Chapter 2

INDIAN SOCIETY AT THE TIME OF THE EMERGENCE OF MAHĀYĀNA BUDDHISM

2.1. Political Condition

2.1.1. The Mauryan Dynasty (317 – 180 BCE)

The Mauryan dynasty was an ancient Indian dynasty which unified the subcontinent for the first time in Indian history and contributed to the spread of Buddhism.

In 327 BCE, Alexander invaded India.\(^\text{26}\) Though Alexander could not conquer India, this war changed the course of Indian history. At that time, in the reign of Agrammes (the last king of the Nanda’s dynasty), there was general dissatisfaction amongst his subjects. With the help of Kauṭilya, the son of a Brahmin of Taxila,\(^\text{27}\) named Chandragupta Maurya, stood up; he overthrew the Nanda dynasty and founded the Mauryan dynasty\(^\text{28}\) with its capital city at Pāṭaliputra (modern Patna). The rise of Chandragupta is an important landmark in the political history of ancient India. R. C. Mazumdar also said that: “The career of Chandragupta, the founder of the Mauryan

\(^{26}\) Akira, Hirakawa, op. cit., 1993, p. 78.
dynasty, sheds lustre on the history of ancient India. Because he was the credit of freeing this country from the Macedonian yoke and securing for the first time, the political unification of the greater part of India under one scepter. It was a remarkable achievement, especially when we remember that Chandragupta did not inherit a throne, but was born in humble circumstances. Chandragupta’s rise to greatness is indeed a romance of history.”

When the situation in Alexander’s former kingdom had stabilized, one of his successors, Seleucus, tried to reconquer the eastern territories, but the war was inconclusive, and the Macedonian offered a peace treaty to Chandragupta. The latter recognized the Seleucid Empire and gave his new friend 500 elephants. Seleucus recognized the Mauryan Empire and gave up the eastern territories, including Gandara and Arachosia (i.e., the country northeast of modern Qandahar). Finally, there was epigamia which can mean that either the two dynasties intermarried, or the union of Macedonians/Greeks with Indian was recognized.

With an area of 5,000,000 sq km, it was one of the world’s largest empires at that time and the largest ever in the Indian subcontinent. Beside his achievements, the overthrow of the Nanda dynasty and the liberation of the Punjab from the Macedonian rule, Chandragupta also brought the Punjab, Sind, Baluchistan, Afghanistan, Himavatkitta, Nepal and Kashmir under his rule. It is generally believed that his empire extended up to Mysore in the south and beyond the natural boundaries of India up to the borders of Persia in the north-west. Chandragupta had now united the Indus and Ganges valley – a formidable empire. He had a secret service, inspectors, a large army, and a beautiful capital city. His adviser, Kautilya

wrote a guide to statecraft which is known as the *Arthaśāstra*. A Greek visitor, Megasthenes, gives a very strange description of the caste system (accepting seven instead of the usual four classes of people), and it is likely that he describes an attempted reform. This is certainly not impossible, because Chandragupta turned out to be not deeply attached to orthodox Brahmanism.

Though Chandragupta descended from a Brahminical family, he converted to the Jaina faith at the end of his career. Under the influence of his teacher, Bhadrabāhu (the high priest of Jainism), he renounced the throne (in 293 BCE) and came to Mysore and stayed there for twelve years. He worshipped the footprints of his teacher, Bhadrabāhu, and took the holy vow of Sallekhana and died.\(^{32}\) The Jain scriptures claim that “Chandragupta at the end of his reign accepted Jainism and abdicated and died as a Jain ascetic.”\(^{33}\)

Chandragupta ruled for twenty-four years (317 – 293 BCE).\(^{34}\) He was succeeded by his son, Bindusāra. Bindusāra extended the rule of the Mauryan Empire towards central and southern regions of India. He also had a Greek ambassador at his court, named Deimachus. According to Greek writers, Bindusāra was also known as ‘Amitraghāta’ (slayer of enemies), but there is no evidence and details of his conquests. However, a vague hint is given by the author of the “Ārya-*mañjuśrī-mūlakalpa*” and by Hemacandra and Tāranātha who wrote that: “The apostle of violence, Chāṇakya outlived Chandragupta and continued as minister of Bindusāra as one of his great lords.”\(^{35}\)

Like his father, Bindusāra also followed an imperialistic policy. In the early days of the rule, Bindusāra was helped and supported by Chāṇakya. According to Tāranātha, a Tibetan Buddhist historian, Chāṇakya helped Bindusāra in destruction of the kings and ministers of sixteen towns and

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\(^{34}\) H., Nakamura, *op. cit.*, 2007, p. 93.

\(^{35}\) Hazra, Kanailal, *op. cit.*, 1984, p. 57.
made Bindusāra as the master of all territory between the eastern and western sea. Although it is generally agreed that Chandragupta extended his conquest from Surashira to Bengal (Gangaripadas), i.e., from the western to eastern seas, V. A. Smith and K. P. Jayaswal suggest from the passage of Tāranātha’s text that Bindusāra conquered the Deccan. But there is no other evidence to support the statement of the Tibetan historian. We are not quite sure whether these sixteen towns were the capitals of the sixteen Mahājanapadas and whether he conquered all of them. The Divyāvadāna refers to revolts in Taxila during his reign and he sent his son Aśoka to suppress it. It is said that he was able to maintain the vast empire which he had inherited from his father. Besides, he also established good and friendly relations with the foreign powers of the west.

