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GUIDELINES FOR STUDY OF THE COURSE

In this Course we have followed a uniform pattern for presenting the learning material. This starts with an Introduction to the Course underlining the significant developments in chronological order and covers four major Themes with coverage of 19 sub-themes or Units. For the convenience of study, all the Units have been presented with a uniform structure. Objectives as the first section of the Unit have been included to help you find what are you expected to learn from the study of the Unit. Please go through these objectives carefully and keep reflecting and checking them after studying a few sections of the Unit. Introduction of the Unit introduces you to the subject area covered and guides you to the way subject matter is presented. These are followed by the main subject area discussed through sections and sub-sections for ease of comprehension. In between the text, some Check Your Progress Exercises have been provided. We advise you to attempt these as and when you reach them. These will help you assess your study and test your comprehension of the subject studied. Compare your answers with the answer guidelines provided after the Summary. The Key Words and unfamiliar terms have been provided at the end of each Unit. At the end of each Unit under Suggested Readings we have also provided a list of books and references. These include sources and books which are useful or have been consulted for developing the material for the concerned Unit. You should try to study them.

COURSE INTRODUCTION

India's history covers a long span of time. It was punctuated by changes in political, economic, social and religious aspects. Of course there were continuities too. The purpose of this course is to introduce you to the major changes and continuities which marked the various stages of history of India. It should be kept in mind that human communities all over the world did not go through the same pace of change and also that the nature of changes, where they took place, was not uniform. That is why when we study Indian society in different stages of its history, we should not expect that even when major changes took place in India, they were identical with what happened, say, in the history of China or in the history of Europe. There were of course stages of change in many societies which were similar in nature. For example, a significant change which took place in Indian society was the transition from food-gathering and hunting to farming. In a later stage, there was the emergence of State organisation. These are broad changes which took place in many other societies also at different points of time, but within these broad changes there were variations. When we study Indian history, we therefore need to know two things:

- 1) What were the major stages of change in Indian history and how did they come about?
- 2) What were the particular institutions and cultural elements in Indian society which may be considered different from those in other societies?

In Indian history when we use the term 'Ancient', we imply the existence of other periods such as 'Medieval' and 'Modern'. You shall be reading about the history of 'Medieval' and 'Modern' periods later on, but right now you may well ask the question: what is meant by 'Ancient' and what distinguishes the 'Ancient' from other periods of our history? Frankly speaking, this is not an easy question to answer. In one sense we have borrowed the idea of dividing the history of our country into three periods by following the writings on European history. But this division is not entirely without justification, although historians continue to debate as to when the 'Ancient' period ended and when the 'Medieval' period began.

In the history of a society we cannot arbitrarily choose a date to draw a sharp line between two periods but it is possible to distinguish the history of one period from that of another by comparing the major social, economic, political and cultural characteristics of these periods. In doing this, historians have come to feel that the historical processes and institutions which went into the making of the ancient period of our history and characterised its society started undergoing perceptible changes from about the 6th-7th centuries CE. There was of course never a complete break from the earlier period, but while certain old institution ceased to exist, others started acquiring new shapes. For example, the republican form of political organization which continued in many parts of northern India till the Gupta period went out of existence during it. In the area of economy, new types of agrarian relations emerged. Caste system which had started emerging from the Later Vedic period took new shapes in the post-Gupta period. There were further elements of regional cultures, like regional languages, which started crystallising in the post-Gupta period. All these changes perhaps indicate that a new phase in Indian history had begun in the 7-8th centuries, although we will be wrong in thinking that they marked a sharp break with the earlier phase.

Another question which is relevant and which also you may feel like asking is: How do we know about historical events and historical changes which took place

so far back in the past? In other words, when historians write about the past what do they depend on since they cannot observe the past? A simple answer to this will be that human societies of all ages have left behind some indication in the form of surviving material, of how they lived. For example, we know about the human communities which lived as hunters and gatherers from the simple stone tools which they prepared and from other types of evidence – like the crude drawings which they made on their rock-shelters. But, in fact, the answer is not as simple as this. What the ancient people left behind has to be discovered and the meaning of what they left behind has to be understood properly, and in most cases, doing this involves work of several types of experts. We cannot make out how exactly a stone tool was made by simple looking at it; it is an expert — in this case a prehistoric archaeologist — who alone has the required training to provide information on this. Supposing an archaeologist comes across remains of animals the ancient hunter hunted, the animals have to be identified by another expert — a palaeontologist. Similarly, the dating of such remains to find out how far back in time do they go has to be done by another type of scientist in his laboratory.

This does not mean that finding out details about only such objects requires collaboration between different types of experts. If you are studying about an age when coins of metal were in use, the numismatist who specialises in the study of coins may give further details about them, but if you want to know the exact percentages of different metals used in making the coin, you shall again have to depend on laboratory tests carried out by scientists. Similarly, only a specialist epigraphist can read and give us the meanings of what was written in the form of inscriptions using different scripts and languages of the past. In the medieval period the ruler of Delhi Firoz-Shah-Tughlaq brought to Delhi Ashokan pillars on which were engraved inscriptions in unknown letters (you can still see one such pillar at Firuz-Shah-Kotla), but even the scholars of his period could not read the letters. It was only many centuries later that an employee of the English East India Company, James Prinsep, who after considerable efforts, finally deciphered the script in which the inscription and many other inscriptions of Ashoka were written.

These are some examples of how historians have to labour to gather information about the past, and the material remains and records from past societies from which they gather information are called sources of History. These sources of course are not uniform for all periods of History. For example, you have already found out that hunting/gathering communities have not left behind any written records because the art of writing was not known to them. Even after writing came to be known not all written records are of identical nature. Even so, historians have to depend on whatever sources are available to them and reconstruct the past for us. The reconstruction of the past of course does not mean that the historian gives us simply the contents or the information which the sources contain. He has to interpret them and thus make us interested in the meaning of the objects which have survived from the past and also in making connections between these objects. If the archaeologists simply arrange before us the tools of different stone ages, we shall not be able to either say how they were made or what use they were put to, nor shall we be able to see how the periods in which these tools were made were different from one another in many respects, in climate, in the mode of getting food, in the social organization of human groups and even in customs and beliefs. Let us take another example. From the study of written texts and from excavations carried out by archaeologists we come to know that cities emerged in the Ganga valley between the sixth century BCE and fourth century BCE. Since this was a new phenomenon in the history of this region, historians are required to explain, in addition to telling

us that cities emerged and in the context of the social situation of the period what they represented.

By giving us explanations and interpretations historians should help us think and even provoke us into questioning their explanations and their ways of understanding the past. This means that like in other areas of knowledge, history writing also keeps on changing and shifting its focus. This may to some extent explain why in the writing of ancient Indian history, historians have moved away from writing mainly about kings and their achievements and have taken up the study of different dimensions of society and of how changes took place in society. Between historians, interpretations or explanations vary; controversies exist in the explanations of various historical phenomena, and in addition to new sources which archaeologists epigraphists, numismatists and others bring to light, it is also new ways of looking at things and new questions which crop up which keep on expanding the horizon of our knowledge about the past and do not allow this knowledge to remain stagnant.

The Course on Ancient Indian history that you are going to study is divided into four **Themes**. Each Theme consists of a number of Units. Each Theme is intended to introduce to you a major concern or period which may be considered as significant in the context of the history of the ancient period of our country. **Theme I** is a broad category which deals with issues like geographical regions of India, sources of ancient Indian history, the tools, technology, society, and art of the Palaeolithic people in a regional context. Regions of India have been seen from a historical and geographical perspective. The Unit (1) explores the close relationship between humans and land. How historians and geographers have visualised the geographical space, and how the consciousness of space was present among the ancients are some of the issues addressed in the Unit. It also discusses important sources for the reconstruction of ancient Indian history. The last two Units (2 & 3) in the first Theme deal with prehistoric cultures. Attempt has been made to move beyond the discussions about origins and chronology and explore the nature of various archaeological cultures and the changes manifested by them. The analysis is based on empirical data, excavations, and tangible material remains. The prehistoric period of history is an important phase that provides the antecedents to the earliest history.

The second **Theme** explores the transition towards the proto-historic cultures of the Indian subcontinent. The first Unit (4) under this theme takes us to the beginnings of agriculture and domestication of animals. This slow, gradual change from Palaeolithic lifeways established new type of links between humans, animals and land and was revolutionary. The last three Units (5, 6, 7) deal with the Harappan civilization. The excavations carried out in Harappa and Mohenjodaro, in the 1920s changed our perception of Indian history. New cities dating back to 2600 BCE were discovered; even *ante* – dating the Vedic cultures. The Units deal with the processes by which the urban centres evolved gradually, their antecedents, town planning, social structure, trade, religion and decline.

In **Theme III** the focus will be on exploring the cultural profiles of different regions of India between the beginning of the second millennium BCE and 6th century BCE. The Theme also underlines the fact that change was not a constant movement towards development. The highly urbanised Harappan culture suffered decline and gradually agriculture-based rural cultures were formed in all the major regions of the subcontinent. Small settlements based on small scale farming come to be transformed into regular rural settlements of later periods. Initially the cultures of the small farming settlements were Chalcolithic, but from the beginning of the first millennium BCE, iron came to be known to different cultures, for example, Painted Grey Ware

culture of the Upper Ganga valley as also the megalithic cultures of peninsular India. The impact of this metal on different cultures is yet to be properly assessed but the point can be forcefully made that all the crucial ingredients of village life such as the techniques of cultivation (even of irrigation), production of varieties of major crops cultivated even today and combining farming with rearing domesticated animals were present in some measure or the other in the regional cultures of the subcontinent between the second millennium BCE and first millennium BCE. This widespread cultural pattern, of course, co-existed with other cultural patterns such as pastoralism and we must also remember that despite the emergence of farming communities, hunting and gathering continued as a way of life. Secondly, in the Ganga valley, the pace of historical change became suddenly fast from the first millennium BCE onward. The Vedic texts along with archaeological material are used to reconstruct the society, economy, polity of the Early Vedic and the Later Vedic period. A new type of society emerged which meant that people living in it had new questions about life, sought meanings in life and had new aspirations. The *Upanishads*, the teachings of the Buddha and Mahavira, and various other types of ideas of the period sought answers to life's problems. Buddhism and Jainism spread rapidly in the centuries that followed.

The last **Theme IV** is concerned with the period from the 6th century BCE till the end of the Mauryan period. The changes taking place in the Vedic period matured in 6th century BCE. Large territories of *mahajanapadas* emerged; monarchies and republics formed. 'Second Urbanization' flourished. Historians place the beginning of the early historical period of Indian history in this phase. The use of metallic money, trade, rise of powerful *gahapatis* and *setthis*, cities and towns bred a sense of alienation among the people. A complex social order arose in which relations between the different social groups was defined. The *Caturvarna* system which appeared in the Later Vedic phase provided the theoretical frame in which society was organized. The fight for supremacy among the *mahajanapadas* resulted in the emergence of Magadha as the most powerful *mahajanapada*. It is during this period that India's northwest came to play a significant role in Indian politics. The great Persian empire was crushed by the expanding army of Alexander of Macedonia of North Greece. He advanced to Panjab plains and fought valiant battles with territories of this region headed by their warriors. The contact with the Persians and the Greeks, opened up north-western part of the subcontinent to Persian and Greek cultural influences. Later the Mauryas laid the basis of a huge empire which incorporated the north-west too. The last two Units (18 & 19) take a sweeping view on the status of gender in ancient India and how in the fields of environment, science and technology ancient Indians achieved and accomplished a lot.

The History Elective Course, EHI-02 was written more than twenty years back. When it was published for the first time, thanks to the work of distinguished panel of experts, Convenor and Course preparation team, it was well appreciated. Now, IGNOU is bringing out a revamped course which will address substantial changes in the readings of early Indian history. Since the 1990s much more data has been brought to light. The new interpretations of the existing data also require a fresh look at various issues of early India. An attempt has been made to incorporate such changes in the present Course.

BLOCK 3

**VEDIC PERIOD AND CULTURES IN
TRANSITION**

UNIT 8 VEDIC PERIOD-I*

Structure

- 8.0 Objectives
- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 Sources
 - 8.2.1 Literary Sources
 - 8.2.2 Archaeological Sources
- 8.3 The Aryan Invasion — A Myth or Reality?
- 8.4 Economy
- 8.5 Society
- 8.6 Polity
- 8.7 Religion
- 8.8 Summary
- 8.9 Key Words
- 8.10 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises
- 8.11 Suggested Readings

8.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit, you will be able to learn about:

- the various sources through which we can attempt to know about the Early Vedic period;
- the theory of a large-scale migration by the Indo-Aryan through these sources and critically evaluate it; and
- the nature of economy, society, polity and religion of the Early Vedic people.

8.1 INTRODUCTION

During the period 2000-1000 BCE, communities at different stages of cultural development were present in different regions of India. Their cultures were essentially agro-pastoral and our understanding of these cultures is based entirely on archaeological remains because with the exception of Harappan culture, none of these cultures have left behind any written records. In this Unit and the following Unit, however, we shall be focussing on the evidence provided by a voluminous body of religious texts which are considered to be the earliest literary records of India. We shall also try to supplement this evidence with, wherever relevant, archaeological evidence. The *Rigveda* is considered to be the earliest collection of hymns available, and so, we shall start by examining the *Rigveda* for an understanding of the Early Vedic period and then go on to other Vedas and allied texts which are placed later. This exercise is relevant for two reasons. First, The Vedas are thought to have been composed by the Aryans and it was long believed that the Aryans played a major role in civilizing the Indian subcontinent. The contents of the *Rigveda*, if analysed carefully, do not give the

* This Unit has been adopted from EHI-02, Block 3

impression of a very advanced material culture. On the other hand, many of the material traits, which are characteristic of the Indian civilization, are already present in the non-Vedic archaeological cultures in different parts of India. Second, when the contents of the *Rigveda* are compared with the contents of the Later Vedas and allied texts, it becomes clear that significant changes took place in the Vedic society itself. This means that there is no fixed cultural pattern which can be called Vedic culture or Aryan culture.

The core geographical area to which the evidence of the *Rigveda* relates to was *Sapt-Sindhava* or the land of seven rivers. This would correspond with the whole of Punjab and its neighbouring regions of Haryana; but *Rigvedic* geography also included the Gomal plains, southern Afghanistan and southern Jammu and Kashmir.

Earlier interpretations regarding the Early Vedic society are based on the theory of Indo-Aryan migration from West Asia into the Indian subcontinent. These migrants who are regarded as the authors of the 'Vedas' are called the Vedic people. According to this historical interpretation, the Aryans came to India in several stages or waves.

The Aryans are considered to represent a linguistic group speaking Indo-European languages. They are distinguished by traditional historians and archaeologists from the non-Aryan Harappans of the preceding period.

However, in making certain observations on Early Vedic society it may be fruitful to see if literary texts and archaeological evidence can supplement each other. If both types of sources are from the same region and of the same period, then they together can give us a more detailed idea on economic, social, political and religious life.

Let us begin by referring to these sources.

8.2 SOURCES

We have two types of sources to study the Early Vedic period-Literary and Archaeological Sources.

Let us examine the literary sources for this period.

8.2.1 Literary Sources

Among the literary sources we may first refer to the four Vedas:

- *Rigveda*
- *Samveda*
- *Yajurveda*
- *Atharvaveda*

Out of these, the *Rigveda* is the earliest text.

The word 'veda' is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Vid' which means 'to know'. The Vedas are essentially a compilation of prayers and hymns, offered by different families of poets and sages to different gods. These four Vedas are also 'Samhitas', in the sense that they represent the oral tradition of the time. Since the hymns

were meant to be recited, learnt and transmitted orally, they were not written down when they were first composed. Due to this reason, none of the *Samhitas* can be dated precisely. Relative dating in terms of the context of these four *Samhitas* has led scholars to believe that the period represented in the *Rigveda* can be placed between 1500 BCE to 1000 BCE.

The *Rigvedic Samhita* comprises ten books or ‘*Mandalas*’ of which books II to VII are considered to be the earliest and belong specifically to the Early Vedic Phase. Books I, VIII, IX and X are considered later additions to the *Samhita*.

Scholars found similarities in the language used in the *Rigveda* and the Avesta, the old Iranian text, older to the *Rigveda*. Based on these linguistic similarities and taking into account the chronological precedence of the Avesta over the *Rigveda*, these scholars suggested that:

- 1) The people represented in both these books belonged to a common linguistic group; they migrated from West Asia and Iran to the Indian subcontinent. These people were called the ‘Aryans’.
- 2) The Aryans had a common original home, from where different groups migrated to Europe and the East.

However, the debate regarding the original home of the Aryans is no longer valid, since the concept of a common racial identity for the Aryans has now been proved false. But a common linguistic identity is still believed by historians and on this basis, some of them still insist upon the theory of the Aryan migration.

8.2.2 Archaeological Sources

Excavations conducted in Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, northern Rajasthan, along the Indus and Ghaggar rivers over the last 40 years, have unearthed many post-Harappan /Chalcolithic settlements from these regions. These have been dated from 1700 BCE to 600 BCE. The Chalcolithic cultures are also called Late-Harappan, OCP (Ochre Coloured Pottery), BRW (Black-and-Red Ware) and PGW (Painted Grey Ware) cultures.

However, we must remember that pottery types do not reflect the entire culture of the people. Different pottery types do not necessarily mean that people who used these pots also differed. Pottery analysis only helps in defining a specific trait of the cultural assemblage, nothing more. Some scholars have made attempts to examine whether the evidence provided by some of these cultures of north-western and northern India can be compared with what we know from the study of Vedic texts.

8.3 THE ARYAN INVASION — A MYTH OR REALITY?

Was the Aryan invasion a myth or reality? Let us see to what extent archaeological evidence help us in answering this question.

Archaeologists have attempted to relate the various post-Harappan cultures with the Aryans. The Painted Grey Ware which has been dated between 900 BCE to approximately 500 BCE has been repeatedly connected with Aryan craftsmanship. Their argument is based on inferences which historians make from their analysis

of the literary texts. Hence, archaeologists, following linguistic similarities found between the *Rigveda* and the Avesta, tried to find similarities in pottery forms, paintings on ceramics and forms of copper objects etc. between post-Harappan and the West Asian/Iranian Chalcolithic assemblages. Such similarities were magnified to support the view that the Aryans were a group of people who migrated from West Asia to the Indian subcontinent. Thus literary and archaeological works were made to support one another in order to validate the notion of migration.

Linguistic similarities between the *Rigveda* and the Avesta are not disputed. But such similarities do not really suggest large-scale migration of people into the Indian subcontinent. Secondly, the similarities which have been found between Chalcolithic artefacts of India and those of Western Asia are only occasional. They also do not suggest large-scale migration of people. The concept of an “Aryan”, as stated before, cannot be equated with any particular type of pottery. It also does not have any ethnic or racial significance. The ‘Aryan’ is, therefore, at best a vague concept, related to linguistic similarities between people.

In this context you should take into account the following points suggested by archaeological excavations at various sites:

- 1) Earlier scholars believed that the Indo-Aryans caused the downfall of the Harappan civilization by destroying the Harappan towns and cities. They quoted *Rigvedic* hymns which invoke Indra to destroy the dwellers of the forts. But archaeological evidence has shown that the decline of the Harappan civilization was not caused by any large-scale destruction brought about by an alien invading group.
- 2) Attempts to identify the makers of Painted Grey Ware with the Aryans also do not receive strong support from archaeological evidence. If the PGW cultures were related to the Aryans, then keeping the theory of invasion in mind, we should have found this pottery type in the areas of Bahawalpur and Punjab i.e. along the route taken by the so-called Aryan migrants. However, we find these pottery types confined to a particular geographical region comprising Haryana, Upper Ganga basin and eastern Rajasthan.
- 3) It was earlier thought that there exists a time gap and hence, a cultural discontinuity between the Late Harappan and the post-Harappan Chalcolithic period. However, recent excavations at Bhagwanpura, Dadheri (Haryana), and Manda (Jammu) have shown that the Late Harappan and Painted Grey Wares could be found together without any breaks. Hence “invasion” cannot be proved on the basis of the excavated sites.

What disappeared after 1750 BCE were the towns and cities of the Harappan civilization and such artefacts as the seals, weights, measures etc. i.e. articles connected with trade and urbanism. The rural structure of the earlier period continued into the second and the first millennium BCE. The variation found in the archaeological remains of the post-Harappan period, in terms of pottery, metal implements and other objects, may also represent ‘regional’ variations in Indian Chalcolithic cultures.

Archaeological evidence relating to the period between second millennium BCE and first millennium BCE has thus helped us modify existing views regarding the Vedic ‘Aryans’ in several ways. First, there is no substantial proof in

archaeology that there was **large-scale migration** of people from central or Western Asia into the Indian subcontinent around 1500 BCE. Second, archaeologically there is no proof that the Aryans destroyed the Harappan civilization and laid the foundation of a new Indian civilization. In fact, although the *Rigveda* repeatedly refers to hostilities and wars between different groups, the so-called clashes between Aryan and non-Aryan communities and cultures are not documented in archaeology. However, since the *Rigveda* is the earliest collection of religious hymns available to us, its importance as a document of history is immense. The hymns provide such insights into various aspects of an early society as would not be available in archaeological evidence. From them we get insights regarding the nature of economy, social organization, kingship and political organization, religions and cosmological beliefs and so on. Much of this information is relevant also for understanding the nature of Indian society at later stages. We now therefore turn to what we learn from the *Rigveda* about the Early Vedic society.

8.4 ECONOMY

The Early Vedic society was pastoral; cattle rearing was the dominant occupational activity. A pastoral society relies more on its animal wealth than agricultural produce. 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.

Hymns of the *Rigveda* yield extensive evidence of the importance of cattle in the Early Vedic society. Many linguistic expressions in the *Rigveda* are associated with the cow (*gau*). Cattle was the chief measure of wealth and a wealthy man who owned many cattle was called ‘*gomat*’. The terms used for conflicts and battles in this period were *gavishti*, *gavesana*, *gavyat*, etc. The former literally means ‘to search for cows’. The terms themselves suggest that possession of cattle was the bone of contention between groups and led to occasional inter-tribal fights and conflicts. The Panis, who were the enemies of the Vedic people, are stated in the *Rigveda* to have hidden their wealth, mostly cows, in the mountains and forests. The Vedic god Indra was invoked to release these cattle. This reference suggests that cattle raids were common. The *raja* or the chief is called the ‘*gopati*’ or one who protects cows. In the *Rigveda*, *Godhuli* is used as a term for a measure of time. Distance is called *gavyuti*. A daughter is called *duhitri* or one who milks the cows. Kinship units are labelled as *gotra*.

All these terms are derived from the word *gau* and suggest that social relations and all-important areas of *Rigvedic* life centred round the rearing of cows. Literary references to pasture lands, cow pens, dairy products and domesticated animals are also found in most of the hymns and prayers.

