CHAPTER – IV

POLITICAL-SOCIO SCENARIO (WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO MAURYAS, SUNGAS, KUSHANAS AND GUPTAS)

The beginning of the Mauryan Period was preceded by a great political upheaval following Alexandra’s invasion of India. Alexander, the King of Macedonia, pursuit of his schemes of conquest of the world invaded India in February on March, 326 B.C. He crossed the river Indus near Atok, and then moved to Taxila where its ruler Ambhi paid him a kind of formal homage. He then marched eastwards and came to the banks of the river Jhelam, and encountered determined opposition from Porus whose dominions lay between the Jhelam and Chenab. Porus was defeated after a hard, fought battle. Having defeated Porus, Alexander crossed both the Chenab and the Ravi and advanced as far as Beas. He placed Porus in charge and entrusted Ambhi with the territory between Indus & Jhelam. After certain other invasions he reached Susa in Persia in May, 324 B.C and died a year later at Babylon in 323 B.C. Alexander’s invasions had no permanent and far reaching effects on India as such. His successors could not establish any effective control over his Indian Conquests. Alexandra essentially went through like a whirlwind and after his death the empire was left to one of his several successors, Seleus Nikator to cope with India. What most surprises us is the extreme poverty of artistic production, architectural, or figurative during the rule of Alexander the Great. It is a failing that can be explained only partially by the fact that such production most have been made of wood or other perishable materials. The only building works of any ambition seem to have been the fortifications. Here might be added the outside wall of Rajagirha, the capital of Magadha until the middle of the fifth century B.C. When it was succeeded by Pataliputra, this wall which extends for about 25 to 30 miles, was considered the sole remains of a Pre-Mauryan structure until the discovery of the Indus Valley Civilization. Now of course, for more of the period has been uncovered, and although nothing yet is known to equal the great intellectual achievements of Buddhism and Jainism, here is increasing evidence from more and more sites and sources of, if by no means monumental artistic activity at least a more dynamic society than once assumed.

In Magadha particularly the influence of Buddhism became quite strong. This religion integrated itself into the new social realities contributing to their renewal. The
most important of the ancient Kings of Magadha was Bindusara who was assassinated by his son and successor Ajata Shatru about 493 B.C. is the history of the unification of the eastern region of the Ganges basin, realized through wars and alliances when the last of Bimbisara’s descendants was deposed and replaced by his viceroy, Shishunga in 413, B.C. The Kingdom of Magadha continued to retain all its power.

The Shaishunaga dynasty lasted only about a half century when a usurper, Mahapadma Nanda, took over the throne of Magadha, initiating the first non-Kshatriya dynasty in India. Some sources claim, that Mahapadma had been born to a mother belonging to the shudra caste, others that he was born of a barber and a courtesan. It is difficult to know how much truth is there in such assertions, but what seems to be true is that for the first time a king comes from a lower caste, perhaps a Vaishya. In any case, this entire period from about (500 to 321 B.C.) – despite its tormented succession of dynasties, usurpations, and assassinations, experienced a consistent development of the state’s military political and economic strength. The merchants who in Bimbisara’s time had already carried decisive political weight took direct control of the some of the real levers of power; the class structure remained, the same, in other words but power groups were shifting within it. There was no basic change with the means of production, so that most farmers never felt the effects of any new situation, meanwhile the Brahmans and Kshatriyas did not see their economic privileges threatened.

**ADVENT OF THE MAURYAS**

With the usurpation of the throne from the Nanda dynasty by the young Chandragupta Maurya, India’s political history took a major turn. Chandragupta Maurya of whose origins little is known, displaced the last King of the Nanda dynasty about 320 B.C. and made himself master of Pataliputra, the capital of Magadha. As for the character of Chandragupta’s somewhat sudden and new “empire” we must realize that he did not rest content with mere territorial expansion but he also allowed for strong internal economic differentiations within the new state Magadha, with its capital Pataliputra, which was essentially an agricultural region, and now found itself at the herd of an empire that included vast areas, like the north west, in which animal husbandry was the principal form of natural exploitation. It is easy to see how all this would lead to a series of expanded

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1 Taddei, M., Monuments of Civilization India, p.34.
possibilities for trade, with an enlarged domestic market as well as a greater variety of potential goods available for export. We cannot assume however that the increased trade led to a production reinvestment of profits. In fact business profits were strictly limited by law as said in Arthasastra which was a study of government economics attributed to Kautilya, the Brahman who, acc. to tradition was Chandragupta Maurya’s chief mentor and counsel. This valuable text states that a license was needed in order to buy grain from the farmers for commercial purposes, that the price was fixed by authorities and that the % of profit was also established at a fixed level, even if this sometimes differed according to the nature of the product involved, he also wrote about the diplomatic principles for the rulers.

For this age we have abundant literary sources of all kinds. A general picture of Indian Civilization can be drawn from the Jatakas and Sutras also and from the western sources particularly Magasthenes. Chandragupta being an ambitious ruler wanted to become the master of the Kingdom of Magadha. He thus secured mastery over a powerful kingdom with rich resources, establishing an efficient system of government and organizing a huge army. In the South, he penetrated as far as Tamil Nadu. It is likely that he conquered trans-vindhyan territories and North Mysore. In the west he pushed his conquests as far as Surashtra or Kathiawar. Towards the close of his reign, Chandragupta had to face another serious rival namely, Seleucus Nikator the ablest general of Alexander. In 305 B.C. he led an expedition to India to recover the Indian territories which Alexander conquered but had been annexed by Chandragupta into his dominions. Seleucus was defeated by Chandragupta. He surrendered Herat, Kandhar, Makran and Kabul and also gave his daughter in marriage to Chandragupta. Chandragupta made a present of 500 elephants to Seleucus and the Greek ruler in turn sent his ambassador Magasthenes to the Mauryan court. He wrote a book “Indica” though available in fragments, describes all he saw in India. Chandragupta’s empire now extended from the Himalayas to the Tamil Country in the South from the Bay of Bengal to the Arabian Sea. It is doubtful whether the Deccan area was directly ruled by Chandragupta or he was simply satisfied with the extension of his influence in the South.

No doubt that we do not have any account of the conquests of Chandragupta Maurya, but we cannot deny the fact that in a short time he made Magadha as a vast empire. Plutarch has written “He ran over and subdued the whole of India. His empire consisted of complete India as such, including Blouchistan and Afganistan, except

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1 Coomarswamy, A.K., History of Indian and Indonesian Art, p.15.
Kashmir and Kalinga. In other words his empire extended from Himalayas in the North to Mysore in the south and from Bengal in the east to Hindustan and Arabian Sea in the west, and Pataliputra being the capital.” ¹The characteristic of the Indian economy during the Mauryan epoch which lasted from 321 to 185 B.C. may be summed up by essentially two elements: state control of agriculture, industry and commerce: taxation of various kinds for the population as mentioned earlier in this chapter. Such a system was necessary to support the Indian state that had developed the prime need being its military obligations. It seems quite clear that a system like the one in force in the Mauryan Empire could enjoy the maximum efficiency when non-productive expenses did not place the state in the position of having an urgent need for money, thus preventing it from undertaking works for the improvement of its main support, agriculture. The village community, even if self-sufficient could not engage in major works, since it was strapped at the same time of production surplus and initiative. And yet, expenses such as those for military needs, which had quite an effect on the budget, could not be eliminated even during peacetime because the army (consisting mostly of Khatriyas) was so intimately connected through caste interests with political power. Any major military obligations, for example such as those that Chandragupta imposed on the state funds, must have left little margin for other expenses.

Undoubtedly, this was one of the reasons why Chandragupta never initiated, so far as we know, any great building enterprises. Besides labour was never in particular abundance, any excess being absorbed by the lower ranks of the army. Thus the two conditions necessary for prestige building activity- financial resources and surplus labor- were still lacking in India. But we cannot be sure of the details of the state’s finances. Probably the state raised the price of products in moments of particular need in order to increase the yield of taxes and to recoup the money paid to the troops. All these characteristics which we have been viewing as elements of Chandragupta Maurya’s reign may be traced in similar forms through the rest of the Mauryan period.

Whatsoever, the credit of freeing the country from the yoke of the Greeks is unanimously assigned to Chandragupta. The early career of this hero is all but unknown although the brilliant achievements of his later life have surrounded his memory with a host of legends. The conflict between Seleucus and Chandragupta Maurya, if any must be looked upon as the nearest approximation to a fair trial of strength between the Greek and

¹ Majumdar, R.C., Ancient India, p.110.
Indian military forces which history has recorded. The defeat inflicted upon the Greek hosts of Seleucus enabled the great ruler to consolidate his mighty empire. During the reigns of Chandragupta and his son and successor Bindusara, it should be noted that not only the whole of the Deccan, excepting the eastern coastal region, formed the part of the empire, but even a considerable part of south Indian Peninsula was either incorporated in their dominions or was bright within their sphere of influence. The capital, Pataliputra (modern Patna) at the confluence of the Ganga and the stone rivers, was the greatest city in India. The wooden wall of the city, probably built of massive sal tree had 64 gates and was crowned with 570 towers. The royal palace within the city was one of the finest in the whole world and its gilded pillars, adorned with golden vines and silver birds exhorted the admiration of the Greeks.

Chardagupta Maurya the great ruler died in 297 B.C. and was succeeded by his son Bindusara who led an expedition into the Deccan and was successful enough there and in his other operations so that, on his death in 272 B.C. almost the entire subcontinent was part of the Mauryan empire. He continued with his father’s policy of expansion to a large extent. But it was Bindusara’s son and successor, Ashoka Piya dassi (286-232 B.C.) who developed into the most imposing of India’s early rulers. Indian history records us of the achievements of this great king and no figure in ancient Indian history is more familiar to us as his. This is first time in the history, we come across original records of a king, composed probably by himself, engraved on imperishable rocks and stone- pillars. The inscriptions of Ashoka furnish a wealth of details about his life and works and we do not possess all this about any other King or ruler from ancient India. The more important of these inscriptions may be classified as :-

1. **Fourteen Rock Edicts** – A set of 14 inscriptions incised in rocks at eight different places can be traced viz-Shahbazgarhi (Peshawar District), Mansehra (Hazara Dist.), Kalsi (Dehra Dun Dist.), Ginger (near Junagadh in Kathiawar), Sopara (Thana Dist. Bombay), Dhauli and Jaugada (Orissa) and Yerragudi (Kurnool Dist. Andhra Pradesh, eight miles from Gooty Railway Station).¹

2. **Minor Rock Edicts** – An edict incised on rocks at 13 different places viz. Rupnath (Jubulpur Dist.), Bairat (Jaipur State, Rajputana), Sasaram (Shahabad Dist. Bihar), Maski (Raichur District), Gavimath and Palkigundu (Kopbal Taluk in Mysore), Gujarra (Datia Dist. Madhya Pradesh), Ahraura (Mirzapur Dist. U.P.), New Delhi,

¹ Majumdar, R.C., Ancient India, p.108.
Rajula Mandagiri (3 miles N.N.W. of Pattikonda in Kurnool Dist., Andhra Pradesh), Yerragudi and three neighbouring places in chitaldrug dist. in Mysore.

3. Seven Pillar edicts – These were engraved on six fine monolith pillars. The complete set of 7 edicts is found only on a single Pillar now at Delhi (removed from a place called Topra). The other pillars found mostly in North Bihar, contain only six of the edicts one of these now at Delhi was brought from Mirat.1

4. The remaining inscriptions engraved on rock, pillars and walls of caves are of miscellaneous character. The most important of these, engraved on a pillar of Rumindei (Nepal Terai), records the visit of Asoka to the place (Lumvinivana) where Gautama Buddha was born, and marks that very site. Two short inscriptions written in Aramaic script, have been found one in Taxila, and the other in Jalalabad Dist., Afghanistan. A bilingual inscription, written in Greek and Aramaic has been found on a rock at Shar-i-Kuna near Kandahar in Afghanistan. Another similar record has also been found in the same locality.

These inscriptions supply the most valuable data for reconstructing the history of Asoka. Unfortunately they tell us nothing about the early eight years of his rule, when he was cruel and bloodthirsty and resized the throne by killing his 98 brothers. In order to know of his act in his these years we have to depend solely on the Buddhist traditions recorded in Chronicles of a much later age. He was known by the name Chandasoka (Ferocious Asoka) and it was later after the war of Kalinga he came to be known as Dharmasoka (religious Asoka). Thus, Ashoka saw to the conquest of Kalinga (Orissa), the only region in India that had offered strong resistance to the Mauryas. He had carved on one of his edicts. “The country of the Kalingas was conquered by King Piyadassi, Beloved of the Gods, eight years after his coronation. In this war in Kalinga men and animals numbering 150 thousand were carried away captives from that country, as many as one hundred thousand were killed there in action, and many to that number perished”2. We may allow for the exaggerations of all figures at this time, but even so, the tradition was that all those people killed and deported, so upset Asoka that he was filled with remorse and turned to Buddhism, “All men are my sons”, says another of the edicts. The feeling of remorse and misery led Asoka to embrace the Buddhist religion, one of whose principles was non injury to all living beings. Thus, then he joined the Buddhist order, followed the principles of Buddhism and became one of his member disciples and a follower. The first

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1 Majumdar, R.C., Ancient India, p.109.
2 Taddei, M., Monuments of Civilization India, p.37.
result of Asoka’s conversion was the determination to abandon warlike undertakings. In future his conquests were to be all religious ones. He laid down great efforts to propagate the religion Buddhism in different parts of the world by all means. His most important mission included the task of his brother, Mahendra and his daughter Sanghamitra, carrying a slip of the sacred Bodhi tree at Gaya to plant at Anuradhapura where it may be still seen. It would appear that Asoka aimed at creating an attitude of mind among his subjects in which social behaviour had the highest relevance. He followed the path of Dhamma. Dhamma stressed toleration, non-violence, respect for those in positions of authority including the Brahmans and the Buddhist monks, kindness towards inferiors, and the acceptance of ideals conducive to human dignity. The practical application of the principles of Buddhism to the everyday affairs of the Kingdom led to the abolition of numerous practices, involving unnecessary suffering to men and beasts. The slaughter of animals to stock the royal class was greatly reduced and finally abolished altogether. He modified the criminal code in various respects which include the three days’ respite for the criminals before the capital punishment during which he received earnest spiritual instruction and consolation. He established hospitals for men and beasts, not only throughout his vast empire but also in the dominions of his neighbouring Kings.

