Punjab, the land of five rivers, in the extreme north-west of the Indian subcontinent can literally be called the cradle of Indian civilization. The earliest traces of civilization and culture in India, be they literary or archaeological, foreign or indigenous, have all been found in this very region, known as Saptasindhu, the land of seven rivers comprising the Sindhu (the Indus), Vitastā (the Jhelum), Asiknī or Chandrabhāgā (the Chenab), Parushnī or Irāvatī (the Ravi), Vipāśa (the Beas), Śatūrdī (the Sutlej) and the Sarsvatī to the Vedic people. Geographically it covered the entire region between the Indus in the north-west and the Yamunā in the south-east. For the students and scholars of history as well as historical geography the entire region from Peshawar to Delhi forms Punjab comprising present day Pakistan, Indian territories of Punjab, Haryana and parts of Himachal Pradesh.

It is here that the sacred hymns of the Vedas were composed on the banks of its rivers and in the forests by various seers, the great religious thinkers and philosophers of their times. Besides the Vedas, the bulk of the Vedic literature – the Brāhmaṇas, the Āraṇyakas, the Upanishads and many works of the Sūtra literature were composed in this land over a period of more than a millennium. The tradition of scholarship continued in this land even in the post-Vedic period and secular works like the Ashtādhyāyī of Pāṇini, the finest and most scientific work on Sanskrit grammar and the Arthasastra of Kautilya, again perhaps the best work ever written of the statecraft are the products of this land. Pāṇini definitely belonged to Śalātūra in Punjab and as per tradition Kautilya was a professor of polity at the University of Taxila. A number of other works like the Epics, Several of the Purāṇas and secular works that may have been composed in Āryavarta but contain copious references to the culture and civilization of ancient Punjab.

The land is equally rich in archaeological heritage. It was at Harappa on the banks of the Ravi in the Montgomery District of Pakistan that the remains of the Indus Valley Civilization were first discovered as early as 1921-22 by Rai Bahadur Daya Ram Sahni, along with those at Mohen jo-daro on the banks of the Indus in the Larkana District of Sind, which was excavated by R. D. Banerji in the same year. Ever since then hundreds of sites discovered till present have yielded a rich repertoire.
of antiquities of the Harappan culture from various parts of the Punjab and even beyond it up to Gujarat. They have added to our knowledge of the society and culture of those times. The archaeological find of the post-Harappan and the subsequent periods are equally large in numbers and spread over the entire area down to the early historic period in continuity to the present times.

In addition to the indigenous literary and archaeological sources, Punjab and its culture finds copious mention in the writings of the Classical writers and the Chinese travelers who visited India from the time of Alexander onwards. Many of the Greek writers who did not get a chance to visit Punjab in person have based their writings on the information provided by those who had accompanied Alexander to this land or the writers like Megasthenes who wrote the *Indica* during his stay in India as the Greek ambassador in the court of Chandragupta Maurya. The Chinese like Fa-Hsien and Hsuan-Tsang visited late in the Gupta and the post-Gupta period but had keen observations and recorded the past of this land on the basis of tradition. These accounts form important source of information for the reconstruction of the history of Punjab and has been fully utilized in the present study.

A lot has been written in the last two centuries about ancient Punjab by stalwarts in the field who have laboriously edited, translated and interpreted various texts or unearthed the archaeological material and studied it for the reconstruction of history. However, their attempts have been macro in scope as they tried to see everything from an all India point of view paying little or no attention to the micro study of the society and culture of Punjab through the ages. As such many problems remain to be discussed for a clear picture of the past of this land. A good example is the relationship between the Vedic and Harappan cultures. This problem has been taken by us in the very first chapter along with a survey of the literature and geography by way of introduction and in order to set the chronology of events in a logical sequence. The imperial writers of the British period of the Indian history had suggest the Vedic Aryans to be the earliest settlers here after their migration from somewhere in the west. But after the discovery of the Harappan civilization they changed their view to accommodate the new evidence and put forward the theory that the Harappans were the earliest indigenous people who were defeated and ousted by
the Aryans. This has become a raging controversy at present. We have examined the entire problem afresh in the first chapter.

Keeping in mind the cultural continuity of the land in mind we have discussed various issues of socio-cultural, socio-religious and socio-economic significance in the chapters that follow the Introduction. Thus we have taken the issue of varṇa and jāti in the second chapter and that of the āśramas, purushārthas and sanskāras in the third. The fourth chapter is devoted to education wherein an in depth notice of the centres of learning like Taxila and the scholarship of Punjab have been taken. The significant topics of social history like the marriage, position of women and Daily life of people, form the fifth and sixth chapters of this thesis. Here in we have shown that Punjab was highly advanced in the field of learning and its women continued to enjoy freedom and high social status equal to that of men right from the Vedic period to the Mauryan age. Economic life has been discussed in the seventh chapter. The conclusion at the end includes the summary of our findings and analysis. Our findings indicate towards a highly prosperous society in Punjab, advanced in material culture and practicing an equally rich spiritual life. They bravely faced the external invasions, befriended the foreigners and assimilated them in the indigenous culture to form a broad minded society with advanced outlook.

Sushma