Compared to the very substantial linguistic evidence for cattle rearing in the *Rigveda*, agricultural activities find very few references. Most of the references to agriculture are of a later date. Apart from ‘*Yava*’ or barley, no other grains are mentioned. The Early Vedic people did not use iron technology. Copper, with which they were familiar, did not have as much value in agricultural operations as iron implements. Stone tools (like axes) were used and these are mentioned in the *Rigveda*. Fire was used to burn down the forest cover and shifting agriculture was practised. Further, the region under discussion received low rainfall and all

the rivers mentioned in the *Rigveda* i.e. the Satluj, Indus, Ghaggar, Ravi etc. are known to change their courses frequently. Without the facilities of large-scale irrigation which were not developed in this period, the alluvial lands near the rivers could not be cultivated on a permanent basis. Thus the hoes, sickles and axes mentioned in the texts, were probably used for slashing purposes or shifting cultivation. The evidence of pastoralism as well as shifting cultivation suggests that the people were either nomadic or semi-nomadic. They moved out of their villages with their herds for a certain period in order to feed their cattle. The literary and the archaeological sources do show that the people did not lead a fully sedentary life. The mobile character of the population is seen in the term 'vis' which also implied a settlement. The suffixes Punar (*vis*), Upa (*vis*) and Pra (*vis*) were constantly used, and the settlements were qualified by them to mean settling near (a settlement), re-entering (a settlement) or coming back (to the settlement).

Gift exchange and redistribution had an important economic role in the society. Tribal conflicts led to the payment of tributes and prestations, i.e. *bali*, to the victorious chiefs by the defeated or the subordinate groups. The rest of the clansmen of the victorious tribe had a share in the spoils and booty won in the war. The chief also fed and gave gifts to his clansmen during ceremonial occasions. This was done by him to acquire prestige.

Evidence of trade and commerce in Early Vedic society is meagre. There was no concept of private property based on land-ownership.

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) Discuss the main sources which have been used to reconstruct the history of the Early Vedic people.

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- 2) What were the salient features of the economy of the *Rigveda* people?

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8.5 SOCIETY

The Early Vedic society was a tribal society, in which social relations based on kingship ties were predominant. The society was not divided according to caste lines, and even the *rajas* (kings), the *purohitas* (priests), the artisans etc. were parts of the clan networks. The tribe was referred to as the *jana* and many

references to the different tribes are found in the *Rigveda*. Inter-tribal conflicts were frequent, an example being the battle of the Ten Kings mentioned in the *Rigveda*. Some of the tribes, which fought in this battle were the Bharatas, the Purus, the Yadus, the Druhyus, the Anus and the Turvasus. Tribal conflicts, as mentioned earlier, were related to cattle raids, cattle thefts etc. The chief of the tribe was the *raja* or the *gopati*. He was the leader in battle and the protector of the tribe. His office was not based on heredity, but he was selected from amongst the clansmen. The warrior category was the '*rajanya*'. Many clans (*vis*) formed a tribe. The clans settled in villages or *grama*. The basic social unit was the *Kula*, or the family, and the *Kulapa* i.e. 'one who protects the family' denoted the eldest male member or the head of the family.

Tribe (*Jana*), Tribal Unit (*Vis*), Village (*Grama*), Family (*Kula*), Head of the family (*Kulapa*).

Society was patriarchal. The birth of a son was the common desire of the people. The importance given to the male members is reflected in the hymns, where the desire for a son is a constant prayer.

Even though society was patriarchal, women also had an important position in it. They were educated and they had access to the assemblies. There are also instances of women who composed hymns. They had a right to choose their partners, and could marry late. However women were always thought to be dependent on their fathers, brothers or husbands. Education was imparted orally, but the tradition of education was not very well developed in this period.

The authors of the *Rigveda* distinguished themselves from other groups whom they called *Dasas* and *Dasyus*. The *Dasas* are described as dark, full-lipped, snub-nosed, worshippers of the phallus and of hostile speech. They were rich in cattle and lived in fortified strongholds. We learn about another people called the Panis who were wealthy in cattle treasures. The term Pani came to be associated with merchants and wealth in the subsequent ages. These groups fought and befriended each other from time to time and one cannot define them as separate racial or the linguistic groups. For example, the most famous chief mentioned in the *Rigveda* is Sudasa who led the Bharata tribe in the battle of the Ten Kings. The *Dasa* ending in his name might suggest some links with the *Dasas*. However, the presence of different groups in the same area might have contributed to the emergence of the *varna* system.

Various occupational groups such as those of weavers, smiths, carpenters, leather workers, chariot-makers, priests etc. are also mentioned. The chariot-makers occupied special social status. There are no references to beggars, wage-earners or wages in the *Rigveda*. However, society was economically stratified, and we do find references to rich people possessing chariots, cattle, etc. and making generous gifts of them.

8.6 POLITY

The tribal polity was not completely egalitarian. A division is found in the *Rigveda* itself, which is seen in references to two groups — the *Rajanyas*, or those who fought the wars, and are credited to be the senior lineage, and the rest of the clansmen or the *vis*, who formed the junior lineage. Though none of the groups occupied a distinct social hierarchy, constant conflicts and inter-tribal wars helped

to create a division in the society. The growing needs for more pasture lands, cattle for the protection of people and their settlement all probably contributed to an increase in inter and intra-tribal conflicts and warfare. The clans held large *yajnas* or sacrifices to help the warrior groups in the wars. In these *yajnas* the officiating priest or the *purohita* acted as the mediator between his clansmen and the gods. He also invoked the gods' blessings for the tribal chief, for his success in the wars. Initially, the whole clan participated in these *yajnas* on an equal footing. Large scale distribution of wealth, food, etc. was made during these sacrifices and members got an equal share. But with the growing incidence of conflicts and fights, *yajnas* or sacrifices also became important and the *purohita* assumed a special status in the society. In the later part of our period, they received a major share of the gifts from the *rajās* and assumed a superior position vis-à-vis the other clan members.

The office of the *raja* also assumed importance on account of wars, etc. and the division between the senior and the junior lineages became sharper. At what point of time these political distinctions became apparent is difficult to state, but we must remember that the 10th book of the *Rigveda* contains the 'Purusha-Sukta' hymn, and in the Later Vedic texts we find evidence of the superior *rajnaya* groups, assuming the status of the Kshatriya, a separate *varna* by itself. These developments took place after 1000 BCE. This does not mean that the society was stagnant during our period of study. In fact it was changing slowly but surely leading to the development, in the Later Vedic phase, of a complex socio-political structure.

Tribal assemblies e.g. the *Gana*, *Vidatha*, *Sabha* and *Samiti* are mentioned in the *Rigveda*. The *Sabha* may have been the council of select clan members and the *Samiti* perhaps comprised the whole clan. These assemblies performed the functions of the government and administration and were also involved in the selection of the *raja* from amongst the clansmen. They thus kept the power of the warriors in check. However, as stated before, though we do not find well defined political hierarchy in the Early Vedic set up, the changes during the period gave rise to a socio-political hierarchy which manifested itself in the origin of the *Varna* system during the 'Later Vedic phase'. Early Vedic Society was governed by tribal values and norms and was largely egalitarian.

8.7 RELIGION

The religious ideas of the Vedic people are reflected in the hymns of the *Rigveda*. They venerated the natural forces around them (like wind, water, rain, thunder, fire etc.) which they could not control, and invested nature with divinity conceived in human forms, which were mostly masculine. Very few female deities were venerated. The religion thus reflected the patriarchal society and was that of primitive animism.

Indra was the god of strength, who was invoked to destroy the enemies. He was the God of thunder and was the rainmaker who was asked periodically to release the water. He could not be vanquished. Thus thunder and rain (natural phenomena) were related with strength, which was personified in a masculine form, represented in the god Indra. The concept of a tribal chief, who was a war-lord is also found represented in the character of Indra.

Agni, next in importance to Indra, was the god of fire. He was considered to be an intermediary between heaven and earth i.e., between gods and men. He dominated the domestic hearth and marriages were solemnized in his presence. Fire destroyed dirt and germs, and hence Agni was considered to be pure. The importance of Agni can be related to that of the *yajna* or sacrifice in the Early Vedic society. It was supposed that the oblations offered to Agni were carried to the gods in the form of smoke. Varuna personified water, and he was the upholder of the natural order of the universe.

Yama was the god of death and had an important place in the Early Vedic religious beliefs. There were many other gods e.g. Surya, Soma (also a drink), Savitri, Rudra etc., and hosts of celestial beings like *Gandharvas*, *Apsaras*, Maruts to whom prayers and hymns were addressed in the *Rigveda*.

The Vedic religion was sacrificial in nature. Sacrifices or *yajnas* were performed:

- to invoke the gods,
- in order to grant boons; victory in battles,
- or for acquisition of cattle, sons etc.

We find some hymns dedicated to the power residing in the sacrificial implements, especially to the sacrificial altar, to the stones used for pressing the *Soma* plant, to the weapons of war, drums, mortars etc. Hymns and prayers were recited in these sacrifices and generally priests performed these *yajnas*. The growing importance of sacrifices in the Vedic society resulted in the growing importance of priests as well. The ritual of sacrifice also led to the growth and development in the knowledge of mathematics and animal anatomy. Elementary mathematics was necessary to make the calculations which were required to establish the positions of various objects in the sacrificial area. Also, the frequent sacrifices of animals led to a knowledge of their anatomy. For the Vedic people, the world grew out of a vast cosmic sacrifice. Religion was not based on magico-ritual formulae, rather it stressed direct communication with the gods through sacrifices, hymns etc. Gods were not worshipped for the spiritual upliftment of the people, nor for any other abstract philosophical concepts, but were invoked to grant material gains.

Sacrificial religion is a religion of the pastoral people. Animal sacrifice is rampant in the pastoral society, where the older animals which can no longer produce milk or meat, or used for breeding purposes, i.e. those who are no longer economically viable, are killed in order to lessen the burden on their owner. Hence animal sacrifice was one way of destroying the old animals and thus had an important role in the society. In the agrarian society however older animals are employed in the fields, used for traction purposes and hence the destruction of animals is frowned upon by a society which primarily depends on agricultural activities. Thus the Vedic religion reflected the patriarchal pastoral society and was materialistic in perspective.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) Discuss five important characteristics of the Early Vedic society? Write in five sentences.

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2) What was the position of *Rajan* in the Early Vedic polity?

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3) Discuss the nature of religion of the Early Vedic people.

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4) Write ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ against each sentence

- a) The Avesta is the oldest Iranian text.
- b) The *Purohita* or the priest had no specific place in the society.
- c) The ‘*Sabha*’ and the ‘*Samiti*’ had no power in the selection of the *Raja*.
- d) Indra, the God of strength, was the most important god in the Early Vedic period.
- e) Religion was based on magico-ritual formulae.

8.8 SUMMARY

In this unit you have learnt about literary and to some extent archaeological sources which help in the reconstruction of Early Vedic society. In the light of the archaeological sources it is difficult to accept the notion of a large-scale Aryan migration. The early Vedic economy was mainly pastoral and cow was the most important form of wealth. Agriculture had secondary importance in the life of the Early Vedic people. The Early Vedic society was tribal and basically egalitarian. Clan and kinship relations formed the basis of the society and family was the basic social unit. Social divisions based on occupations had started but there was no caste division. In the Early Vedic polity, the tribal chief or the *Rajan* and the priest or the *Purohita* had important positions. Among several tribal assemblies the *Sabha* and the *Samiti* played important roles. Though there was no well-defined political hierarchy in the Early Vedic set up, the tribal polity was not completely egalitarian. The Early Vedic people personified the natural forces, e.g. wind, water, rain etc. and worshipped them as gods. They worshipped god not through any abstract philosophical concept but for material gains. There was growing importance of sacrifices or *yajnas* in the Vedic religion. What you must remember is that this society was not static but dynamic. Between 1500 BCE and 1000 BCE society was constantly evolving and newer elements in the economic, social, political and religious were operating to transform its structure.

8.9 KEY WORDS

Artefacts	: Something made by human beings, of archaeological interest, e.g. a simple tool or weapon.
Bali	: Tributes and prestations paid to the victorious chiefs by the defeated groups.
Clan	: Large family group, found in tribal communities.
Kinship	: Relationship by blood.
Nomad	: Member of a tribe that wanders from place to place and who has no fixed home.
Patriarchy	: Male dominated family or tribe.
Animism	: The attribution of a soul to natural objects and phenomenon.
Semi-sedentism	: Settlers who do not settle in a place permanently and move to a new settlement.
Shifting agriculture	: After the use of a land for cultivation for a short period, it is left and fresh land is used.
Stratigraphy	: Layers detected in the excavation. The basis for detecting these layers could lie in the different soil types or different artefacts found in the excavated profile.

8.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) See Section 8.2
- 2) See Section 8.4.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) Your answer should include that it was a tribal society, society was patriarchal, family was the basic social unit, caste division was not present etc. See Section 8.5.
- 2) *Raja* was the chief of the tribe. Frequent wars made him important. He was the protector of the tribe. His position was not always hereditary. See Section 8.6.
- 3) The Vedic people worshipped various forces of nature as gods. Stress was on sacrifice but not on magico-ritual formulae. Religion was based on material gains. See Section 8.7.
- 4)
 - a) yes
 - b) no
 - c) no
 - d) yes
 - e) no

8.11 SUGGESTED READINGS

Basham, A. L. (1986). *The Wonder that was India*. New Delhi

Kosambi, D. D. (1987). *The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India in Historical Outline*. New Delhi

Thapar, Romila (2002). *The Penguin History of Early India. From the Origins to AD 1300*. New Delhi: Penguin Books.

UNIT 9 VEDIC PERIOD-II*

Structure

- 9.0 Objectives
- 9.1 Introduction
- 9.2 Sources
 - 9.2.1 Literary Sources
 - 9.2.2 Archaeological Sources
- 9.3 Iron Technology and its Impact
- 9.4 The Nature of Economy
 - 9.4.1 Importance of Pastoralism Declines
 - 9.4.2 Changes in the Functions of Rituals
 - 9.4.3 Emerging Importance of Land
- 9.5 Polity and Society
 - 9.5.1 Polity
 - 9.5.2 Society
- 9.6 Religion
- 9.7 Summary
- 9.8 Key Words
- 9.9 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises
- 9.10 Suggested Readings

9.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will be able to learn about:

- the sources which enable us to study the Later Vedic society;
- the changes in the social, political, economic and religious structure during the Later Vedic period; and
- the economic and social implications of change in technology with the introduction of a new metal, i.e. iron.

9.1 INTRODUCTION

The period that you are going to study now, extends roughly from 1000 BCE to 600 BCE. By this period some of Vedic tribes had moved from the 'Sapta Sindhava' region to the Upper-Ganga valley and other adjacent regions.

During the period of this shift a number of changes in their social, political, economic and religious structure took place. In this Unit, we shall be discussing the major aspects of these changes.

9.2 SOURCES

We get both literary as well as archaeological sources to study this period. Let us discuss these below:

* This Unit has been adopted from EHI-02, Block 3

9.2.1 Literary Sources

The later additions especially the 10th *Mandala* of the *Rigveda Samhita* and the *Sama*, the *Yajur* and the *Atharvaveda Samhitas* are the other Vedic texts which are assigned to the Later Vedic phase. The *Samaveda Samhita* is a book of prayers and chants which are from the *Rigveda*, modified and set to tune for the explicit purpose of singing them during rituals. The *Yajurveda* elaborates the rituals which accompany the recitation of hymns. The rituals and the hymns in this *Samhita* document the social and political milieu of this period. The *Artharvaveda* contains the folk tradition of this period and represents popular religion. It is a good source for understanding the socio-religious conditions of the common people.

These *Samhitas* are followed by a series of texts called the *Brahmanas*, which are commentaries on the Vedas. They explain the social and religious aspects of the rituals and throw light on the Vedic society. Although it would be wrong to take any period of early Indian history as the ‘Epic’ period as such, the two Sanskrit Epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* are rich in information on different aspects of early Indian society. Historians believe that the core of what is reflected in these Epics can be traced to the Later Vedic phase. The geographical focus of the phase was on the territories of the upper-Ganga basin and the middle-Ganga basin, although other regions are also mentioned. In the Epics, major events took place in this region. We must however remember that there is nothing to prove that the stories narrated in the Epics were actual historical events. Secondly both the Epics took centuries to reach their present shape. So, there are many types of societies which we may find reflected in the Epics.

9.2.2 Archaeological Sources

The literary sources repeatedly refer to the areas of Western U.P., Haryana and Rajasthan. The period assigned to the Later Vedic phase is circa 1000 BCE to 600 BCE. Many communities and cultural groups are mentioned in the texts. However, particular pottery forms cannot be identified with any tribe or group. It should be noted that in the same geographical region some agricultural communities flourished in roughly the same time bracket. These communities used a particular kind of pottery called the Painted Grey Ware (PGW). Thus, these archaeological finds would reflect the material conditions of the Later Vedic society.

More than 700 PGW sites have been found along the Upper-Ganga basin. Their distribution extends from the dry beds of the river Ghaggar in Bahawalpur and northern Rajasthan, to the watershed of the Indus and Ganges and the Ganga-Yamuna Doab. The eastern limit of this ware is restricted to the northern plains of the Ganges, as the site of Shravasti indicates. Some important PGW sites are Atranjikhhera, Ahichhatra, Noh, Hastinapura, Kurukshetra, Bhagwanpura and Jakhera.

The Banas culture of southern Rajasthan, which has been dated from 2000- 1400 BCE may have possibly extended to the Ganges valley at around 800 BCE. Thus, these Black-and-Red ware users can also be related to the present period.

Archaeology does not document the eastward shift of the ‘Vedic Aryans’, a shift which is suggested in the literary texts. Archaeology does not document any

single culture shifting eastwards. Thus, there remains a large gap between the nature of the literary and the archaeological sources. There is however the general point that the Later Vedic society as well the society reflected in archaeology was a society which had used iron. Iron objects are common to most of the PGW sites. The Carbon 14 dates from Atranjikhera, Jodhpura and Noh suggest that, in the context of the Gangetic plains, this metal was introduced around 1000-800 BCE. The exploitation of the iron ore in Uttar Pradesh, Himachal and Punjab, and later in South Bihar, was an indigenous phenomenon. The *Rigveda* mentions “*ayas*” which may refer to iron, though the archaeological evidence relates iron to the Later Vedic period. Literary sources provide ample corroboration of this. The Yajur Veda qualifies “*ayas*” as *Syama ayas*, and the *Brahmanas* speak of *Krishna ayas*. Both the words refer to a black metal which means Iron.

Recent excavations suggest that the megalithic people of south India too were familiar with iron technology. Hence, we can no longer talk in terms of the introduction of iron technology into the Indian subcontinent by the migrant Aryans.

9.3 IRON TECHNOLOGY AND ITS IMPACT

An important question to be asked here is: did the knowledge of iron lead to any advancement in the metal technology of the period? Similarly, one would also like to know the extent to which the introduction of a new technology changed the material milieu of the society.

The evidence of the Later Vedic period suggests a transition from a pastoral society to a sedentary agrarian society. It was earlier suggested that the socketed axes made of iron were extensively used to clear the forests of the Gangetic *Doab* for permanent cultivation. It was also believed that iron tipped ploughshares and hoes increased the efficiency of agricultural implements which furthered agricultural activities. Thus, scholars believed that the knowledge of iron technology was an important factor for the development of agrarian economy. However, we now know that the Later Vedic period was neither purely agrarian, nor was it well advanced in iron technology. The rich iron ore mines of Bihar were still not exploited, and the technology of smelting iron was primitive.

The objects which are found in the excavations are iron tipped arrowheads, spearheads, etc. i.e. weapons of which the largest number comes from the Ahichhatra excavations. Sickles, hoes, axes are rarely found in the excavations. One ploughshare has been reported from Jakhera which probably belongs to the end of this period. Thus, from the excavations, it appears that the use of iron was restricted to making weapons. Iron did not influence the agricultural technology until the second half of the first millennium BCE when the marshlands and monsoon forests in the middle-Gangetic valley were gradually cleared.

In the Later Vedic period, clearing of forests by burning was carried out in the upper *Doab*. We have the description of the burning of the *Khandavavana* in the *Mahabharata* to establish the city of Indraprastha. Iron tipped weapons and horse chariots helped military activities which were rampant in this period and have been extensively documented in the *Mahabharata*. However, in subsistence related activities, iron technology had practically no role.

9.4 THE NATURE OF ECONOMY

The growth of agriculture in the Later Vedic period was made possible by the availability of vast tracts of fertile alluvial lands of the Ganga-Yamuna *Doab* and the middle-Ganga valley. This was an area which was slowly settled throughout the first millennium BCE. However, the Later Vedic texts reflect the continued importance of pastoralism.

Both archaeological and literary sources document the introduction of rice as the staple diet of the people. The PGW and Banas culture have yielded charred grains of rice from excavated sites. The Vedic texts mention *Vrihi*, *Tandula* and *Sali*, all denoting rice. It appears that double cropping was practised now, and the fields grew both barley and rice. The elaborate sacrifices of this period, e.g. the *Rajasuya*, include offerings of grain along with milk, ghee and animals. The twelve sacrifices prescribed in the *Atharvaveda* for acquiring material benefits recommend the gifts of cows, calves, oxen, gold, cooked rice, thatched houses and well cultivated fields to the brahmanas. The items of the offerings are a clear indication of the growing importance of sedentary settlements and agriculture. Later Vedic texts also refer to eight, twelve and even twenty-four oxen yoked to the plough. Though the number of oxen mentioned is possibly symbolic, the reference suggests that plough cultivation was familiar in this period.

9.4.1 Importance of Pastoralism Declines

Pastoralism was no longer the main subsistence activity of the people as it was in the Early Vedic period. Mixed farming which included cultivation and herding was the occupational norm of this period. Agricultural activities in this phase were not labour intensive. The sites from where rice remains are found in the excavations are located on the elevated areas of the *Doab*. This suggests that wet rice cultivation which is labour intensive was not practised as yet.

Mixed farming led to the rise of sedentary settlements. The PGW deposits are generally 2 to 3 m. deep and indicate that people were living in the same spot for a long time. At Bhakpura and Jakhera, the excavations show that the earlier phase of circular huts made of wattle-and-daub or wood were replaced in this period by more substantial houses with earth walls. Thus, durable materials were being used for house construction owing to the adoption of a sedentary life style.

9.4.2 Changes in the Functions of Rituals

In the Early Vedic society rituals were performed to bring about the welfare of the entire tribe. Gods were worshipped for ensuring victory over other tribes, granting of cattle and sons. It was also an occasion for the chiefs to distribute wealth. In the Later Vedic society, the function of rituals underwent a subtle change. Rituals became much more complicated which could continue for years. Thus, only the rich could perform them. The spirit of collectivism was reduced. Sacrifices were performed to ensure control over the rest of the tribe. Gifts were no longer given to the entire tribe. Rather the chief gave gifts to the brahmanas who performed sacrifices for him. The rituals were so complicated that it needed expert brahmanas to perform it since wrong incantation could bring disaster to the performer. The performance of sacrifices was supposed to grant super-human status to the chiefs meaning that they were superior to rest of the tribe. For this

service the chief passed on a large part of his wealth to the brahmana priest. Thus, the rituals became a mechanism for ensuring the material and spiritual superiority of the chiefs and the brahmanas.

9.4.3 Emerging Importance of Land

Land was cultivated through family labour and the help of domestic servants and slaves. In this period, initially land was owned by the clan or the *vis*. When clan ownership gradually changed to family ownership, the *grhapati* or householder became a man of wealth. The *vaisyas* (those who originally belonged to the *vis*) were the producing class in the society and they became the source of wealth and subsistence for the *kshatriyas* and the *brahmanas* who did not actively participate in food production. The *vaisyas* had to give prestations to the *kshatriyas* in lieu of the latter’s protection of their lands; *dana* and *dakshina* to the priests for their moral upliftment. The *vis/vaisya*, characterizing the householding economy, became the mainstay of economy. Prestations and *dana* to the non-producing classes helped in the distribution of subsistence goods. There are no references to the sale of land. *Visvakarma Bhauvana*, a ruler, was rebuked by *Prithvi* (the earth) when he tried to make a grant of land. This textual reference suggests communal ownership of land over which the *vis* had major participatory rights.

