during the Malwa king's invasion. This suggests that while the kingdom was not annexed, it suffered significant plundering and destruction. The Malwa invasion greatly weakened the Rashtrakutas, creating an opportunity for the Chalukya ruler Tailapa II to launch an attack in 923 CE, delivering the final blow that had been initiated by Siyaka II of Malwa. With this victory, the Chalukyas reclaimed their dominance in the Deccan, establishing their capital at Kalyani. The year 923 CE is generally regarded as marking the end of the primary Deccan branch of the Rashtrakuta dynasty.

An inscription from Vijjaya of the Kalachuri dynasty—who had been a major feudatory of the Rashtrakutas for two centuries—confirms that Karakaraja II was

killed by Tailapa during the Chalukya invasion. This decisive defeat is further supported by two copper plate inscriptions from 992 CE and 1008 CE, issued by Aparajita of the Shilara dynasty, a former Rashtrakuta vassal, indicating that he had gained independence following the Rashtrakuta downfall.

In the aftermath, Peramanadi Marasimha of the Ganga dynasty—who was connected to the Rashtrakutas through generations of matrimonial alliances—attempted to restore Rashtrakuta power by placing Indraraja IV, the grandson of Krishnaraja III and his own cousin, on the throne. However, this endeavor failed, marking the definitive end of the once-mighty Rashtrakuta dynasty. As with many chapters in Indian history, the fall of one great empire paved the way for another, continuing the cycle of rise and decline that has shaped historical narratives over time.

Self Check Exercise-2

Q-1   Which queen was renowned for her administrative expertise and served as a regent during her son's minority?

Q-2   Kailasnatha temple at Ellora, was built during the reign of which Rashtrakuta king?

Q-3   The rashtrakuta dynasty had diplomatic with which foreign kingdom?

18.5 Rashtrakuta Administration

In the Rashtrakuta system of governance the king was the sovereign and fountain of power. He used high sounding titles like Paramesvara, Paramabhattaraka, Maharajadhiraja to add to his dignity. He lived in extraordinary pomp and grandeur. The Rashtrakuta court was marked with impressive ceremonies and etiquettes. In the court, the king was attended by Ministers, officers, vassals, generals, poets etc. Kingship was hereditary. It is usually Inherited by the eldest son from the father.

The latter was called Yuvaraja. In special cases, younger sons were selected as heir to the throne. The actual work of the administration was carried out by the ministers whose number is known. Person of efficiency was appointed as ministers. Some officers were appointed to carry tours of inspection throughout the empire and keep watch upon the vassals. The emperor established direct rule over part of the empire and the rest was governed by vassals. Powerful vassals enjoyed complete autonomy in their internal administration. They could even make land grants without seeking the Approval of the suzerain. The vassals attended the court when

summoned by the emperor. Sometimes they accompanied the king in military campaigns. The empire under the direct rule of the monarch was divided into administrative units styled Rashtras or Vishayas.

The Vishyas were subdivided into Bhuktis. Each Bhuktis consisted of several villages. Rashtra was headed by Rashtrapati who exercised both civil and military jurisdiction over the Rashtra. He maintained law and order, collected taxes and maintained records of accounts. Village headmen carried out administration at village level. In the village administration, the popular representative council played some important role. Household were represented in the councils. The revenue of the state was mainly derived from the tributes paid by the vassals. Mines, forests and wasteland also brought the revenue. Land tax was called the Udranga or Bhagakara, the kings's share. Normally the tax collected was of the gross produce. The lands that were granted to the Brahmins and temples were also not exempted from taxation, but the tax on such land was low. If the state was visited by natural disaster like drought or famine, the tax was not levied. The Rashtrakuta had a well-developed system of coins. There were five kinds of coin- Drama, Suvarna, Godhyanka, Kalanju and Kasu. Some gold coins also issued by Rashtrakuta emperors. The Rashtrakuta had a vast army. A greater part of the army was always stationed at the capital for safety. The Rashtrakuta standing army was employed both for defensive and offensive purpose. Added to this the armies of the provincial and feudatories also could be drawn whenever necessary. The Rashtrakuta armies were well organized and known for their efficiency.

Self -Check Exercise-3

Q-1   Identify the theory of origin of the Rashtrakuta Dynasty.

Q-2   Discuss the political history of the Rashtrakuta Dynasty.

Q-3   Examine the administration and society under the Rashtrakutas.

18.6 Summary

The Rashtrakuta dynasty ruled over large portions of India from the C.E 8th to 10th century. Taking the advantage of weak Chalukya power, an official in the Calukyas' administration named Dantidurga declared his independence in C.E 253. The dynasty that he and his family formed the core of was called the Rashtrakuta, with their capital based in Ellora.After Dantidurga came Krsna 1, who was responsible for starting construction of Kailasa temple at Ellora in the late 8th century C.E. This rock-temple was entirely out of a hillside to represent Mt. Kailasa, which is

a mountain in the Himalayas said to be the home of Vishnu. Due to strategic location of their Empire in the middle of India along the top of the Deccan Plateau, the Rashtrakutas took advantage of this and frequently interfered with both the northern and southern kingdoms of India.The Rashtrakutas also controlled large portions of the western coast of India. The majority of the trade with West Asia came through these ports and much of the Rashtrakutas wealth along with it. The Rashtrakutas also maintained good relations with the Arabs in Sind and traded extensively with them. Amoghavarsha was one of the longest-reigning kings in India and also one of the most powerful. His power was so great he was acknowledged as one of the greatest Rulers across the world alongside

With the Caliph of Baghdad, the Emperor of China, and the Emperor of Rome. He was favorable to the Jain religion and may have been partially responsible for its rise in popularity, along with the decline in Buddhism. A major focus of the Rashtrakuta dynasty was the control of Kanauj. The Rashtrakuta, Pratihara, and Pala were all kingdoms focused on controlling this city and fought among each other known in Indian history as a tripartite struggle.

18.7 Glossary

Rashtrakuta: The Rashtrakutas were a prominent royal dynasty that governed extensive regions of the Indian subcontinent from the 6th to the 10th century. The earliest recorded evidence of their rule is a 7th-century copper plate inscription, which documents their governance from Manapur, a city located in Central or Western India.

18.8 Answer to the Self-Check Exercise

Self-Check Exercise-1

Ans.1: Dantidurga, also known as Dantivarman or Dantidurga II, was the founder of the Rashtrakuta dynasty. He established Rashtrakuta rule in the mid-8th century CE by overthrowing the Chalukyas of Badami. His reign marked the rise of the Rashtrakutas as a dominant power in the Deccan region of India, with their initial capital at Manyakheta (modern-day Malkhed in Karnataka).

Ans.2: The Rashtrakutas adopted both Sanskrit and Kannada as their official languages. Sanskrit served as the medium for administration, literature, and inscriptions, demonstrating their support for classical learning. Kannada was prominently used in inscriptions and local governance, reflecting their patronage of regional languages and literature. This bilingual approach facilitated cultural and linguistic integration across the empire.