As a result of Asoka’s wonderful zeal and activities Buddhism which was till then confined to an insignificant sect, was transformed into a world religion. His missionary visited not only the different parts of India and Ceylon as mentioned earlier but also western Asia, Egypt and Eastern Europe of the foreign kings, whose dominions thus receive the message of the Buddha, five are mentioned in the inscriptions of Asoka by name, viz. Antiochus theos king of Syria and western Asia, Ptolemy Philadephus of Egypt, Antigonus Gonatas of Macedonia, Magas of cyrene, and Alexander of Epirus. The names of the missionaries whose sphere of work lay in India proper, are preserved in the Ceylonese literature. The relic caskets unearthed about 70 years ago at Bhilsa\(^1\). Those of moggallana and saiputta, recently exhibited many towns of India evoked unparalleled interest. But by far the most novel means adopted by the emperor to make the people realize the blessed doctrines of the Buddha, was to engrave them on rocks, pillars and caves throughout his vast dominions. Many have been lost but we still possess about 35 separate records, containing a glowing personal narrative of the emperor, and give a detailed account of what he believed to be the dharma. He engraved the teachings and

\(^1\) Majumdar, R.C., Ancient India, p.111.

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principles of Dharma on imperishable stones, which even today, stand as an undying monument even after a lapse of more than 2000 years.

The ideology of Dharma died with the death of the emperor. It was perhaps too idealistic to solve the problems of his times. At the same time it can hardly be described as a revolutionary doctrine, since it was largely an emphatic reiteration of certain existing principles of ethics. But credit must be given to the man who had the vision to seek such a solution and took courage to attempt it, 50 years after the death of Asoka the Mauryan Empire had declined. Some historians have traced this decline to the policies of Asoka, claiming that his Pro- Buddhist sympathies led to a Brahmanical revolt against the Mauryan rules; others have suggested that his adherence to non-violence led to a weakening of the military strength of the empire and thus laid it to open attacks, particularly from the North west. Other possibilities speak that the later Mauryan Kings may have been weak and ineffectual rulers, unable to hold together such a vast empire. No detailed account of the Kings is found, those who followed or took over the throne after Asoka. It seems that the final blow to the dynasty came from an attempt to restore the Brahmanic authority. Thus, in 185 B.C. Brhadratha, the last of the Mauryas, was assassinated by his commander-in-chief of the army, Pushyamitra, who belonged to the Shunga family, which according to Panini belonged to the Brahman clan. The occasion was probably determined by the pressure of external military forces, in any case we know that the Shunga Kingdom included only the central part of the vast territory that had belonged to the Mauryan Empire, Magadha.

Buddhist tradition speaks of Pushyamitra as a ferocious persecutor of Buddhism. He was certainly an orthodox Brahman. There are reasons to believe that he successfully carried the arms of the Magadha empire upto the bank of the Sindhu and consummated his victories by the celebration of two Asvamedha sacrifices. The great grammarian Patanjali refers to one of these, and probably officiated as a priest on the occasion. We are told in the Sanskrit drama Malvikagnimitram, that Pushyamitra’s valiant grandson, Vasumitra, son of Agnimitra, the ruler of Vidisa, guarded the sacrificial horse and rescued it from the Yavanas or Greeks after a terrible fight on the banks of the Sindhu. Intermittent fights with the Greeks continued throughout the reign of Pushyamitra and that of his descendants. Ultimately, the Punjab and Sindh were lost to the Magadha Empire and became the scene of contest for supremacy among the hosts of foreign invaders that began to pour into India. The emperor of Pataliputra probably still claimed allegiance, however nominal, from the
rest of Northern India. But it was quite evident that his actual power was dwindling day by day for hosts of Independent States, monarchical and republican, gradually sprang up in different directions all over the country.

THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE

The Mauryan empire was indeed the first attempt in India to secure administrative centralization on an extended scale but it was nothing by the side of the ruthless concentration of policy achieved by Mauryan empires and the methodical and complete suppression of all local autonomy and initiative within their frontiers. The scope of the Mauryan state was very wide. The state was integrated into the vast institutional apparatus for all the main concerns of life – religion, ethics, society, family, economics, culture etc. It embraced the whole of life. The central government of the Mauryans was bureaucratic. It was a highly centralized government. It was manned by numerous officials of varying grades and enjoying many privileges. It kept in touch with all phases of the political, economic and social life of the public to a great extent. From the accounts of Megasthenese we learn that the people were quite happy and prosperous in that age and thus can be called to be self-sufficient. Life was a synthetic whole in which religion and materialism were blended together. The harmony of three pursuits of life- Dharma, Artha and Kama were regarded as the ideal which formed the background of social life.

The stability of Mauryan Empire depended upon the prosperity of agriculture, trade and commerce. Agriculture was the main occupation of the people and Magasthenese places it at second place in the list of the professions followed by the society. The money lending class helped in the growth and development of agriculture. They advanced loans to the agriculturists and other related professions. The prosperity of the agriculturists added to the revenue of the state. The government gave many facilities to the farmers and provided them with, seeds and food and any help needed by them. Government had a direct control with the farmers and agriculturists which made the position of the farmers quite sufficient and prosperous. The social life of the people was also characterised by the joint family system. Great veneration was shown towards all elders in the family. But the family life must have been considerably affected by the growth of inter-marriage and polygamy, because the first marriage generally took place with a girl of the same caste and others were added later. About polygamy Magasthenese remarks that the Indians “marry many
women; some they marry hoping to find in them willing help-mates and others for pleasure and to fill their houses with children”.

The society also acquired the renunciation of the world and social obligations, due to the rise of religions such as Jainism and Buddhism in the Mauryan age, especially under the rule of Asoka the great. It was a great menace to the orthodox society. Kautilya in his Arthasastra, “does not all approve of a premature renunciation of the world and the duties of domestic life without the formal sanction of the legal authorities and without making provision for son and wife”. But the ascetics or hermits of various orders who renounced the world for developing successfully their spiritual life formed a unique feature, of the society of the age. These ascetics were noted for their noble spiritual thinking, complete indifference and aversion to material good, constant endeavour to realize god, and utter fearlessness of bodily pangs, even to death. They were embodiment of those virtues, eternal truths and spiritual ideas which were the basic ideals of Indian life.

Magasthenese has written that the people in Mauryan age lived a moral life and loved truth. It reveals to us the simplicity and a high standard of social and personal morality among the people of those times. They possessed a noble simplicity of character and marked intellectual powers. They had simple laws as they were quite honest and brave as well. Thefts were rare and generally the property and the house was left unguarded and unlocked respectively. Thus, the social life was quite rich in content and comprehensive in its outlook.

The caste system in this age became more rigid as compared to the earlier times. Though Magasthenese makes no mention of the four-fold divisions of the caste system yet Varna (Caste) and Asrama, (stages of religious discipline) the two charaterstic institution of the Hindu social polity reached a definite stage in this age. Kautilya’s Arthasastra describes the four Asramas and the duties assigned to each.

It enumerates the virtues which should be cultivated in common in all the four Asramas. This system of Asramas was thus well established in the Mauryan age. However the choice was left to every individual, who was not forced either to lead a householder’s life or to renounce it against his will. Magasthenese points out that the population of the society was divided into 7 classes namely, philosophers, husbandmen, hardmen and hunters, traders and artisans, soldiers, secret inspectors or overseers and councillors¹. It

¹ Sharan P., Ancient Indian Political thought and institutions, p.63.
seems as if Magasthenese mixed castes with professions to some extent. In fact rigidity of caste seems to have greatly slackened in the time of Asoka when Buddhism became one of the dominant religion in the country. Acc. to Magasthenese, Brahmans enjoyed a high status in the society though they were in minority. They performed religious rites and ceremonies and practiced astrology and considered the world as illusion or Maya. Magasthenese mentions working class along with the philosophers and Brahmans. In the royal edicts also the labouring class is mentioned side by side with Brahmans. It seems that the Buddhists, Jains and Ajvika monks enjoyed the same status as the Brahmans.

The Mauryan age gave a great opportunity for higher education to the public by opening schools and high educational institutions maintained by state and public charities. Teaching was primarily the duty of Brahmans but after Buddha’s time, the Buddhist monks seem to have assumed a large share in educating the masses. The universities of Taxila, Ujjain and Varanasi were quite famous as seats of learning, but their education seems to have been mainly literacy and religious. The dharma- sastras, grammar and rhetoric and varta (Politics and economics) were widely studied by the people and thus were included in the essential courses. From the time of Panini (6th century B.C.) great importance was attached to the study of grammar and was supposed to be a primary course of study. Ashoka’s edicts indicate that literacy prevailed among the common people and Magasthenese also witnessed that education was widely spread in Mauryan times. The establishment of nunneries bring the evidence that even women achieved education in those times though there is no direct evidence found. The Mauryan sources indicate that Pali, Prakrit, Ardhamagadhi languages were used. Kautilya wrote his Arthashastra in Sanskrit. But the Buddhist literature and the jatakas - the previous birth stories of the Buddha, were written in Prakrit. Ashoka issued his orders in Prakrit, in Brahmi script. Ashoka also used Khorasthani script in the Gandhara region.

Position of women in this age was quite interesting and noteworthy. Some of them pursued the study of philosophy and lived a life of continence. But married women were denied the privilege of sharing with their husbands the knowledge of the sacred lore. As the nuns - both Buddhist and Jain, were freely initiated and could wander about all over the country with free access to palaces and cottages, thus it seems that women were provided

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1 Thapar, R., Ashoka and the decline of Mauryas, p.56.
2 Rai, R., A History of India, p.56.
3 Luniya, B.N., Life and Culture in Ancient India, p.263.
4 Rai, R., A History of India, p.56.
with considerable freedom. Though marriage between members of the same caste was
preferred but inter-marriage between different castes was prevalent. They permitted re-
marriage of women whose husband had died, had become an ascetic or had gone abroad,
after a certain period of time as depended on the circumstances and situations\(^1\). Accounts
of the Greek writer testify to the prevalence of the Sati- system in the North western
region. Prostitution was in vogue. Polygamy was practiced esp. by rulers and noblemen.
Ashoka also mentions that women were particularly given to the performance of many
trivial and worthless ceremonies. They took delight in the practice of ritual. The fact that a
wife took a prominent share in religious activities by the side of her husband is clear from
the record of the benefactions of Karuvaki, the second queen of Asoka himself\(^2\). Offences
against women of kinds were severely punished, including the actions of officials in charge
of workshops and prisons. The offence of killing a woman was equal to that of killing a
Brahman in fact. Thus, it can be noticed that the status of women was high in the society
under the Mauryans.

Secularism has always found hospitable acceptance in India not merely because of
the intellectual legacy of western liberalism, democracy, egalitarianism and different
shades of socialism permeating the mind of the Indian elite during the national struggle for
independence and at the time of formation of the Indian republic but also because of the
inexorable social and political compulsions and the teachings and traditions fostered by the
saints, scholars and statesmen through the ages. The Mauryan philosophy talks of balanced
harmonious integration for individuals. Four-fold Purushartha has expect individuals to aspire
for Dharma (the righteous performance of one’s duties in accordance with ethical code of
conduct), Artha (righteous earning of wealth and resources), Kama (Satisfaction of
aesthetic desires) and Moksha (the final liberation) behind which the underlying idea is
that the human spirit is fundamental and for its realisation all social and political
allurements and fears are to be transcended\(^3\). The concept of Dharma is perhaps, the most
comprehensive concept in the Hindu philosophy. No befitting rendering of it has so far,
been possible in any modern language. Dharma includes compass, ethics, morality and
virtue. The rise of Buddhism in Mauryan age resulted in the refreshing reinterpretation of
the notion of Dharma. In the Arthashastra of Kautilya the term Dharma has been described
variously at various places. It signifies the sense of social duty towards oneself

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\(^1\) Luniya, B.N., Life and Culture in Ancient India, p.262.
\(^2\) Rai, R., A History of India, p.132.
\(^3\) Tyagi, R., Secularism in Multi-religious Indian Society, p.25.
(swadharma) and one’s society (varnadharma). A.K. Sen, is thus, of the considered view that in ancient India Dharma was an admixture of socio-ethico-religious ideas, and not a purely religious concept. Kane and Sinha interpret it as “the mode of life or a code of conduct”. It is thus a principle of both individual self development and communal self development. In the customary aspect of Dharma as followed by Ashoka emphasizes on the performance of rituals, appeasement of numerous gods and goddesses, offering of deities altogether find detailed illustrations in vedic and post vedic literature. The term Dharma, thus, covered the wide range of subjects stretching from law to deity, practically all the matters of public behaviour and in turn the social behaviour as a whole.