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

1) What was the impact of iron technology on the Later Vedic society?

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2) What was the family in the Later Vedic period?

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9.5 POLITY AND SOCIETY

The transition from a predominantly pastoral to a mixed farming economy had a great impact on the character of the Later Vedic society and polity. The main trends of changes were:

- Tribal identity of the Early Vedic society gradually gave way to territorial identity and consequently the nature of chiefship changed.
- The social structure which was based on relations within a clan and was largely egalitarian in the Early Vedic period became much more complex.

This type of society is marked by inequality. Even the same clan was divided into groups, some of which could have had a high status in society and some low status.

9.5.1 Polity

Jana was used in the sense of people or tribe in the *Rigvedic* period, but now the concept of *janapada* emerged. *Janapada* meant the area where the tribe settled. The word *rashtra* was also used for the first time in the Later Vedic texts. However, it was still not used in the sense of a state with well defined territories.

The Kurus, who were formed from the union between two major Vedic tribes—the Bharatas and the Purus, are mentioned in texts as occupying the area in the upper portion of the Ganga-Yamuna *Doab*. Similarly, the Panchalas are mentioned as people who occupied the middle portion of the *Doab*, called the *Panchala desa*. This indicates that tribal identities were merging with territorial identities. It is also stated that when the Kurus and the Panchalas came together, their authority over the upper and middle reaches of the Ganga-Yamuna *Doab* was complete. These changes in the relationship between the *Jana* and the area over which it wielded control helped towards the formation of the *mahajanapadas* and *janapadas* by the sixth century BCE.

Tribal Chiefs and Warriors

When tribal groups came to be associated and identified with particular territories, it also brought about a change in the status and functions of the tribal chiefs. The *rajan* or the chief was no longer involved only in cattle raids but emerged as the protector of the territory where his tribesmen settled. The *rajanya* which already was a superior lineage during the *Rigvedic* period, now became the ‘Kshatriya’ i.e. those who held power over dominions, which is the literal meaning of the word ‘Kshatriya’. The kshatriya class based their power on their role as the protector of the tribes and the land over which their tribes settled. The ‘*vis*’ had to pay prestations to the kshatriya, in lieu of the latter’s protection and thus the status of the *vis* was progressively subordinated to the kshatriya lineage. *Bali* and *Bhaga* no longer meant prestations given at will, but gradually assumed the form of regular tributes and taxes.

Tribal Assemblies

The change in the status of the kshatriya or the warrior class is also reflected in the changing nature of the tribal assemblies. The *sabha* became more important than the *samiti* during this period.

Reference to *rajas* in the assembly or the *sabha* suggests that they helped the king in his duties. The office of the *raja* or the chief was not based solely on birth, but the choice of *rajas* was restricted to the kshatriyas.

Raja’s Legitimacy

In the absence of firmly established principles of heredity and primogeniture, consecratory rituals became very important for the ruler in order to assert this authority. Hence, ceremonial sacrifices like *Rajasuya*, *Ashvamedha* and *Vajapeya* were performed on lavish scale. In the *Rigvedic* period, the *Ashvamedha yajna* was a small affair. But in later period, this was performed to subjugate other areas and legitimize the ruler’s hold over alien lands. The other two *yajnas*

included prayers for the ruler's health and all three were in essence legitimizing methods employed by the *raja* to proclaim his superiority and power. For instance, the sacrificer was proclaimed as a *raja* in the course of the *Rajasuya*. These sacrifices were found to be of relevance in later periods also when new kingdoms and new monarchs emerged. They used sacrifices to give religious legitimacy to their power.

The *raja* was also required to integrate his territory with resources, economic production and distribution which enhanced his status considerably from a mere raider, or a leader in battles. However, he was not yet the sovereign. The fact that he was elected and could be removed put severe constraints on him, since he was answerable to the clan. Also, he did not appoint the other *rajās* who helped him with his duties. They were chiefs in their own right. What is important is that the kshatriya lineage gained a distinctly superior status during this period, the reason being that the concept of territorial identity was established now. Thus, territory became the physical manifestation of the ruler's power to rule.

Tribal Conflicts

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

The Priest

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

9.5.2 Society

We have already read about the declining status of *vis* and the ascendancy of the kshatriyas and the brahmanas. Society was thus composed of unequal groups.

One hymn describes the origin of the four *varnas*, i.e. Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya and the Shudra from the body of the universal creator, Prajapati. The 'Hymn of the Primeval Man' comes from the later portion of the *Rigveda*. This hymn for the first time describes the origin of the four *varnas*. It says...

“When they divided the Man, into how many parts did they divide him? What was his mouth, what were his arms, what were his thighs and his feet called?

“The Brahman was his mouth, of his arms made the Kshatriya, his thigh became the Vaishya, of his feet the Shudra was born”.

The symbolism which is projected in these hymns is that brahmana, kshatriya, vaishya and shudra are limbs of the society. However, these limbs did not have equal status. The brahmana was compared to the head whereas the shudra was compared to the feet. In social life brahmanas were considered the highest varna because society could communicate with gods with the help of brahmanas only. The shudras on the other hand performed menial tasks and included slaves captured in wars.

Concept of Varna

The system of *varna* had the following features:

- status by birth
- a hierarchical ordering of the *varnas* (brahmana, kshatriya, vaishya, shudra) with brahmanas at the top and shudras at the base.
- Rules of endogamy and ritual purity.

The *Varna* system is further tied with the concept of *Dharma* i.e. universal law, and the *varnadharma* was an attempt to establish a social law for a systematic functioning of the society. However, the *varnadharma* system was not properly developed in the Later Vedic society.

The division of social groups was based on occupation alone, and society was still flexible, where, one's occupation did not depend on birth.

Even in the later times i.e., post-Vedic, the *varnadharma* described the ritual status of each group. The *varna* system did not prevent the non-kshatriyas from claiming kshatriya status and becoming rulers (examples being the Nandas and the Mauryas) nor brahmanas from claiming political suzerainty (e.g. Shunga kings).

Thus, the theoretical model of the *varna* system could never be rigidly enforced in the post-Vedic period.

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

Gotra

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

Family

The patriarchal family was well established and the *grhapati* acquired a special status. Since house holding economy was gaining predominance, the position of

the householder too acquired economic importance. The rights on land were based on usage, and communal ownership of land prevailed. The *grhapatis* were wealthy and their ritual role was that of a *yajamana* (i.e. he who orders sacrifice). Their wealth did not come from gifts but was produced by their own efforts. Through *yajnas*, which they were bound to perform to gain merit, a part of their wealth got channelled to the brahmanas.

Despite the presence of some women philosophers and the references to a few queens participating in the coronation rituals, women were considered subordinate to men, and were not involved in any major decision making.

Three Stages of Life

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

9.6 RELIGION

The texts of this period indicate two different religious traditions:

- the Vedic, which is documented in the *Sama* and *Yajurveda samhitas* and the *Brahmanas*
- the non-Vedic or perhaps the folk tradition extensively documented in the *Atharvaveda*.

The fact that the Atharvan religious tradition was considered to be part of the Vedic suggests assimilation of different cultures and beliefs into the Vedic religious system. The *Yajurveda Samhita* and *Brahmanas* document the sacrificial religion of the period. Sacrifices became very important during this period and they assumed both a public and private character. The public sacrifices e.g. the *Rajsuyas*, *Vajapeya*, *Ashvamedha* were conducted on a massive scale, where the whole community participated. Some of the rituals performed in these sacrifices show elements of a fertility cult. For instance, the *Ashvamedha yajna* required the chief queen to lie next to the sacrificial horse, where the queen represented the earth, and this ritual was thought to ensure the prosperity of the king. A number of agricultural rituals were performed in the *Rajasuya* and the *Vajapeya yajna*. The periodical rejuvenation of the earth and its fertility are some of the themes which were included in the ceremonial *yajnas*.

Priest Craft

Later Vedic texts reveal the elaboration of rituals which were complicated and needed professional men, trained in the art of performing them. *Vidhis* or rules for performing the sacrifices were formulated and the Vedic sacrifices no longer meant a simple offering of food/oblations into the fire. The types of offering, types of sacrifices etc. differed according to the needs of the patron or the *yajamana*.

Sacrifices were now endowed with mystical symbolism and every ritual act was endowed with mysterious power. A new science of priestcraft emerged because of the complexities involved in the performance of these *yajnas*, whether private or public. Thus, a class of priests became specialists in the performances of *yajnas*. There were even different sets of priests for performing different stages of the same sacrificial ritual.

The Changing Gods

Two prominent Early Vedic gods, Indra and Agni lost their importance. Prajapati the creator became important. This phenomenon also represents the importance of sedentism now, since creation myths are important in agrarian groups. Rudra, a minor deity in the *Rigveda*, became important now and Vishnu was conceived as the creator and protector of the universe. Pushan who protected cattle in the former period now became the god of the shudras. The changing status of the deities is an indication of the change in the character of the tribes from pastoral groups to sedentary agriculturist groups. The Early Vedic gods who represented natural phenomena were slowly discarded and the personification of natural elements as divine beings became very complex. It was no longer easy to find the natural element which represented a particular god from the hymns of the Later Vedic period.

Folk Tradition

The *Atharvaveda* is a mine of information regarding the folk tradition. Its contents are radically different from the Vedic sacrificial religion and it is concerned more with magic. The contents of this *Veda* cover different aspects of human life. The hymns deal with:

- the cure for diseases,
- prayers for health,
- charms for the prosperity of home and children,
- cattle and fields,
- charms to produce harmony,
- charms concerned with love and marriage or conversely rivalry and jealousy etc.

The *Atharvaveda* thus documents the kinds of superstitions and beliefs which were prevalent. The term *Atharvan* indicates magical formula and the *Atharvan* priests officiated in this religion. Gods of the Vedic tradition were invoked but the reasons for which they were invoked were trivial and individualistic. Many godlings and spirits such as *pisacas*, *rakshasas* and so on (some malevolent and some benevolent), were invoked either to bring good fortune or to cause havoc and destruction to one's friends and foes respectively. The invocations and the chants related to the domestic and the household and were close to the daily cycles of existence of the common man.

For example, Indra was asked to kill the house robber, the worm in the body and the wolf devil. The Ashvins were entrusted with the protection of agriculture and the killing of rats. Savitri was summoned to fix a place where a new home could be built. Pusan was invoked to bring harmony and safe delivery of babies, while Surya was invoked to remove demons.

Towards the end of this period, a strong reaction against priestly domination and against the complexities involved in the *yajnas* resulted in the formulation of a philosophical doctrine which is enunciated in the *Upanishads*. These texts emphasized the knowledge of the *atman* or the soul as against ritualistic practices and the wasteful expenditure which accompanied sacrifices. Thus, the materialistic aspect of the religion was discarded, and religion was raised to the realm of philosophy. The *Upanishads* emphasized the changelessness and indestructibility of the soul which in a way seemed to emphasize the need for stability and integration in a period when the *janapadas* and *mahajanapadas*, i.e. republics and monarchies were emerging.

Thus, we find that a great change in religious beliefs and practices had taken place between the Early Vedic and the Later Vedic period (This change was partly related to the shift from pastoralism to agriculture). The religious changes of this period parallel and reflect the socio-political and economic changes that had taken place from the Early Vedic to the Later Vedic phase.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

1) What does the changing nature of gods in Later Vedic phase indicate?

.....

2) Mark ‘True’ or ‘False’

- a) *Atharvaveda* reflects the folk tradition of the Later Vedic period. ()
- b) Iron technology was mostly used for agriculture in the Later Vedic period. ()
- c) In the Later Vedic period pastoralism was the main subsistence activity. ()
- d) Land had become more important and tribe ownership of land gradually changed to family ownership in the Later Vedic period. ()
- e) During the Later Vedic period, the *sabha* became more important than *samiti*. ()
- f) The Later Vedic people began to marry within the same *gotra*. ()
- g) The gods in Later Vedic period reflect the change in the character of society from nomadic to a settled one. ()

9.7 SUMMARY

In this Unit you got to know that the Vedic society was changing from pastoral nomadic lifestyle to a settled agricultural society, but iron was yet to play an important role in agriculture. Well defined political units were established, laws were codified, and a distinct social stratification emerged. Vedic and the folk

religious tradition of this period were increasingly coming together while maintaining their identity. In this process of change, some minor gods of Early Vedic period e.g. Rudra, became more important while the earlier important gods e.g. Indra became less important. Both the literary and archaeological sources of this period have to be read together to get an overall picture of the period.

9.8 KEY WORDS

Consecration	: The process of giving importance or legitimacy.
Double Cropping	: To grow two crops on one piece of land simultaneously.
Endogamy	: Marrying within e.g. within a tribe, caste or a <i>gotra</i> etc.
Exogamy	: Marriage outside a caste, <i>gotra</i> etc.
Fertility Cult	: A ritual/religious practice where human birth or process of birth is emphasised.
Folk Tradition	: Traditions of the common people.
Gift Economy	: An economy in which gifts play an important role in maintaining its institutions.
Labour Intensive	: An activity where labour or manpower is used relatively more than technology.
Sedentary	: Stationary or remaining at one place.
Stratification	: Division into levels; e.g. social stratification means division of society into different kinds according to some criteria e.g. caste, wealth etc.
Subsistence activity	: Activity relating to economic survival.
Prestation	: Service or offering required by custom or promise.

9.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) Your answer should comment on whether iron had become important for war or daily use and why?
- 2) Your answer should comment on the importance of the family, importance of the householder, position of women in family.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) Your answer should comment on whether the new gods indicated a new kind of society.
- 2)
 - a) True
 - b) False
 - c) False
 - d) True
 - e) True

- f) False
- g) True

9.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 10 EMERGENCE OF IRON*

Structure

- 10.0 Objectives
- 10.1 Introduction
- 10.2 Pre-Iron Age Cultures
- 10.3 Beginnings of Iron Technology
- 10.4 Megalithic Culture
- 10.5 Painted Grey Ware Culture
- 10.6 Northern Black Polished Ware
- 10.7 Urbanization in Ganga Valley
- 10.8 Summary
- 10.9 Key Words
- 10.10 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises
- 10.11 Suggested Readings

10.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will learn about:

- the Pre-Iron Age cultures;
- the emergence of iron in the Indian subcontinent;
- Iron Age of south India and its relationship with Megaliths;
- the two most important pottery traditions of North India: PGW and NBPW; and
- role of iron in the emergence of Second Urbanization in the sixth century BCE.

10.1 INTRODUCTION

This Unit deals with the emergence of Iron in India. The students will also learn about the various aspects of Pre-Iron Age cultures and see how these cultures provided a foundation for the emergence of the Iron Age. After reading this Unit you will be able to know about the different pottery traditions of Iron Age and the antiquity of iron in India.

The emergence of iron created momentous changes which led to the rise of urban centers in the Indian subcontinent. This Unit will also explain the impact of iron technology on the cultural sphere.

10.2 PRE-IRON AGE CULTURES

Before beginning with the study of the Iron phase, it is necessary to have a look at the various Pre-Iron age cultures, understand their material culture and get an idea as to how they formed the basis for the emergence of Iron Age.

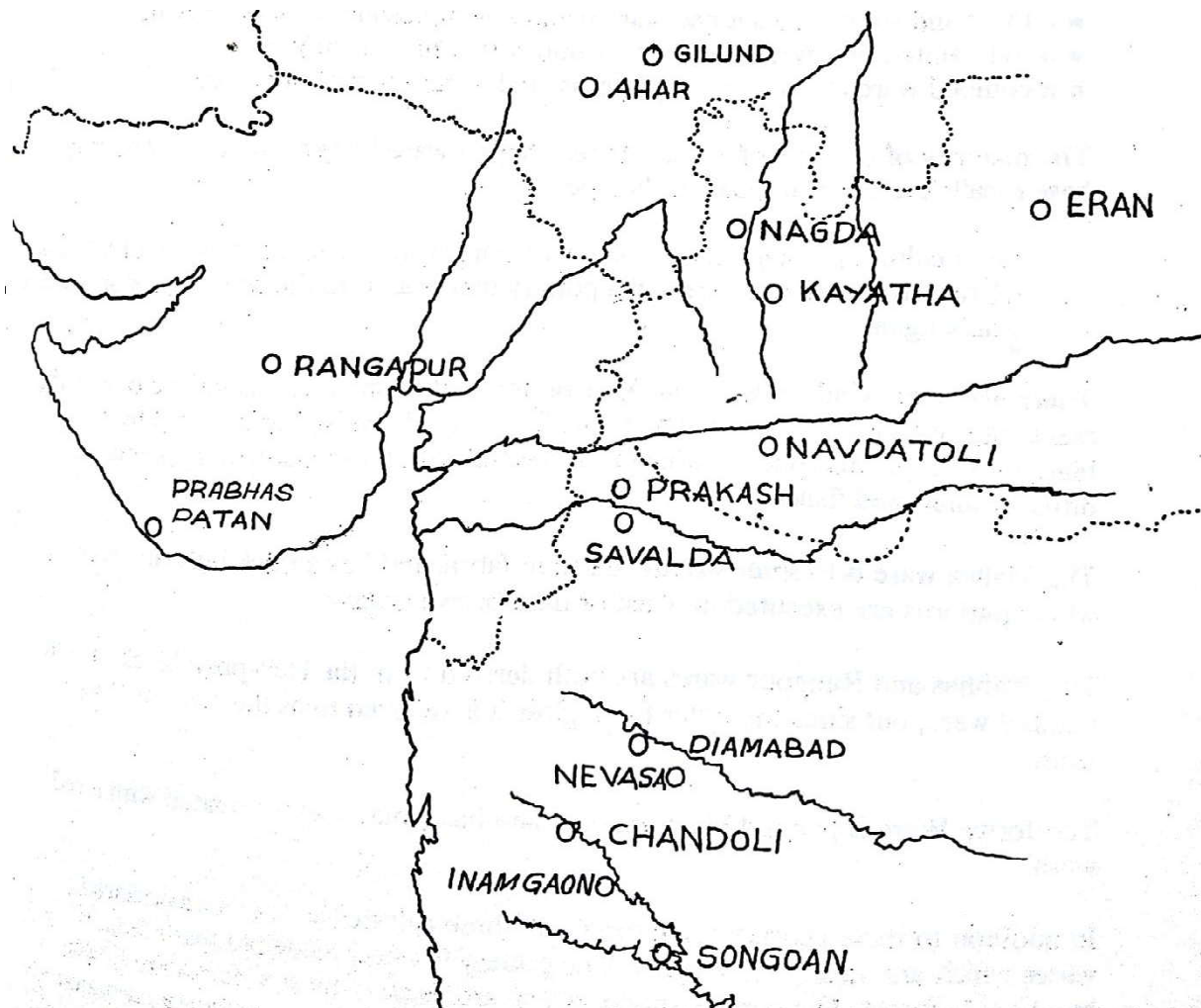
* Dr Sidharth Shankar Rai, Baba Saheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University, Lucknow

Chalcolithic Cultures

Chalcolithic culture is a phase of human history when copper tools were used along with stone tools. This was basically a rural culture and was spread across the Indian subcontinent. These cultures are distinguished on the basis of pottery traditions and named after their key sites or the region they belonged to. The general pattern of life of the Neolithic period continued during this period. The number of settlements increased, and different types of potteries were made on a fast wheel with well levigated clay. Evidence of pottery decoration is also found in this period. Some of the prominent non-Harappan Chalcolithic cultures are as follows:

- Banas Culture (Rajasthan), 2600 BCE-1900 BCE
- Kayatha Culture (Madhya Pradesh), 2400 BCE-2000 BCE
- Malwa Culture (Western Madhya Pradesh), 1700 BCE-1400 BCE
- Jorwe Culture (Maharashtra), 1400 BCE-700 BCE
- Prabhas Culture (Saurashtra Coast), 1800 BCE-1200 BCE
- Savalda Culture (Tapi Valley)

Though there were regional variations, the Chalcolithic cultures have presented a certain uniformity in their material traits. The Chalcolithic people practiced hunting and farming, domesticated animals, used a large number of microliths as well as agricultural implements such as querns and mullers, lived in thatched



Map: Chalcolithic Sites in Western and Central India. Source: EHI-02, Block 3.

huts, used mud bricks (Gilund in Rajasthan and Nagda in Malwa), had clearly defined burial practices, and their burial goods indicated the presence of a stratified or a ranked society.

Chalcolithic people were well connected with regional and trans-regional cultures through trade and exchange networks. Site hierarchy and settlement patterns suggest a kind of chiefdom in the Chalcolithic culture. The Chalcolithic cultures were non-urban in nature. Unlike the Harappan culture, they were not based on surplus production, extensive trade, crafts, fortified towns, writing and an elaborate drainage system.

The Chalcolithic cultures are significant as they represent early farming communities in non-Harappan India. Though these were non-urban cultures, they represent a more sophisticated and advanced society as compared to the preceding Neolithic cultures. This is evident in their well-made pottery, growing of varied crops in different ecological niches and fine copper tools. They laid the base for the growth of agricultural surplus and urbanism of the sixth century BCE when the advent of iron initiated important changes in the economy and society.

The Chalcolithic sites were deserted around 1000 BCE, though at places they continued to exist up to 700 BCE.

OCP Culture and the Problem of Copper Hoards

Copper hoards refer to the accidental finds of various copper objects as hoards, in the Ganga valley (Figure 10.1). These copper artifacts are made from pure copper and comprise shouldered celts, antennae swords, harpoons, spearheads, rings and anthropomorphs (Figures 10.2 and 10.3). The excavations at Saipai and Sanauli reveal the archaeological context of these copper objects. From Saipai a hooked spearhead and harpoon was found in archaeological excavations in 1970. From the same cultural level, a special kind of pottery was found which is called Ochre Coloured Pottery (OCP). Presently more than 100 copper hoards have been found from different parts of India.



Fig. 10.1: Copper Hoard Artefact from Rewari, Haryana

(Probably not a use-object but more likely had religious function) Credit: Pyule, 1981, 93 no. 1075, PID, PI 100.1075.

Source: Wikimedia Commons. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Copper_Hoard_Culture#/media/File:Rewari_Cu_hoard_object,_1075.jpg)

The major copper hoards sites are Rajpur-Parasu, Bithur, Bisauli, Sarthauli, Manpur, Saipai etc. It is observed that the copper hoard sites are located between latitude 78°E and 84°E. Copper hoards are made from almost pure copper. These objects have been prepared with casting technique as well as by hammering and cutting of metal sheets. Further processing like cold work and annealing seems absent in these objects. These objects could have been used in hunting, fishing and clearing of the jungles. Another view states that these objects are very heavy and had no use in the day-to-day activities of the people. This was the reason as to why they have not been found in a stratigraphical context. One thing is certain, that, the copper technology of the Copper Hoards was very sophisticated and could not have been the work of an ordinary culture.