Ans.3: Amoghavarsha I, also known as Amoghavarsha Nrupatunga I, was a prominent Rashtrakuta ruler and a renowned patron of arts and literature. He authored the classical Kannada text *Kavirajamarga* ("The Royal Path for Poets"), written in the 9th century. This work is considered one of the earliest and most significant contributions to Kannada literature, serving as a guide for poets and a treatise on rhetoric and poetics.

Self-Check Exercise-2

Ans.1: Rashtrakuta Queen Lokamahadevi, also known as Lokadevi, was known for her administrative acumen. As the wife of Amoghavarsha I, she served as a regent during her son's minority, ensuring stable governance and continuity of the empire.

Ans.2: The Kailasanatha Temple at Ellora was commissioned during the reign of Rashtrakuta king Krishna I, who ruled between 756 and 774 CE. This magnificent rock-cut temple is celebrated for its architectural brilliance and intricate carvings.

Ans.3: The Rashtrakutas maintained diplomatic ties with the Abbasid Caliphate, promoting cultural exchange, trade, and diplomatic missions. During the reigns of Amoghavarsha I and Krishna III, they corresponded with the Abbasid Caliphs in Baghdad, facilitating the exchange of knowledge in science, mathematics, astronomy, and literature. These ties also strengthened trade routes, connecting India with the Islamic world and enriching the socio-economic and cultural landscape of medieval India.

Self-Check Exercise-3

Ans.1: The Rashtrakuta dynasty is believed to have originated from the Maratha region (modern-day Maharashtra), as indicated by historical records and inscriptions. Emerging as a significant power in the Deccan around the 6th century CE, they established their capital at Manyakheta (present-day Malkhed in Karnataka). Dantidurga, the dynasty's founder, defeated the Chalukyas of Badami to establish Rashtrakuta rule, leading to a period of military expansion, territorial growth, and cultural patronage that shaped medieval South India.

Ans.2: The Rashtrakuta dynasty, which flourished between the 8th and 10th centuries CE, played a pivotal role in shaping the political landscape of the Deccan and beyond. Their political history can be summarized as follows:

Foundation and Early Expansion (8th Century CE):
The dynasty was founded by Dantidurga in the mid-8th century CE after he defeated the Chalukyas of Badami. Establishing his capital at Manyakheta, Dantidurga's conquests laid the groundwork for Rashtrakuta expansion.

Expansion and Golden Age (8th–9th Centuries CE):
Under rulers like Govinda III, Amoghavarsha I, and Krishna I, the Rashtrakuta Empire reached its peak, expanding across central and southern India, including present-day Karnataka, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and parts of northern India. They engaged in military conflicts with the Cholas, Pallavas, and Pratiharas, establishing themselves as a dominant power.

Cultural and Intellectual Flourishing:

The Rashtrakutas were patrons of art, literature, and culture. Amoghavarsha I authored *Kavirajamarga*, a landmark in Kannada literature. They supported both Jainism and Hinduism, leading to the construction of grand temples like the Kailasanatha Temple at Ellora, exemplifying their architectural brilliance.

Ans.3: The Rashtrakuta dynasty introduced significant administrative and social advancements, reflecting their cultural diversity, administrative innovations, and evolving socio-economic structures.

Administration:

Centralized Administration: The Rashtrakutas established a centralized administrative system with the king at the apex. The kingdom was divided into administrative units governed by officials appointed by the king, ensuring effective governance and collection of revenues.

Revenue System: Land revenue formed a significant part of the economy. The Rashtrakutas collected taxes based on agricultural produce, which helped fund administrative activities and military campaigns.

Military Administration: The Rashtrakuta kings maintained a strong military force composed of infantry, cavalry, and elephants. Military commanders played crucial roles in territorial expansion and defense.

Society:

Religious Pluralism: The Rashtrakuta dynasty patronized both Hinduism and Jainism. Temples and monasteries flourished, reflecting religious tolerance and cultural integration. Prominent scholars and saints contributed to religious and philosophical discourses.

Cultural Patronage: The Rashtrakutas were great patrons of art, literature, and architecture. They commissioned magnificent temples like the Kailasanatha Temple at Ellora and encouraged scholars to produce literary works in Sanskrit and regional languages like Kannada.

Social Structure: Society was stratified, with the king and nobility at the top, followed by priests, warriors, traders, and farmers. Artisans and craftsmen played crucial roles in temple construction and artistic endeavors.

Trade and Commerce: The Rashtrakuta Empire was a hub of trade, benefiting from strategic locations on trade routes connecting northern and southern India. Trade in spices, textiles, and other commodities flourished, contributing to economic prosperity.

Urbanization: Cities like Manyakheta (the capital), Ellora, and Pattadakal thrived as cultural and economic centers. These cities housed administrative centers, markets, temples, and residential areas, showcasing urban planning and development.

18.9 Suggested Readings

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18.10 Terminal Question

1.   Write an essay on the origin of the Rashtrakuta dynasty.

2.   Describe in brief the political history of the Rashtrakuta.

3.   Write a note on the Northern campaign of Rashtrakuta Monarchs.

4.   Give an account of the Socio-Relgious and Economic condition of the Rashtrakuta Empire.

5.   Discuss the contribution of the Rashtrakuta monarch to the growth of Art and Literature.

Unit-19

The Cholas

Structure:

19.1 Introduction

19.2 Learning Objectives

19.3 Early and Imperial Cholas

Self Check Exercise-1

19.4 Raja Raja Cholas and Rajendra Chola I

Self Check Exercise-2

19.5 Other Campaigns in Southeast Asia

Self- Check Exercise-3

19.6 Summary

19.7 Glossary

19.8 Answers to Check Check Exercises

19.9 Suggested Readings

19.10 Terminal Questions

19.1 Introduction

The Cholas who ruled from the ninth century to the thirteenth century CE (850 – 1279 CE) played a very important part in the political and cultural history of South India. The core region of their control- Cholamandalam - was the area around Tanjore up to East Coast, the Coromandal of later times. The Chola period of south Indian history with its impressive corpus of inscriptions has been widely discussed in recent years. There have been diverse theories and many new interpretations drew less on political authority and more on institutions established at this time, together with the articulations of cultural forms. The standards established in society, religion and fine arts during this period were regarded as classical and came to dominate the patterns of the living in the south and also influenced and modified at certain levels in the patterns existing elsewhere in the Peninsula. There was also an active intervention in south-east Asia to a greater degree than before, in commerce and in its cultural forms.

19.2 Learning Objectives

After studying this lesson, the learner will be able to:

- Understand about the early history of the Cholas.
- Know about the military achievements of the Chola Kings.
- Expansion of Cholas in Southeast Asia

19.3 Early Cholas

The Cholas have been recognized as rulers since ancient times. They are first mentioned in Ashoka's II and XIII Rock Edicts alongside the Pandyas and Cheras, where they are described as a friendly southern power beyond Mauryan control. Sangam literature also provides significant details about Chola chiefdoms. Among the early Chola kings, Karikala Chola was the most prominent. He is credited with founding the city of Puhar at the mouth of the Cauvery River and constructing an embankment along the river. He also focused on land reclamation and improving irrigation systems. Although Chola rulers were known during the Mauryan period, their post-Sangam history remains unclear, as does their connection with the Cholas of the early medieval period.