The Mauryan society established the institution of slavery which was recognized not only by the law-books and the literature on polity, but was expressly referred to inscriptions of the times. Asoka marked a distinction between a slave and a hired labourer and suggested kind treatment for all. According to Magasthenese, “all Indians are free and no one is a slave.” But probably Magasthenese was not aware of slavery in society, because in India it was mild and limited as compared with that prevailing among the Greeks.

People in those times used to wear cotton garments, an undergarment which reached below the knee half-way down to the ankles and an upper garment which they threw partly over their shoulders and partly twisted in folds round their head. It was like a modern dhoti and chadar. Turban was worn by men, Magasthenese observed that in the dress, Indians showed a partiality for richness and bright colours, liberally using ornaments of gold and gems and flowered muslin with attendants carrying umbrellas after them. The robes were worked out in gold and ornamented with precious stones. Ornaments were made of gold, silver, pearls, gems and precious stones and ivory. Jewellery included earrings, necklaces, armlets and bracelets worn both by men and women. Women also wore girdles, anklets and garlands as accessories. Women generally decorated themselves with heavy ornaments from top to bottom which enhanced their beauty.

People in the ancient age celebrated many festivals and rejoiced considerably. The celebration of Vasantotsava, Dipavali, Giripuja etc. is evident as the references of it have been found. The change of seasons was always an occasion to be celebrated with full gatherings in the society. Not only signing, dancing, music was undertaken but entertainments also included buffoons, mimic players, rope-dancers, jugglers and wandering bands etc. Ball-games were favoured by women. One of the popular pastime
was also hunting basically an interest of men. Boating, swimming and archery were other games amongst the youth. Animal fights between bulls, rams, elephants and rhinoceros were also quite popular. The combats of men and animals often led to shedding of blood and thus, later on Ashoka forbade such combats and instead introduced spectacles of heavenly scenes which would provide both entertainment and moral instructions.

Buddhist writers have referred to games on wooden boards with eight or ten rows of squares from which probably chess-play ultimately evolved. Samajas or merry gatherings were often held in honour of a deity e.g. Brahma, Pasupati-Shiva or Saraswati. Dance and music was held up high among the sixty four arts and was supposed to be enjoyed by men and women of all classes altogether.

According to ancient Indian philosophy, there were two extreme schools of thought about the ends of life. On one extreme there were those philosophers who looked at the world from a pessimistic point of view; and they considered the world unreal and full of sorrows. On the other extreme, there was the lokayat philosophy, which stood for the enjoyment of the world and the senses. So far as Kautilya is concerned, he adopted the middle path. He advocated the enjoyment of pleasures in human life, but the aim of life according to him was the attainment of trivarga-dharma, artha and Kama. For the realization of moral virtues, discipline is essential because it aims at controlling the senses. He gave first place to discipline in life and the next place to the study of Vedas and other branches of knowledge.

Control over senses, according to Kautilya is very necessary for the good of society; because in its absence there is bound to arise conflict of interests among different persons. The existence of society depends on the respect for the property and women of others and only under such conditions the four ends of life can be realized. For the maintenance of social order, authority of the state is essential. Thus the prescription of social rules, is the first need, after which comes the ruler, who exercises authority and punishes the evil doers. There were many reasons why the Mauryan society and its social structure was quite richer in content and comprehensive in its outlook on the whole. It will not be an exaggeration if we call the Mauryan age, a period of cultural brilliance, no less than a golden period in Indian history. It was for the first time in history that the whole of the Northern India was under a very efficient and centralized government the basic principles of which are even followed by the present government of India. There was peace, order and stability and subsequent material prosperity in the whole of the country.
India’s prestige was raised up in the eyes of the foreigners. The credit goes to Ashoka, one of the greatest kings of the Mauryan age\textsuperscript{1}. He is the only king in the history of the world who gave up war after victory and made an attempt to banish war entirely from the world. He not only gave to the world lessons of religious toleration but placed before the world the model of an ideal King.

But inspite of all the above explanations, some historians have said that the decline of the Mauryan Empire was due to the certain policies of Ashoka. They claimed that his Pro-Buddhist sympathies led to a brahmanical revolt against the Mauryan rulers; others have suggested that his adherence to non-violence led to a weakening of the military strength of the empire and laid it open to attacks, particularly from the Northwest\textsuperscript{2}. But it should not be ignored that Ashoka did not make any reduction in the army and never neglected the defense of the empire. Hence the principle of Dhamma is not only the reasons for the decline of the Mauryan rule. Other possibilities must also be considered, not least among them being that the later Mauryan kings may well have been weak and ineffectual rulers, unable to hold together such a vast empire. Further more the pressure of a highly paid bureaucracy and a large army could not have been sustained over a period of almost 150 years without a strain on an agriculture economy. Either these two money consuming items would have had to be whittled down and readjusted or in periods of depression fresh sources of income would have had to be found. Finally the strongest bond in uniting people into a political entity, the desire on the part of the people to become a nation was lacking. The divergences in the various parts of the subcontinent were too great to allow the formation of a national unit. The doctrine of Dhamma, which might have created a common factor of loyalty, failed to do so. The subsequent fragmentation of the subcontinent was not entirely arbitrary, for it led to the identification of geographical areas as political entities. These were to remain the nuclei of political units in the Indian subcontinent for many centuries. In 185 B.C. the Mauryan empire ceased to exist. The Mauryan empire disintegrated, leaving the frontier regions vulnerable to attack. The Bactrian Greeks on the northern side of the Hindu Kush mounted assaults on the Indian provinces and annexed the Kabul Valley, as well as Gandhara. During their supremacy, the Indo-Greeks exercised control over all provinces west of the Khyber Pass, Gandhara and the hill regions as far as Humza, Punjab and Multan. It was during this time, the Indians learnt much from the Greeks in the sphere of scientific enquiry which included metallurgy,

\textsuperscript{1} Luniya, B.N., Life and Culture in Ancient India, p.279.
\textsuperscript{2} Rai, R., A History of India, p.58.
astronomy and astrology. In the area of arts and crafts too, the Greeks contributed significantly. It was they who introduced skillfully executed coins bearing the name and portrait of the ruling king. Representations of Greek gods and other mythological figures appeared on the reverse of these coins. The artisans, craftsmen and technicians that streamed into India from Greece in the wake of Alexander’s invasion by their skill reflected the strength of the empire.

**SUNGAS-THE INHERITORS OF THE MAURYANS**

The immediate inheritors of the Mauryas in the Ganga heart land Magadha, were the Sungas, a Brahman family which had usurped the throne at Patliputra. In 185 B.C. Brhadratha, the last of the Mauryans, was assassinated by his commander—in-chief of the army, Pushyamitra, who belonged to the Shunga family as mentioned above. Buddhist tradition speaks of Pushyamitra as a ferocious persecutor of Buddhism. He was certainly an orthodox Brahman, and it is significant that on two occasions he carried out the traditional house sacrifice. However the orthodox reaction against Buddhism must have been brief because it was during the Shunga epoch that the first great Buddhist sanctuaries sprang up and that the initiative in the field of monumental architecture extended to broader groups of the population, thus ceasing to be a royal prerogative. The dominions of Pushyamitra included Magadha and extended southwards to the Narmada, northwest to Jalandhar in the Punjab. It has been recorded that the north western provinces of the Magadha empire had been arrested by Demetrius the Greek king of Bactria, about the beginning of the second century B.C. Demetrius was so successful in his Indian expedition that the Greek writer gave him the appellation of “King of the Indians”. But while he was busy in India, the Bactrian throne was usurped by one Eucratides, and Demetrius tried in vain to dislodge him. Eucratides, though successful against Demetrius, was not destined to enjoy his ill- gotten power for a longer period of time. He was cruelly murdered by his own son who drove his chariot over the dead body of his father.

These internal dissentions among the Greeks probably gave Pushyamitra a good opportunity to recover some of the lost territories and restore order in the empire. But they were followed by other terrible consequences for the Greeks while they were fighting

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1 Taddei, M., Monuments of Civilizations India, p.46.
2 Coomarswamy A.K., History of Indian and Indonesian Art, p.23.
3 Majumdar, R.C., Ancient India, p.118.
amongst themselves for some or the other reasons, Bactria was invaded by the Scythian hordes, and the Greek sovereignty in the fair valley of the oxus was extinguished for ever (C. 12 B.C.)\(^1\). The Greeks, driven from Bactria, were forced to take shelter in their Indian dominions in Afghanistan and the western Punjab, where they ruled for two hundred years more. There were rival dynasties ruling in different localities and it is at present impossible to deal with them in a consecutive narrative. But the interesting fact remains that within this narrow enclave, cut off from the mainland of Greece, and all but unknown to the Greek historians, there flourished two or more principalities ruled over by about thirty Greek kings.

The names of these Greek rulers are evident through the coins, but we hardly know anything about most of them of the few kings, who are known to us from other sources also. Menander, King Milvida of the Buddhist literature is the most prominent. His capital was sakala, the present Sialkot, and he seems to have led several victorious expeditions into the interior of Northern India. Another King Apollodotus, is also said to have conquered Kathiawar Peninsula. In general however, the sovereignty of the Greek kings was confined to Afghanistan and the Punjab, and it is only at rare intervals that they temporarily carried their arms into the interior. Pushyamitra, a Hindu and patron of Brahmanism arrested the disintegration of the empire. He marked a powerful Brahmanic reaction and the Buddhist principle of Ahimsa fell in the background. For all the political disorder, and despite the restoration of traditional social orders, this period became the time when Indian monumental work first took on distinctive forms that have survived. Although Buddhist monumental architecture had made its appearance in the Mauryan age, as has been noticed, and although the greatest architecture undeniably belongs to the later periods it was in the Sunga period that in this field – as in the figurative arts – India used for the first time a language of her own, abandoning the Indian “accent” or placing it in a totally new context.

It is seen that Mauryan art represented basically a court phenomenon, or better, it was an art based on royal commissions, a manifestation of an ideology according to which the state was ideally identified with the community in its highest expression, with its welfare, and thus with the social order that surrounds every individual. Mauryan art ignored every possible counterpart of the King that king wanted to transform into a religious support for his power. We have also analyzed how Mauryan official art of a high

\(^1\) Majumdar, R.C., Ancient India, p.119.
technical level was accompanied by a most modest ceramic production that stylistically has nothing to do with the former. There are two currents that developed side by side and that marked the profound difference between the court culture and that of the city dwellers who had recently emigrated from the country and were still by tradition bound to a religiosity associated with agricultural communities. The Shunga period marks a profound revolution in all these tendencies. The Shunga terra-cottas for instance, reveal not only a decidedly better technique compared to Mauryan ones but-and this is what counts most-they are perfectly compatible stylistically with the more ambitious monumental works. And this despite the fact that the subjects differed religions in the decorations of the architectural monuments, and secular in the terror-cottas found in abundance at excavation sites. When such a unity in expression has been attained, we may speak of a true “Indian art”.

**SOCIAL STRUCTURE**

It is quite clear that the Shunga rule was the result of a Brahmanic revolt against the weak and pacific Buddhist monarchy of the Mauryas. As a result, the Shunga government restored old Brahmanic faith with its ceremonies rituals of scarifies and the supremacy of the Brahmans and gave a set-back to Buddhism. The Sunga period witnessed the revival of the Brahmanical influence and the gravning importance of the Bhagvata religion which counted even the cultural Greeks among its votaries. It was under the patronage of this dynasty, that the Sanskrit scholar Patanjali composed his celebrated work, the Mahabhasya, and thus provided a fresh stimulus to the study of Sanskrit literature. In fact, the foundations for the revival of the Brahmanical religion and literature which came with full force under the Gupta Emperors were laid in the time of Sungas. Scholars hold the opinion that probably Manu-Smriti was compiled in this age itself. The literary activity of the period under review makes a great advance over that of the preceding one. The religious’ literature has grown in content and diversity and the vast canonical literature of the Buddhist throws into shade anything attempted before or since in this line. Philosophical literature has also been systemized and developed. If Ashvaghosha, Nagarjuna, Parshwa and Vasumitra has enriched the Buddhist literature with their works, the Jains did not lag behind. It will not be an exaggeration if we say that even in absence of strong central authority, incursions of foreigners, frequent revolts, and wars, there was general efflorescence of literary activity which reached at its climax in some branches of the literature during this long period of struggle.
The society’s framework depended on the caste-system. A large number of foreigners like Sakas, Yavanas, Pahlavas soon formed an integral part of it. As they were conquerors and warriors, many of them were merged in the Kshatriya fold. Many of them adopted Hindu names as Dharmadeva, Rishabhadatta, Agrivarman etc. and performed Hindu practices. The gradual absorption of these foreign elements in the society leave no trace to their individual identity or separate existence as a foreign tribe or community.

Another feature of the society of this period was the intermarriage between different groups giving birth to new castes. Aryans in the Deccan and the Eastern parts of the country established matrimonial alliances with the non-Aryans. In the Aryans, inter-caste marriages known as Pratiloma and Anuloma were common. All this gave rise to the mixed castes then, there were persons who were degraded in society on account of not fulfilling their sacred duties. They were styled Vratya and formed castes of their own.

The society of this age also resulted in transformation of the people of many small sovereign republics into new castes. The rising power of Magadha wiped out from existence many small republics known as Gana and incorporated them in its widening sway, but they were allowed to follow their own professions, customs and traditions for which they were distinguished from others. This gave rise to certain new groups in the society.