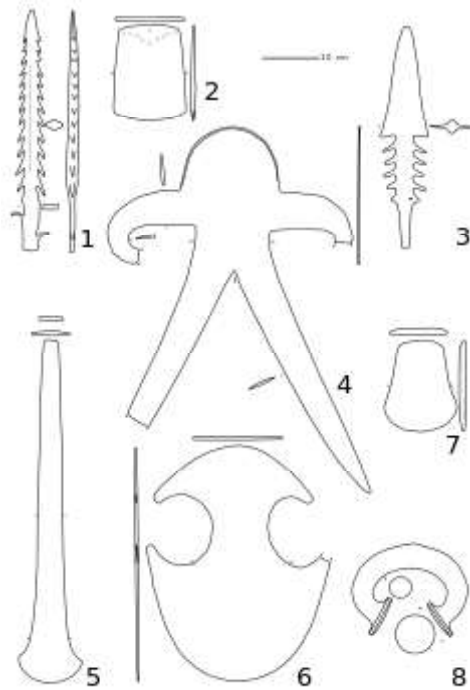


Fig. 10.2: Selected Hoard Artifacts. 1-2 from South Haryana; 3-4 from UP; 5 from MP; 6-8 from Bihar-North Odisha-Bengal.

Source: Wikipedia Commons (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Copper_Hoard_Culture#/media/File:Ind_cu_hoard_groups.svg)



Fig. 10.3: Anthropomorphic Figures, Ganga Yamuna Basin. From Bisauli

(212 Kms. From N. Delhi), Badaun District, UP. Credit: Ismoon.

Source: Wikipedia Commons. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Copper_Hoard_Culture#/media/File:Anthropomorphic_figures,_chalcolithic,Yamuna-Ganga.BKB.jpg

Confusion persists regarding their authorship. Some scholars associate them with the Harappan culture while others relate them with Vedic people. Scholars maintain that it is possible that after the decline of the Harappan civilization, the Late Harappan people moved out and spread eastwards and introduced copper technology in local areas. This surmise is corroborated by the finds of Late Harappan ware in association with OCP at Ambakheri and Bargaon in Western UP. However, the picture is hazy and needs more research.

10.3 BEGINNINGS OF IRON TECHNOLOGY

Iron metallurgy is more complex than copper and involves several stages in the process of ore procurement and the manufacturing of finished tools. According to some scholars iron metallurgy started at one place and then diffused to other regions. This mono-centric theory is being questioned today and the available data shows that Iron technology emerged independently in various regions of the Old World.

Antiquity of Iron

Antiquity of Iron in India is a highly debatable issue. It is well established that Rigvedic people had no knowledge of Iron. Early Buddhist literature and Kautilya's *Arthashastra* refer to iron smithing in early historic India.

The middle phase of Ahar Chalcolithic period (2500-2000 BCE) has given clear evidence of several iron artifacts which became more prominent in the Late Ahar phase (2000-1700 BCE). In the PGW culture (1000-600 BCE) iron is reported from several sites in the Ganga valley and it is found in the context of south Indian Megaliths in the 1st millennium BCE.

Excavations conducted at Raja Nal Ka Tila and Malhar in north-central India are significant for tracing the origin of iron technology in this region. From Raja Nal Ka Tila iron is reported from pre-NBP deposits (1400 BCE and 800 BCE). A number of iron tools and iron slag were found from this site. The most important evidence of iron working has come from the site of Malhar in district Chandauli of Uttar Pradesh. This site is located in a hematite rich rocky area. Four cultural periods viz. Pre-Iron, Iron, NBPW and Shunga-Kushana period have been identified from this site. Iron tools along with the finds of furnaces and iron slag establish this as an important iron metallurgical centre.

It is plausible that iron metallurgy developed independently and had more than one independent centre of origin. Iron was found either as a by-product of copper smelting or it was extracted separately and developed parallel to copper smelting. Several cultures are associated with Iron Age. Black-and-Red ware culture which is of pan-Indian character; PGW and NBPW culture of north India; and Megalithic culture of south India are important in this context.

Black-and-Red Ware culture

Black-and-Red Ware or BRW culture is represented by a distinctive pottery which due to inverted firing technique has black colour on the inside while the rest of the fabric is red in colour. BRW has been found from all over India. It was found in the Harappan context in Gujarat; as a pre-Painted Grey Ware (Pre-PGW) culture in northern India and in the context of Megaliths of south India. Excavations at Atranjikheda and Noh have revealed that BRW was sandwiched between OCP

and PGW level. This chronological sequence (OCP-BRW-PGW) has been found at most sites but more prominently at Jodhpura and Noh. Co-existence of BRW and PGW found at Ahichchhatra, Aalamgirpur and Hastinapura, is remarkable. The extension of this pottery tradition can be marked at Pandu-Rajar-Dhibi in east, Deshalpur in west, Ropar in the north and Aadichnallur in south.

This is an independent culture due to its distinct stratigraphical profile and associated cultural remains. From this cultural phase evidence of iron has been reported from Noh. A few burnt bricks are reported from Atranjikheda.

Pottery

This pottery has a fine fabric and was made on fast wheel. It comprises of mainly table ware. Majority of this pottery has no painting but some BRW found at Ahar has white painting on both sides of pottery. This ware shows regional variations. In north India this pottery is plain, with a fine fabric, and comprises mostly table ware. In west India it has white paintings and is available in both fine, medium to course fabrics. Bowl with a spout and dish-on-stand are typical pottery types found at Ahar. On the basis of TL dating this culture has been placed between **1450-1200 BCE**.

10.4 MEGALITHIC CULTURE

The word 'Megalith' has originated from the Greek term '*Megas*' (large) and '*Lithos*' (stone). These are big stones erected to mark burial sites. Colonel Meadows Taylor was the first person who conducted extensive explorations in 1852-62 in the Shorapur-*Doab* of Karnataka and wrote on the megaliths. After excavations at Brahmagiri, Sir Mortimer Wheeler established the importance of Megaliths in Indian Archaeology.

Distribution

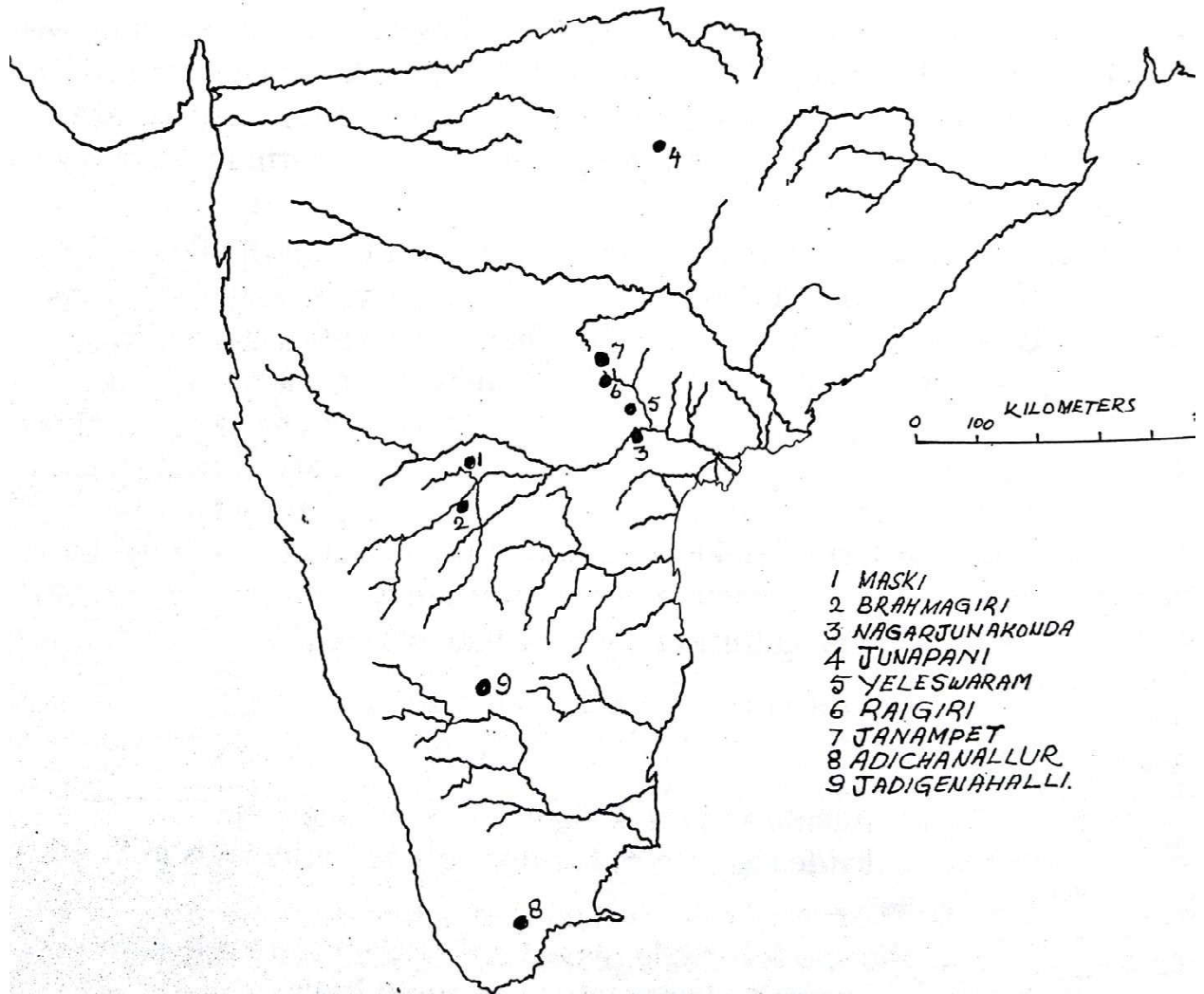
The Megaliths are spread across the country and are primarily located in the Vindhya in southern Uttar Pradesh, Vidisha region of Maharashtra, and in most parts of South India (Map 10.1). Megaliths in these regions are associated with iron. Megaliths are also found in the north-east India, Madhya Pradesh (Bastar Region), and in Singhbhum region of Bihar. However, here they represent a separate culture and are not associated with iron.

Types of Megaliths

Megaliths are structures which are built of dressed or undressed large stones, erected in the memory of dead, usually over the earth's surface. In forms and structures, they are of seven types such as Menhir, Dolmenoid cist, Topi Kal, Kudai-Kals or Hood stone, Cairn circle, Multiple- Hood stone and Alignment.

- a) *Menhir*: An upright stone standing alone or in alignment with others. Length ranges from 1.5 m. to 2.5 m. Found in Deccan, Kerala and Chitrakoot district of UP.
- b) *Dolmen*: The meaning of dolmen is 'Table of Stone'. These megaliths take the shape of a stone table. For making dolmens four stone slabs are placed and arranged in box like structure. Sometimes stone slabs are placed in a *Swastika* shape and covered with a flat capping stone. Some dolmens were provided with a port-hole. These holes were designed to offer grave-goods

to the dead buried in these dolmens. Dolmen Cists found in the Vindhyas are small and made from several small stone slabs. These dolmens were used as burials where pottery and iron objects were found with a number of dead. Dolmens are frequently found in Brahmagiri (Karnataka) and Chingalpet (Tamil Nadu) and associated with post-cremation rite.



Map 10.1: Important Iron Age Sites in South India. Source: EHI-02, Block 3.

- c) *Umbrella Stone (Topi-Kal)*: These megaliths have an umbrella-like structure. These are called *Topi-Kals* in the local language. In this type of Megalith, four stone slabs were joined and erected over a burial and a big rounded stone was placed over these in such a fashion that it looked like an umbrella. These megaliths have been found from Ariyannur and Cheramanangad in Kerala.
- d) *Hood Stone*: These are similar to Topi-Kals. Here, dome shaped big stone-slabs were placed over the ground surface. It looks like a snake-hood. Sometime five to twelve hood stones are found over the burial. These are arranged in circular form and are called multiple hood-stones. These were supposed to cover pit burials and found more frequently in Kerala.
- e) *Cairn Circle*: These are found within stone circles. In this type of megalith, a pit of around 2m depth and 3.5m diameter was dug for funeral. After cremation, peripheral stone blocks were placed in a circular form and used as marker for a single or multiple human burials. Excavations of these burials

have revealed that the body was placed in burials with a packing of clay soil and stone rubble. These burials are found in Chingleput, Chitradurg and Gulbarga districts in south India and Kakoria in north India.

- f) *Rock Cut caves*: These were made of laterite-stone. These caves have been formed by digging out stairs and pit in the rock. These stone cutting was possible only due to use of iron tools. Further, rocks were cut in order to make a cave. Some additional doorways were also provided in the front. After creating a door, the inside chamber was created with a rectangular rock-cut pillar in dome shape. These caves were provided with a central opening to the roof to offer grave goods to the dead.
- g) *Sarcophagi*: This was a terracotta coffin made for the post-cremation rites of children. These are found in three types — legged coffins, circular and elongated urn burials. Legged coffins are terracotta boxes with animal-like legs at the bottom. These terracotta boxes were fired well in order to give strength to the Sarcophagi. Sarcophagi are found frequently in Chingleput, Brahmagiri and Maski regions of south India.

Chronology

The Megalithic culture ushered in the Iron Age in south India. At some places it is found as being overlapped with the Neolithic culture. The date of south Indian megaliths is not certain and has been decided on the basis of stratigraphy, *Sangam* literature, coins, pottery and radio-carbon dating. On the basis of cultural sequence at Brahmagiri, Wheeler has placed the date of Megaliths between 3rd century BCE to 1st century CE. South Indian Megaliths represented burial monuments and, pottery, iron tools along with coins of that period were found frequently from them. From Chandravalli, Rouletted ware and a Roman silver coin of 1st Century CE were found. In a Cist burial at Coimbatore, a coin of Roman emperor Augustus (63 BCE-14 CE) was found.

Various types of burial practices are mentioned in the *Sangam* literature which describe the different methods of erecting memorial stones in memory of heroes who died during cattle raids. Cremation, Cist Burials, Pot-burials, Inhumation and exposure of dead body in the open are the five major types of post-death rites described in *Manimekalai* and *Silpadikaram*. All these types of practices are reflected in the Megalith culture of south India. The Sangam literature was composed during 1st century BCE-3rd century CE.

Some radio-carbon (14C) dates are available from megalithic sites. Two radiocarbon dates of 1105 BCE and 955 BCE are reported from the megalithic context at Hallur site in Karnataka. From Vidarbha, the sites of Naikund and Takalghat have given radiocarbon dates of 700 BCE. The south Indian megalith culture began much before the megalithic culture of Vidarbha. On the basis of these evidences Megalithic Culture of south India and the Deccan can be placed between **1000 BCE and 100 BCE**.

Relationship with Iron

Megalithic culture is closely associated with the beginning of the use of iron in south India. However, the term 'Megalithic Culture' cannot be used synonymously with Iron Age culture. Some thirty three types of iron tools have been identified from Megalithic burials (Figure 10.5). These include hoes, sickles and axes for the purpose of agriculture; dishes and tripod stands for domestic use; chisel and

nails for artisanal activities; swords, daggers, spears and arrowheads for war and hunting (Jain, 2006). Mahurjhari near Nagpur has given evidence of head ornaments of horses which were made of copper sheets with iron-knobs. Evidence from megalithic site of Naikund in Vidarbha is highly significant as an iron smelting furnace has been found. Similarly iron slag in large quantities has been found from Paiyampalli in Tamilnadu. This indicates that iron smelting was a local activity. This region is rich in iron ore. From north Indian site of Kakoria, no iron tools were found, hence the Megalithic culture of Kakoria is associated with Chalcolithic culture. On the other hand, Iron Age burials from Kotia in the same region have a megalithic character. This period can be understood as one of technological advancement when people learnt to control fire in order to extract iron from ore.

Various items of gold (bangles, rings, earrings, beads), silver (studs and beads), copper/bronze (bangles and dishes, lids) have also been found but on a lesser scale. The prominent sites which have yielded objects of gold are Adichanallur (Tamilnadu), Maski (Karnataka), Nagarjunakonda (Andhra Pradesh), Mahurjhari and Junapani (Maharashtra). Silver has been found at Junapani and Nagarjunakonda. Copper lids of dishes are obtained from Khapa (near Nagpur) and Adichanallur. Beads of semi precious stones such as agate and carnelian and shell and horn were also used.

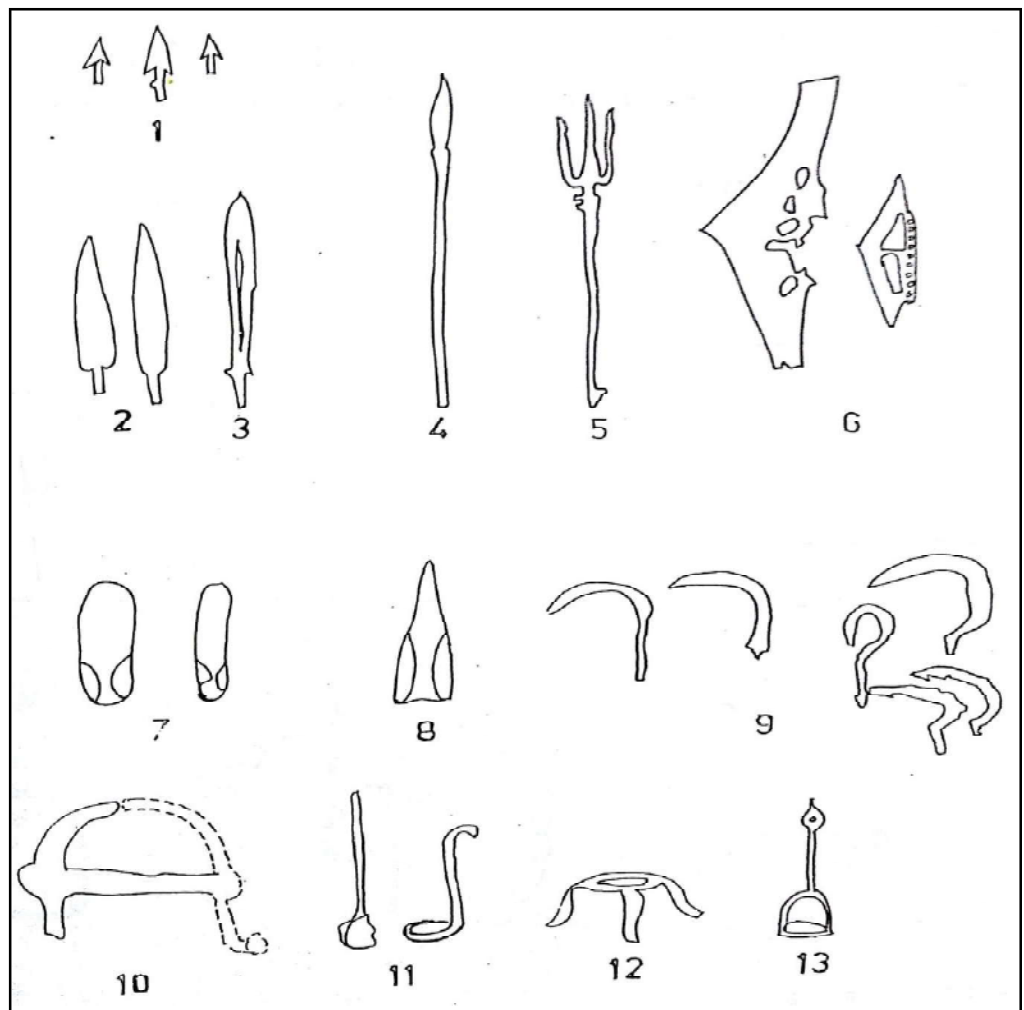


Fig. 10.5: Iron Implements from South Indian Megalithic Graves. 1. Arrowheads; 2. Daggers; 3. Sword; 4. Spearhead; 5. Trident; 6. Battle Axe; 7. Hoes; 8. Plough Share; 9. Sickles; 10. Stirrup; 11. Laddles; 12. Tripod; 13. Lamp. Source: EHI-02, Block 3.

Megalithic Life ways

Megaliths are usually found near sources of water, stone, and iron, gold or other metals. Megalithic culture was primarily a rural culture of settled community in which agriculture and animal husbandry were the major modes of subsistence. Perhaps they were acquainted with irrigation technology and used iron tools in cultivation. Grains of rice, barley and gram are found from their burials. The major domesticated animals were cow, buffalo, horse, sheep and goat. This culture can be marked as having a complex society where different elements were collaborating to achieve specialization in craft and technology. From megalithic burials a number of artifacts such as iron tools, Black-and-Red Ware, beads of semi-precious stones, shell, paddy- husk and ornaments (bangle, necklace, ring) have been found. Many a time more than one person was buried in a single burial. This indicates that they believed in life after death. Some kind of communal effort is assumed in the construction of megaliths as dealing with big stones was a very onerous task.

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) Write a paragraph of ten lines on the Pre-Iron Age cultures of India.

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- 2) What are the different types of Megaliths? Discuss any two.

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10.5 PAINTED GREY WARE CULTURE

Not all sites in north India where PGW has been found are associated with iron. For instance, sites of the Gagghar-Hakra region are without iron whereas those of the Ganga-Yamuna Doab have given evidence of iron objects. The Iron Age of north India is broadly associated with PGW culture. The term PGW stands for Painted Grey Ware which is a pottery tradition that is grey in color and decorated with black designs.

Geographical Distribution

This pottery has been found from a wide region of northern India. This pottery was first discovered at Ahichhatra (Bareilly district) during the excavations in 1940. Now more than 100 archaeological sites of this culture have been discovered. PGW is mainly confined to Uttar Pradesh, Northern Rajasthan and east-northern India. The major archaeological sites of this culture are Ahichhatra,

Hastinapura, Kaushambi, Shravasti, Sringaverpura and Mathura in Uttar Pradesh; Vaishali in Bihar; Manda in Jammu; Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh; Ropar in Punjab; Noh in Rajasthan and Bhagwanpura in Haryana. The extent of this pottery tradition can be traced to Manda in north, Ujjain in south, Tilarakot (Nepal) in east and Lakhiyopir (Sindh, Pakistan) in the west. The concentration of PGW sites is more prominent in the Upper Ganga valley. It appears that the expansion of PGW culture in eastern India occurred late as most of the PGW sites in middle and lower Ganga valley have limited number of pot-sherds and these sherds were obtained from early-NBP or NBP cultural phase.

The PGW was an iron-using rural culture, which was spread along river banks. Some sites mentioned prominently in the *Mahabharata* such as Hastinapura, Kurukshetra, Panipat, Tilpat, Baghpat, Mathura and Bairat have been excavated. PGW has been discovered at all these sites. The picture they depict is that of an agro-pastoral lifestyle.

Pottery types

Pottery of this culture is made on a fast wheel with well-levigated clay. This pottery has a thin core and a smooth finish. It is very well fired. The entire PGW assemblage is homogeneous with a few regional variations. This pottery comprises of mainly table ware and was probably meant to be used by the wealthy sections. Some large sized vessels like vases and carinated *handis* have also been found. Black Slipped Ware, Plain Grey Ware and Black-and-Red ware are associated potteries. PGW forms a small percentage of the total pottery assemblage.

PGW carries various geometric designs such as lines, criss-crosses, circles, dots, sigma and semi circles etc (Figure 10.6). *Swastika* is also depicted on some pottery. More than fifty decorative patterns have been identified. These decorations are made on the outer surface in matt black color (Figure 10.7). Some have decoration on inner side also. The pottery was painted before firing. A thin slip was applied on both surfaces and pottery was fired in reducing conditions at around 600°C in order to create smooth ashy surface and core. These people had expertise in firing technique and thus achieved a uniform grey colour. The people of PGW period were innovative and this is also reflected in their archaeo-metallurgy.