The Rise of the Imperial Cholas

The Imperial Chola dynasty of Tanjore was founded by Vijayalaya (850–871 CE). He established his power around Uraiyur, captured Tanjore from the Muttaraiyar chieftains (who were allies of the Pandyas), and expanded his kingdom along the lower Kaveri. Though he acknowledged Pallava overlordship, he strengthened Chola rule. He is also credited with constructing the temple of Nishumbhasudini.

Aditya I (871–907 CE), Vijayalaya's successor, significantly expanded the Chola kingdom. He defeated the last Pallava ruler, Aparajita, in 893 CE, gaining control over Tondamandalam. He later conquered Kongudesa (modern Coimbatore and Salem) from the Pandyas and claimed to have captured Talakad, the capital of the Western Gangas. He further strengthened Chola power by entering into a matrimonial alliance with the Pallavas.

Parantaka I (907–953 CE) was the first major ruler of the Chola dynasty. He ruled for nearly 50 years and is considered the true founder of the Chola empire in South

India. He secured the northern frontier by defeating the Pandyas and capturing their capital, Madurai, after which he assumed the title *Maduraikonda* (Conqueror of Madurai). The Pandyan ruler Rajasimha, after his defeat, sought refuge at the court of the Sri Lankan king. Parantaka I later defeated the combined forces of the Pandyas and the king of Sri Lanka at the Battle of Vellur, bringing Pandyan territories under Chola control. However, towards the end of his reign, the Rashtrakuta king Krishna III defeated him at the Battle of Takkolam (949 CE), occupying a large part of the northern Chola territory. Parantaka I was also a great temple builder, providing the golden roof for the Vimana of the famous Nataraja temple at Chidambaram. The famous Uttarameruru inscriptions, detailing the Chola village administration, date back to his reign.

After Parantaka I's death in 953 CE, the Chola kingdom saw three decades of weak rulers, leading to a decline in power. However, the Chola empire was firmly re-established with the accession of Rajaraja I (985–1014 CE) and his son and successor Rajendra I. Their reigns marked the peak of Chola power, consolidating and stabilizing the kingdom.

Rajaraja I, originally known as Arumolivarman, took the title *Rajaraja I* upon ascending the throne. He laid the foundation for a vast empire and introduced an efficient administrative system. His reign saw extensive military campaigns and territorial expansions, solidifying the Cholas as a dominant power in South India and beyond recorde in hisTanjour inscriptions.

Self Check Exercise-1

Q-1   Who was the founder of Chola dynasty?

Q-2   What was the Chola capital?

Q-3   Which inscription gives information about Chola Village Administration

19.4 Raja Raja Chola (985 – c. 1014 CE) was born in 947. His birth name was Arulmozhivarman. He was the third child of Parantaka Chola II Also referred to as Sundara Chola and Vanavan Maha Devi of the Velir Malayaman lineage.

He ascended the throne in 985. As per the Thiruvalangadu copper-plate inscriptions, Arulmozhi Varman aka Raja Raja was rightfully elected by a democratic process that was followed by the Cholas.

Post becoming the King, Arulmozhi varman adopted the name of Raja Raja which means "King of Kings". Being a Shiv bhakt, he was also known as Rajaraja Sivapada Sekhara (he who has the feet of Shiva as his crown). During his reign, his elder sister Kundavai Pirāttiyār helped him in administration and also in the management of temples. Raja Raja Chola was a renowned king of southern India. During his tenure as the Chola King, he expanded his kingdom beyond South India into the domain of Sri Lanka and could even capture Kalinga in the north. His naval campaigns helped him in capturing of the Malabar Coast as well as the Maldives.Throughout his reign, he carried out various conquest.

In 994, in the Kandalur War, Rajaraja destroyed the fleet of the Chera king Bhaskara Ravi Varman Thiruvadi (c. 978–1036) successfully.

- He defeated the Pandya king Amarabhujanga and took control of the port of Virinam.
  - In the year 1008, Rajendra Chola I led the Chola army and Rajaraja could capture Udagai from Cheras.
  - Raja raja invaded the norther part of Sri Lanka in 993.
  - In 998, Rajaraja captured the regions of Nolambapadi, Gangapadi and Tadigaipadi (present day Karnataka)

To commemorate these south India conquests, He adopted the Powerful title of Mummudi Chola. This tutle was used by Tamil kings who ruled the three kingdoms of Cholas, Cheras and Pandyas.

Rajendra Chola I (c. 971 CE – 1044 CE), often called Rajendra the Great and also known as Gangaikonda Chola and Kadaram Kondan, was a prominent Chola Emperor who ruled from 1014 to 1044 CE. He is regarded as one of the most influential rulers of early 11th-century South Asia due to his patronage of the arts, promotion of trade, and extensive expansion of the Chola Empire.

During his reign, the Chola Empire became the dominant political, military, and economic force in the Indian subcontinent. Through trade and conquest, its influence extended across the Indian Ocean, making Rajendra one of the few Indian

rulers to successfully conquer territories beyond South Asia. His early years saw him actively participating in military campaigns against the Western Chalukyas and the rulers of Anuradhapura, securing his initial victories. He also suppressed rebellions in the Chera and Pandya vassal states and consolidated Chola rule in Sri Lanka. As Emperor, he completed the conquest of Anuradhapura, bringing much of Sri Lanka under Chola control.

Rajendra further expanded his empire by defeating the kingdoms of Kalinga and Vengi and subduing the Laccadives and Maldives, renaming them *Munnir Palantivu Pannirayiram* ("Twelve Thousand Islands and the Ocean Where Three Waters Meet"). These islands later served as strategic naval bases. His most remarkable military achievement was his campaign in Southeast Asia, where he annexed Srivijaya, Kedah, Tambralinga, and Pegu, securing Chola dominance in the region.

His campaigns against the Pala dynasty resulted in significant loot, which he used to construct the city of Gangaikondacholapuram. This city remained the capital of the Chola Empire and a major center of trade and commerce for centuries. Notable for its artificial lake, strong fortifications, and the grand Brihadisvara Temple, the city reflected the empire's prosperity. A devout Shaivite, Rajendra also supported Buddhism, constructing numerous stupas in South India and Southeast Asia.

One of his lasting legacies was the development of extensive trade networks. By controlling key maritime routes, particularly the Strait of Malacca, he facilitated the rise of the "emporia" system, which streamlined trade based on demand. This boosted the empire's economy, strengthening its military and expanding its commercial reach. The Cholas formed a strong alliance with the Khmer Empire, extending trade connections as far as Song China, even incorporating Chinese ships into their naval forces. Chola trade also flourished with Arabia, North Africa, Anatolia, and the Turkic regions, particularly in the spice trade.