The Sunga monarchs were ardent followers of Brahmanism as said earlier. Under their liberal patronage, Brahmanism received a great impetus. Important orthodox Vedic rites and the Asvamedha, Rajasurya, Aptoryama and other scarifies were revived altogether. The new revived Brahmanism had two principal sects—Vaishvanism and Saivisim—Vaishvanism known as Bhagvatism flourished well in the North as well as in the Deccan. The epigraphic reference to such names as Vasudev, Samarkshana, Indra and four guardians of the quarters Yama, Varuna, Kubera and Vasava prove the existence of Vaishvanism in the Deccan. Similarly, Saivism was also prevailing in many parts of the country. Lord Shiva in the Deccan was worshipped under four names—Shiv, mahadeva, Bhava and Bhutapal. References to Naga, Sarpa and Sarpila indicate the prevalence of Naga cult or serpent worship also.

Though the Sungas, were ardent patrons of Brahmanism, they tolerated Buddhism and Jainism as well. Both Brahmanism and Buddhism prospered under their tolerant rule. The votaries of Brahmanism offered stipend for the education of the Buddhist monks. Pious donors excavated Chaitya Grihas or caused caves to be excavated for the residence
and use of the Buddhist Bhikṣus and monks. Villagers were also assigned by the Kings and their officials for the support of the Buddhist monasteries and establishments. People from all walks of life donated money to the monasteries and established caves for the monks. The inscription in the Kanheri cave in Maharashtra records the gift of a cave by Nagamulamiks (Nagamula), daughter of a Maharaja. Vijayanika, the daughter of Sadakara Sudamsana also donated a cave. The inscription in the Nasik cave refers to the building of a chaitya by a lady named Bhatapalika. Inspite of the prevalence of a large number of sects and creeds, the votaries of different faiths were living in perfect harmony. Sometimes, they even offered grants and endowment to one another. The King’s religious charities were not confined to their own faith in Brahmanism but were liberally extended to Buddhism also.

The Dharmasastras reflect the spirit of the Vedic literature in all respect, especially in assigning the highest status to the Brahmans in reality. In Manu- Samhita, for example, the highest supremacy is given to a Brahmana, though emphasis is also laid on his superior knowledge and qualifications. He filled the highest officers of state and society by his multiple role as a teacher, priest, judge, prime minister assessor and member of the Dharma Parishad. He was punishable in law, but not by capital punishment.

Slavery was a recognized institution of the Indian Society from the oldest Vedic times. The smritis distinguish between different classes of slaves and also lay down various rules regarding their status. Slavery was also the judicial punishment for crime. Through the disabilities of the slaves according to the Smriti law were very great yet they were not without personal rights. A slave was not entitled to any property according to Manu and was not to be a judicial witness except in the last resort.

The status of women in this period was marked by great deterioration. The respect and honour which they had enjoyed in the Rigvedic age became but a memory during this period. The practice of widow-remarriage, which was fairly common in the Vedic Age, was now regarded with disfavour and the widows were also not permitted to learn any Vedic mantras. The place and the situation of a woman became quite difficult and complicated. Thus, the Sunga dynasty gave a new outlook to the society, the people, the religion, art and literature as a whole. Pushyamitra Sunga was succeeded by his son Agnimitra who in his turn was succeeded by his son Vasumitra. There were seven successors of Vasumitra but they were all incompetent and worthless. The last king Devabhuti was assassinated in 75 B.C. by his Brahman minister Vasudeva Kanva who
usurped the throne. The Kanva dynasty, founded by Vasudeva, comprised only four kings and ruled a period of 45 years and contributed little to Indian life.

**INDO – PARTHIANS AND THE SAKAS**

Still later in the North – west of India, the Parthians developed a powerful empire. Its first ruler was Gondapherene who ruled sometimes between A.D. 20 and A.D. 48. He ruled a vast Kingdom which included Qandhar, Kabul and Taxila. It has been already discussed how an independent national kingdom was established in Parthia, about the middle of the third century B.C. by a successful revolt against the Seleucid monarch of Syria. As early as the middle of the second century B.C., the Parthian king Mithradates I had carried his arms up to the Sindhu. At a later period, a powerful chief named Maues established a principality in the western Punjab. About the same time a line of Parthian princes ruled in the Kandhar region, the most notable of them being Vonones and Azes. Towards the close of the first century A.D., Parthian chiefs were squabbling for power in lower Sindh. Some Parthian Kings also ruled in the Peshawar valley. A very early Christian tradition affirms that the Apostle, St. Thomas visited the court of Gondaphares, and converted him and his family to Christianity.

The Kanvas were still overtaken by the sakas who were at first a nomadic tribe, and lived on the Northern bank of the river Jaxartes or Syr Daria. Being dispossessed of their homelands by another nomadic tribe, the yueh-chi they fell upon Bactria and destroyed the Hellenistic monarchy in that province, as has already been related. Later on, they proceeded South and East, and entered India in various bands, through different ways. They must have formed a strong settlement on the bank of the Helmund river, as the region was called Sakasthana (now corrupted into Seistan) after them. In India we can clearly trace three important Saka principalities two of them were in Northern India, and had Mathura and Taxila as their respective capitals. The third comprised Malwa and Kathiawar Peninsula in western India. The rulers of these countries called themselves Satraps or Viceroys. Though it is impossible to say anything about the overlord whose Viceroys they were and although, there is scarcely any doubt that they were practically independent monarchs, the nomenclature has been accepted by modern historians, who style the Saka rulers of Mathura and Taxila as Malwa and Kathiawar Peninsula as Northern Satraps, and those of Malwa and Kathiawar Peninsula as the Western Satraps. The most famous ruler of
the Sakas was Rudradaman. He ruled over Gujrat, Malwa, Cutch, Sindh and Konkan. The
Junnagarh rock Inscription tells that in 170 A.D., Rudradaman got repaired three times
stronger, the embankments of Lake Sudarsena near Girnar which had been originally built
by orders of Chandragupta Maurya. The Sakas ruled over Gujrat for about 2 centuries and
were conquered by the Guptas in early fifth century A.D. the term ‘Saka’ or ‘Scythian’ is
given generally to the nomads who occupied the northern regions of Asia and Europe ¹.

The Sakas in India, esp. the Indo scythians under Maues and the House of Azes in
the Indus Valley, progressively occupied provinces that had been ruled by the Indo- Greeks
since the time of Menander. They inherited and continued to use the Greek Political
institutions and culture that they found. They retained the Greek provinces and the Greek
system of administration. In town planning they retained the Greek chessboard form of
town plan at Sirkap (Taxila). Their buildings such as the Saka temple at Jandial, were
Greek in plan and decoration. Greek had ousted Mauryan art at Taxila, but it had become
increasingly moribound. Removed from cultural contact with the west, it became
increasingly indianized under the Sakas. The process is seen in the stupa of the double
headed eagle in Sirkap, where some niches still have the pedimented front of a Greek
temple but others have ogee Indian arches and the form of Indian toranas. The Parthians
brought with them important Hellenistic elements which were valued in Parthia. At home,
the Parthians also retained established Greek cultural traditions and institutions inherited
from the Seleucids. Although the sizeable concentrations of Greeks and Hellenized peoples
had lost the privileged position they had once enjoyed, Greek remained the lingua franca
for commerce in western Asia. Greek speech and culture were appreciated by the educated
Parthians Parthian Kings used the title “Philhellenos” (lover of Greek culture) on their
coins occassinally from the time of Mithradates I, and regularly from the middle of the
First century B.C. When the Indo-Parthians came to control the empire of Azes II in the
first decades of the first century A.D., the Indus provinces saw a renaissance of
Philhellenism, drawing of fresh western Sources which brought a new and strong
Hellenistic influence on the coinage, art and architecture of the empire of Gondophares,
which can be seen so clearly in the Pahlava period of the excavations at Sirkap (Taxila).

Many of the inscriptions of the Saka and Pahlava period are religious dedications
often recording the deposit of Buddhist relics and foundations. The Maues, the Azes, the
Indo- Parthian and even the Sakas of Mathura were all the patrons of Buddhism. Along

with Buddhism, the Sakas also retained their own Iranian faith. The imposing temple of Jandial, in a key position outside the gate of Taxila, shows the high regard in which Zoroastrianism held by the upper classes of Taxila. In general the Sakas seem to have had a sympathetic, tolerant attitude to all the religions of their subjects Buddhism, Jainism, Brahmanism etc. The reverse types of the coins of the Indo-Scythians and Indo-Parthians remain essentially in the Greek tradition. The Greek gods Zeus, Artemis, Apollo, Poseidon and Nike still dominated the types used by Maues, as well as the same Greek gods with Hermes, Pallas, Demetar and Heracles under the Azes dynasty, including of course, animal types such as the lion, elephant and Indian humped bull. The Pahlavas continued in the same tradition. Gondaphares naturally showed a preference for Nike in various forms, and also used for the first time the figure of Siva on his coinage.

In the early years of the first century A.D. about the time of the Pahlava conquest by Gondaphares, Taxila suffered a great earthquake. When this city was rebuilt, new building methods were used, including a strong form of diaper masonry that was much more durable than the early rubble construction. The legend of St. Thomas, skilled in architecture and all types of work in wood and stone, being sold in Syria to a merchant called Habban and being brought to the court of Gondaphares, is set against the background of skilled craftsmen from Western Asia being commissioned to do work for the Pahlavas. The rebuilt Pahlava city of Taxila produced a rich range of finds, particularly gold jewellery, silver plate and bronze vessels, probably buried when the city was under immediate threat from the Kushans. Objects found among the debris of buildings destroyed at this time include ornaments of personal use, household utensils, implements and arms, many of strongly Hellenistic character. The Pahlava conquest of taxila clearly led to a major influx of articles from the Greeco – Roman world, and to encouragement being given to articles and craftsmen to imitate western models. The reopening of trade routes across Parthia and the development of sea routes to the lower Indus facilitated this process, but the revival of Hellenism came with the Pahlavas.

**COUNTRY UNDER THE KUSHANS**

The rise of the empire of the Kushans is an important landmark in the history of central Asia known to Chinese historians as Kuei- Shuang, who were one of the important

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2 Ibid., p.196.
tribes of the great Yueh-chi who had been driven out from their original homeland by another warring tribe, the Hsiung-nu (Huns) and had settled in Northern Bactria. Here two important changes came over them. In the first place, they gave up their nomadic habit, and adopted a settled life. Secondly, the solidarity of the great Yueh-chi tribe was destroyed and five of its clans established five independent principalities in the conquered region. More than a century passed away, and then the chief of the Kushanas, one of the five clans of the Yueh-chi, found means to bring the other four clans under his sway. Kozola Kadphises or Kadphises I, who accomplished this great task, and laid the foundation of the greatness of his clan, did not rest content by merely establishing a united Yueh-Chi principality. For this he had to fight with the Greeks and the Parthians, who were now in possession of the territories immediately south of the Hindukush. Through his long career he was engaged in this task, and ultimately succeeded in finally extinguishing the Parthian and the Greek domination in the North-western frontier of India. A series of coins beautifully illustrate how the authority gradually passed from Hermaeus, the last Greek ruler of Kabul to Kadphises I.

But although Kadphises I, disposed of his enemies, viz. the Greeks and the Parthians and occupied Kabul, he was not destined to enjoy the fruits of his labour. With the Indian empire almost within his grasp, he died full of years and honours at the age of eighty. But the task which he left unfinished was more than accomplished by his son and successor, Vima Kadphises or Kadphises II, who conquered India, probably as far as Banaras, if not further towards the east. He did not, however, rule his Indian dominions in person, but appointed military chiefs to govern them on his behalf. Thus, established a vast Kushan empire which included large tracts on both sides of the Hindukush mountains.

The next Kushana emperor, the famous Kanishka, is probably the most familiar figure in ancient India after Asoka. His memory has been fully cherished by the Buddhists who looked upon him as one of the greatest patrons and a number of traditions have gathered round his name. According to these he conquered the whole of Northern India including Kashmir and Magadha, and his power extended up to the borders of the desert of Gobi in central Asia. He is further credited with success in wars against the Parthians and the Chinese, and also with the conquest of three rich provinces belonging to the latter, i.e. Kashgar, Yarkand and Khotan. It is even alleged that hostages from a Chinese principality

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2 Luniya, B.N., Life and culture in Ancient India, p.285.
lived in his court. Kanishka’s Indian dominions included Kashmir and upper Sindh, and extended to Benaras in the east and the Vindhyas to the south. Kanishka made Purushapura as his capital and the great relic tower which got erected there was a thing of wonder and excitement for all for hundreds of years, and its ruins have been discovered near Peshawar. There was an argument over the chronology of the Kanishka group of Kings and of the Kadphises group. But the excavations at Taxila and elsewhere have conclusively settled this argument because the coins of the Kadphises group, and not of Kanishka, Huvishka etc. are found in the early Kushan levels of Sirkap. Some believed that Kanishka founded an era which is believed to be the Saka era current today. This would place the accession of Kanishka in 78 A.D. But opinions widely differ in this point. Much has been written on this subject but no final solution is possible without fresh evidence. The late Dr. Fleet and some scholars following him, placed the same event in 58 B.C., thus regarding him as the founder of the Vikrama-Samvat. Others put his region in the second century A.D., while some even push it as late as third century A.D. Certain it is that the four kings ruled for about one hundred years which great empire of Kanishka passed away. Kanishka was followed by three kings Vasishka, Huvishka and Vasudeva. The chronological framework of the dynasty of the great Kushans is provided by the series of inscriptions dated in the era of Kanishka. Inscriptions are known of Kanishka dated years 1-23, of Vasishka dated years 24-28, of Huvishka dated years 28-60 and of Vasudeva dated years 67-98. There is another inscription of year 41 from Ara of a Kanishka, son of Vajheshka, with the titles “Maharaja rajatiraja devputra” and “Kaisara”. Year 41 falls in the middle of the region of Huvishka.