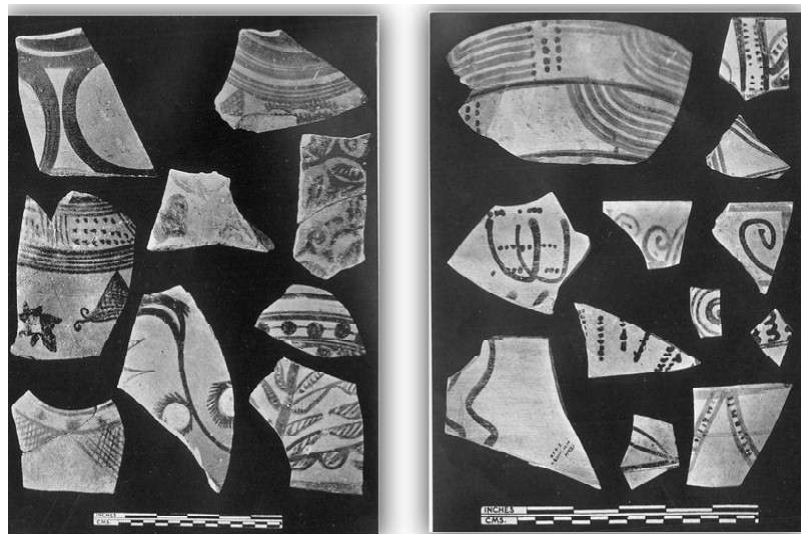


Fig. 10.6: Sherds of PGW (right) and Harappan Red Ware (left) from Rupnagar, Punjab. Credit: Aman 0980. Source: Wikimedia Commons (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Painted_Grey_Ware_culture#/media/File:BaraSite.jpg)

Chronology

The earliest dates of this pottery are reported from Atranjikheda and Noh, which are 11th century BCE and 9th century BCE respectively. Most of the sites show 7th-6th century BCE as a period of PGW culture. In the middle-Ganga valley this pottery is found in a late context (around 6th century BCE) indicating that it reached these areas when NBPW culture had already started. Broadly the time period of PGW culture is between **1000-600 BCE**.

The PGW culture represents a well developed rural life. Some surplus production is indicated by the discovery of round and square storage bins. Agriculture was the main mode of subsistence. Animal husbandry, fishing was also practised. The main crops of this period were rice (Hastinapura) and barley (Noh). Wheat does not appear to be a popular food grain. Cow and horse were the main domesticated animals. Bones of horse were recovered from the excavations at Hastinapura. Food grains and meat formed a major part of the diet. Hearths and agricultural implements were obtained from Atranjikheda. The site of Jakhera has yielded sickle, hoe and a ploughshare. However, most of the iron implements are related to hunting or warfare. These include lances, spearheads, blades, daggers and arrowheads. It is in the succeeding period of NBPW that we see that agricultural implements increase in number.



Fig.10.7: Painted Grey ware. Sonkh (UP). Government Museum, Mathura.

Credit: Biswarup Ganguly. Source: Wikimedia Commons

(https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Painted_Grey_Ware_-_Sonkh_-_1000-600_BCE_-_Showcase_6-15_-_Prehistory_and_Terracotta_Gallery_-_Government_Museum_-_Mathura_2013-02-24_6461.JPG)

The houses of this period were made of mud bricks and wattle-and-daub. From Bhagwanpura some baked bricks were found but the use of baked bricks was not popular. Beads of semi-precious stone such as lapis lazuli, jasper, agate, and carnelian have been recovered from many sites. The unavailability of the raw materials in zones of PGW-using culture suggests some kind of trans-regional trade and exchange network. No evidence of coins is found from this cultural phase. The people of this period were involved in barter or exchange with other regions. Some basic site hierarchy is suggested in the research (different areas) of Makkhan Lal, George Erdosy and M.R. Mughal. Most of the PGW sites studied by these scholars were found to be smaller than 5 hectares and estimates suggest that they were inhabited on an average by 60-450 people. (Singh, 2008). Some socio-economic complexity is assumed for this period. A few proto-urban elements present at some sites (Jakhera) seemed set to usher in fully-fledged urbanization of the sixth century BCE.

10.6 NORTHERN BLACK POLISHED WARE

Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW) is an important pottery tradition of the Indian subcontinent. The time range is **700 BCE-100 BCE**. It was during this period that processes related to the formation of states and emergence of urbanism in the Ganga valley crystallized.

This is a fine ware, sometimes as thin as 1.5 mm, well fired, wheel-made deluxe pottery. It was made on a fast wheel and has a distinct metallic sound. The shining surface has been created so brilliantly that its gloss has not faded even after 2500 years. The common shapes are bowls with straight, convex, tapering and corrugated sides; dishes with incurved rims and convex sides; knobbed lids; sharply carinated handis and miniature vases. This pottery has been found at more than 1500 sites and extends from Taxila and Charsada in the northwest to Amaravati in Andhra Pradesh; and from Pabhas Patan in Gujarat to Tamruk in Bengal. The main excavated sites are Ropar in Panjab, Raja Karna Ka Tila and Daulatpur in Haryana; Hastinapura, Atranjikheda, Kaushambi, Shravasti in UP; Vaishali, Patna and Sonpur in Bihar. At sites in the Panjab, Haryana, Rajasthan and UP, it is preceded by PGW phase with an overlap between them. In eastern UP and Bihar NBPW follows Black-and-Red ware phase (Singh, 2008).

Geographical Distribution

The NBPW was first reported during the excavations at Saranath (Varanasi) in 1904 and then at Bhita near Prayagraj. During the excavations at Taxila, excavators believed it to be a Greek black pottery because such types of glazed ceramics were very popular in Greek culture. Its concentration in northern India (Ganga valley) is remarkable, that is why, it is called 'Northern' Black Polished Ware. However, it is not confined to northern India alone. This pottery is found in several colors such as silver, golden, orange, chocolate and pink, although the dominating color of this pottery is black. That is why this pottery is termed as 'Black'. The shining surface does not appear to be a result of polish. So, the name 'NBPW' appears to be a misnomer for this pottery.

Pottery types

This pottery has a shining layer on the outer surface and black colour inside. This pottery has been divided into five categories. The first type is of fine fabric and comprises bowls. The second type of ceramic is of relatively thin fabric and plates are the main shapes.

The NBPW was mainly a table ware (Figure 10.8). Some NBP potsherds were painted in two colors. This shows close similarity to and influence of PGW over NBPW. This pattern of decoration includes vertical lines on horizontal bands, dots in circle, circle, taurine and semi-circles. It is probable that this pottery evolved out of PGW. This pottery had an important place in social life as some broken potsherds were found riveted with copper wires.

Manufacturing Technology

NBPW was fired in a controlled atmosphere in closed firing pits. This was a great technological innovation in the history of earthenware manufacturing. The closed kiln facilitated the control over firing conditions to achieve a reducing and oxidizing environment and the maximum utilization of temperature. It was

believed that black gloss of NBPW was the result of some sort of post-firing treatment in which kiln-hot pottery was coated with some organic liquid of vegetable or animal origin. Yet another geo-chemical study proposes that the black color of NBPW was due to the presence of magnetic iron oxide. The characteristic gloss was a product of the alignment of mica platelets to the surface of the slip. But none of the theories successfully provide a correct explanation for the gloss of NBPW. It is well established that NBP producers had achieved a high technological excellence and NBPW production technology was restricted to a special section of craftsmen. When this pottery gradually lost its importance in society the manufacturing technology also disappeared.

NBPW Culture

NBPW culture is related with an era of extensive use of iron technology in the Indian subcontinent. The radiometric dates push its antiquity to 8th century BCE but it is generally associated with the archaeological sites of urban character which developed during the early phase of Buddhism (sixth century BCE onwards) in the Ganga valley.

The NBPW phase is associated with the 'Second Urbanization' which is reflected in the settlement patterns, habitation, coins, agriculture and animal husbandry, art and architecture and trade activities of this period. Considerable increase in human population is revealed in the growth of smaller settlements near bigger ones.

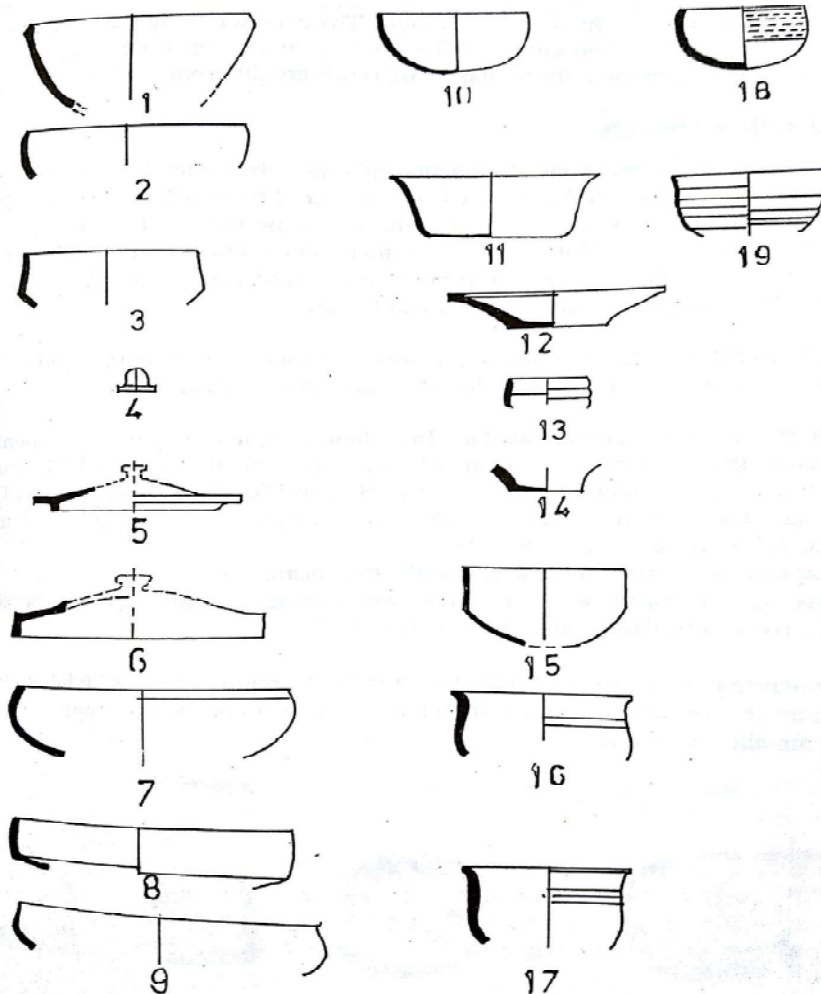


Fig. 10.8: NBP Pottery. Source: EHI-02, Block 3.

Some of the earliest punch-marked coins are associated with NBPW. A standard measurement system had come into existence which was essential for trade and commerce. Buddhist literature mentions about increased trade activities and formation of different trading groups in this period.

Despite the existence of extensive trade activities, the major mode of subsistence was agriculture and animal husbandry. The people in this period were cultivating two crops in a year. Canal and ponds were used for irrigation. Grains of rice, wheat, barley, pulse, mustard etc. were major agricultural produce. Metal and bone arrowheads were found from Ujjain, Allahpur, Shravasti and Kaushambi. Net-sinkers and metal fish hooks were used for fishing.

This period is marked with increased art and craft activities. Terracotta figurines of elephant, bull, deer, chariot and other toys were found from this cultural context. In this period terracotta figurines of mother goddess, snakes and mythical creatures that have human head and animal bodies were also found.

According to *Mahaparinibbana Sutta of Digghanikaya*, sites of Champa, Rajagriha, Shravasti, Saketa, Kaushambi and Varanasi were functioning as major cities during the sixth century BCE. Excavations at these sites have exposed well developed town-plans. People of this period were living in rectangular houses. Houses were made with baked bricks. From all the sites, soakage pits and ring wells have been found which indicate people's concern with hygiene. For drainage of water, terracotta pipes were used.

All together this culture presents a coherent picture of the development of urban centres in corresponding areas. This cultural period can be marked as the foundation period of Indian culture when people adopted a comparatively new technology for their societal needs.

10.7 URBANIZATION IN GANGA VALLEY

An early attempt towards theorizing urbanization in archaeology was made by Gordon V. Childe who proposed ten criteria to identify the cities in his seminal paper 'The Urban Revolution' (Childe, 1950). His study was mainly based on Mesopotamian urbanism. He proposed that a place can qualify for a city status if it has the following ten characteristics:

- 1) Big settlement size
- 2) Craft specialization
- 3) Centralization of surplus
- 4) Monumental public architecture
- 5) Ruling class and developed social stratification
- 6) Writing
- 7) Predictive and exact science
- 8) Conceptualized and sophisticated art styles
- 9) Inter-regional long distance trade
- 10) Social organization beyond kinship.

The above theory of Childe is largely dependent on the concept of surplus production. Surplus production ushered in the development of ruling class, social stratification and other traits of cities. This hypothesis was later used by Marxist historians for interpreting the urbanization of early India. D.D. Kosambi associated iron technology with the advent of urbanization in ancient India. He pointed out that extensive use of iron tools led to the clearing of forests and growth of agricultural surplus. Due to this process population increased dramatically and it further assisted in the exponential growth in agricultural production that finally led to the development of urban centers and a ruling class. R.S Sharma (Sharma, 1974) argues that the forces of production released sufficient surplus production for the rise of class-based and state-based society. He further explains that surplus production gave rise to social hierarchy that emerged in the form of *varna* system in ancient India. This interpretation was in line with Childe's theory of urban revolution where surplus was necessary for the emergence of a ruling class and the further development of societal complexity and other traits of urban centers. However, this interpretation is very static and fails to examine the dynamic process of urbanism. A. Ghosh raised the pertinent point that 'between accumulation of surplus and need for it, which preceded the other?'. He maintained that surplus cannot be accumulated and utilized in the absence of a state. M.K. Dhavalikar suggested that urbanization means - a large population, a strong agricultural base, well developed trade, including skilled craftsmen. But centralized power structure (i.e. State) functioned only as a binding force.

The 'Second Urbanization' in the Ganga valley occurred during the sixth century BCE. During this period settlements proliferated and a four tier hierarchy within settlements was visible. This happened due to rapid growth in population. Agriculture provided a strong base for this process. Different kind of grains such as cereals, barley, pulses, wheat and rice were produced. It is pertinent that during this period iron implements for agricultural purposes are found in abundance from archaeological sites. Iron tools certainly boosted agricultural produce which assisted in feeding a large population and led to accumulation of surplus production. But can iron be marked as a prime mover of this process? This issue continues to be debatable. It is reasonable to assume that other factors were crucial too. Societal response to a particular technology, availability of resources and social complexity played a crucial role in the emergence of state.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) Identify true (✓) and false statements (×)
 - a) Excavations at Saipai and Sanauli revealed the archaeological context of copper hoards. ()
 - b) Chalcolithic cultures were another type of Harappan cultures. ()
 - c) Chalcolithic people of Rajasthan procured copper raw materials from Khetri Mines. ()
 - d) Iron technology in India was borrowed from Mesopotamia. ()
 - e) Black-and Red-Ware has been found from all over India. ()
 - f) Sarcophagi were terracotta coffins. ()
 - g) Iron was not found in Megalithic burials. ()
 - h) NBPW is associated with Second Urbanization in Ganga Valley ()
 - i) PGW has also been found in pre-Iron age context. ()

2) Discuss the major Iron Age cultures of north India.

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10.8 SUMMARY

Use of iron was a leap forward in human life in terms of subsistence and development. There were many iron using cultures in early India. The Painted Grey Ware culture and Northern Black Polished Ware culture were the most important. In the initial phase there was a predominance of weapons while the later phase had a preponderance of agricultural implements. Whether iron equipments indeed helped in clearing the forests leading to surplus production and the founding of the State is still a debatable issue and needs more research. Surplus did not increase in a short period of time but was a long and slow process.

10.9 KEY WORDS

- Animal Domestication** : Adaptation of animals to humans, which were then used for serving as pets or suppliers of animal products (e.g., meat, milk, wool, etc.) or for providing labour and other services.
- Archaeo-botany** : This is the study of ancient plant remains recovered from archaeological excavations for the study of ancient past environment and human subsistence.
- Complex Society** : Complex societies are identified by reduced residential mobility leading to intensified economic production and division of labor, the presence of hierarchical position, institutionalized leadership, and hereditary status differences.
- Environmental archaeology** : This is the interdisciplinary study of past human environment interactions to understand long-term relationship between humans and their environments.
- Radiocarbon Dating** : This is a popular absolute dating method which can date archaeological material spanning around 55000 years to the modern period. This technique is based on measurement of ratio of stable atom of Carbon (C^{12}) and carbon isotope (C^{14}). This method is limited to such artifacts which have carbon as one constituent.

- Smelting** : This is an advanced stage of metallurgical process by which a metal is obtained from ore by heating beyond the melting point. This is performed in the presence of oxidizing agents as air, or reducing agents as coke.
- Thermoluminescence (TL) dating** : This is an absolute dating method which is used to date objects which have been fired in past (like pottery).
- Urban Revolution** : This is a hypothesis suggested by Gordon V. Childe and explains sudden changes in primitive societies leading to the development of large, urban and complex societies.

10.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) Please see Section 10.2 and its Sub-sections.
- 2) Please see Section 10.4 and its Sub-sections

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 3) a) ✓, b) x, c) ✓, d) x, e) ✓, f) ✓, g) x, h) ✓, i) ✓.
- 4) You will be discussing Painted Grey Ware Culture and Northern Black Polished Ware culture. Please see Section 10.5 and 10.6 and their Sub-sections.

10.11 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 11 INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENTS AND ASCETICISM*

Structure

- 11.0 Objectives
- 11.1 Introduction
- 11.2 Changes in Society and Religion in Sixth Century BCE
- 11.3 Beginnings of Asceticism
- 11.4 *Upanishadic* Thought
 - 11.4.1 *Atman-Brahman*
 - 11.4.2 The Theory of Transmigration
 - 11.4.3 Doctrine of Emancipation
- 11.5 The *Saddarshana* or Six Systems of Philosophy
- 11.6 *Nastika* Schools of Thought
 - 11.6.1 Buddhism
 - 11.6.2 Jainism
 - 11.6.3 Scepticism and Materialism
- 11.7 Summary
- 11.8 Key Words
- 11.9 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises
- 11.10 Suggested Readings

11.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will learn about the:

- intellectual developments in the sixth century BCE;
- main features of Upanishadic thought;
- six systems of philosophy;
- philosophy of Buddhism and Jainism; and
- asceticism and how it was incorporated in orthodox and heterodox circles.

11.1 INTRODUCTION

Major developments occurred in social, economic and political realms in the sixth century BCE. We will study the processes of ‘Second Urbanization’, emergence of cities and towns, rise of *Janapadas* and *Mahajanapadas* and the new religions of Buddhism and Jainism, in the subsequent Units. In this Unit, we will be dealing with intellectual developments that took place in the sixth century BCE.

The mid-first millennium BCE in the Indian subcontinent saw the flowering of speculative thought. New ideologies emerged. Though such thought was present in an embryonic form in the *Vedas*, new intellectual ideas developed more fully

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and in different ways within the heterodox sects. In the Brahmanical orthodox tradition the *Upanishads* encapsulated this change. In the heterodox tradition, many ideas emerged which questioned the efficacy of the *yajna* and were against the validity of Vedic learning. We will be learning about these in this Unit.

11.2 CHANGES IN SOCIETY AND RELIGION IN SIXTH CENTURY BCE

The sixth century BCE was period of profound change. The old tribal society was breaking up. The feeling of security and comfort that clan solidarity gave was withering away. The deep feeling of disquiet was turning some to asceticism.

The sacrifice or *yajna* was a central feature of the Brahmanical religion. The *Vedas* celebrated great sacrifices which were initiated on behalf of wealthy tribesmen and powerful chiefs. The main purpose of sacrifices was to propitiate the gods and in return obtain boons from them. The aim of the sacrifice was to fulfil one's desires with regard to greater wealth, sons, cattle, success in war and long life. The mediation of the priests ensured this and much more. The priests knew the intricacies of the ritual and sacrificial formulae; they were the ones who alone knew how to bring the gods to sacrifice and hence enjoyed great power.

Many changes can be seen in the religious ideology by the Later Vedic period. The notion of sacrifice became all important. Now the universe was believed to have originated from sacrifice. Regular sacrifices ensured the continuity of the cosmos and prevented chaos. Thus, the gods were secondary, it was the Brahmana who was supreme in terms of his role as a mediator in sacrifice; he could elevate the happiness and social position of his patron or conversely destroy him by his slightest variation of the ritual. However, this was also the beginning of growing dissatisfaction with the excessive ritualism of the Vedic religion. The sacrificial cult was no longer considered valid. Buddhist and Jaina texts at many places speak disparagingly about the Brahmanical sacrifices and rituals and adopt an anti-Brahmanical stance. Besides this, certain changes in the social fabric were proving to be too tumultuous. There was a deep sense of anxiety among the populace. The 'Second Urbanization' had ushered in new towns, coinage, new forms of wealth and new classes of rich *setthis* and *gahapatis* (the immensely wealthy traders and financiers). The new-found prosperity was based on the use of iron which led to the clearing of forests and the availability of more and more land for cultivation. The introduction of plough agriculture and the resultant surplus made possible the emergence of states – monarchies and oligarchies. The kshatriyas became powerful, and land and money were the new criterion of wealth. Cattle were important but receded into the background. Most prominent commercial cities were also the capitals of the *janapadas* such as Kaushambi, Kashi, Ayodhya and Rajagriha. The other features of this vibrant economy were: the use of metallic money, trade, trading networks, usury, social stratification, guilds, and an increasing sense of alienation. These changes coincided with other developments. Clan hierarchy of the earlier period was giving way to territorial identity. *Janapadas* and *Mahajanapadas* emerged. The *janapadas* were named after the kshatriyas and others constituting the *jana* (tribes), such as Gandhara, Kuru, Pancala, Matsya, Chedi, Kashi, Kosala, Magadha etc. Power came to be exercised by the kshatriyas and the use of force became legitimized. This was a post-tribal society in which kinship ties were breaking away. An increasingly

hierarchical society was hostile to anyone who did not conform to the norms of the society. A new order was coming into existence. A king speaks, thus, in *Maitrayani Upanishad*, “I am like a frog in a dry well”. This is indicative of the growing insecurity. Attempts to find an escape from the difficult times led to the emergence of ‘heterodox sects’.

Apart from this, there was an urgency to find answers to the fundamental questions of human salvation or liberation. Various ideas were forwarded but none were found to be satisfactory. Many believed that asceticism was the answer to the problems of continuous change that the society was going through. Besides this, there was a realization that an individual through meditation could attain self-knowledge which would transcend the stage of even the gods. Asceticism resulted in complete freedom from all social obligations and ties and in turn ensured for the renouncer moral status higher than that of a sacrificing brahmana.