Rajendra's grand overseas expedition began in 1023 with a powerful naval force. His fleet first conquered Sri Vijaya (Palembang, Sumatra), followed by Malaiyur in southern Sumatra, Bangha Island, Pannai in eastern Sumatra, and Ilamuridesam in northern Sumatra. The campaign continued into Malaysia, capturing Vallaipandur (northeastern Malaysia) and Kadarem (northwestern Malaysia). His

forces then advanced into Thailand, seizing Ilankasokam (southeastern Thailand), Mathamalingam (eastern Thailand), and Thalaitakkolam (southwestern Thailand). On their return journey, they took Manakkavaarem (Andaman and Nicobar Islands) and Maapapaalam (a major seaport in Myanmar), before heading back to the Chola homeland. This expedition concluded in 1024, and the conquered regions were commemorated in his *Meikeerthi* inscriptions.

Following his victory over Sri Vijaya in 1023, Rajendra built the Vijayamkonda Cholaeswaram Shiva Temple in Erumbur, Tamil Nadu. His triumphs on the mainland and overseas led to the construction of magnificent granite temples, now recognized as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. These temples stand as enduring monuments to the Chola Empire's military prowess, cultural achievements, and global influence during Rajendra's reign.

Self Check Exercise-2

Q-1   Who built the Brihadeswara temple?

Q-2   Which Chola king started the Naval army?

Q-3   In whose tenure, 72 traders were sent to China?

19.5 Other Campaigns in Southeast Asia

In 1025 CE, Rajendra Chola launched a naval expedition across the Indian Ocean, leading Chola forces in an invasion of Srivijaya. The campaign targeted multiple locations in present-day Malaysia and Indonesia, including Kadaram (the capital), Pannai in Sumatra, and Malaiyur in the Malay Peninsula. Rajendra also attacked Tambralinga and the Gangga Nagara Kingdom, situated in present-day Malaysia and southern Thailand. The Cholas captured Sangrama Vijayatunggavarman, the last ruler of the Sailendra Dynasty, marking the decline of Srivijaya's maritime supremacy.

Following the invasion, the Chola Empire took control of several key Srivijayan territories, including the vital trading ports of Ligor, Kedah, and Tumasik (modern-day Singapore). This conquest facilitated the expansion of Tamil merchant guilds, such as Manigramam, Ayyavole, and Ainnurruvar, into Southeast Asia. For the next century, Tamil trading organizations from southern India dominated commerce in the region. Rajendra Chola's exploits were later recorded in the

medieval Malay chronicle *Sejarah Melayu*, where he is referred to in a distorted form as Raja Chulan. The influence of his campaign is evident in Malay royal titles, with rulers such as Raja Chulan of Perak bearing names linked to the Cholas. Some records even describe Rajendra as the King of Lamuri in northern Sumatra.

The invasion resulted in the fall of the Sailendra Dynasty, coinciding with the return of the renowned Buddhist scholar Atiśa from Sumatra to India in 1025 CE. Despite the destruction, Srivijaya managed to survive, as the Cholas did not establish direct rule over the region. The invasion, primarily aimed at plundering wealth rather than long-term occupation, significantly weakened Srivijaya's dominance. This decline paved the way for the emergence of new regional kingdoms, such as Kahuripan and its successor, Kediri in Java, which focused on agriculture instead of maritime trade. Sri Deva ascended as the new ruler of Srivijaya, restoring trading activities and sending an embassy to China in 1028 CE.

Although the Cholas did not maintain territorial control, their invasion had lasting economic consequences. Tamil traders increasingly encroached upon Srivijaya's trade networks, which had traditionally been controlled by Malay merchants. This shift led to a growing Tamil commercial presence on the Malay Peninsula and the northern coast of Sumatra, altering the region's trade dynamics for years to come.

Self-Check Exercise-3

Q-1   Describe the military achievements of Raja Raja Chola.

Q-2   Discuss the conquest of Rajendra I.

Q-3   Write a note on the conquest of the Cholas in the Southeast Asia.

19.6 Summary

The Cholas re-emerged on the scene as the most powerful polity in the Tamil macro-region with the nucleus of their activities in the Kaveri delta. In this Unit, we have discussed the early history of Cholas, and the military achievements of Raja Raja and Rajendra 1 in India and Southeast Asia.

19.7 Glossary

Coromandel: fine-grained, greyish-brown ebony streaked with black, used in furniture

Monarch: a sovereign head of state, especially a king, queen, or emperor

Lucrative: producing a great deal of profit

19.8 Answer to the Self-Check Exercise

Self-Check Exercise-1

Ans1: Vijayalaya Chola founded the Chola dynasty in the 9th century CE, establishing its rule in present-day Tamil Nadu, India. His reign marked the beginning of the Chola Empire's rise to power, setting the stage for its territorial expansion and cultural influence across southern India.

Ans 2: The capital of the Chola dynasty changed over time as their power grew. Initially, Vijayalaya Chola and Aditya I ruled from Uraiyur (modern-day Tiruchirapalli or Trichy) in Tamil Nadu. However, during the peak of Chola dominance in the 10th and 11th centuries CE, the capital shifted to Thanjavur (Tanjore), which became a prominent center for administration, culture, and architecture, especially during the dynasty's golden age.

Ans 3: The *Uttaramerur inscriptions*, dating back to the 10th century CE, provide significant insights into the Chola village administration system. Found in Uttaramerur, near Kanchipuram in Tamil Nadu, these inscriptions describe the democratic procedures of local governance, including elections, officials' responsibilities, and rules for village administration. They highlight the Cholas' decentralized governance structure and the socio-political organization at the village level.

Self-Check Exercise-2

Ans1: The Brihadeshwara Temple, also known as the Big Temple, was constructed by Rajaraja Chola I during his reign from 985 CE to 1014 CE. Located in Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu, this architectural marvel was completed around 1010 CE and is now a UNESCO World Heritage site, showcasing the Chola dynasty's advanced engineering and artistic skills.

Ans 2: Rajaraja Chola I is credited with establishing the Chola naval force and significantly expanding their maritime power. His reign marked a turning point in the Cholas' dominance over sea trade routes and coastal territories.

Ans 3: Kulottunga Chola I, who ruled from 1070 CE to 1120 CE, is known for sending 72 traders to China. His reign was marked by extensive maritime trade and diplomatic exchanges with various regions, including China.

Self-Check Exercise-3

Ans 1: Raja Raja Chola I was a prominent Chola ruler known for his significant military achievements, which expanded the empire's influence. Key accomplishments include:

- **Conquest of the Chera Kingdom:** He defeated the Cheras of present-day Kerala, bringing their territories under Chola control.
- **Sri Lanka Campaign:** He led expeditions to Sri Lanka, conquering several regions and extending Chola suzerainty in the Indian Ocean.

- **Pandya Campaign:** Raja Raja Chola I defeated the Pandyas of Tamil Nadu, further strengthening Chola dominance in the region.
- **Naval Power:** He developed a powerful navy, securing sea trade routes and facilitating communication with Southeast Asia, including diplomatic missions to China.
- **Fortifications and Strategy:** Raja Raja Chola I fortified key cities, ports, and naval bases, ensuring defense against invasions.
- **Administration of Conquered Territories:** He implemented efficient administrative systems, appointing trusted officials to govern newly acquired lands.