Some scholars have identified him with the great Kanishka and suggested that with advancing years and pressure of military affairs in central Asia, Kanishka had left his son Vasishka as viceroy in India. Vasishka predeceased his father and was replaced by his brother Huvishka. But it could as well be proposed that this Kanishka was another ruler who held the western part of the Kushan Empire in year 41, perhaps a brother of Huvishka associated with him in power or a member of a collateral branch who usurped power for a time in part of the empire. There are several other possibilities such as the division of the empire between 2 brothers, Vasishka and Huvishka, on Kanishka’s death, with a second Kanishka succeeding his father and finally becoming sole Kushan emperor. But there is another possibility, that both Vasishka and his son Kanishka belonged to a separate group of kings after the great Kushans (Kanishka, Huvishka and Vasudeva).

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2 Ibid., p.252.
There is also another Kushan ruler, Vaskushana, found in an inscription dated year 22 from Sanchi. He could not have ruled independently in this area when Kanishka was alive. It is therefore, tempting to identify this Vaskushana with Vasishka. While a king called Vasishka is not known in the coin series of the great Kushans, a king of this name is known in the coinage of the later Kushans after Vasudeva\textsuperscript{1}. It can therefore, be suggested that Vaskushana, a Kushan Maharaja in year 22 and the Kanishka of the Ara inscription in year 41, belong to the period after the century of the great Kushans. These later Kushan rulers would include both Vasishka and his son Kanishka and perhaps another Kanishka known from the Mathura inscription of year 14, which on paleographic grounds comes closer to the Gupta period. In the light of above explanation, a chronological framework is set up of the early, great and later Kushan rulers. The last ruler, Kanishka, may then have been a contemporary of the later Indian dynasties preceding the early Guptas. The extension of the Kushan Empire in northern India seems to have been the achievement of Kanishka, whose inscriptions are found at Mathura, Kausambi and Sarnath. The distribution of copper kushan coins of Kanishka and Huvishka extends as far as Patna and Gaya in eastern India. Kanishka had hold over Kashmir and parts of central and South-western India as well as the North-east India.

After Huvishka, the Kushans lost some more distant territories in eastern India, but Mathura remained under Kushan rule. The long series of inscriptions found there continues upto year 57, of the second Kushan era under the later Kushans and it has been thought that Mathura was a second capital of the Kushans, for the eastern region. Huvishka’s region was a period of political security and economic prosperity. The extensive range of gold coins of Huvishka, retaining a good weight standard and high gold purity, suggests economic stability closely associated with political stability. Vasudeva’s long rule of more than thirty years was equally characterized by political stability at home. After Vasudeva, the Kushans lost more territory to a series of new dynasties and republican states. The downfall of the Kushan Empire was mainly due to the invasion of the Sasanians who had overthrown the Arsacid dynasty and founded a powerful kingdom in Persia early in the third century A.D. The Sasanian King Shapur I (241-272 A.D.), is known to have made extensive conquests in Bactria and Afghanistan and subjugated the Kushans. According to the latest theory on the subject, Shapur’s invasion some time between 241 and 250 A.D. coincides more or less with the end of the region of Vasudeva and

\textsuperscript{1} Harmatta, J., History of Civilizations of Central Asia, Vol.-II, p.253.
consequently the accession of Kanishka, one hundred years before this, falls about 142 A.D. But the overthrow of the Kushan Empire did not mean an end of the Kushan power in India. Kushan Kings, known in history as the later Kushans, and bearing names of Kanishka and Vasudeva, ruled in Kabul and a part of the Punjab valley for a long time. They were outset by another branch of the same clan, known as the Kidara Kushans, who ruled in the same region till the 4th century A.D. Kidara was probably the contemporary Kushan King who is referred to as Daviputra–Shahi-Shahanu-Shahi in the Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudragupta. The Kushan power was brought to end by the growing power of the Nagas and Guptas in India alongwith the Sassaniad Kings.

**SOCIAL STRUCTURE**

During the period of the Kushan empire, great progress was made in the social and economic life of the people of Central Asia. After the disintegration of the Mauryan empire, there was for the first time a very vast empire which not only embraced nearly the whole of the Northern India but also considerable territories outside it as far as Central Asia\(^1\). The empire of the Kushans proved a great civilizing factor. It opened the way for Indian civilization to central and eastern Asia. Trade and commerce flowed between China, India, Persia, Mesopotamia and the Roman empire. The Kushan ambassadors were dispatched to the great Roman emperors. The sea-borne trade of India was carried, under the Kushans, through the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea. The economic stability and prosperity which was enjoyed in that age was due to a number of factors (a) the unification of the greater part of central Asia’s ancient agricultural regions under the authority of a single empire; (b) the maintenance of the political stability; (c) the rapid development of farming and handicrafts ;(d) the expansion and strengthening of trade relations with India, China and the countries of the Near East.

Archaeological evidence reveals intensive exploitation of new agricultural land and the expansion of agricultural oasis at the beginning of the Christian era in the river valleys and ancient agricultural oasis of Central Asia, esp. in the southern regions, even though the best and most suitable croplands, were by that time already under cultivation. It has also been established that, with the opening up of new regions and the extension of crop-farming to the northern provinces of central Asia on the lower reaches of the Zerafshan, on

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\(^1\) Luniya, B.N., Life and culture in Ancient India, p.308.
the middle reaches of the syr Darya and in the Tashkent oasis, large numbers of nomadic livestock – breeders switched to a settled way of life and new centres of urban civilization was formed. Large-scale irrigation systems were developed in the Zerafshan and Kashka Darya Valleys and Tashkent oasis. Agriculture attained a high level of development during the Kushan period. Its growth was primarily due to the rapid expansion of irrigation and to the fact that more land was supplied with water and brought under cultivation than at any other time in the ancient history of Central Asia.

Detailed analysis of archaeological material (esp. the types of settlements and material remains) shows that in the Kushan period there was considerable variety in social status and property ownership, patterns which subsequently spread to virtually the whole of the territory of Central Asia on the local coins minted in central Asia and in the “Ancient letters’ and other Sogdian written documents, a wide range of terms is used to denote different social groups in the Kushan period and the era immediately preceding it¹. There is some direct, and a great deal of indirect, evidence to show that the commune occupied an important place in the socio-economic life of Central Asia and in the ancient east as a whole. The commune consisted of the aristocracy (azat), merchants (Xvakar) and free peasants and craftsmen (Karikar) of these categories, the highest status was enjoyed by the azat, that is, persons of “high and noble birth”, “The azatkar, or free persons associated with the azat, had the children of the azat of aristocratic noble origin”. According to the written sources, the azat owned the land and the villages and were the chief retainers of the local and provincial rulers.

Next come the Xvakar, or merchants who constituted one of the propertied classes. The third category consisted of the Karikar, who paid a poll-tax and were not regarded as noblemen. The Ancient letters contain terms such as “bandak” (slave) and “daya” (bondwoman). The use of slave labour in the economy is evident through many documents from the Toprak-Kala palace archives². In spite of the very considerable number of slaves, slavery was not the only and probably not the predominant, form of labour. Little use was made of slaves either in agriculture or in handicraft work, as their labour was not profitable.

Unfortunately, historians do not yet have at their disposal concrete material on many of the most important aspects of the social and economic history of Central Asia.

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² Ibid., Vol.-II, p.289.
during the Kushan period. There is virtually no information from Central Asia proper on the different categories of land ownership. There is, however, some direct and a great deal of indirect evidence that suggests that there were several different categories. There was one category known as Uzbar land. The uzbar, or levy, was already known in the Achaemenid period as revenue directly received from royal land. A number of estates consisting partly of vineyards belonged to the category. The same estate might also contain Patbazik land. In Achaemenid times the term “Patbazik” meant the delivery to the king of a contribution in kind, consisting of fruits and types of produce. A special priestly class, who is attested in the area long before the Kushans, also probably possessed land during this period. Unfortunately there is almost no specific material on “communal land ownership”, but it seems probable that the commune during this period was intensively exploited by the state and large landholders, who tried to attach members of the commune to the land in a process that ultimately led to the emergence of feudalism in Central Asia. The Kushans were great patrons of art and literature. Large quantities of Sanskrit literature of high standard both religious and secular, were produced in the congenial atmosphere of royal patronage. The name of the Kushan emperor Kanishka is associated with several eminent Buddhist writers, Asvaghosha, Nagarjuna, Vasumitra and Charak\(^1\).

The Kushan age, was a period of religious upheaval. It witnesses the development of Saivism and the allied cult of Kartikeya and the cult of Mihira and Vasudeva Krishna. An important event of the Kushan Empire is that it not only witnessed the extension of Buddhism but also the most serious dissension within the bosom of the Buddhist church itself. Discussions and divisions among the monks, regarding the observance of certain practices, rules on conduct and rituals had been going on for many a generation, but a remarkable change in the fundamental doctrines of the religion manifested during this age. It was this change in the Buddhist creed which permanently divided Buddhist church into two big camps- Hinayana and Mahayana, the former was the original Buddhism and the latter was the new school of Buddhism. Mahayanism was recognized as the state religion by the Kushanas. This new school of Buddhism, had developed well in the Punjab and the North- west of India which was completely over-run and occupied by horders of foreign invaders- Greeks, Parthians and Scythians. They had brought with them many new customs, traditions and beliefs which prevailed even after they abandoned their own religion and adopted new creed- Buddhism. The most important was the practice of

\(^1\) Luniya, B.N., Life and culture in Ancient India, p.308.
making images of the deities whom they used to worship. When they adopted Buddhism they began to make images of the Buddha and worship them, esp. the Greeks.

The exposition and preaching of the Hindu doctrine of Bhakti or devotion had its reaction on Buddhism. The Bhakti cult, which was becoming popular at this age, enjoined upon its followers a deep single minded devotion and intense attachment to the object of their worship and inspired the devotees with a feeling of warmth and emotion. This was not prevalent in the religion Buddhism to some extent as it was quite orthodox. As the Bhakti supplied the idea of a god-head or an object of worship, and emphasizes purity, truthfulness and charity, the lay-followers of Buddhism accepted Bhakti and began to make his images and use them as visible objects of worship. Above all, many Hindus adopted Lord Buddha as one of their gods and worshipped him which helped to bring about a compromise between the two majorly followed religions i.e. Hinduism and Buddhism.

Other characteristic feature of Kushan period was the considerable increase in handicraft production, which came to assume considerable importance in the life of the country. This was to some extent due to the development of irrigated agriculture, which provided the necessary raw materials, and to the expansion of trade, which opened up new markets for the sale of hand-crafted products produced by the people. The high levels of development was achieved by different branches of handicrafts such as ceramics, metal-working, iron-forging, weaving, jewellery-making etc. Pottery was also well developed at this age. Archaeological excavations have brought to light not only large quantities of ceramic products but also the remains of a whole pottery works containing several kinds of kilns. Craftsmen also produced metal ware and adornments for women and were very finely made.

The Kushan emperors appear to have been richly adaptable. When the Kushans had settled down in India they conformed to their new environments. Hindu society was such a living organism that they could adopt themselves to its changing circumstances. The vast Kushan empire, extending from Central Asia to Bihar and from Kashmir to Sind, containing peoples of different nationalities and religions with a heterogeneous socio-economic background, was governed through an organized administrative system. Kushan rulers accepted the prevalent Indian and Chinese concept of the divinity of kingship, and borrowed the Achaemenid and subsequently Indo-Greek and Indo-Parthian system of appointing Satraps as provincial governors, while the feudal lord (dandanayaka) was their
own creation. The title is no doubt Indian, but all feudal lords known to have been associated with the Kushan administration were foreigners. The kingdom of the Kushans, with its cultural and artistic traditions, was devastated by the Hordes of white Huns who descended on the north-west provinces of India around the middle of the fifth century A.D. Their revolting cruelties and vandalism left a trail of dead bodies and ruined monasteries. With the destruction of the Kushana empire, the Graeco-Roman element in Indian civilization gradually lost its outward identity as it merged and dissolved into the variegated patterns of Indian culture.

**POSITION OF THE ANDHRAS**

While the Greeks, the Parthians, the Sakas and the Kushans were harrying the north-western frontier of India, a powerful Kingdom was established in the Deccan by the Andhras. The Andhras are an ancient people, and are referred to in a legend in the Aitareya Brahmana which shows that they lived on the border of Aryan settlements, and had a mixture of Aryan and non-Aryan blood in them which may be dated about 800 B.C. Five hundred years later, they proved to be a very powerful dynasty, which possessed numerous villages and thirty towns, defended by walls and towers, and an army of 100,000 infantry, 2000 cavalry, and 1000 elephants. Their history is not known but it appears quite probable that shortly after the death of Ashoka they threw off the yoke of the Mauryan dynasty, which resulted in its downfall. King Simuka who achieved this task, belonged to the Satavahana family. The word Satavahana, in its corrupt form Salivahana is almost a household word all over India. Actually, Salivahana or Satavahana, was the name of the royal family founded by Simuka. Simuka and his two successors extended their dominions from the mouth of the Krishna to the whole of Deccan plateau. Partishthana, modern Paithan or Pytoon on the Godavari, was their western capital, while Dhanyakataka, near Bezwada on the Krishna, was the eastern capital. For nearly two hundred years the powers of the family were confirmed to the territories south of the Vindhyas, but according to the Puranas, the Satavahanas killed the last Kanva ruler, and became master of Magadha in the last century B.C.