But, was the emergence of speculative thought just a form of ‘life negation’? May be not! The ascetics were not only trying to escape the pessimism of the times but also were in search of True Knowledge. The wisdom in the *Vedas* was not found to be sufficient. With the emergence of questions about creation, cosmos and Man in the *Rigveda* and the Hymn of Creation representing the earliest record of philosophic doubt, the beginnings of abstract thinking had been laid. It was in the sixth century BCE that a bewildering variety of speculations and alternative ideas regarding the origin of the universe, the nature of soul, cosmic energy and consciousness began to emerge. Some of these were accepted by the Brahmanical system and incorporated into the *Upanishads* which represented the orthodox tradition. Others led to the origin of heterodox sects which did not believe in the efficacy of the Brahmanical ritual and repudiated the authority of the *Vedas*.

In the orthodox belief system, the universe had emerged from the primeval sacrifice. Later *tapas* (power derived from asceticism) played an important role in the act of creation. Other more heterodox teachers put forward naturalistic and atheistic cosmogonist theories. According to them, the origin of the universe was ascribed variously to water, fire, wind or ether. For some, the universe emerged without the agency of any god or any impersonal entity but due to fate (*niyati*), time (*kala*), nature (*svabhava*) or chance (*samgati*). It was believed the world had emerged due to internal evolution or ‘ripening’ (*parinama*) and not because of any external force. The Buddha believed that any speculation on first causes was futile. There were others who were pyrrhonists who denied the possibility of any certain knowledge at all. Materialists rejected the existence of soul and all other immaterial entities. Some believed in the atomic theory. Thus, the intellectual life of the sixth century BCE was throbbing with ideas and fundamental questions.

The people who were leading the speculative thought were ascetics. However, the literature of this period mentions some kshatriyas too who were as keen, for example, Janaka of Videha, Ashvapati of Kaikeya, Hiranya-nabha of Kosala, Ajatashatru of Kashi (Varanasi), Pravahana Jaivali of Kuru-Panchala.

11.3 BEGINNINGS OF ASCETICISM

The term ‘ascetic’ refers to a person who has renounced worldly pleasures, opted out of society and has cast himself away. In the mid first millennium BCE, he was struggling to comprehend the Ultimate Reality, discover the ecstasy (*ananda*)

of liberation from all bondage. He was restoring to austerity (*tapa*) and meditation (*dhyana*) in order to achieve the goals, he had set before him.

Asceticism was not something novel. In later hymns of the *Rigveda*, we find references to a class of holy men who were different from the *Brahmanas*. They were called *munis*. They went about naked, maintained ritual silence and dwelt with the demi-gods and birds. They had attained special powers which made them different from ordinary mortals. In the *Atharvaveda* there was a category of men called *vratyas*. It broadly meant an Aryan who did not any longer believe in the sacredness of the *Vedas*. He could also be understood as a priest of non-Vedic fertility cult. Thus, certain alternative ideas which were not based on the sanctity of the *Vedas* were being raised as early as the Later Vedic period. All efforts were made to incorporate them in the Brahmanical set up and these could have been a source for new doctrines and practices.

By the time of the *Upanishads*, ascetics had become quite common and they were the ones who were propounding the new teachings and metaphysical theories. In the mid first millennium BCE, the ascetic either confined himself to isolation from all, or he could join other ascetics as a group and follow a guru or a teacher. Those who joined a sect had to follow certain restrictions on their conduct and behaviour. They could not observe caste rules, followed celibacy, could not own property, broke food taboos, and carried distinctive outward symbols of their order (a robe, or going naked). Ascetic groups referred in the Vedic literature and some texts like the *Aranyakas* and *Upanishads* were overly concerned with asceticism.

Tapasvin, *sramana*, *sanyasin*, *parivrajaka*, *yogi* are some of the terms that we come across in the texts. They were all renouncers, who having given up on pleasures of life, had taken to a life of austerity. They were given to controlling the functions of the body (breathing mainly) and wandering from place to place in search for the Ultimate Truth. *Parivrajaka* was a young man who had taken to the life of a wanderer for a short while before becoming a *grihastha*. But more often, *parivrajaka* was a state of permanent renunciation.

Most of the ascetics wandered from place to place either alone or as part of groups under the guidance of a teacher. They participated in discussions held in *Kutuhala-shalas* (discussion halls) on philosophical subjects. Some of the brahmana ascetics lived in hermitages in the forests sometimes with their families though conforming to a celibate status. They were sedentary. Meditation and severe penance accorded them magic potency. They acquired hidden powers. They could crumble mountains to dust, turn the rivers dry, burn the opponents if angered, protect a city, and increase its wealth and much more. The power which was earlier ascribed to the sacrifice or the *yajna*, was now transferred to *tapsya* and meditation.

Those who took to asceticism, sooner or later, obtained insight into the nature of reality. They came to understand the cosmic mystery, the nature of the universe and found bliss beyond life and death. With this the realization of being ultimately free dawned upon them. He who attained salvation became a conqueror above conquerors. All sects aspired to attain this experience, but the interpretation differed from sect to sect. The development of asceticism and mysticism soon became a challenge for the brahmanas who were quick to incorporate this element into their ideology. The *Ashrama* theory of the four stages of life was propounded

for the first time in the *Dharmasutras*. In the *Ashrama* theory, the terms used for the four stages in a life-cycle were *brahmachari*, *grihastha*, *vanaprastha* and *sanyasa*. The fourth stage of *sanyasin* was the final stage. It was possible for a person to become a *sanyasin* only subsequent to the performance of social obligations. The fourth category allowed one to opt out of the system only after having fulfilled the social obligations of a *grihastha*. This was strongly emphasized to ensure that the social dissent remained muffled. For the Buddhists and Jainas, however, the *grihastha* stage could be by-passed and one could become a renouncer without having to go through the householder's stage. That is why their doctrines were all the more threatening to the established social order. The discussions and teachings of those mystics who chose to follow the traditional path, were incorporated and added to the *Aranyakas* and *Upanishads*. Thus, we find that the system of *yoga*, which was part of the traditional orthodox Hindu system, developed by this time.

11.4 UPANISHADIC THOUGHT

Upanishads are the earliest recorded discourses on the key philosophical doctrines about the *atman* (self), *brahman* (Ultimate Reality), *karma*, *yoga*, *samsara* (worldly existence), *moksha* (enlightenment), *purusha* (man) and *prakriti* (nature). The major *Upanishads* can be dated to the period between the eighth to sixth century BCE. They represent a transition from the philosophical ideas of the *Vedas* to the development of new ideologies that emerged in the post-Vedic period.

The word '*upanishad*' is made up of three parts: *upa+ni+shad*, which means that it was an instruction which was to be imparted to the student who is 'sitting down near one's teacher'. It also means '*rahasyam*', indicating that it was a secret doctrine to be imparted only to a few, those who were worthy of such an instruction.

The *Upanishads* represented a change in how knowledge was now being sought. There was a shift from the acceptance of the *Vedas* as revealed knowledge to the possibility that knowledge could be gained through intuition, observation and analysis. Earlier, during the Vedic sacrifices, the *yajamana* would initiate the sacrifice with the mediation of a brahmana priest. The *Upanishads*, on the contrary, were a search for the Ultimate Liberation of the soul but without the mediation of a priest or the presence of any intermediaries. The Upanishadic religion saw a smaller role for Vedic deities and the aim was not the attainment of pleasures of heaven with god Indra but release from all bondage i.e. *moksha*. It came to be realized that the Vedic ritual alone could not lead one to the *Brahman* or the Ultimate Reality.

Alternative belief systems were developed which embodied new ideas about the Ultimate Reality and how to attain it. Doubts about the efficacy of the *yajna* in promoting happiness surfaced. The moot questions now were: what is reality? How are the questions of mortality and immortality tied to the notions of the self, rebirth and retribution? How can *moksha* be attained? There was considerable thought behind the development of new techniques of perception which included *dhyana* (meditation) and *yoga*. The natural way of life conducive to achieving this was asceticism (*tapas*). Some form of renunciation was present in the Vedic sacrifices also. For instance, the granting of either fruits or animals as owned by the *yajamana* as offering in the *yajna* amounted to renouncing what one owned.

The aim for him was, however, the pleasures of the heaven of Indra. But now, the aim had changed to that of release or liberation: *moksha*.

We will be discussing the main features of the Upanishadic thought below.

11.4.1 *Atman-Brahman*

The *Upanishads* talk about two concepts—*Atman* and *Brahman*. These two have become the cornerstone of Indian philosophy. *Brahman* is visualized as the Universal Soul. *Atman* is the Individual Soul. The *Atman* is something like an essence which pervades every individual being. It is a life force, a consciousness or the Ultimate Reality. One of the most well-known teachings of *Atman* appears in *Chandogya Upanishad* as the instruction of the brahmana Uddalaka Aruni to his son Shvetaketu. Uddalaka begins his explanation that one can know about the universal of a material substance from a particular object made of that substance. For example, by means of something made of clay, one can know clay; by means of an ornament made of copper, one can know copper. He takes these examples to demonstrate that objects are not created out of nothing. Rather, the creation is a process through which multiplicity of forms get transformed from an original being (*sat*). Such forms characterize our everyday experiences. Just as bees collect nectar from different sources, but when gathered together they form an undifferentiated mass; just as different rivers after flowing into the ocean become one with the ocean, similarly *Atman* resides individually in every being but merges with the *Brahman* and becomes one with it. Uddalaka next asks his son to put some salt in a glass of water. Shvetaketu does so. Upon being asked by his father to fetch the salt, Shvetaketu could not find it as it had dissolved in the water. Next, Aruni asks his son to taste the water. Upon being found salty, Aruni preaches Shvetaketu instruction on the Ultimate Reality. He says, ‘*You don’t perceive that one Reality (sat) exists in your body, my son, but it is truly there. Everything which is has its being in that subtle essence. That is Reality! That is the Soul! And you are that, Shvetaketu!*’ (As cited in Basham, A L. [2004], pp. 253)

The *Upanishads* use a rich imagery to express the difficult meanings of the Self and *Brahman*. Below is a small dialogue between Uddalaka Aruni and his son Shvetaketu on the meaning of *Atman*:

- “Fetch me a fruit of the banyan tree”.
- “Here is one, sir”.
- “Break it”.
- “I have broken it, sir”.
- “What do you see?”
- “Very tiny seeds, sir”
- “Break one”.
- “I have broken it, sir”.
- “Now what do you see?”
- “Nothing, sir”
- “My son”, the father said, “What you do not perceive is the essence, and in that essence the mighty banyan tree exists. Believe me, my son, in that essence is the Self of all that is. That is the Truth, that is the Self. And you are that Self, Shvetaketu!”

(*Chandogya Upanishad*, vi, 13. As cited in Basham, A.L., 2004, pp. 252-53)

“*Tat tvam asi*”, you (individual) are that (universal essence), is the leading theme of the *Upanishads*.

Uddalaka’s explanation of creation has influenced the *satkaryavad* theory — that the effect exists within the cause. It was accepted by the *Samkhya*, *Yoga* and *Vedanta darshanas*. Uddalaka’s conceptions about the Self are different from those present in the Early Vedic texts where the emphasis is not on human body or the individual person but on the primordial or the ideal body (Black, Brian. “The Upanishads”. Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy).

The *Upanishads* believed that the knowledge of the *Atman* leads to liberation or Ultimate Freedom. This freedom is the freedom from death. Yajnavalkya’s teachings in the *Upanishads* believed that the *Atman* dwells within the body; it is because of the *Atman* that the body is alive; when death comes, the *Atman* does not die but finds a new dwelling place in another body.

During the closing part of the *Vedas*, the sages had conceptualized of a single creator or the controller of the universe. They called it Prajapati, Vishvakarman, Purusha, Brahmanaspati, *Brahman*. He was at this stage only a deity. The search for the nature of this deity begins in the *Upanishads*. The sum and substance of the Upanishadic doctrine is represented by the formula *Atman=Brahman*. The *Brahman* comes to mean the Ultimate Essence of the universe. The state of *Brahman* is likened to a state of dreamless sleep. The *Atman* permeates not only man but is present in everything – the sun, the moon, the world. This *Atman* is *Brahman*. Just as from the ingot of iron, all that is made of iron is known, similarly, from this *Atman*, *Brahman* is known, everything else is known. The essence of man and the essence of the universe are one and the same and it is *Brahman*. It is the most active principle in the universe and yet the most passive and unmoved. Thus, it is said in the *Mundaka Upanishad*:

*As a spider ejects and retracts (the threads),
As the plants shoot forth on the earth,
As the hairs on the head and body of the living man,
so, from the imperishable all that is here.
As the sparks from the well-kindled fire,
in nature akin to it, spring forth in their thousands,
So, my dear sir, from the imperishable
living beings of many kinds go forth,
And again, return into him*

(As cited in Dasgupta, Surendranath, 2004, pp. 49-50)

The Universal Essence is sometimes defined in purely negative terms. “The Self can only be described as ‘Not this, not this’. It is incomprehensible, imperishable, ... unattached, ... unfettered, ... it does not suffer, ... it does not fail.”

11.4.2 The Theory of Transmigration

The idea of Transmigration has its beginnings in the later portions of the *Rigveda*. However, it is in the *Upanishads* that is presented in the most advanced form. The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* has the first occurrence of this doctrine in a developed form. This doctrine developed in the *Upanishads* in two stages. In

one, the idea of transmigration is treated in combination with the Vedic idea of recompense in the other world, and in another, the idea of transmigration comes to the forefront in supersession of the idea of recompense in the other world. Thus, it is said that those who perform pious and good deeds travel the way of the fathers (*pitryana*) after death. Their soul enters first into smoke, then into night, the dark half of the month, etc., and at last reaches the moon; after a residence there as long as the remnant of his good deeds remain he descends again through ether, wind, smoke, mist, cloud, rain, herbage, food and seed, and through the assimilation of food by man he enters the womb of the mother and is born again. Here, we see that the soul enjoys the recompense in the world of the moon but is re-born again in this world.

The other way is the way of gods (*devayana*), meant for those who cultivate faith and asceticism (*tapas*). These souls at death enter successively into flame, day, bright half of the month, bright half of the year, sun, moon, lightning, and then finally into *Brahman* never to return. Deussen says that “the meaning of the whole is that the soul on the way of the gods reaches regions of ever-increasing light, in which is concentrated all that is bright and radiant as stations on the way to *Brahman* the ‘light of lights’” (as cited in Dasgupta, Surendranath, 2004, p. 54).

The other part of the doctrine of Transmigration does not refer to good deeds or bad or refer to *devyana* or *pitryana*. In this idea the Self itself destroys the body when it becomes weak. It builds a newer and fairer frame by its own activity when it reaches the end of the present. At the time of death, the Self collects within itself all senses and faculties and after death all its previous knowledge, work and experience accompanies him. The falling off of the body at the time of death is only for the building of a newer body either in this world or in the other worlds. The Self which, thus, takes rebirth is regarded as an aggregation of diverse categories. The root of all this is the desire of the Self and the consequent fruition of it through will and act. When the Self continues to desire and act, it reaps the fruit and comes again to this world for performing acts. All the course of these rebirths is affected by the Self itself by its own desires, and if it ceases to desire, it suffers no rebirth and becomes immortal. The most distinctive feature of this doctrine is that it refers to desires as the cause of rebirth and not *karma*. *Karma* only comes as the connecting link between desires and rebirth – for it is said that whatever a man desires he wills, and whatever he wills he acts (Dasgupta, Surendranath, 2004, pp. 55-56).

In whatever way the theory of Transmigration was expounded it linked all life forms into a single system. Even the gods had to undergo transmigration. As one Indra died, another was born. The same law applied to animals, insects and plants.

A closely connected doctrine is that of *karma*. Man’s past actions determine his birth in this world. Bad *karma* leads to birth in lowly dominions and a life of good deeds, asceticism, *dana* leads to higher births. This theory became the cornerstone of all Indian thought. Now, suffering could be easily explained as the result of one’s deeds. Similarly, social inequalities could be justified. To many people the theory of karmic retribution must have held out hope for the possibility of a better life in next birth. This would have held a promise in a situation wrought with fear and tension. However, to others, death was always terrible. A way had to be sought to escape the recurring cycle of birth and death. Pessimistic outlook towards life, never mind how adequate, found its answer in asceticism and meditation.

11.4.3 Doctrine of Emancipation

Emancipation or *mukti* is further developed in the *Upanishads*. We already know the two paths through which the soul travels after death. *Pitryana* allows the soul to enjoy the fruits of his *karma* but the soul takes rebirth again. In *devayana*, those who are faithful and performed asceticism went by the way of gods but never return back and suffer rebirth. *Mukti* is a state of infiniteness that a man attains when he knows his own Self and, thus, becomes *Brahman*. Rebirth is the only option for the ignorant but one who has no desire and has divested himself of all passions becomes one with *Brahman*.

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) What were the main features of society and religion in the sixth century BCE which led to the emergence of asceticism?

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- 2) Discuss the *Atman-Brahman* doctrine of the *Upanishads* in 100 words.

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11.5 THE *SADDARSHANA* OR SIX SYSTEMS OF PHILOSOPHY

The Hindu system of philosophy classifies philosophical thought into two classes: *Nastika* and *Astika*. *Nastika* literally means *na asti* (it is not). They do not regard the *Vedas* as supreme knowledge, nor try to establish their own validity on their authority. They are principally three in number: Buddhists, Jainas and *Charvakas*. The *Astika-mata* or the orthodox schools are six in number. These are *Sankhya*, *Yoga*, *Vedanta*, *Mimamsa*, *Nyaya* and *Vaisheshika*. They are also called the six systems of philosophy or *Saddarshana*. They have different origin and purpose but later came to be regarded as equally valid ways of salvation. They were divided into three groups of two, which were thought to be related and complementary. These were: *Nyaya* and *Vaisheshika*; *Sankhya* and *Yoga*; and *Mimamsa* and *Vedanta*. A very clear rendition of the chief characteristics of these schools of thought has been presented by Professor A. L. Basham (2004) which are summarized below.

Nyaya

Nyaya means ‘analysis’. It is a school of logic and epistemology rather than theology. Its teacher was Aksapada Gautama. Its *sutras* are dated to the Common

Era. The belief is that clear thinking and logical argument are essential for attaining highest bliss. This is essentially a system of reasoning which was given a religious basis.

Vaisheshika

It was the school of 'individual characteristics. It is older than *Nyaya* but complementary to it. In the medieval period both were merged into one. *Vaisheshika sutras* deal with physics and metaphysics. The founder to whom the earliest *sutras* are attributed is Uluka Kanada. They have some similarities with the Buddhist and Jaina schools of thought. They believe that nature is atomic. The atoms are the instrument of soul. The soul is distinct from the atoms. Salvation depends on realizing the atomic nature of the universe and its difference from the soul. The basic tenet of *Vaisheshika* goes like this: Each element has individual characteristics called *visheshas*. They are to be distinguished from the four non-atomic characteristics called *dravyas* (time, space, soul and mind). The atoms are eternal but at the end of the great dissolution, with the death of Brahma, the atoms become separated from one another. The new Brahma utilizes the old atoms to fashion a new world. Thus, *Vaisheshika* believes in the dualism of matter and soul.

Sankhya

Sankhya means 'count'. It is the oldest of the six systems and occurs in a rudimentary form in the *Upanishads*. Ancient sage, Kapila, was its founder. In matters of rigid dualism and fundamental atheism this school shares a lot with Jainism. It postulates a remarkable doctrine of the evolution of the cosmos in simple terms. Its theory goes like this: there are twenty-five basic principles (*tattva*) of which the first is *prakriti* and the last is *purusha*. Creation or rather evolution does not take place due to any divinity but due to the inherent nature of *prakriti*. *Purusha* is 'the person' or the Soul. *Purusha* is not dependent on *Prakriti* and the same is true of *Prakriti*. A universe is devoid of soul, and yet evolving. Soul becomes involved with matter, and their salvation lies in realizing their difference from it. A very important feature of *Sankhya* metaphysics is the doctrine of the three constituent qualities (*guna*), causing virtue (*sattva*), passion (*rajas*) and dullness (*tamas*). When the cosmic matter is at an undeveloped stage, the three constituent qualities are in equilibrium. As the world evolves, one or the other quality predominates in different objects or beings and the proportions account for the values of the universe. This three-fold classification had a profound effect on subsequent Indian life and thought.

Yoga

It is translated as 'spiritual discipline' or 'application'. It consists of all kinds of religious exercises and acts of self-mortification present in Indian religions. The follower is called a *yogi*. Though *yoga* was part of every school of thought, it represents a distinct system in which psychic training is the chief means of salvation. The *Yoga Sutra* of Patanjali is its basic text. Patanjali was a well-known grammarian who lived in about second century BCE. They share a lot in terms of metaphysical ideas with the Sankhya school, but they differed in that they introduce a god into the picture. The god of the *yoga* school is an exalted being who is symbolized in the sacred syllable of *OM* which plays an important role in meditation and giving insight into the sublime purity of the Soul. The course of training is divided into eight stages:

- 1) Self-control (*yama*)
- 2) Observance (*niyama*)
- 3) Posture (*asana*)
- 4) Control of breath (*pranayama*)
- 5) Restraint (*pratyahara*)
- 6) Steadying the mind (*Dharana*)
- 7) Meditation (*Dhyana*)
- 8) Deep Meditation (*Samadhi*)

The method of attaining spiritual strength and salvation is through yogic practices which aim to awaken the *kundalini*. This is how it happens: the chief vein of the body is called *susumna*. It runs through the spinal column. Along its path there are six ‘wheels’ (*chakra*) or concentration of psychic energy. At the top of the vein, inside the skull is *sahasrara* also called as the lotus, which is a very powerful psychic center. In the lowest wheel behind the genitals in a *chakra* called *kundalini*, the ‘serpent power’. It rests generally in a quiescent state. By yogic powers the *kundalini* is awakened and rises up the vein *susumna*, passes through all the six ‘wheels’ of psychic force and unites with the topmost *sahasrara*. When this happens, salvation is reached.

Mimamsa

It is a school of exposition. Its earliest work is the *sutras* of Jaimini (second century BCE). They explain the *Vedas* as eternal, self-existent and wholly authoritative. This led to some development of logic, semantics and dialectics in this school. It developed a full philosophy of salvation in the seventh and eighth centuries. According to it, respect for the *Vedas* and observance of their rules are essential first steps to salvation. Later, this school merged with the *Vedanta*.

Vedanta

Literally meaning “the end of the *Vedas*”, it is also called *Uttara Mimamsa* (later-*Mimamsa*) tradition. The doctrines of the *Vedanta* are based on the *Upanishads* and *Brahma Sutras* of Badarayana. The classical *Vedanta* is that of the great philosopher Shankara (788-820 CE) who had produced extensive commentaries on the *Brahma Sutras* and the chief *Upanishads*. The doctrine of Shankara is often called as *advaita* (‘allowing no second’, i.e. monism) or *kevaladvaita* (strict monism). He believed in the idea of ‘double standard of truth’. According to this, on the everyday level of truth, the world is produced by Brahma. It goes through an evolutionary process similar to the one present in the *Sankhya* school from which he borrowed the doctrine of the three *gunas*. However, on the highest level of truth, the whole universe, including the gods, is *maya* – illusion. Ultimately, the only reality is *Brahman*, the World Soul of the *Upanishads* with which the Individual Soul is identical. Once the unity between the two is recognized through meditation, salvation is attained.

11.6 NASTIKA SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT

The Upanishadic doctrine was part of the orthodox tradition. However, there were others who did not believe in the Brahmanical religious ideas and expounded their own metaphysics and philosophy. Let us discuss these heterodox sects constituting the *Nastika* school of thought.