These achievements established the Cholas as a dominant force in South Asia, promoting military strength, cultural growth, and maritime supremacy.

Ans 2: Rajendra Chola I, son of Raja Raja Chola I, ruled from 1012 CE to 1044 CE and expanded the Chola Empire to its greatest extent. His key conquests include:

- **South India and the Deccan:** Rajendra consolidated control over southern India, defeating the Chalukyas and other regional rulers to secure strategic trade routes and fertile lands.
- **Sri Lanka Conquest:** He completed the conquest of Sri Lanka, bringing the entire island under Chola control, which provided access to valuable resources and key ports.
- **Southeast Asian Expeditions:** Rajendra launched naval campaigns to Southeast Asia, including modern-day Myanmar, Malaysia, and Indonesia. These expeditions secured trade routes and established Chola influence over the Srivijaya Empire.
- **Naval Strength:** He enhanced the Chola navy, enabling long-distance expeditions and safeguarding maritime trade routes.
- **Administrative and Cultural Impact:** Rajendra established administrative centers in conquered territories, integrating them into the Chola governance system. His reign also saw advancements in art, architecture, and literature.

Rajendra Chola I's conquests expanded the Chola Empire across South India, Sri Lanka, and Southeast Asia, cementing its position as a dominant Indian Ocean power and fostering cultural exchange.

Ans 3: Under Rajendra Chola I, the Chola conquests in Southeast Asia during the 11th century were notable for their scale and strategic importance. These expeditions extended Chola influence into present-day Myanmar, Malaysia, and Indonesia. The primary objectives were to dominate maritime trade routes, secure resources like spices and precious metals, and establish diplomatic ties with powerful kingdoms such as the Srivijaya Empire. The Chola navy, known for its advanced capabilities, played a crucial role in these campaigns, ensuring Chola supremacy in the Indian Ocean trade network.

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19.10 Terminal Questions

1. Describe the military achievements of Raja Raja Chola.

2. Discuss the conquest of Rajendra I.

3 Write a brief account of the Chola conquests in Southeast Asia.

Unit-20

Cholas Administration

Structure:

20.1 Introduction

20.2 Learning Objectives

20.3 Chola Administration

      20.3.1 Local Administration: Ur and Nadu

      20.3.2 Brahmadeya and Nagaram

      20.3.3 Kings, Officials, and Chiefs

Self Check Exercise-1

20.4 Indian Culture in Southeast Asia

Self- Check Exercise-2

20.5 Summary

20.6 Glossary

20.7 Answers to Check Check Exercises

20.8 Suggested Readings

20.9Terminal Questions

20.1 Introduction

The Cholas emerged as the most dominant power in the peninsular region, with the Kaveri valley serving as the core of their influence. They successfully established one of the most enduring regional states in the Tamil macro-region. This unit provides an overview of the Chola kings, their administration, and the roles played by officials and chiefs.

The rise of the Cholas as a ruling power began in the 9th century CE when Vijayalaya captured Tanjavur from the Muttarayas, a feudatory chief of the Pallavas. Following this, the Cholas extended their control over Pallava territories and subdued the Pandyas. Their rule was firmly established, drawing resources from the fertile Kaveri valley. During the reign of Rajaraja I and his successors, various feudatory chiefs were brought under control, and the administrative unit of Nadu was reorganized into Valanadu, governed by subordinate chiefs. Prominent landowners were integrated into the state system, granted prestigious titles, and assigned

administrative and military responsibilities, including land revenue assessment and collection.

20.2 Learning Objectives

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- Understand the territorial expansion, administration, and institutional structures of the Cholas.
- Gain insight into the Chola administrative system.

20.3 Chola Administration

The Cholas traced their lineage to the Suryavamsha (Solar dynasty). Their inscriptions, particularly prashastis (panegyric records) found in sources like the Tiruvalangadu Copper Plates, Larger Leiden Plates, Anbil Plates, and the Kanyakumari inscription of Vira Rajendra, intertwine mythical traditions with historical narratives. These inscriptions served to legitimize Chola rule by emphasizing their connection to both Sanskritic and Brahmanical traditions. Additionally, the Cholas linked themselves to the legacy of the Sangam period, further reinforcing their royal status.

From the eighth year of Rajaraja I's reign onwards, Tamil Meykirtis (royal inscriptions) omitted genealogical records, instead focusing on military achievements. These inscriptions, often engraved on stone, were primarily addressed to the Tamil landed elite. The Cholas claimed Kshatriya status, evident from titles like Kshatriyasikhamani, assumed by Rajaraja I. The Sanskritic suffix Varman in names such as Adityavarman (821–906 CE) and Parantaka Varman (702–755 CE) was another marker of their Kshatriya identity. During coronation ceremonies, Chola rulers adopted new titles, including Prakesarivarman, Rajakesarivarman, and Arumolivarman (a Tamil name with a Sanskrit suffix).

Chola copper plate inscriptions include both prashastis and genealogies in Sanskrit, while details regarding land grants are recorded in Tamil. The kings conducted ceremonies such as Hiranyagarbha and Tulabhara to reinforce their legitimacy. Land grants, often issued under the guidance of Brahmana advisors (dharmopadeshta), served as a means of resource redistribution, rewarding Brahmanas for meritorious service while simultaneously securing political legitimacy. While records of land grants are well-documented, grants involving gold and cattle are mainly mentioned in prashastis. Land grants also played a crucial role in converting unsettled regions into agrarian settlements.

Rajaraja I was revered as Ulakalanda Perumel (the great one who measured the earth like Trivikrama) and was compared to Shiva, who controlled the land of Bhargava Rama. Chola inscriptions reference various administrative entities involved in executing land grants, including:

1. Nattar (local assembly representatives)

2. Brahmadeyakkilavar (Brahmana landholders)

3. Tax-free villages such as:

    o Devadana (land granted to temples)

    o Pallichandam (land given to Jain institutions)

    o Kanimurruttu (uncultivated land)

    o Vettapperu-Urkalilar (certain privileged villages)

4. Nagarattar (trading community based in urban settlements)

20.3.1 Local Administration: Ur and Nadu

The Nattar were representatives of the Nadu, while Brahmadeyakkilavars were Brahmana beneficiaries of Brahmadeya land. Nagarattars belonged to Nagaram, a settlement primarily composed of traders. Various tax-free villages included Devadana, Pallichandam, Kanimurruttu, and Vettaperu.

Historian Y. Subbarayalu noted that Nattar were analogous to Vellanvagai Urars (peasant village representatives), as multiple Urs together constituted a Nadu. The Ur, a key village unit, was generally composed of non-Brahmana landowners. Subbarayalu regarded the Ur as a fractional component of the Nadu, which incorporated and represented multiple peasant settlements. He also observed that Ur villages were characterized by differentiation in social structure, with distinct groups including:

- Cultivators (Kaniyudaiyar)

- Tenant cultivators (Ulukudi)

- Artisans

- Agricultural laborers

Most cultivators belonged to the Vellala community. The Ur was responsible for overseeing village land, including its sale, purchase, and gifting. To be a member of the Ur, land ownership was a prerequisite. Ur members also held titles such as Udaiyan, Kilan (Kilavan), Velan, and Peraraiyan, all of which indicated landholding status.