The Puranas have credited Simuka for his achievements, and accordingly some schools have referred the foundation of the Satavahana power to 27 B.C. or shortly before

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1 The statement made by Pliny who probably got his information from Magasthenese.
it. But this is incompatible with another statement of the some puranas that the Satavahanas ruled for 456 years. Satavahana while in that case, ended in the 5th century A.D. If, therefore, the statement is accepted that Simuka, the founder of the Satavahana family, destroyed the Kanvas then a total reign-period of 300 years should be assigned to them for which there is some authority in the Vayu Purana. The scholars are thus divided in their views about the date of Simukas, some place him about 220 B.C.¹ and hold that the Andhras declared their independence shortly after the death of Asoka. Others, however place Simuka towards the end of the last century B.C. and regard him as having ended the supremacy of the Kanvas. Both, however, agree that the rule of his family ended about the middle of the third century A.D. However that may be, it is certain that in the first century B.C. there was a great Andhra empire which extended its sphere of influence not only over the whole of the Deccan and south Indian peninsula, but also over Magadha and central India (Including Malwa). More than hundred years passed in peace and prosperity, when the empire had to feel the terrible shock of the foreign invasions that convulsed North western India. The Andhra emperors had to fight with the Greeks, the Sakas and the Parthians, but the details of the struggle are not known. Towards the end of the first century A.D. the Saka chiefs called the Western Satraps of Malwa and Kathiawar Peninsula, whose early history has been recorded already, dispossessed the Andhras of their dominions in Malwa, conquered the North western portion of the Deccan, and occupied the important city of Nasik. It was a critical moment, not only for the Andhra Kingdom, but also for the whole of Southern India, for the chance were that the whole country would be submerged under the barbarian invasions. Fortunately, a great hero arose in the Satavahana family in the person of Gautamiputra Satakarni. He ascended the throne about 106 A.D. and inflicted a crushing defeat upon the Saka chiefs of Malwa and Kathiawar Peninsula. Thereby he not only recovered his paternal dominions in the Deccan, but also conquered large territories in Gujarat and Rajputana. His mother Gautami Balasri has described her son as a unique Brahman, who totally uprooted the Kshaharata dynasty and extirpated the Sakas, Yavanas (Greeks) and Pahlavas (Parthians). He is also said to have been lord of many countries including Aparanta (N. Konkan), Shrashtra (Kathiawar), Akara – Avanti (east and west Malwa), Anupa and Kukura, which together denoted regions in the neighbourhood of the preceding two. He totally defeated the Kshaharata

¹ Duff, C.M., The chronology of Indian History, pp. 18-21.
ruler Nahapana, and having driven him out of Maharashtra restruck his coins in his own name for immediately putting them into circulation again.

Gautamiputra died after a glorious reign of about 25 years, and was succeeded by his son Pulumayi. About that time the two Saka principalities of Malwa and Kathiawar Peninsula were united under Rudradaman and there ensured a long and protracted struggle between the two rulers. Rudradaman seems to have been successful in pushing back the Andhras to the Deccan proper, and enjoyed his kingdom extending over Malwa, Gujrat and Rajputana. A matrimonial alliance was established between the rival dynasties, by the marriage of Pulumayi (or his brother) with the daughter of Rudradaman, but intermittent struggles continued. A later Satavahana named Yajna Satakarni seems to have conquered the southern dominions of the Western Satraps. His coins, have contained figures of ships, probably indicating the naval power of the Andhras. He not only ruled over Aparanta and the whole of the Deccan but probably also over the eastern part of central Provinces. He was the last great ruler of the Satavahana family. Soon after his death the vast kingdom was split up into several principalities, probably ruled by members of the ruling family. There were four or five successors of Yajna satakarni in the main line who continued to rule till about the middle of the third century A.D.

According to one Puranic account the dynasty comprised about thirty kings, who ruled for over 450 years, an unusually long period in Indian history. But according to another Puranic account there were 19 kings in the family who ruled for 300 years\(^1\). The different branches of the Satavahana family, which ruled in different parts of the kingdom after the decline of the central authority, were soon ousted by new powers some of which were probably feudatory states at the outset. As noted above, the Abhiras established a kingdom in the north-western Deccan which probably included northern Konkan and southern Gujarat. The Ikshvakus occupied the Andhra country proper between the mouths of the Krishna and the Godavari while the Bodhis and the Chutus ruled respectively in the North-Western and South-Western Deccan, the Brihatphalayanas in the Masulipatam region, and the Pallavas in the South Indian Peninsula, in the region around Kanchi (modern canjeeveram in Madras). But more powerful than these and several other powers that came into prominence on the runis of the Andhra Kingdom were the Vakatakas, who were the dominant power in the Deccan from the end of the third to the middle of the Sixth century A.D.

\(^1\) Rai, R., A History of India, p.62.
The most interesting point to be noted about the Satavahanas is, that they evidently
did not hesitate to enter into marriage with foreigners such as the Sakas, and thus presented
themselves as the defenders of the Brahmins and enemies of contamination among the
Indian castes. This brought an elasticity within the caste system itself, which worked
essentially to preserve class privileges and thus adopted from time to the socio-economic
realities of the nation. The Hindu Satavahanas were known as protectors of Buddhism, a
religion which at least in theory rejected the validity of the caste system.

THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE

The socio-economic and religious conditions play an eminent role in shaping the
cultural life of a particular region or community. Art and culture are directly governed by
such conditions of the people within a given space and time. The unique geographical
position of the Andhra country with its large navigable rivers, alluvial soil, a chain of hilly
ranges and large sea coast, has helped immensely towards the growth of its society. The
prosperous peasants, flourishing tradesmen, artisan and craftsmen who had embraced
Buddhism along with the learned acharyas, monks and nuns made a fervent bid to uphold
the cause of Buddhism. The internal trade provided an opportunity to local tradesmen to
visit different places during the course of their business and bring home the new ideas and
concepts.

Although Asoka had introduced Buddhism in the Deccan, yet the real champion
who imported the high artistic traditions, religion and language of the north into South
India were the Satavahana monarchs. The emergence of the mighty Satavahanas in
Andhradesa brought in a considerable change in the socio-economic and religious
conditions. They were a sophisticated class of people who had gained much experience of
the Aryan mode of life- a high standard of living based on the urban society and finer
attainments in the realms of art and literature. The Satavahana kings and nobles had
established themselves as great patrons of art even before their coming to Andhradesa. The
entire coastal Andhra was throbbing with the Buddhist philosophy and art during the
Satavahana period. The extant archaeological sites, extending vertically right from
Srikakulam district in north to the Prakasam district in the South of Andhradesa reveal the
wide popularity of Buddhism which lasted at least for about thousand years, right from 3rd
century B.C. - 8th century A.D.
Along with Buddhism, Hinduism had also emerged as the most popular and powerful faith which attracted the attention of kings, nobles, tradesmen and artisans alike. The two principal sects of Brahmanism viz. Vaishnavism and Shaivism, seemed to have gained maximum popularity in Andhra region. The society underwent a considerable change during the period of later Satavahanas and Ikshvakus in Andhra region. It was during the last quarter of the first century A.D., an active sea-borne trade all along the east coast developed and the Roman gold and silver currency, along with the luxury items used by the sophisticated and affluent Roman society were pouring into India through the famous sea-ports in the South. A large quantity of Roman currency and fine pottery pieces of Roman origin have been recovered from the various excavated sites of Andhra region which would prove the mixing up of ideas, cultural traits, and norms of the Roman society with the Satavahana culture of the Deccan. It is thus, clear that the socio-religious conditions of the Deccan during early centuries of the Christian era were greatly influenced by alien cultural contacts and such a cultural infusion and material prosperity of the people at large resulted favourably in developing new outlook, forms and motifs in the field of art and architecture of Andhra country. That is why, the early art of Andhra, though based on the common denominator with early art of Bharhut, Sanchi and Bodhgaya, presents different highly sophisticated and urban social traits.

Early medieval era of the Indian history brings forth a dramatic change in the social outlook, religious concepts and mythology which has given a new life to Indian art and architecture. The Mahabharta, Ramayana and the various Puranas received greater attention and admiration of the people at large. A detailed survey of cultural history of India in early medieval period will vouchsafe the emergence of Hinduism as the most dominating pantheon, which continued to inspire the art and culture of the country for a period of not less than thousand years. The stable political conditions of the country resulted in an unprecedented growth of trade and commerce which made the people happy and prosperous. In the field of art, new norms were set and iconography of various gods and goddesses was codified. After the downfall of the Ikshvaku Empire, the political history of the Deccan presents an era of turmoils and instability. The petty chieftains of the region i.e. Brahtphalayanas of Kadura, Anandas of Kandarapura, Salankayanas of vengi and the Vishnukundins were engaged in constant warfare to establish their political supremacy. It must have affected the growth of art and architecture in the region. This is

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1 Sharan, P., Ancient Indian political thought and institutions, p.p.75-76.
why we do not find adequate examples of art and architecture of this period. However, the political supremacy of Vishnukundians must have given a sign of relief to the people, who could direct their attention towards the cultural growth of the era. It is during this period the Guptas in the North and Vakatakas in the Central India had established their extensive empires.

THE GUPTAS - A CLASSICAL AGE

After the downfall of the Kushans and the Andhras no great political power arose in India for some time. As we have seen above, for about a century India was divided into a large number of independent states whose varying fortunes and mutual struggles are the chief features of the history of this period. There were kingdoms as well as non-monarchical states, and on the whole the political situation was not unlike as at the beginning of the sixth century B.C. The political disintegration which followed the dissolution of the Kushan Empire continued up to the beginning still ruled over western Punjab, but they had erased to exercise any authority further east. The Sakas ruled over Gujarat and a part of Malwa, but their power was also on the decline. The rest of northern India was divided into a number of small kingdoms and autonomous states.

The origin of the Guptas is somewhat obscure. Many authorities on Gupta history believe that they came from Magadha or Northern Bengal which was the original nucleus of their empire. On the basis of the provenance of early Gupta coins, hoards and the distribution of the important Gupta inscriptions, historians have now come to accept the lower Doaba region as the original home of the Guptas. From the Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudragupta we learn that while the first two kings of the Gupta dynasty were merely maharajas, ChandraGupta I ( C. 319/320-335 or C.350), the son and successor of the second king, Ghatotkaca (C.280- C.319), assumed the title of maharajadhiraja. This has led some historians to believe that the ancestors of Chandragupta I were petty land holders under the later Kushans, the Bharashivas or the Murundas.

The Gupta era dates from the accession of ChandraGupta I in C. 319/320, although the era itself was not introduced by him. ChandraGupta I married a Licchavi princess early in his career. The Licchavis were an old- established clan who ruled over the Maghadan region during the first quarter of the fourth century. The princess whom the king married was named Kumaradevi as their portraits have been found engraved on the coins where
they can be seen together. His son and successor, the great emperor Samudragupta, took
pride on his descent on the mother’s side, from the licchavis. These facts give rise to a
natural presumption that the matrimonial connection with the licchavis materially
contributed to the political greatness of the Guptas. For it is just possible that the Guptas
acquired great social prestige by matrimonial relation with an ancient Kshatriya clan like
the licchavis and naturally proclaimed this fact in all possible ways.

At the time of the death of Chandragupta I in C.350, the Guptas, in alliance with
the licchavis, had become the greatest power of northern India. This alliance brought with
it certain problems, however, since the nature and traditions of the two states were
fundamentally different. The Guptas were monarchical and patrons of Brahmanism, whereas
the licchavis had strong Buddhist learnings. The Allahabad pillar inscription tells us that
Chandragupta nominated SamudraGupta as his successor. Samudragupta was one of the
greatest military Genius as his whole reign was a vast military campaign. He was an
embodiment of the political principal preached by Kautilya viz, “whoever is superior in
power shall wage a war, whoever is possessed of necessary means shall march against the
enemy.” He first of all waged a ruthless war of extermination against his neighbouring
kings in northern India. He seems to have advanced as far as the chambal and in this area
all the kings were killed, and their kingdoms incorporated into the growing Gupta empire.
It was unnecessary for the valiant emperor to proceed further, either towards the east or
towards the west, for the eastern kingdoms like Bengal, Assam, and Nepal, the western
non-monarchical tribal states like those of the Malavas, Yaudheyas, Arjunayanas, Madras
and Abhiras in the Punjab and Rajaputana, and a host of minor ones in Malwa and Madhya
Pradesh preferred submission of their own accord, and agreed to pay homage and taxes to
the Gupta emperor. Indeed, the terror of the Gupta arms was such that even the distant
Kushana Kings of Ajghanistan and the Saka Satraps of Gujrat sought the favour of
SamudraGupta.

But the most difficult undertaking of the Gupta emperor was inquestionably the
great military expedition to the south along the coast of the Bay of Bengal. Passing through
the forest tracks of Madhya Pradesh, he proceeded to the orissan coast, and then marching
through Ganjan, Vizagapatam, Godawari, Krishna and Nellore districts, his victorious
army reached as far as the famous Pallava kingdom of Kanchi, now represented by canjeevaram, south-west of Madras\textsuperscript{1}.

The southern expedition of SamudraGupta, though highly successful from a military point of view, did not lead to any permanent conquest. More than twelve kings were defeated in battle and taken prisoners, but as SamudraGupta could not hope to rule over their dominions permanently, he took the prudent course of re-instating them, probably as tributary kings. It reflects great credit on the political sagacity of SamudraGupta as he knew the limitation of his power and capacity. He was content with direct rule over a consolidated dominion in northern India, and an acknowledgment of supremacy from the rest. SamudraGupta’s direct political control was confined to the Ganges valley, since the kings of the South and the Deccan were not under his suzerainty, but merely paid him tribute. Thus, he achieved the difficult task of bringing about the political unification of the Ganges valley.