11.6.1 Buddhism

It was founded by the Buddha (“the Enlightened one” or “the Awakened”) in the sixth century BCE. The story of Gautama and his quest for enlightenment along with his teachings and precepts will be dealt with in Unit 12. Here, we will be discussing the metaphysical and psychological basis of the Buddhist thought.

The Pali canon was sifted and codified at the three councils of Rajagriha, Vaishali and Pataliputra. It was committed to writing in Ceylon during the reign of King Vattagamani (89-77 BCE). The *Pitakas* along with commentaries, semi-canonical works and verse chronicles form a large body of literature which gives a good enough idea about the Buddhist ethics and philosophy. The basic propositions of this school are as follows: There is *dukha* (suffering) inherent in life. It can only be eliminated by giving up ‘thirst’ (*tanha*, often translated as ‘craving’) which includes personal ambition, desire, longing and selfishness of all kinds. Longing can be stopped, and this can be done by taking a middle course between self-indulgence and extreme asceticism and leading a moral and well-ordered life. The doctrine central to these teachings is called ‘Chain of Dependent Origination’ (*paticca-samuppada*). It is a series of twelve terms or states, one leading to another and finally ending in pain and *dukha*. The mechanics of this doctrine is that *dukha* or pain is due to ignorance – as sort of cosmic ignorance which leads to the delusion of the self-hood. This ignorance is a facet of the universe’s fundamental nature which is: it is full of sorrow (*dukha*); it is transient (*anicca*); and it is soulless (*anatta*).

The universe is transient. Every being or object is transient. A human being is a compound of five psychosomatic elements — body, feelings, perceptions, states of mind, and awareness. They vary from minute to minute and lead to ever newer configurations. For example, the old man is not the same person as the baby in arms seventy years ago. In fact, he is not the same person as a man a minute ago. Every moment man is changing and leading to the coming into being of a new man caused by the first. This is the chain of cause and effect which links one state to another. The universe is in a constant state of flux. All ideas about permanence arise from a state of ignorance out of which sorrow springs.

Buddhism does not believe in soul. The universe is soulless. Even the gods are soulless. In transmigration nothing passes from one life to another. There is only a chain of cause and effect, in which the new includes the old. If nothing passes from life to life, and if transmigration is in force, then how would one explain the Buddhist principle of bad *karma* in one’s life affecting another? According to the Buddhists, the answer is that as a result of chain of cause and effect, evil done by an earlier being affects the present existence of that being, no matter how different from each other they might be.

The only stable entity is *Nirvana* (in Pali, *Nibbana*). This is the state of bliss, reached when one realizes True Knowledge. *Nirvana* is outside the universe and is not part of it. That is how one can explain the paradox that the universe is in a constant state of flux and *Nirvana* is at rest.

11.6.2 Jainism

Vardhamana was the 24th *tirthankara* in Jainism and was known to his followers as Mahavira (‘the Great Hero’). He renounced material life at the age of thirty.

At first he followed the path of *Nirgranthas* ('free from fetters') which had been founded some two hundred years earlier by Parsvanatha. The term *Nirgrantha* was used by the followers of Mahavira.

Jainism, like Buddhism, is primarily atheistic, in the sense that the gods are considered to be present but are not important enough in the universal scheme. The world functions according to the universal law and not according to the wishes of any deity.

The universe functions due to the interaction of living souls (*jivas*, literally 'lives'), and five categories of non-living entities (*ajivas*). All living beings contain soul, but according to Jainism, all inanimate objects like stones, rocks, running water also contain soul. There are an infinite number of souls in the universe. *Karma* is a subtle matter which in a fine atomic form adheres to an individual soul and makes it different from other souls. An activity leads to *karma* of some kind. Deeds of cruel nature produce more *karma*. The *karma* already acquired leads to the acquisition of more *karma*, and thus, the cycle of transmigration continues. Transmigration can only be escaped by dispelling the *karma* already sticking to the soul. One also has to ensure that no further *karma* is acquired. The annihilation (*nirjara*) of *karma* is done through penance, and the prevention (*samvara*) of the influx (*asrava*) and fixation (*bandha*) of *karma* in the soul is ensured by disciplined conduct, as a result of which it does not reach dangerous quantities and is dispersed immediately. When the soul is finally free it rises to the highest heaven to the top of the universe, where it remains in bliss through all eternity. This for the Jainas is *Nirvana*.

For them monastic life is essential for attaining *Nirvana*. One can attain *Nirvana* through fasting, self-mortification and meditation. All additional *karma* can be rid off through strict discipline. Layman cannot do this. Nudity is essential to attain *Nirvana*.

The life of a Jaina monk is governed by five vows: non-violence, non-stealing, truth, abjuring sexual activity and possession of property. The act of killing or injury is the most potent cause of the influx of *karma* and, therefore, to be avoided. Agriculture is prohibited because cultivation and harvesting entails destruction of life in plants and soil. Jainism went much further than other religions in their doctrine of non-violence. They believed that any act, no matter how unintentional, of a man if leads to injury to others, then it is a sin and leads to *karma*.

11.6.3 Scepticism and Materialism

The sixth century BCE saw the active participation in discussion by many teachers including Mahavira, Gautama Buddha, Gosala and others. From this time onwards the materialist school begins to get popular. According to this school, all religious observance and morality were futile. A man should enjoy life to the fullest and make the most of the joys. The frugal virtues of Buddhism and Jainism were rejected. A man should not forsake happiness due to concomitant sorrow. Just as he accepts the corn with the occasional husk, he should accept joys of life with an occasional sorrow.

Many teachers of this period did not believe in the primacy of gods. Gods were, according to them, mere super-natural beings but having limited powers. They believed in the transmigration doctrine though its mechanics were interpreted differently.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

1) What are the six systems of philosophy? Explain.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

2) Write True or False against the following statements:

- i) The *Upanishads* contain the teachings of the Buddha. ()
- ii) The concept of *Atman* meant the individual soul. ()
- iii) The heterodox sects were against the authority of the *Vedas*. ()
- iv) The *Sankhya* school was the oldest of the six systems of philosophy. ()
- v) The word *Vedanta* means ‘the end of the *Vedas*’. ()
- vi) The Pali canon was committed to writing in China. ()
- vii) The doctrine central to Buddhism is called *paticca-samuppada*. ()
- viii) Jainism is not atheistic in nature. ()

11.7 SUMMARY

The sixth century BCE was a period of intense change. The developments occurring on the social, political and economic front were tearing apart the social fabric. The Vedic religion had become expensive and onerous. Voices of protest against the Vedic ritual and sacrifices led to the emergence of heterodox sects. For them it was not the collective ritual but the individual and his quest for salvation that mattered. Besides, the questions regarding the place of individual in the universe, the meaning of Self, and the origin of consciousness were turning many to asceticism. There was a yearning to achieve the Highest Truth which would end all suffering, uncertainties and doubts. This resulted in the emergence of a multitude of speculative theories. The forest hermits had also opted for asceticism but within the framework of orthodoxy. It was chiefly among them that the literature of the *Upanishads* developed.

11.8 KEY WORDS

- Ahimsa* : non-injury, non-violence.
- Ashrama* : the four stages of life — *brahmacharya* (celibate studenthood); *grihastha* (the householder stage); *vanaprastha* (partial renunciation); and *sanyasa* (complete renunciation).
- Atman* : the imperishable Ultimate Reality within the Self, according to the *Upanishads*.
- Bhikku* : Pali (skt. *Bhikshu*), literally one who lives by begging alms; a Buddhist monk.

<i>Brahman</i>	:	the imperishable, ultimate reality in the universe, according to <i>Upanishads</i> .
<i>Charvaka</i>	:	an atheistic materialist philosophical school, also known as <i>Lokayata</i> .
<i>Darshana</i>	:	Literally ‘view’; philosophy.
<i>Karma</i>	:	Doctrine according to which actions have consequences that manifest themselves in present and future lives.
<i>Moksha</i>	:	Liberation from the cycle of birth and death.
<i>Nibbana</i>	:	skt. <i>Nirvana</i> . A term used in the Buddhist philosophy to mean liberation from the cycle of birth and death.
<i>Paribbajaka</i>	:	In Pali. Literally, wanderer, renunciant.
<i>Patichcha-samuppada</i>	:	In Pali. The law of dependent origination; a part of the Buddhist teaching.
<i>Tirthankara</i>	:	Literally, ‘ford builder’; a Jaina saint.

11.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) See Section 11.2.
- 2) See Sub-section 11.4.1.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) Please see Section 11.5
- 2) i) False, ii) True, iii) True, iv) True, v) True, vi) False, vii) True, viii) False

11.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 12 JAINISM, BUDDHISM AND AJIVIKAS*

Structure

- 12.0 Objectives
- 12.1 Introduction
- 12.2 Rise of New Religious Ideas
- 12.3 Material Milieu
- 12.4 Gautam Buddha and the Origin of Buddhism
 - 12.4.1 Development of Buddhism
- 12.5 Origin of Jainism
 - 12.5.1 Teachings of Mahavira
 - 12.5.2 Development of Jainism
- 12.6 Other Heterodox Ideas
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- 12.8 Impact of New Religious Movements
- 12.9 Summary
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- 12.11 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises
- 12.12 Suggested Readings

12.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, you will learn about:

- the background to the rise of new religious ideas during the sixth century BCE;
- the emergence and growth of Buddhism and Jainism;
- the main tenets of these religions;
- the influence these religions came to wield on contemporary society; and
- the other heterodox ideas prevalent in the sixth century BCE.

12.1 INTRODUCTION

The sixth century BCE was an important stage in Indian history as far as the development of new religions is concerned. In this period, we notice a growing opposition to the ritualistic orthodox ideas of the brahmanas. This ultimately led to the emergence of many heterodox religious movements. Among these, Buddhism and Jainism developed into well-organised popular religions. This Unit attempts to analyse the emergence and significance of these new religious ideas.

Firstly, it deals with the factors that were responsible for the emergence and growth of heterodox ideas. Then it goes on to explain how the Buddha and

Mahavira tried to find a solution in their own ways to end human suffering. Since the causes for the emergence of these two religions are common in nature, there is some similarity in the principles adopted by these religions. However, they differ completely on some of the basic principles. We have discussed these points in this Unit.

The other heterodox religious ideas which were current during the sixth century BCE have also been dealt with. Finally, we examine the impact of these religious movements on contemporary economy and society.

12.2 RISE OF NEW RELIGIOUS IDEAS

The new religious ideas during this period emerged out of the prevailing social, economic and religious conditions. Let us examine some of the basic reasons which contributed to their emergence:



Ancient Kingdoms and Cities of India during the time of the Buddha (c.500 BCE). Credit: Avantiputra7. Source: Wikimedia Commons. ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mahajanapadas_\(c._500_BCE\).png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mahajanapadas_(c._500_BCE).png))

- 1) The Vedic religious practices had become cumbersome, and in the context of the new society of the period, had become in many cases meaningless. Sacrifices and rituals increased and became more elaborate and expensive. With the breakup of communities, the participation in these practices also became restricted to some and as such irrelevant to many sections in the society.
- 2) Growing importance of sacrifices and rituals established the domination of the brahmanas in the society. They acted both as priests and teachers and through their monopoly on performing sacred religious rites, they claimed the highest position in society which was now divided into four *varnas*.
- 3) Contemporary economic and political developments, on the other hand, helped the emergence of new social groups which acquired considerable

economic power. You have seen that merchants living in cities or even rich agricultural householders possessed considerable wealth. Similarly, the kshatriyas whether in the monarchies or in the *gana-samghas*, came to wield much more political power than before. These social groups were opposed to the social positions defined for them by the brahmanas on the basis of their heredity. As Buddhism and Jainism did not give much importance to the notion of birth for social status, they attracted the vaisyas to their folds. Similarly, the kshatriyas i.e. the ruling class were also unhappy with brahmanical domination. Briefly put, it was basically the discontent generated by the dominant position of the brahmanas in the society, which contributed to the social support behind the new religious ideas. It is worth remembering that both the Buddha and Mahavira came from kshatriya class but in their search for answers to the pressing problems of society they went beyond boundaries set by their birth. Further, when we try to find out how their ideas were received by their contemporaries, we notice that they had a range of people responding to them: kings, big merchants, rich householders, brahmanas and even courtesans. They all represented the new society which was emerging in the sixth century BCE and the Buddha and Mahavira, and other thinkers of those times, in their own ways, responded to the problems of a new social order. The Vedic ritualistic practices had ceased to be of much relevance to this new social order.

The Buddha and Mahavira, were by no means, the first to criticise the existing religious beliefs. Many religious preachers before them, like Kapila, Makkali Gosala, Ajita Kesakambalin and Pakuda Kachchayana had already highlighted the evils of the Vedic religion. They also developed new ideas on life and God. New philosophies were also being preached. However, it was the Buddha and Mahavira, who provided an alternative religious order.

This was the background which helped the emergence and establishment of new religious orders in the sixth century BCE. Among these Buddhism and Jainism were most popular and well organised.

12.3 MATERIAL MILIEU¹

Scholars have contemplated over the fact as to why Buddhism and Jainism arose in north eastern India? Both the heterodox religions cannot be simply understood as a reaction against the growing rigidity and ritualism of the Brahmanas. If this had been so, then such religious ideas would have emerged in western UP where there was a more rigid entrenchment of brahmanical principles. R. S. Sharma believes that the answer has to be sought within the material conditions of the life of the people. Let us examine some of his observations below:

- 1) Iron had been introduced in western UP by 1000 BCE and it gradually spread to eastern UP. Evidence for the use of iron has been documented at the sites of Prahladpur (Dist. of Varanasi), Chirand (Bihar), Vaisali, Sonpur (Gaya) etc. between 8th to 5th century BCE. Between 600-300 BCE eastern UP saw the advent of plough, iron axe, share and sickle in agriculture. This led to the clearing of jungles and large settlements came up. R. S. Sharma believes that the existing socio-economic conditions were not conducive for the growth of agriculture. Cattle wealth was being decimated in the land of

¹ This section has been written by Dr. Suchi Dayal

Kuru and Pancala in western UP through slaughter in sacrifices. *Shatapatha Brahmana* indicates the prevalence of the same practice in eastern UP and Bihar. Once sanctioned by religion, sacrifices became a senseless destruction of cattle, and hence, an impediment to agricultural progress. Just to give an idea about the scale of animal wealth that was destroyed during sacrifices, mention may be made of *Ashvamedha* sacrifice in which 600 animals of various types were killed. Thus, large scale destruction of cattle wealth was proving to be detrimental to the growth of agriculture. Early Pali texts were deeply concerned about agriculture, sowing and cultivating. It is in this context that Buddhist emphasis on *ahimsa* and non injury assumes a new significance. Gautama Buddha maintained that animal sacrifice did not produce any merit. *Suttanipata* considered non-violence as the greatest virtue. Both the teachings of Buddhism and Jainism emphasized non-injury, and this became revolutionary teaching in a time when cattle were being killed for religion or food. .

- 2) The introduction of iron, the resultant surplus, along with various other factors led to the formation of urban settlements in this period. Trade flourished and we see the emergence of trading groups like the *setthis*. The Brahmanical attitude to trade was not encouraging. Sea voyage was considered a taboo as this could impact the purity of the caste structure adversely. The earliest law givers prescribe trade and agriculture for the *vaisyas* who were ranked lower than the *brahmanas* and the *kshatriyas*. Besides, trade in men, liquids, cloth, leather, food grains etc. was prohibited for the *brahmanas* who could take to agriculture in times of distress. The people of Magadha and Anga were looked down upon as they traded in certain commodities. In contrast, the Buddhists treated sea voyages with approval. The first lay converts to Buddhism were from the trading class. Rich traders like Anathapindika gave generous donations to the *Sangha*.
- 3) The advent and use of money currency led to the emergence of the practice of usury and money lending. The existing social ideology did not favour the lending of money on interest. As an early Lawgiver, *Apastamba* lays down that *brahmanas* should not accept food from a person who charges interest (*vardhisikah*). On the other hand, there are repeated references to debtor, creditor, debt and interest in the Pali texts. Money lending was not condemned. However, there was an emphasis on clearing of debts which supposedly made a person happy.
- 4) The urban setting led to emergence of eating houses, prostitutes which did not find favour with the Brahmanical texts. *Apastamba* lays down that the *brahmanas* should not eat food prepared in shops. But Buddhist texts do not exhibit such an attitude. Early Pali texts refer to prostitutes living in cities. Amrapali was a famous courtesan who charged fifty *kahapanas* for one night. The Brahmanical texts did not approve of prostitution. According to Baudhayana, food offered by a prostitute or an unchaste woman is prohibited. In contrast the Buddha did not believe in any such injunctions. Women were admitted in the Buddhist order and there was no prohibition on prostitutes joining the *Sangha*.
- 5) The new form of social set up that was characterized by the advent of iron, large settlements, new forms of wealth and valour led to the emergence of *kshatriyas* as a powerful class of warriors. Their powerful status brought

them in direct competition with the brahmanas who always credited themselves at being at the top of the social hierarchy. The Buddha and Mahavira both belonged to the kshatriya class. The Buddhists accorded first place to the kshatriyas who they felt were the protector of the fields, and thus had a right over a part of the peasants produce in the form of taxes.

Thus, Buddhism may well be regarded as the product of the material milieu of the sixth century BCE. Negatively it undermined those religious practices which hampered the growth of agriculture. It was suited perfectly to the new detribalised class based and state based social structure which was the product of the second phase of iron.

12.4 GAUTAM BUDDHA AND THE ORIGIN OF BUDDHISM

Buddhism was founded by Gautama Buddha who had been given the name of Siddhartha by his parents. His father was Suddhodana, the chief of the Sakya clan and mother was Maya, princess of the Koliya clan. He was born in the Lumbini grove (modern Rummindi) in the Nepal Tarai region. We know this through an inscribed pillar of Ashoka. The date of the birth of the Buddha is a matter of dispute but most of the scholars place it about 566 BCE.

Though his life was spent in royal splendour, it failed to attract the mind of Gautama. As tradition describes it, he was deeply affected by the sight of an old man, a sick person, a dead body and an ascetic. The misery of human life cast a deep spell on Gautama. In order to find a solution to the misery of mankind, he left home at the age of 29 (Figure 12.1).



Fig. 12.1: Scene of the Buddha's Great Departure from Palatial Life, Gandhara. 1-2 CE. Guimet Museum. (The Buddha is surrounded by a halo, accompanied by numerous guards, mithuna loving couples and devata, who have come to pay homage.) Source: Wikimedia Commons. (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Great_Departure.JPG)

Gautama spent six years as a wandering ascetic. From a sage named Alara Kalama he learnt the technique of meditation and the teachings of the *Upanishads*. Since these teachings did not lead Gautama to final liberation, he left him along with five brahmana ascetics. He practised rigid austerities and resorted to different kinds of self torture to find the truth. Ultimately abandoning this he went to Uruvela (near, modern Bodh Gaya on the banks of Niranjana river) and sat under a *pipal* tree (Bodhi tree). Here he attained the Supreme Knowledge (Enlightenment) on the 49th day of his continuous meditation. Since then he was called the *Buddha* (the Enlightened One). From here he proceeded to the Deer park at Sarnath near Varanasi and gave his first sermon which is known as "*Dharmachakra Pravartana*" (setting in motion the wheel of Dharma) (Figure 12.2).



Fig.12.2: Teaching Buddha (Dharmacakra Mudra)

Gupta Period, Sandstone, H.160cm. Archaeological Museum, (ASI), Sarnath, India. Credit: Teraprapas. Source: Wikimedia Commons ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Buddha_in_Sarnath_Museum_\(Dharmajak_Mutra\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Buddha_in_Sarnath_Museum_(Dharmajak_Mutra).jpg))

Asvajit, Upali, Mogallana, Sari-putra and Ananda were the first five disciples of the Buddha. The Buddha laid the foundations of the Buddhist *Sangha*. He preached most of his sermons at Shravasti. Anathapindika, the rich merchant of Shravasti became his follower and made liberal donations to the Buddhist order.

Soon he started visiting places to propagate his sermons. He visited Sarnath, Mathura, Rajgir, Gaya and Pataliputra. Kings like Bimbisara, Ajatasatru (Magadha), Prasenajita (Kosala) and Udayana (Kausambi) accepted his doctrines and became his disciples. He also visited Kapilavastu and converted his foster mother and his son Rahula to his faith. At the age of 80 (486 B.C.), he died at Kusinagara (Kasia in Deoria district in Uttar Pradesh), the capital of the Mallas (Figure 12.3).



Fig.12.3: The Parinirvana of the Buddha, Gandhara 2-3rd century. Credit: PHG. Source: Wikimedia Commons. (<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Paranirvana.JPG>)

Let us now examine the teachings of the Buddha which became popular and gave a new direction to the religious ideas of the time.

Teachings of the Buddha

The basic teachings of the Buddha are contained in:

- The Four Noble Truths, and
- The Eight-Fold Path

The following are the Four Noble Truths:

- 1) The world is full of suffering.
- 2) All sufferings have a cause; desire, ignorance and attachment are the causes of sufferings.
- 3) The suffering could be removed by destroying its cause.
- 4) In order to end suffering one must know the right path. This path is the Eight-Fold Path (*Ashtangika Marga*).

The Eight-Fold Path consists of the following principles:

- Right View. It is to understand that the world is filled with sorrow generated by desire. The ending of desire will lead to the liberation of the soul.
- Right aim. It seeks to avoid the enjoyment of the senses and luxury. It aims to love humanity and increase the happiness of others.
- Right speech, which seeks to emphasize the speaking of truth always.
- Right action, which is understood to be unselfish action.
- Right livelihood. It instructs that a man should live by honest means.
- Right effort. It is the proper way of controlling one's senses so as to prevent bad thoughts. It is through correct mental exercises that one can destroy desire and attachment.
- Right mindfulness. It is the understanding of the idea that the body is impermanent, and meditation is the means for the removal of worldly evils.
- Right concentration. The observation of it will lead to peace. Meditation will unravel the Real Truth.

Buddhism laid great emphasis on the law of '*karma*'. According to this law the present is determined by past actions. The condition of man in this life and the next depends upon his own actions.

Every individual is maker of his own destiny. We are born again and again to reap the fruits of our '*karma*'. If an individual has no sins, he is not born again. Thus, the doctrine of *karma* is the essential part of the teachings of the Buddha.

The Buddha preached '*nirvana*', the ultimate goal in the life of a man. It means the shedding of all desires, and ending of sufferings, which finally leads to freedom from rebirth. By a process of elimination of desire, one can attain '*nirvana*'. Therefore, the Buddha preached that desire is the real problem. Prayers and sacrifices will not end the desire. So, unlike the emphasis on rituals and ceremonies in the Vedic religion he laid emphasis on the moral life of an individual.

The Buddha neither accepted nor rejected the existence of God. He was more concerned about the individual and his actions. Buddhism also did not believe in the existence of soul. Besides these the Buddha laid stress on certain other aspects:

- The Buddha emphasized on the spirit of love. Love could be expressed towards all living beings by following ‘*ahimsa*’ (non-killing). Though the principle was well understood, it was not emphasized as much as in Jainism.
- An individual should pursue the middle path and both severe asceticism as well as luxurious life are to be avoided.

Buddhism in a very short period emerged into an organized religion and the Buddha’s teachings were codified.