Scholar N. Karashima analyzed the Tanjavur inscriptions of Rajaraja I and the Gangaikondacholapuram inscription of Virarajendra, describing Vellanvagai villages as encompassing:

- Agricultural land
- Pastoral land
- Irrigation systems
- Burial sites
- Residential areas, including:
    - Ur-Nattam/Ur-Irukkai (landholder dwellings)
    - Kammanacceri (artisan quarters)
    - Paraicceri (agricultural laborer quarters)

Karashima suggested that land in Ur villages was held collectively, though he also noted instances of individual land sales. Subbarayalu, however, argued that land ownership in this period increasingly shifted toward individual holdings.

The Nadu was named after a prominent village within it, which was sometimes a Brahmadeya settlement but often was not. The number of Nadus increased from the 9th century CE onward, initially forming in fertile areas before expanding to peripheral regions with fewer villages. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri described the Nadu as comprising multiple villages, while T.V. Mahalingam considered it an administrative unit subdivided into villages. There is ongoing debate about whether Nadus included only Vellanvagai villages or also Brahmadeya, Devadana, and other grant lands.

Subbarayalu argued that both Nadu and Ur represented territorial units consisting of Vellanvagai villages, with representatives participating in Nadu assemblies. Determining the exact boundaries of Nadus is challenging, as they varied in size and were not defined by natural features like rivers. Unlike artificial administrative divisions, Nadus were naturally formed clusters of peasant settlements.

Traditionally, historians viewed the Nattar as a territorial assembly governing Nadu, with subordinate assemblies for Brahmadeya and Pallichandam. However, recent scholarship suggests that the Nadu was not a Chola administrative creation but a pre-existing agrarian unit that the Cholas integrated into their governance system. In contrast, the Valanadus, introduced during Rajaraja I's reign, were artificially created administrative divisions.

In the initial stages, Nadus were established in fertile regions before gradually expanding into comparatively less fertile areas. This expansion contributed to the growth of the agrarian economy. Nadus situated in highly fertile zones had larger populations than those in less fertile regions. Numerous inscriptions provide insights into Nadus, including the Kiranur inscription of 1310, which mentions the 'urom of villages Nanjil, Peruncevur, Viraikkudi... as qualified for the Nadu or Vada-chiruvayil-nadu.'

Inscriptions also indicate that the Nattars were primarily Vellalas, and the administrative functions of the Nadu were carried out by Vellalas holding the title of Velan. As the Nadu was a collective of agricultural settlements, the primary occupation of the Nattar was farming. Chola copper plate inscriptions dealing with land grants recognize the Nattar as responsible for executing the king's land grants, including defining land boundaries and establishing the rights of new grantees. The Nattar operated under the authority of the ruler and also supervised irrigation projects, allocated land to temples, managed donations to religious institutions, and oversaw tax exemptions for temple land grants. In exchange for these responsibilities, they collected deposits as compensation. Nadu itself granted tax-free land to temples (nattiraiyili), and the tax liability of these lands fell on Nadu, which levied specific cesses, including Nadatci, Nattuviniyogan, and Nattu-vyavasthai, to cover these expenses. The Nattar played a crucial role in the sale and lease of temple lands and were also responsible for tax assessment and collection. Occasionally, Nattar collected revenue on behalf of the state, while at other times, royal officers known as Komarravar handled this function.

Royal functionaries, including Mudaligal and Dandanayakam, were assigned administrative duties in Nadu. The Cholas integrated local landholders into the state system, making them functionaries who operated under the king's authority. Nadu was the fundamental revenue administration unit, and its tax-related terms included Nattup-puravu, Nattu-vari (land revenue), and Nattukkanakku. The Nattukkanakku was the official responsible for revenue administration within Nadu. Revenue assessment and collection at the village level took place within the framework of the Nadu. Any tax exemptions granted to a village were reflected in Nadu's financial records.

20.3.2 Brahmadeya and Nagaram

Brahmadeyas comprised Brahmana landholders who were granted tax-free agricultural land and formed a distinct group. In contrast, Nagaram consisted of traders engaged in commerce and exchange, particularly in areas that developed as trade centers due to increased craft production and artisan activities. By the mid-9th century CE, when the Cholas rose to power in Thanjavur, several densely populated and prosperous Brahmadeyas already existed in the Kaveri region. The Karantai plates of Rajendra I reference 1080 Brahmanas residing in TribhuvanamahadeviCaturvedimangalam.

The Brahmana assemblies, known as Sabha or Mahasabha, administered these settlements. Many Brahmadeyas were centered around temples, which played a vital role in reinforcing social order through religious and ideological traditions based on the Puranas, Itihasas, Bhakti, and Varnashrama Dharma. The Chola kings granted lands to Brahmanas and established Brahmadeyas as a means of legitimizing their rule. Inscriptions suggest that many Brahmadeyas functioned as independent administrative units (Taniyur) within a Nadu, managing their revenue and judicial affairs. Some Taniyurs were subordinate to temples, with administrative bodies such as the Mulparusai overseeing governance. Inscriptions outline qualifications for Sabha membership, including age, landholding, knowledge, and good conduct. Although the Karantai plates mention Brahmadeyas, they do not detail how the Sabha and its committees were formed. These institutions likely emerged from Dharmashastric traditions rather than royal decree.

The Sabha managed temple land, cattle, and other assets, assigned land to tenants, collected rent, recorded revenue and expenditures, and supervised temple staff. It functioned collectively, prioritizing the community's interests over individual concerns. However, in the later Chola period, the significance of Brahmadeya settlements diminished. From the mid-11th century CE onwards, fewer new Brahmadeyas were established, while temple construction increased, and older temples were renovated. Financial difficulties sometimes forced the Mahasabha to rely on revenue from neighboring villages to cover expenses.

Nagaram settlements housed traders and artisans. A 1036 CE inscription from Chidambaram distinguishes between higher-status non-Brahmana inhabitants

(Kudiga) and lower-status groups (Kilkalanai). Kudiga included merchant groups such as Sankarappadiyar (lower tier) and Vyaparin (higher tier), along with cultivators (Vellalas), cloth merchants (Saliyar), and fishermen (Pattinavar). The Kilkalanai group consisted of subordinate artisans like carpenters (Taccar), blacksmiths (Kollar), goldsmiths (Tattar), and weavers (Koliyar). Nagarattar served as the governing body of traders, and Nagaram settlements were distinct areas with a local council known as Nagaravariyam.

Nagaram communities collectively owned land (Nagarakkani), which they acquired through purchase or lease. They also managed tax collection, allocated resources to local groups, and maintained financial records, including income and expenditure reports. Taxes levied by Nagaram included Kadamai (land tax) and Nagaraviniyogam (a tax to sustain Nagaram). In some instances, Nagaram settlements functioned independently from Nadu (Taniyur).