SamudraGupta was really a hero of hundred fights, as the court poet describes him in a long laudatory inscription incised on the Asokan pillar at Allahabad. The court poet has described him not only as brave and skillful in battle, but also as a patron of learning a celebrated poet and a musician. It even seems probable that although not the eldest son he was selected as his successor by ChandraGupta I. The Gupta kings were patrons of Brahmanical religion and SamudraGupta restored the Asvamedha sacrifice which had fallen into obeyance for a long time. But he was of tolerant spirit, and extended his favour to other religions also. This is well illustrated by his gracious permission to the Buddhist king of Ceylon to build a monastery for his subjects at Bodhgaya. It appears that the Ceylonese pilgrims to Bodh-Gaya felt great inconvenience for want of a suitable residence, and represented their grievances to the king Meghavarna of Ceylon. The latter sent an envoy with rich presents to SamudraGupta to obtain permission to build a monastery for his subjects, and the Gupta emperor graciously sanctioned the laudable project which was duly carried into effect.

SamudraGupta died in or shortly before 380 A.D. and was succeeded by ChandraGupta II, the worthy son of a worthy father as believed by the historians. He not only successfully maintained the vast empire which his father had left, but also added to it many areas with conquests undertaken by him on his own. He first directed his army against the Saka rulers known as Western Satraps rulings in Gujarat and Kathiawar.

\textsuperscript{1}Thakur, U., Some Aspects of Ancient Indian History and Culture, p.37.
peninsula. The last known date of the Kshatrap coins is C.388, and the earliest silver coins of ChandraGupta II struck imitation of them, were of 409. Thus, the annexation of western India to the Gupta kingdom must have taken place between these dates. This completed the Gupta conquest of northern India and gave them access to the western Indian ports.

It is generally believed that chandraGupta II gave his daughter PrabhavatiGupta in marriage to the Vakataka crown prince Rudrasena II to secure an ally for his Saka Campaigns. But the Vakatakas, who had risen to the position of major power in the vidarbha and adjacent regions in the latter half of the third century, were then passing through a crisis and were thus unable to act as a safeguard for the Guptas against their Saka adversaries. The Guptas nevertheless put this marriage alliance to good use. Rudrasena II died five years after coming to the throne and as his sons were minors, his widow, the daughter of ChandraGupta II, acted as regent from 390 to 410. This allowed the Guptas to secure virtual control of the Vidarbha region.

Gupta power reached its climax under ChandraGupta II. In the east, the frontiers were preserved and in the west they were stretched beyond the Jamuna. The republican states to the west of Mathura were finally integrated with the kingdom; western India was added; and the Deccan was brought under its orbit of direct influence. ChandraGupta II assumed the title of Vikramaditya. He developed fully the concept of kingship, in consonance with the religious ideal of the time, as attested by the discovery of his Chakravikrama type of coins. The reverse of the coin contains a charka (wheel), inside which is a standing male handing three balls to a haloed royal figure. The entire symbol has been interpreted as the Chakrapurusa of Vishnu, who is bestowing on the Chakrabarti (sovereign) the three kingly virtues of authority, energy and counsel.

The reigns of SamudraGupta and ChandraGupta, covering nearly three-quarters of a century, once more brought about the political unity of Northern India. Inspite of numerous wars people enjoyed prosperity and security of life and prosperity. The administration was highly organized and was far more liberal than in the Mauryan times. Fa-hien, a Chinese pilgrim, travelled through the Gupta empire during the reign of ChandraGupta II, and has left a very pleasing picture of the country. The taxes were light and the administration was very liberal. Cruel punishments, so much in vogue in Mauryan times, were abolished, and harassing rules and regulations like Registration and Passports were unknown. Fa-hien everywhere witnessed the wealth and luxury of the people and the economic condition was very satisfactory. Trade and commerce flourished and the people
followed various arts and the crafts. The period also ushered in a tremendous intellectual and religious revival, accompanied by wonderful achievements in art and architecture at large.

The reign of KumaraGupta I (C.414-C.454), the son and successor of ChandraGupta II was one of peace and relative inactivity\(^1\). Thirteen inscriptions of his reign that have come to light show that like his father, he succeeded in keeping the kingdom intact. The discovery of his coins from as far as Ahmadabad, Valabhi, Junagadh and Morvi suggests that he kept the newly acquired western provinces in a firm grip. Towards the end of his reign, peace was disturbed by the invasion of an enemy whose identity has not been definitely established. Acc. to the Bhitari pillar inscription of SkandaGupta (C.454-C.467)\(^2\), the son and successor of KumaraGupta I, the hostile forces belonged to a tribe called Pushyamitra. For more serious, however, was the threat of a Huna (Hephthalite) invasion and SkandaGupta had to concentrate on defending the kingdom against external invasions throughout his reign. Although the Bhitari inscription leaves no doubt as to the severity of the struggle, the Hunas was finally repulsed. He had to defeat the barbaric hoarders in order to save his empire. So terrific was the conflict that the heir to the mighty empire had to pass a night on the bare ground. The songs of praise in honour of SkandaGupta were sung in all directions by men, women and even children.

There are good grounds to believe that SkandaGupta’s succession to the throne was not a peaceful one, and there was a struggle between him and his half – brother Puru Gupta, son of the chief queen of KumaraGupta. Probably SkandaGupta’s mother was queen of inferior rank and this gave an advantage to his rival. But SkandaGupta triumphed at the end. This rivalry between SkandaGupta and PuruGupta did not end with the accession of SkandaGupta, and probably had repercussion on the question of succession after his death. Certain it is that SkandaGupta was succeeded by PuruGupta or his sons, who in their official records traced the genealogy direct from KumaraGupta omitting altogether the name of SkandaGupta.

SkandaGupta’s reign seems to have been full of wars. His greatest enemies were the Hunas, a ferocious barbarian horde who lived in central Asia, whose one branch, known as the Ephthalites or White Huns, occupied the oxus valley and advanced against both Persia and India. They crossed the Hindukush, occupied Gandhara and hurled

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\(^1\) Thakur, U., Some Aspects of Ancient Indian History and Culture, p.32
\(^2\) Luniya, B.N., Life and Culture in Ancient India, p.320.
defiance at the mighty Gupta Empire. It was a grave peril to the whole of India. ‘The
danger was perhaps for greater than the one which SkandaGupta faced towards the close of
his father’s reign. Once more he arose equal to the occasion and inflicted such a terrible
defeat upon the hunas that for half a century they does not disturb the Gupta empire though
they wrought havoc on Persia during this period. In the light of subsequent events in India,
and the history of the Huna raids in other countries, the successful and effective resistance
to them by SkandaGupta must rank as one of the greatest achievements-of the age. This
heroic feat fully entitled SkandaGupta to assume the title of Vikramaditya. His command
was obeyed by his governors of Bengal and Kathiawar peninsula, and one imperial writ ran
from the Bay of Bengal to the Arabian Sea.

Peace and prosperity prevailed over this vast empire at the time of SkandaGupta’s
death, which probably took place about 467 A.D. The history of the Gupta Empire,
immediately after this, is very obscure. The successors of SkandaGupta included
BudhaGupta who succeeded his father PuruGupta whose earliest known date is 477 A.D.
But there is an inscription of a king called KumaraGupta II, dated 474 A.D. His relation to
PuruGupta is not known, and his history is very obscure. It is possible that he was
SkandaGupta’s son or legitimate successor, who revolted against the usurpation of the
throne by PuruGupta, or by removing whom PuruGupta ascended the throne. In any case
PuruGupta’s son BudhaGupta ruled from A.D.477 to at least A.D.495\(^1\), and probably upto
500 A.D, without any rival, and there is no reason to suppose that the peace and prosperity
of the empire suffered to any considerable extent during this period. The death of
BudhaGupta was followed by a period of troubles caused by dissensions in the royal
family, revolt of feudal chiefs, and foreign invasions- all the three acting and reacting upon
each other. He was further succeeded by his brother NarasimhaGupta and the latter by his
son and grandson, named respectively KumaraGupta III and VishnuGupta. There are good
grounds to believe that the last of these ended the reign of BuddhaGupta about 550 A.D.
and it is, therefore, reasonable to presume that the reigns of his three successors covered
the first half of the 6\(^{th}\) cen. A.D. The epigraphic records have shown that at least two
other Gupta kings ruled during this period. One of them, VainyaGupta, issued a land –
grant in eastern Bengal in 507 A.D., and his gold coins and seals leave no doubt that he
belonged to the imperial Gupta family. The other, BhanuGupta is also known from a single
inscription dated 510 A.D on a memorial pillar found at Eran (Saugor Dist. M.P.). It tells

\(^{1}\) Duff, C.M., The Chronology of Indian History, pp.28-29.
that “the mighty king, the glorious BhanuGupta, the bravest man on the earth, fought a battle in which his feudatory chief Goparaja was killed, and the latter’s wife died with him in the same funeral pyre, the earliest epigraphic record of the Sati rite in India.

The post Gupta period in northern India saw the emergence of regional kingdoms, mostly derived from the feudatories of the Guptas. The more important among them were the later Guptas, the Maukharis, the Pushyabhutis and the Maitrakas. The later Guptas had no connection with the Gupta main line. The Aphsad inscription gives a detailed history of the dynasty which shows that the later Guptas were rulers of Magadha with suzerainty over Malwa. They were eventually ousted from Magadha by the Maukharis of Kanauj, who originally held the region of western Uttar Pradesh. The Pushyabhutis ruled in Thaneswar. They had made a marriage alliance with the Maukharis and on the death of the last Maukhari king, the Maukhari nobles requested Harsha, the reigning king of the Pashyabhuti dynasty, to unite his kingdom with them and rule from Kanauj. The Maitrakas ruled in Gujarat, with Valabhi as their capital. Of all these states which arose out of the ruins of the Gupta kingdom, that of Valabhi proved to be the most durable. The unusual large number of records of this family that have come to light help to reconstruct their political history with some degree of certainty. There were able rulers among them, such as Shiladitya, under whose leadership Valabhi became the most powerful kingdom of western India towards the close of the sixth century. The Maitrakas continued to rule until the middle of the eighth century, when they succumbed to outside attacks- probably from the Arabs.

Of all the successor states to the Guptas, that which rose to greatest eminence, however, was ruled by the Pushyabhuti of Thaneshwar. The Pushyabhuti family came to the fore with the accession of Prabhakaravardhana, but it was during the reign of his son Harshavardhana ( 606 -647) that they succeeded in establishing political authority over most parts of northern India. The early history of Harsha’s reign is reconstructed from his biography, the Harsacaritam, written by his court poet Bana. This is supplemented by the account of the Chinese pilgrim Hsuan Tsang, who visited India during Harsha’s reign. Harsha made Kanauj, the seat of his power and it rose to political prominence from the late sixth century as a place strategic importance. From there he extended his authority in all directions. Rajasthan, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Orissa were all under his direct control and he exercised influence over a much wider area. The most important political development in western India from the seventh century was the rise of the Rajputs, their
origin is somewhat obscure, but it has been suggested that they came from central Asia with the Hunas, displaced the original tribal inhabitants of Rajasthan and laid the foundation of the later Rajput families. The most notable among the Rajput dynasties were the Gujaras, Pratiharas, the Guhillas and the Cahamanas, but they were to play their part in wider Indian politics only at a later date.

**SOCIAL STRUCTURE**

For a reconstruction of social conditions under the Guptas, the dependence on legal contemporarery texts, or smritis is essential. A number of such texts, most of which took the Dharmasutra of Manu as their basis, were written during this period, the best known being the Yajnavalkya, the Narada, the Brihaspati and the Katayana. These Smritis provide an ideal representation of society from the brahmanical point of new. It is supported by the inscriptions of the period and by the accounts of the Chinese pilgrims Fa-Heisn and Hsuan – Tsang. In the Gupta period, brahmanical reaction against Buddhism and Jainism became stronger. As a result, Varna (i.e Caste) based social stratification and the supremacy of the Brahmans (the higher caste) received much greater emphasis. It is difficult to ascertain the Guptas, but they were in all probability, Brahmans themselves and strongly supported the brahmanical social order. The Brahmans were given land on a large scale and they claimed many privileges which have been listed in the Narada. The kshatriyas (the second, or warrier, caste) also continued to enjoy great prestige due to their political influence, and there was a tacit understanding between these two upper castes in sharing social and political power.

The degeneration of the Vaisyas (the third, or trader, caste) which had begun earlier, intensified during this period. Because of advanced agricultural techniques and developments in handicrafts, the condition of the Sudras (the fourth, or menial, caste) improved and there was no great difference between a poor Vaisya and a prosperous Sudra. The Vaisyas, however, retained there supremacy in industry and commerce and held important positions on the municipal boards. The Smritis of the Gupta periods made a clear distinction between the sudras and the slaves. This period saw the emergence of the untouchables, who were beyond the pale of the caste structure and lived outside the city boundaries.
From this cumulative evidence it appears that the significance of the traditional varna structure, based on colors and race, was being seriously undermined and the jati structure, based on occupational status, was becoming increasingly important. The people in the Gupta age prospered to the maximum. The Chinese pilgrim Fa-Hien says that the people were virtuous, rich and prosperous, and cities were teeming with population. People followed the principle of Ahimsa which was probably the outcome of the Buddhist ethics of Ahimsa, already being practiced during the Mauryan and the post-Mauryan Age. Gupta kings had the financial backup to be patrons on a lavish scale. The steady stream of revenue from the land was augmented by income from commercial activity. Indian trading stations were dotted throughout the islands of South-East Asia, Malaysia, Cambodia and Thailand.