The Buddhist canon (collection of teachings) is divided into three sections namely:

- 1) The *Sutta Pitaka* consists of five sections (*nikayas*) of religious discourses and sayings of the Buddha. The fifth section contains the *Jataka* tales (birth stories of the Buddha).
- 2) The *Vinaya Pitaka* contains the rules of monastic discipline.
- 3) The *Abhidhamma Pitaka* contains the philosophical ideas of teachings of the Buddha. It is written in the form of questions and answers.

12.4.1 Development of Buddhism

Let us examine the factors which contributed to the popularity of Buddhism.

Spread of Buddhism

Even during the lifetime of the Buddha, Buddhism was accepted by a large section of the people. For example, the people of Magadha, Kosala, Kaushambi had embraced Buddhism. The republics of Sakyas, Vajjis and Mallas also followed the process. Later on, Ashoka (Figure 12.4) and Kanishka made Buddhism the state religion and it spread to Central Asia, West Asia and Sri Lanka. The appeal of Buddhism for a large section of population was because of the following factors:



Fig.12.4: The Words “Bu-dha” (The Buddha) and “Sa-kya-mu-ni” (“Sage of the Sakyas”) in Brahmi Script on Ashoka’s Rummindei Minor Pillar Edict (c. 250 BCE). Credit: Dharma from Penang, Malaysia. Source: Wikimedia Commons. <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=72611830>

- Emphasis on practical morality; an easily acceptable solution to the problems of mankind and a simple philosophy attracted the masses towards Buddhism.
- The ideas of social equality laid down in the codes of Buddhism made many lay followers accept Buddhism.
- Merchants, like Anathapindika, and courtesans like Amrapali, accepted the faith because they got due respect in this religion.
- The use of popular language (Pali) to explain the doctrines also helped in the spread of the religion. This was because the Brahmanical religion had limited itself to the use of Sanskrit which was not the language of the masses.

- The patronage extended by kings was another important reason for the rapid growth of Buddhism. For example, according to tradition, Ashoka sent his son Mahendra and his daughter Sanghamitra to Sri Lanka to preach Buddhism. He also established many monasteries and contributed liberally to the sangha.
- The institution of *Sangha* had helped to organize the spread of Buddhism effectively.

The Institution of Sangha

The *Sangha* was the religious order of the Buddhists. It was a well-organized and powerful institution which popularised Buddhism. Membership was open to all persons above fifteen years of age, irrespective of caste. Criminals, lepers and persons affected by infectious diseases were not given admission into the *Sangha*. Initially the Buddha was not in favour of admitting women in the *Sangha*. However, he admitted them at the repeated requests of his chief disciple Ananda and his foster mother Mahapajapati Gotami.

On admission, the monks had to ceremonially shave their head and wear yellow or saffron robes. Monks were expected to go on a daily round in order to preach Buddhism and seek alms. During the four months of the rainy season they took



Map of Buddhist Missions during Reign of Ashoka. Credit: Javierfv1212. Source: Wikimedia Commons. (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Asoka%CC%A0_Buddhist_Missions.png)

up a fixed abode and meditated. This was called the retreat or 'vasa'. The *Sangha* also promoted education among the people. Unlike Brahmanism, people of different orders of the society had entry to education. Naturally the non-brahmins who were deprived of education got access to education in Buddhism and thus education reached wider sections of the society.

The *Sangha* was governed by democratic principles and was empowered to enforce discipline amongst its members. There was a code of conduct for the monks and nuns and they were bound to obey it. The *Sangha* had the power to punish the erring members.

Buddhist Councils

According to tradition shortly after the death of the Buddha the first Buddhist Council was held in 483 BCE in the Sattapanni cave near Rajagriha (Figure 12.5). Mahakassapa presided over the assembly. All the teachings of the Buddha were divided into two *Pitakas*, namely: *Vinaya Pitaka* and *Sutta Pitaka*.

The text of *Vinaya Pitaka* was established under the leadership of Upali and that of *Sutta Pitaka* was settled under the leadership of Ananda.

The second Council was held at Vaishali in 383 BCE. The monks of Vaishali and Pataliputra had accepted certain rules which were declared as contrary to the teaching of the Buddha by the monks of Kaushambi and Avanti. The Council failed to bring about a compromise between the two opposing groups. Hence the council ended in a permanent split in the Buddhist order into Sthaviravadins and Mahasangikas. The former upheld the orthodox *Vinaya Pitaka* while the latter favoured the new rules and their further relaxation.



Fig. 12.5: The Sattapanni Caves of Rajgir (Bihar) which served as the Location of First Buddhist Council. Source: Wikimedia Commons. (<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sattapanni.jpg>)

The third Council was held at Pataliputra during the reign of Ashoka under the chairmanship of Moggaliputta Tissa. In this Council the philosophical interpretations of the doctrines of the Buddha were collected into the third *Pitaka* called *Abbidhamma Pitaka*. An attempt was made in this Council to free the Buddhist order from the dissidents and innovations. Heretical monks numbering sixty thousand were expelled from the order. The true canonical literature was defined and authoritatively settled to eliminate all disruptive tendencies.

The fourth Council was held during the reign of Kanishka in Kashmir. This council was a gathering of Hinayanists of north India. It compiled three commentaries (*Vibhashas*) of the three *Pitakas*. It decided certain controversial questions of differences that arose between the Sarvastivada teachers of Kashmir and Gandhara.

Buddhist Schools

In the second Council held at Vaishali, the Buddhist order was split into two schools namely:

- 1) Sthaviravadins, and
- 2) Mahasangikas

The Sthaviravadins followed strict monastic life and rigid disciplinary laws as originally prescribed. The group which followed modified disciplinary rules was called the Mahasangikas.

Mahayana developed after the fourth Buddhist Council. In opposition to the Hinayana group, which believed in orthodox teachings of the Buddha, those who accepted the new ideas belonged to the Mahayana sect. They made images of the Buddha and worshipped it as god. In the first century CE, during the period of Kanishka, some doctrinal changes were made.

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) What were the material conditions that gave rise to new religious ideas in the sixth century BCE?

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- 2) What are the main features of Buddhism?

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12.5 ORIGIN OF JAINISM

According to Jaina traditions, twenty-four Tirthankaras were responsible for the origin and development of Jaina religion and philosophy. Of these, the first twenty-two are of doubtful historicity. In the case of the last two, Parsvanatha and Mahavira, Buddhist works confirm their historicity.

Parsvanatha

According to the Jaina tradition the twenty-third Tirthankara, Parsvanatha (figure 12.6) was the son of King Asvasena of Varanasi and his Queen Vama. He abandoned the throne at the age of thirty and became an ascetic. He received Enlightenment after 84 days of penance. He died at the age of 100 years, nearly 250 years before Mahavira. Parsvanatha believed in the eternity of ‘matter’. He left behind him a good number of followers. The followers of Parsvanatha wore a white garment. Thus, it is clear that even before Mahavira some kind of Jaina faith existed.



Fig. 12.6: Jina Parsvanatha. Madhya Pradesh, 600-700 CE. Credit: Sailko. Source: Wikimedia Commons. (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:India,_madhya_pradesh,_jina_parshvanatha_dalla_temp%C3%A8sta,_600-700.JPG)

Mahavira

The twenty-fourth Tirthankara was Vardhamana Mahavira (Figure 12.7). He was born in Kundagrama (Basukunda), a suburb of Vaisali (Muzzaffarpur district, Bihar) in 540 BCE. His father, Siddhartha was the head of Jnatrikas, a kshatriya clan. His mother was Trishala, a Lichchavi princess. Vardhamana was given a good education and was married to Yashoda. He had a daughter by her.



Fig.12.7: Mahavira, the 24th Tirthankara of Jainism in Current time Cycle. Credit: Dayodaya. Source: Wikimedia Commons. (<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mahavir.jpg>)

At the age of thirty, Vardhamana left his home and became an ascetic. At first he wore a single garment which he abandoned after 13 months and began to wander as a 'naked monk'. For twelve years he lived the life of an ascetic following severe austerities. In the 13th year of his asceticism, at the age of 42, he attained the 'Supreme Knowledge'. He was later known as 'Mahavira' (the supreme hero), or 'Jina' (the conqueror). He was also hailed as 'Nirgrantha' (free from fetters).

For the next thirty years he moved from place to place and preached his doctrines in Kosala, Magadha and further east. He wandered for eight months in a year and spent the four months of the rainy season in some famous town of eastern India. He often visited the courts of Bimbisara and Ajatasatru. He died at Pawa (near Rajagriha) in Patna district at the age of 72 (468 BCE).

12.5.1 Teachings of Mahavira

Mahavira accepted most of the religious doctrines laid down by Parsvanatha. However, he made some alterations and additions to them. Parsvanath advocated the following four principles:

- 1) Truth
- 2) Non-violence
- 3) Non-possession
- 4) Not to receive anything that was not voluntarily given.

To this Mahavira added the fifth principle of celibacy (*brahmacarya*).

Mahavira believed that soul (*jiva*) and matter (*ajiva*) are the two basic existing elements. According to him, the soul is in a state of bondage created by desire accumulated through previous births. By means of continued efforts the soul can be relieved of bondage. This is the final liberation (*moksa*) of the soul. The liberated soul then becomes 'the pure soul'.

According to Jainism, man is the creator of his own destiny and he could attain 'moksa' by pursuing a life of purity, virtue and renunciation. *Moksa (nirvana)* can be attained by observing the following three principles (*ratnatraya*):

- 1) Right belief
- 2) Right knowledge
- 3) Right action

He advocated a life of severe asceticism and extreme penance for the attainment of 'nirvana' or the highest spiritual state. He believed that the world was not created by any supreme creator. The world functions according to an eternal law of decay and development. He thought that all objects, animate and inanimate have a soul. He believed that they feel pain or the influence of injury.

He rejected the authority of the *Vedas* and objected to Vedic rituals and the supremacy of the brahmanas. A code of conduct was prescribed for both the householder and monks. For the purpose of avoiding evil *karma*, a householder had to observe the following five vows:

- 1) Non-injury
- 2) Non-stealing

- 3) Non-adultery
- 4) Speaking the truth
- 5) Non-possession

It was also prescribed that worshippers should feed cooked food to the needy every day. He preached that lay worshippers should not take to agriculture, since this involved the destruction of plants and insects. A monk had to observe certain strict rules. He had to abandon all worldly possessions. He had to root out every hair of his head by his own hands. He could walk only during the day, taking care that he does not kill or injure any being. He had to train himself so as not to be affected by objects of the senses.

Jainism believed that the monastic life was essential to attain salvation and a householder could not attain it.

According to tradition the original doctrines taught by Mahavira were contained in fourteen old texts known as '*purvas*'. In the first Council at Pataliputra, Sthulabhadra divided the Jaina canon into 12 '*angas*' or sections. This was accepted by Svetambaras. However, the Digambaras refused to accept this claiming that all the old scriptures were lost. At the second Council held at Vallabhi new additions were made in the form of '*Upangas*' or minor sections. Among the 12 *Angas* the *Acharanga sutta* and *Bhagavati sutta* are the most important. While the former deals with the code of conduct which a Jaina monk is required to follow, the later expounds the Jaina doctrines in a comprehensive manner.

12.5.2 Development of Jainism

Teachings of Mahavira became very popular among the masses and different sections of the society were attracted to it. Like Buddhism, Jainism also underwent change with time. We will now see what contributed to the spread of this religion and what the developments in it were.

Spread of Jainism

Mahavira had eleven disciples known as *Ganadharas* or heads of schools. Arya Sudharma was the only *Ganadhara* who survived Mahavira and became the first '*Thera*' (chief preceptor) of the Jaina order. He died 20 years after Mahavira's death. The Jaina order in the days of the late Nanda King was administered by two *Theras*:

- 1) Sambhutavijaya, and
- 2) Bhadrabahu.

The sixth *Thera* was Bhadrabahu, a contemporary of the Maurya King Chandragupta Maurya.

The followers of Mahavira slowly spread over the whole country. In many regions royal patronage was bestowed upon Jainism. According to Jaina tradition, Udayin, the successor of Ajatasatru was a devoted Jaina. Jaina monks were seen on the banks of the river Indus, when Alexander invaded India. Chandragupta Maurya was a follower of Jainism and he migrated with Bhadrabahu to the south and spread Jainism. During the early centuries of the Christian Era Mathura and Ujjain became great centres of Jainism.

The success of Jainism was more remarkable than Buddhism. One of the important causes for the success was the popular dialect (Prakrit; religious literature was also written in Ardhamagadhi) used in place of Sanskrit by Mahavira and his followers. The simple and homely morals prescribed to the masses attracted the people. The patronage extended by kings helped Jainism to gain a place in the minds of the people.

Jain Councils

Towards the close of Chandragupta Maurya's rule, a terrible famine broke out in south Bihar. It lasted for about 12 years. Bhadrabahu and his disciples migrated to Sravanabelgola in Karnataka. Other Jainas remained in Magadha with Sthulabhadra as their leader. They summoned a council at Pataliputra in about 300 BCE. In that council the sacred teachings of Mahavira were divided into twelve *angas*.

The second Jain Council was held at Vallabhi (Gujarat) in 512 CE and was presided over by Devardhi Kshemasarmana. The purpose of this Council was to collect the sacred texts and write them down systematically. However, this time the 12th *Anga* drawn at the first Council was lost. All the remaining *Angas* were written in Ardhamagadhi.

Sects

The split in the Jaina order became wider from the third century BCE. The differences over wearing a garment were apparent even during the time of Mahavira. The followers of Bhadrabahu, after their return from Sravanabelgola to Magadha refused to acknowledge the canon holding that all the 14 *Purvas* were lost. Moreover, a wide gulf had developed between those who emigrated and those who stayed back in Magadha. The latter had become accustomed to wearing white garments and made a departure from Mahavira's teachings, while the former still continued going naked and strictly followed his teachings. Hence, the first split in the Jaina order was between the Digambaras (sky clad or naked) and Svetambaras (clad in white).

During later years further splits took place among both the sections; the most important of them being one that renounced idol worship altogether and devoted itself to the worship of the scriptures. They were called the Terapanthis among the Svetambaras and the Samaiyas among the Digambaras. (This sect came into existence about the sixth century CE)

12.6 OTHER HETERODOX IDEAS³

There were many non-brahmanical heretical sects who were expounding ideas which were at variance with the orthodox Brahmanical beliefs. These were the contemporaries of the Buddha as mentioned in the *Sumanna-phala sutta* of *Digha Nikaya*. These teachers are largely mentioned as a group and not individually. There is a lot of confusion about their teachings and much caution needs to be exercised. Buddhist and Jaina sources are the main sources of information about these sects.

It is mentioned in *Sumanna-phala sutta* that when the Buddha along with 1250 *bhikkhus* was stationed at Rajagriha, King Ajatashatru felt in need of spiritual

³ Section 12.6 and 12.7 have been written by Dr. Suchi Dayal

guidance. His ministers then suggested the names of the following heretical teachers one by one.

- 1) Purana Kassapa
- 2) Makkali Gosala
- 3) Ajita Kesakambali
- 4) Pakudha Kaccayana
- 5) Sanjaya Belatthiputta
- 6) Nigantha Nataputta

Each is referred to as the leader of an order (*ganacariyo*), well known, famous, the founder of a sect (*titthakaro*), respected as a saint (*sadhu-sammato*), revered by many people, a homeless wanderer of long standing (*cirapabbajito*) and advanced in years. Now let us discuss the teachings of each briefly:

- 1) Purana Kassapa preached the doctrine of *Akriya* or non-action. He was a brahmana teacher whose main doctrine was that action did not lead to either merit or demerit. According to him, even if a man killed all the creatures on earth, he would not incur any sin. Similarly, he would not earn any merit through good deeds or even by standing on the bank of Ganges. Similarly, self-control, gifts and truthfulness would not earn him any credit.
- 2) Makkali Gosala: A doctrine of *niyativada* is prescribed. According to the most celebrated teacher of the Ajivika sect, Makkali Gosala, there is no cause or basis for sin of living beings. Neither is there cause or basis for the purity of living beings. No deed can affect one's future births. No human action, strength, courage and human endurance can affect one's destiny. All men are without power, strength or virtue. They are driven by destiny, chance and nature (we will be discussing Ajivikism in more detail below).
- 3) Ajita Kesakambali: There is no merit in alms-giving, sacrifice or offering. Good deeds or evil deeds do not lead to good karma or bad karma respectively. There is no transmigration of soul. No ascetic can reach perfection on the right path. Man is formed of four elements: when he dies, earth returns to the aggregate of earth; water to water; fire to fire; air to air; while the sense vanishes into space.
- 4) Pakudha Kaccayana: There are seven immutable elements. These are: the bodies of earth, fire, water, air, joy, sorrow, life. Even if a man cuts off the head of another with a sword, he does not take life as his sword passes through these seven elements. This is the theory of *Asasvatavada*. These seven elements do not lead to any pleasure or pain.
- 5) Sanjaya Belatthiputta: If you asked me, "Is there another world?" and if I believed that there was, I should tell you so. But that is not what I say. I do not say that it is so; I do not say that it is otherwise; I do not say that it is not so; nor do I say that it is not not so. Clearly the above-mentioned lines underline the satirical nature; a tilt at agnostic teachers who are not willing to give any definite answer to any metaphysical question put to them.
- 6) Nigantha Nataputta: Nigantha can be identified with Vardhamana Mahavira, the 24th *tirthankara* of Jainism. According to the passage, the four-fold restraint is a barrier that surrounds a *nigantha*. By avoiding all sin, he becomes perfected, controlled and firm.

12.7 AJIVIKAS

The most prominent teacher of the Ajivika sect (Figure 12.8) was Makkali Gosala



Fig. 12.8: The 3rd Century BCE mendicant caves of the Ajivikas (Barabar hills, Near Gaya, Bihar). Credit: Thomas Fraser Peppé 1870. Source: Wikimedia Commons https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Barabar_hill_with_Sudama_and_Lomas_Rishi_caves.jpg



Fig.12.9: Ajivika Monk in a Gandhara Sculpture of the Mahaparinirvana. Credit: Daderot. Source: Four Scenes from the Life of the Buddha - Parinirvana - Kushana dynasty, late 2nd to early 3rd century AD, Gandhara, schist - Freer Gallery of Art - DSC05119.JPG. Photo Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons. (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ajivika_Monk_in_a_Gandhara_sculpture_of_the_Mahaparinirvana.jpg)

He was at one time closely associated with Mahavira but later went a separate path. The theory that Ajivikas believed in, was Fatalism. It was around this principle that a new sect developed which consisted of naked wanderers who were dedicated to asceticism. They were popular till the Mauryan period. Ashoka and his successor, Dasaratha, had also patronised Ajivikas. After this period, in north India, the Ajivika community lost its influence and soon became insignificant. The three heterodox sects of Buddhism, Jainism and Ajivikism had much in common. All three were against the sacrificial rituals of the Brahmanical religion and monistic theories of the *Upanishads*. The Ajivikas (Figure 12.9) introduced cosmic principles in place of natural personification of the *Vedas* and world-soul theory of the *Upanishads*. All the three religions recognised the rule of natural law in the universe.

The Ajivikas believed in *niyati*, the all-encompassing rule of the principle of order. According to them, *Niyati* controlled everything – all actions, all phenomena. Human volition has no role and was completely ineffectual. Thus, strict determinism was the central tenet of Ajivikism. They developed India's earliest atomic theory. They practised asceticism of the most severe form which often ended in death by starvation.

According to both the Buddhist and Jaina sources, Makkali Gosala exalted *Niyati* to the status of the motive factor of the universe and the sole agent of all phenomenal change. Sin and suffering, attributed by other sects to *karma*, was without cause or basis other than the force of destiny. *Karma* was unaffected by virtuous conduct, by vows, by penances, by chastity, but it was not denied. Ajivikas believed in transmigration of soul and every soul was fated to run the same course through a period of 84,00,000 *mahakalpas*. All beings were driven by destiny (*niyati*), chance (*Sangati*) and nature (*bhava*).

Vedic, Buddhist and Jaina philosophical systems do give some merit to free will. Fatalism does not figure prominently in them. Though Indian doctrine of *karma* was considered important to account for suffering or happiness in this life and the next, the individual is credited with free will, who by choosing the right course of action, could improve his condition and ultimately win salvation. This doctrine Gosala opposed.

12.8 IMPACT OF NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS

The rise and development of the new religious ideas had brought some significant changes in the contemporary social life. Following are some of the important changes:

- The idea of social equality was popularised in this period. Buddhists and Jainas did not give any importance to caste system. They accepted members of different castes in their religious order. This was a great threat to the age long domination of the brahmanas in the society. Acceptance of women in the Buddhist order also had an important impact in society because this gave women equal status with men in the society.
- Brahmanical texts had assigned an inferior position to traders. Sea voyages were also condemned. But as Buddhists and Jainas did not give any importance to caste and did not look down upon sea voyages so the trading community was very much encouraged by these new religious ideas.

Moreover, the emphasis on ‘*karma*’ by these new religious ideas for future life also indirectly favoured the activities of the trading community.

- The new religions gave importance to languages like Prakrit, Pali and Ardha-Magadhi. Buddhist and Jaina philosophies were discussed in these languages and later, canons were written in the local language. This paved the way for the development of vernacular literature. Thus, the Jainas, for the first time, gave literary shape to the mixed dialect, Ardha-Magadhi, by writing their canons in this dialect.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

1) Who were the Ajivikas? What were their ideas?

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2) Mark which of the following is right (✓) or wrong (×)

- a) The growth of trade and commerce helped in the emergence of heterodox ideas. ()
- b) The Buddha delivered his first sermon at Bodhgaya. ()
- c) Mahavira added the idea of celibacy to the four principles of Parsavanatha. ()
- d) Mahavira did not believe in the supreme creator. ()
- e) The concept of *nirvana* is same in Buddhism and Jainism. ()

12.9 SUMMARY

In this Unit you have seen the emergence and establishment of new religious ideas in the sixth century BCE in north India. The contemporary socio-economic needs largely contributed to the emergence of these new religious ideas. Among these, Buddhism and Jainism became very popular among the people. In spite of some differences, both the religions put emphasis on humanity, moral life, *karma* and *ahimsa*. Both of them were highly critical of caste system, domination of the brahmanas, animal sacrifices and the ideas of god. This was a direct challenge to the existing Vedic religion. Besides this, you have also learnt about other heterodox sects like Ajivikas and their ideas. All these brought about a significant change in the attitude of the people and they, as a result, began to question the age long supremacy of the Brahmanical religion.

12.10 KEY WORDS

<i>Ahimsa</i>	:	Non-killing or non-violence
Heterodox	:	Non-orthodox
<i>Karma</i>	:	Action of an individual
<i>Pitakas</i>	:	Buddhist religious texts

<i>Purvas</i>	:	Jain religious texts
Schism	:	Division of an organization into two or more groups.
Sect	:	Group of people united by beliefs or opinions.
<i>Tirthankara</i>	:	Refers to the Jain preachers who acquired supreme knowledge.

12.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) See Section 12.3.
- 2) See Section 12.4.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) Ajivikas were a sect whose most prominent teacher was Makkali Gosala. He believed in the principle of *niyati* or fate. Rigid determinism and atomic theory were the two central tenets of Ajivikism. See section 12.7
- 2)
 - a) ✓
 - b) ×
 - c) ✓
 - d) ✓
 - e) ×

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