20.3.3 Kings, Officials, and Chiefs

The administration of the Chola kingdom involved several officials. Although there is no conclusive evidence of a formal council of ministers, Uddan-kottam may have served this function. Administrative mobility was observed, with individuals moving up and down the hierarchy. Traditional historiography classifies officials into higher (Perundanan) and lower (Sirutaram) categories, with the Senapati (military commander) holding an intermediate position known as SirudanattupPerundaram. Judges (Nyayattar) existed at both levels, but recent research suggests these classifications are not entirely supported by historical evidence.

Officials were compensated with land grants, and taxes on land were collected in both cash and kind. Landholding officials, designated as Udaiyan or Kilan, could sublease or sell land. Communal land ownership was prevalent, and customary village rights were recognized. The smallest administrative unit was the village, which combined with others to form a Nadu. Several Nadus constituted a Valanadu, and multiple Valanadus made up a Mandalam (province). Taniyur referred to a separate village or settlement site. Other administrative titles included Karumigal (officials) and Panimpkkal (servants). The Anbil plates reference a Brahmana officer, ManyaSachiva, who received a land grant from the king.

Royal orders were typically issued orally (Triuvaykkelvi) and recorded in writing (Sri-mukham) by the Anatti (executive officer). Local elites, such as Nattukkon, Nadukilavan, and Urudaiyan, witnessed and verified land grants. Officers involved in land grant administration included Uttaramantris, while land revenue matters fell under the Puravuvari-tinaikkalam department. Land rights were recorded in the Varipottagam register, maintained by officials such as Variyiledu. Supervisors (Kankanis) audited financial records, and clerks (Mugavettis) drafted royal orders. Pattolais were junior land revenue officers.

In Nadu, officials such as Nadu Kuru (revenue assessment officer) and Nadu Vagai (revenue official) managed taxation. The Mandira Olai officer was responsible for drafting the Tirumugam (royal order). The Naduvirukkai served as the petitioner, while the Anatti acted as an intermediary between the king and the public. Once oral orders were transcribed and verified, they were entered into records by officers such as Vidaiyiladigari. Legal matters were adjudicated by village assemblies through Nyayattar committees, while the central court (Dharmasana) handled higher judicial cases, presided over by Dharmasanabhattas, Brahmanas knowledgeable in law

Various forms of punishment were practised, including fines and capital punishment. The king's officers, known as Adhikaris, held titles such as Udaiyan, Kilan/Kilavan, Velan, Muvendavelan, Brahma, Pallavaraiyan, and Vilupparaiyan. Some officers adopted multiple titles, and at times, they prefixed their names with the Chola ruler's name or epithet.

The Naduvirukkai, primarily Brahmanas (holding titles like Bhatta and Brahmadhirajan), served as intermediaries between the royal authority and the bureaucracy and were always mentioned alongside the Adhikaris. Temple administration personnel were known as Srikaryam, though they did not oversee rituals or worship. In some instances, Adhikaris also held the position of Srikaryam, signifying their importance in the administrative system.

The Senapati managed military affairs and held the king's title or name, along with designations such as Udaiyan, Brahma, Araiyan, and Kilan. The office of Dandanayakam likely corresponded to that of the Senapati, with Pallavaraiyan being a commonly associated title.

During the Chola period, prominent chiefs included the Paluvettaraiyars, Vels, Malavas, Gangas, and Banas. These chiefs were granted land and, in return, collected dues while ensuring territorial protection (padi kaval). In the post-Kulottunga period, records mention Nilamaittittu, a diplomatic agreement between multiple chiefs. These chiefs also maintained their own soldiers and retainers, whose services were utilized by the Chola kings.

Self Check Exercise-1

Q-1   Which southern state had excellent village administration?

Q-2   What was a special feature Chola Administrative System?

Q-3   What was the primary unit of administration in Chola?

Q-4   Which body was responsible for local administration in villages?

20.4 Indian Culture in Southeast Asia

Medieval lawgivers and commentators ordained that a person should not cross the seas. This would imply that India shunned all relations with the outside world, but this is not so, for India has maintained contact with its Asian neighbours since Harappan times. Indian traders went to the cities of Mesopotamia, where their seals dating to the second half of the third millennium BC have been found. From the beginning of the Christian era onwards, India maintained commercial contacts with China, Southeast Asia, West Asia, Central Asia, and the Roman Empire. We may recall how the Indian land routes were connected with the Chinese Silk Route, and also India's commercial intercourse with the eastern part of the Roman Empire. India also sent its missionaries, conquerors, and traders to the neighbouring countries where they founded settlements.

Indian culture also spread to Southeast Asia, but not through the medium of Buddhism. Except in the case of Burma it was mostly diffused through the Brahmanical cults. The name Suvarnabhumi was given to Pegu and Moulmein in Burma, and merchants from Broach, Banaras, and Bhagalpur traded with Burma. Considerable Buddhist remains of Gupta times have been found in Burma. From the first century AD onwards, India established close trading relations with Java in Indonesia, The region known as Suvarnadvipa, or the "Island of Gold," by ancient

Indians, saw the earliest Indian settlements in Java established as early as AD 56. By the second century CE, several small Indian principalities had emerged in the area. When the Chinese pilgrim Fa-Hsien visited Java in the fifth century, he observed the prevalence of Brahmanical traditions. During the early centuries of the Christian era, the Pallavas established colonies in Sumatra, which later evolved into the powerful kingdom of Sri Vijaya. This kingdom remained a significant political power and a major center of Indian cultural influence from the fifth to the tenth century. The Indian communities in Java and Sumatra served as conduits for the spread of Indian culture, with the process of settlement continuing over time.

In Indo-China, which today comprises Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, Indians established two prominent kingdoms: Kamboja and Champa. The powerful Kamboja kingdom, located in present-day Cambodia, was founded in the sixth century. Its rulers, devoted followers of Shiva, transformed Kamboja into a hub of Sanskrit learning, as reflected in numerous inscriptions from the period.

Adjacent to Kamboja, the kingdom of Champa encompassed southern Vietnam and parts of northern Vietnam. It appears that Indian traders were responsible for founding settlements there. The kings of Champa were also Shaivites, and Sanskrit served as the official language of the kingdom. Champa was widely recognized as an important center for the study of the Vedas and Dharmashastras.

Indian settlements across the Indian Ocean thrived until the thirteenth century, with their inhabitants gradually assimilating with local populations. This continuous interaction led to the development of unique art, language, and literature, blending Indian and indigenous traditions. Numerous artistic artifacts from these regions exhibit a harmonious fusion of both cultural influences. Remarkably, the largest Buddhist temple in the world is not in India but in Borobudur, Java. Built in the eighth century, Borobudur features 436 engraved images depicting the life of Buddha. Similarly, the Angkor Wat temple in Cambodia, constructed in the medieval period, surpasses Borobudur in size and stands as a testament to architectural excellence comparable to that of ancient Egyptian and Greek masterpieces.

The epics of the Ramayana and Mahabharata have also left a lasting cultural imprint on the region. In Indonesia, folk plays based on the Ramayana continue to be

performed, showcasing its enduring popularity. Additionally, the Indonesian language, Bahasa Indonesia, contains numerous Sanskrit-derived words, highlighting the deep linguistic and cultural influence of Indian civilization.