Some historians have characterized the socio-economic developments of the Gupta period in terms of feudalism. Although there was a long tradition of donating land to the Brahmans, the number of such donations greatly increased in the Gupta period. Revenue to the king, exemption from the interference of government officials, and even the right to enjoy fines levied on cultivators, were all transferred to the religious beneficiaries. Due to this self-sufficient economy, religious donations as well as land-grants to secular officials became quite popular.

Hinduism had by this time evolved from the beliefs of the Vedic period into a humane and sophisticated religion, perhaps the most fundamental changes were the two features which arose partially out of the heterodox challenge to early Hinduism. The first of these was the tendency towards monotheism, which was stressed by the increasing worship of either of the two deities Vishnu and Siva. In addition the ritual of worship was also changing in favour of personal devotion (bhakti) rather than sacrifice. Thus Hinduism revitalized itself and was able slowly to supplant the heterodox religions. The Brahmans, who regarded themselves as the interpreters of Hinduism, were able to rewrite the older texts to conform to their own vision of society, as evident from puranic literature, and were able to convert popular secular material, such as the two epics, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana into sacred literature.

It was from these cultural roots that the classical norm evolved. The language of Brahmanism, Sanskrit became the language of erudition and court literature. Many scientific writings were produced and the classification of scientific knowledge led to

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many exciting results. Medical knowledge began to travel west and aroused the interest of West Asian Physicians. Experienced metallurgists displayed their skill in minting beautiful coins, in the use of iron of such excellence that it defies reproduction in metal sculpture, and in copperplate charters. Indian mathematical knowledge was probably the most advanced of its time, with the use of place notation of numerals and familiarity with the concept of the cipher. Astronomy saw even more spectacular progress due to the role which Aryabhata played that time.

The advancement of knowledge lay in the hands of the Brahmanas. This had the advantage of intensifying the intellectual tradition within a small group of society. Unfortunately however, owing to the evolution of the social pattern in ancient India this also led to intellectual construction. Brahman superiority was in part sustained by the maintainence of caste in Indian society. With the rewriting of early literature, especially legal literature, the division of society into castes was reiterated and the pre-eminent status of the Brahman was emphasized. The result was fairly rigid ordering of society in theory at least. In addition, the educational function was appropriated by the brahmans, who with the decline of the Buddhist monasteries in the Post-Gupta period, became the major purveyors of formal education in many parts of the subcontinent. Technical knowledge was gradually relegated to the position of a craft tradition practiced in the guilds. Formal education was to become entirely scholastic, resulting in intellectual in-growing.

Although women were idealized in literature and art, in practice they had a distinctly subordinate social position\(^1\). Education of a limited kind was permitted to upper-class women but they were not allowed to participate in public life. Pre-puberty marriages, became the order of the day and thus girls had no voice in the settlement of their marriage. However, the practice of swayamvara or self-choice of husband had also not gone out of use entirely. Though polygamy was widely prevalent, women were not ordinarily allowed to contract a second marriage. The custom of sati was gradually coming into general use, especially among the ruling families widow-marriage was becoming unpopular. Usually, a widow lived a life of vows, fasts and renunciation, a life of chastity and austerity, prescribed by the Smritis. The attitude of the contemporary Smritis towards women was one of contempt. Women were described as almost a consumer commodity, exclusively owned by their husbands. Only those women could enjoy a measure of

freedom who deliberately chose to opt out of the prevailing system of regulations by becoming a Buddhist nun or a courtesan.

With the rise of the Gupta Empire, the progress of Sanskrit got an additional momentum all over the country. The political unification, peace, stability and property under the Guptas, coupled with their rich and liberal patronage to Sanskrit resulted in the flourishing of Sanskrit literature in all its branches. The Gupta monarchs being highly cultured liberally patronized Sanskrit literature. They associated themselves with a number of intellectual celebrities who flourished in the favourable atmosphere of the age. SamudraGupta, a gifted poet and musician, associated himself with the learned people, and encouraged court-poetry. ChandraGupta II followed in the footsteps of his father and he associated with the dramatists and poets like Kalidasa. The Gupta emperors were so zealous admirers and liberal patrons of Sanskrit that they are said to have enjoined its use even in their palace and harem. They made Sanskrit the official language, so all their inscriptions and documents were written in Sanskrit. In coins, legends and scriptures, Sanskrit replaced Prakrit. This encouragement resulted in a great and all round development of Sanskrit literature and consequently the Gupta Age witnessed some of the finest productions in the whole range of Sanskrit literature. It is manly for this reason that the Gupta period had been called the Golden Age of the Sanskrit literature and also the Classical Period of Sanskrit literature.

Apart from Sanskrit, the languages of the masses known as Prakrit also developed. The Prakrit avoided harsh combination of consonants and gave preference to final vowels. The earliest Prakrit was Pali, used by the Buddhists for their scriptures as well as preaching. The Gupta period witnessed the evolution of other Prakrits such as Sauraseni used in Mathura and its vicinity, Ardhamagadhi spoken in Oudh and Bundelkhand, Magadhi in modern Bihar and Maharashtri in Beror. Great progress was made in the domain of scientific studies during this age. Aryabhatt, Varahmihira and BrahmaGupta were, in their olden days,” the foremost astronomers and mathematicians of the world.” The period also made great progress in astronomy. Varahamihira, refers to such astronomers as Latadeva, Simha, Pradumna, Vijauyanandin and Aryabhatt. An account of

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1 Luniya, B.N., Life and Culture in Ancient India, pp.328-340.
2 Bashem A.L., A Cultural History of India, p.43.
five astronomical works known as Paitamaha, Romaka, Paulisa, Vasishtha and Surya has been made 1.

Education under the Guptas progressed considerably. Private teacher or Guru was the pivot of the education- system in that age. Renowned Acharyas or progressors and scholars used to give education individually and privately in their homes or ashramas. Often they resided in holy places, big towns and capitals of kingdoms. There was also a class of wandering teachers who deliberately adopted a vow of life-long poverty for the purpose of study and instruction. In this Age, the study of the Vedas fell into the background. In place of the Vedas, Puranas, Smritis - Logic, Philosophy, Metaphysics, Sanskrit grammar, Dharma or law, astronomy cum astrology, Dhanurveda, Artharastra etc. was studied with great enthusiasm. As regards famous centres of ancient education, the well-known centre of education, Taxila, was on the decline. In the fifth century A.D, there was left nothing of educational importance. But Nalanda was rising to its fame under the liberal patronage of the Gupta sovereigns 2. This Buddhist monastery was becoming a famous university and a large number of monasteries or Viharas were constructed there to provide accommodation to the growing number of monks and students. Nalanda was getting renowned for the magnificence of its establishment and the intellectual as well as moral pre-eminence of its inmates. The resident monks of Nalanda were esteemed not only for their learning but also for their high noble character. Other important Buddhist monasteries began to develop into the centres of education during the later half of the Gupta period. There were monastic colleges of higher learning. Patliputra in Magadha, Vatsagulam and Nasik in Maharashtra, Kanchi in south, Ayodhya and Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh were the other centres of education.

One of the most interesting of the documents throwing light on the social mores of the well-to-do citizens is the Kamasutra. Better known as a manual of the art of love, it incidentally also depicts the young dilettante in his daily routine, a life given over to a certain relaxed comfort, devoted to poetry, music, painting and sculpture, and embellished with flowers, delicate perfumes, well-seasoned food, and other refinements of gracious living An even more graphic documentation of life in the Gupta age is available from the vast number of terracotta figurines and models of this period, ranging from toys and

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representations of ladies and gentlemen of fashion, to cult images relating to the more popular manifestations of religion.

The high level of urban culture in the Gupta period evolved a high and refined, delicate and elegant art of toilets and cosmetics. Both men and women enjoyed highly sophisticated toileting which included dyeing of hair, painting of nails, scenting the body, face and the hair with incense and other perfumes, powders and pastes, using of scented hair-oils, hair-lotions and other perfumes, massaging the body and the face with perfumed oils and pastes etc. They used sandal juice, camphor as unguents and sedatives. They used camphor with betel and olive-wood incense for perfuming drinking water. Whatever was done to beautify the body and the soul during this period was raised to the standard of Lalitkala or Fine art in which simplicity, delicacy, refinement and elegance was the main concern.

The use of magical incantations, spells and charms of various kinds bear testimony to popular superstitions of the age. Brihaj Jataka and Brihat Samhita of Varahamihira have references to them. By the fourth century A.D. a new class of works called Dharanis (protective spells) rose in prominence in Mahayana sect of Buddhism, and it became immensely popular. People had belief in omens, portents in all walks of life. The favourite indoor pastimes included Dice and Chess, whereas hunting, ram-fights and cock-fights were the principal outdoor amusements. Ball game was popular with women and children. Dramas, shows, fairs also provided a variety of entertainment. For measuring time, there were water-clocks in many places. A water-clock was consisted of a small pot which kept floating in a vessel filled with water. There was a hole at the bottom of the pot and water slowly entered into it. It took 24 hours to fill the pot completely and this period was known as Ghataka.

THE DECLINE OR THE DOWNFALL OF THE GUPTAS.

It is generally believed that Gupta period is the “Golden Age” as it has been compared with the age of Pericles in ancient Greece or with the Elizabethian Age in England. This view is based on the manifold achievements made by the country during this period. It was an age when a large part of India was brought under “one political umbrella”. Both inland and foreign trade flourished and the material prosperity of the country increased by leaps and bounds. It was in this age when Indian genius gave birth to
some of the world’s best creations in art, literature, philosophy and religion, as seen above. It was a period of religious toleration and liberal thought. Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism flourished side by side. Indian monasteries spread Indian culture and Buddhism in China and Central Asia and in the Far East Asia. So this age is regarded as the Golden Age of ancient India or the period of the Hindu Renaissance. The Gupta Empire broke up and disappeared, by the middle of the 6th century a live of rulers with the same surname, but not connected in their official genealogy with the imperial line, ruled in Bihar and parts of utter Pradesh. The great emperors of the fourth and fifth centuries were soon forgotten, with the exception of ChandraGupta who was remembered by his title Vikramaditya and the palmy days of whose reign passed into folk tradition. In the second half of the sixth century a city on the upper Ganga, before its confluence with the Jamuna, Kanyakubja, rose to prominence as the capital of the Maukhari kings. The city of Sthanvisvara now Thanesar in the watershed between the Ganga and the Indus, became the capital of a rising family of rulers descended from a certain Pushyabhuti. Gujarat and Malwa were in the power of the Maitraka dynasty, founded by a general of the Guptas. In the Deccan the Chalukya dynasty was gaining its strength, while in Tamil Nadu the dynasty of the pallavas was also enlarging its boundaries.

This was the pattern of Indian politics until the Muslim invasion. There were generally five or six main focuses of power throughout the subcontinent, with numerous lesser kingdoms, sometimes independent, sometimes tributary to one of the greater rulers. Those corners of the subcontinent with well-defined natural frontiers such as Kashmir, Nepal, Assam, Orissa and Kerala, were less involved in the constant struggles for power, and their political life, though also often marked by local conflict, was rarely much affected by the constant strife in the Great Plains. The usual system of government bore some resemblance to the feudal system of medieval Western Europe. As we have seen in the earlier description, the Mauryas established a bureaucracy, and the Guptas received some features of Mauryan administration, though they allowed greater devolution of power. As the Guptas declined, principal governors, whose posts were already often hereditary, took to calling themselves Maharajas, and increasingly assumed the status of kings.

It is believed by the historians that the institution of feudatories was not at all healthy for the empire during the reign of the strong monarch, like SamudraGupta or

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1 Coomarswamy, A.K., History of Indian and Indonesian Art, pp.70-72.
Skanda Gupta, the feudatories quietly executed all the obligations to their overlord, but when the authority at the centre became weak, they felt naturally emboldened to raise the banner of revolt and declare their independence. Thus, whenever the central authority tended to become weak these feudatories were sure to create trouble only to add to the miseries of the emperor.

Another factor which might have contributed to the decline of the empire was the rise of the Brahmana feudatories, as in this period the Brahmans became important. As a result, land was granted to the Brahmans accompanied with the police and administrative rights over such land. The Guptas also surrendered almost all the revenues over such lands including pasturage, mines for the production of salt, forced labour for all hidden treasures and deposits. Of the seven organs of state, taxation and coercive power played a significant role in the growth, development and consolidation of a healthy monarchy. If the powers are delegated, the state is supposed to disintegrate. And this situation was created by the Guptas when along with the land grants to the Brahmans, they also surrendered there powers in the favour of the Brahmans. Another factor which must have contributed to the decline of the Guptas was the nature of the bureaucracy. With the passage of time more and more Imperial offices became hereditary. At the time of BuddhaGupta’s death theoretically the central power was in the same position as during the reign of SkandaGupta though practically the situation had changed a lot. But the forces of disruption and disintegration were already at work during the reign of BudhaGupta and they became obvious after his death. The conquest of Malwa by the Hunas gave a death blow to the already crumbling Gupta edifice, which was facilitated by the feudal structure of its administration. This battle was a turning point in the history of the Hunas in India, for it was on the battle field of Eran that the conquering Hunas clashed for the first time, with the resisting forces of the erstwhile victor, the Guptas, who were now fighting with their back to the wall. The result was quite tragic. The weak Gupta resistance organized by BhanuGupta broke to pieces under the terrific pressure of the violent Hunas, thoroughly exposing their weakness as a fighting nation. After the successful conclusion of the Eran episode, the conquering Hunas ultimately burst out of Eastern Malwa and swooped down upon the very heart of the Gupta empire, conquered parts of U.P., Rajputana, Punjab, Kashmir and the city of Gaudas. In order to weaken the authority of the Guptas, Toramana played an active role in encouraging the different sections of the imperial family to embark on a career of adventurism and carve out independent principalities.