Cultural Give and Take - About sculpture, the head of the Buddha from Thailand, the head from Kamboja, and the magnificent bronze images from Java are regarded as the best examples of the fusion of Indian art with the local art traditions of Southeast Asia. Similarly, beautiful examples of painting, comparable to those of Ajanta are found not only in Sri Lanka but also in the Tun Huang caves on the Chinese border

It would be incorrect to assume that religion was the sole factor behind the spread of Indian culture. Missionaries were supported by traders and conquerors, with trade playing a crucial role in establishing India's connections with Central Asia and Southeast Asia. The very names Suvarnabhumi and Suvarnadvipa, used for regions in Southeast Asia, reflect the Indian pursuit of gold. Trade facilitated not just the exchange of goods but also the sharing of cultural influences.

However, it would be misleading to suggest that cultural transmission was one-sided. India, too, absorbed various influences from its neighbours. The art of minting gold coins was learned from the Greeks and Romans, silk cultivation techniques came from China, betel leaf farming was adopted from Indonesia, and several other products and practices were assimilated from nearby regions. Likewise, the technique of growing cotton spread from India to China and Central Asia.

Despite this exchange, India's contributions to art, religion, script, and language were particularly significant. However, no civilization in the region became an exact replica of Indian culture. Just as India preserved and evolved its distinct identity despite foreign influences, each Southeast Asian country developed a unique cultural character by blending Indian elements with indigenous traditions.

Self-Check Exercise-2

Q-1   Write a note on the culture of the Cholas in Southern Asia.

Q-2   Discuss the role and functions of Ur and Nadu.

20.5 Summary

The Cholas regained prominence as the dominant power in the Tamil macro-region, centering their activities around the Kaveri delta. This period saw an increase

in the practice of land grants. In this unit, we explored key terms found in inscriptions, such as nattar, brahmadeya, pallichandam, and devadana, and examined their role within the agrarian economy's institutional framework. Additionally, we analyzed the fundamental features of nadu, ur, and nagaram. Later, we delved into the military campaigns of the Chalukyas of Kalyana, whose rule, followed by the Kalachuris, witnessed significant cultural advancements. The Virashaiva movement, which emerged during the Kalachuri interregnum, challenged the caste system, advocated for equality, and attracted a wide following.

20.6 Glossary

Ur: a south Indian village Nadu: a locality consisting of many settlements, in early medieval south India

Nagaram: market or commercial centre in early medieval south India

Nagarattar: the corporate organization of the nagaram.

Nattar: leading men of the nadu in early medieval south India

Mandapika: a local center of exchange, in between small periodic markets and larger trade entres.

20.7 Answer to the Self-Check Exercise

Self-Check Exercise-1

Ans.1 The Chola period was renowned for its outstanding village administration. The Cholas established a decentralized system that ensured efficient governance at the grassroots level. The *Uttaramerur inscriptions* offer valuable insights into the democratic procedures and administrative framework implemented in Chola villages. These inscriptions highlight the presence of elected village assemblies, the duties of officials, and mechanisms for resolving disputes and collecting taxes. The Chola village administration in Tamil Nadu was remarkably advanced for its time, promoting local autonomy while maintaining a strong connection with the larger imperial system.

Ans.2 A distinctive feature of Chola administration was its well-organized and decentralized governance structure, which balanced central authority with local self-governance. The Chola administrative system functioned hierarchically, from the central government down to village institutions. At the top, the king held supreme authority, overseeing military matters, taxation, justice, and the promotion of temples and cultural activities. Below the king, regional governors (*Nadu* or *Mandaladhipatis*) managed provinces, ensuring that royal orders were implemented effectively. At the village level, democratic assemblies (*Ur* or *Sabha*) played a vital role in local governance, handling taxation, justice, and infrastructure development.

Ans.3 The village (*Ur*) was the fundamental administrative unit under Chola rule. Each village functioned as an independent socio-economic entity governed by a local assembly (*Ur* or *Sabha*) composed of elected representatives. These

assemblies managed day-to-day affairs, including dispute resolution, tax collection, and infrastructure maintenance, such as irrigation systems and temples. The village assembly was instrumental in ensuring efficient rural governance while remaining integrated into the broader Chola administrative framework.

Ans.4 In the Chola administration, village-level governance was primarily handled by the village assembly known as the *Ur* or *Sabha*. This assembly was responsible for managing various local matters, such as tax collection, judicial proceedings, irrigation system maintenance, and community infrastructure. It comprised elected representatives from the local community, who deliberated and made decisions on behalf of the village. These village assemblies reported to higher administrative officials, ensuring the effective implementation of royal policies at the grassroots level. Thus, the *Ur* or *Sabha* played a crucial role in maintaining order and facilitating governance throughout rural areas of the Chola Empire.

Self-Check Exercise-2

Ans.1 During the Chola dynasty's rule in South India, their cultural influence significantly shaped Southeast Asia, impacting the region's art, architecture, religion, and trade. The Cholas maintained strong maritime ties with Southeast Asian kingdoms, leveraging their advanced naval power and strategic ports like *Nagapattinam*. This interaction led to extensive cultural exchange, spreading Hinduism, particularly *Shaivism* and *Vaishnavism*, alongside Tamil language and literature.

Architecturally, the Chola influence is evident in Southeast Asian temples and monuments, which adopted Dravidian styles and intricate carvings. The Cholas' patronage of art and literature further enriched the region, popularizing Tamil epics like the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*.

Economically, trade flourished as Southeast Asia imported luxury goods such as textiles, spices, and gemstones from South India. This economic and cultural exchange strengthened ties between South India and Southeast Asia, leaving a lasting legacy that continues to shape the region's cultural and religious landscape.

Ans.2 In Chola administration, *Ur* and *Nadu* were two distinct yet interconnected administrative units, each playing a crucial role in governance and revenue collection.

Ur (Town or Settlement):

1. *Urban Centers*: *Ur* referred to towns or settlements where administrative and commercial activities were concentrated.
2. *Administrative Hubs*: These towns hosted royal officials responsible for local governance, including revenue collection and judicial functions.
3. *Economic Significance*: Urban centers facilitated trade, housing markets, workshops, and artisanal production, making them vital for the empire's economy.

Nadu (Rural District):

1. *Rural Administration*: *Nadu* represented rural districts focused on agricultural production.
2. *Agricultural Management*: Local officials in each *Nadu* oversaw land assessment, irrigation, and agricultural tax collection.
3. *Community Governance*: Village assemblies (*Sabhas*) within the *Nadu* managed local issues, resolved disputes, and enforced royal decrees.

Together, *Ur* and *Nadu* formed an integrated administrative structure. While *Ur* promoted urban economic growth and efficient governance, *Nadu* ensured agricultural productivity and grassroots administration. This system also shaped revenue collection, with *Ur* contributing through trade taxes and *Nadu* through land-based assessments.

20.8 Suggested Readings

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20.9 Terminal Question

1   Give a detailed description of the administration of the Cholas.

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