Bindusāra was one of the greatest rulers of the Mauryan dynasty, and his reign may be regarded as an important period in the history of the dynasty Empire. It is pity that the historians do not say much about the great personality or the service rendered to the cause of his country. He ruled between the two great rulers, Chandragupta and Aśoka, and probably this was the reason why he was unable to attract the interest and attention of the historians who always paid their highest tributes to Chandragupta and Aśoka.

According to the Japanese scholar, H. Nakamura, Bindusāra ruled for 25 years (293 – 268 BCE). But according to Buddhist tradition, he ruled for 27 or 28 years. Though the reign of Bindusāra is not much mentioned in the history of India, this does not mean that he was not an able ruler.

36 *Loc. cit.*
41 H., Nakamura, *op. cit.*, 2007, p. 94.
According to the “Ārya-mañjuśri-mūlakalpa,” he was a very witty, wise, clever, polite tongued and a courageous man. He was especially interested in the religion. In his seventh pillar inscription, Aśoka had mentioned that his predecessor king made a propagation of Dharma. Probably this indication of Aśoka was towards Bindusāra. Thus, Bindusāra can be called as a powerful and benevolent ruler.

Bindusāra’s successor was his son, Aśoka, who ruled from (268 – 232 BCE). Aśoka was the third monarch of the Mauryan dynasty in the 3rd century BCE, and was also the first ruler of a unified India and one of the greatest political figures of all time. He has been described by historians as “the greatest of kings” and that “not because of the physical extent of his empire, extensive as it was, but because of his character as a man, the ideals for which he stood, and the principles by which he governed.”

There is a saying that, when Aśoka was born, he was a child with rough skin and for this reason Bindusāra did not like him. Therefore, his mother tried to keep him away from his father to save his life. When Aśoka grew up, he undoubtedly was able to win Bindusāra’s confidence. That is why, instead of sending the vice-regent Susīma or Sumana (Aśoka’s eldest), Bindusāra sent Aśoka to Takaṣīlā (Taxila) to suppress a revolt. But Aśoka was successful. He was appointed as viceroy or governor of Avanti by his father. When he heard that, his father had approached the end of life. He rushed forward to Pātaliputra, the capital of his father, and took the charge of the administration of the Mauryan Empire in his own hand. In the war of succession against his elder brother, Aśoka got the help of the entire

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42 Ibid., p. 94.
43 R. C., Mazumdar, op. cit., 1951, p. 71.
ministry of Bindusāra, Khallātaka (Prime Minister) and five hundred other ministers. Ultimately, Aśoka became the fittest candidate for the throne.

During the first thirteen years of his reign, Aśoka, like Chandragupta and Bindusāra, followed an aggressive policy of expansion of the Mauryan Empire. Aśoka inherited an empire which was extended from Afghanistan to Mysore. He included eastern, western and northern Bengal in the east. In order to expand his empire further, Aśoka opened the war to invade Kaliṅga on the east coast of India (in the present-day states of southern Orissa and north coastal Andhra Pradesh) and annexed it to his empire. Aśoka undoubtedly ruled over a vast empire. From the rock and pillar edicts which were found in large numbers in different parts of India and the neighboring countries, we can easily guess the wide extent of his dominions. Though victorious, the Kalinga war was a turning point in Aśoka’s life, and is also important event in the history of Magadha and India. The misery and bloodshed of the war awakened his feelings of repentance and sorrow. It made him devoted to the practice of “Dharma” and ultimately changing his state policies. He established Dharma, “the law of justice” everywhere in India. He embraced Buddhism and became a clement king of peace and he never engaged himself in war with any one. He was always anxious for the welfare of his subjects. He spread the teachings of Buddha to his subjects through inscriptions on rocks and pillars by local dialects throughout his country. He played a great role in the religious history of the country and devoted a greater part of his time and energy in the welfare of the religion.

He sent out missionaries as far away as Cyrenaica to convert others to the same beliefs, and he sent his son to Sri Lanka to preach the Buddha’s teachings. He erected many stūpas, founded Buddhist monasteries, softened the harsh laws of Bindusāra and Chandragupta, forbade the brutal slaughter

49 Hazra, Kanailal, op. cit., 1984, p. 64.
of animals, and organized a large Buddhist council at Patna, which had to establish a new canon of sacred texts and repress heresies.

One can undoubtedly say that, under Aśoka’s reign, India enjoyed an era of social harmony, religious transformation, and an expansion of various branches science and knowledge. Chandragupta’s embrace of Jainism increased social and religious renewal and reform across his society, while Aśoka’s embrace of Buddhism has been said to have been the foundation of the reign of social and political peace and non-violence across all over India. Aśoka patronised the spreading of Buddhism into Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia, West Asia and Mediterranean Europe. Therefore, during his reign, Buddhism flourished in these countries.

Aśoka’s great career is known through his inscriptions on rocks and pillars that were erected throughout his empire. His rock edicts were found at Shahbazgarhi and Mansehra near Peshawar; at Kālsi near Dehra Dun in U.P.; at Sopara in the Thana district of Bombay state; at Girnar near Junāgarh in Kathiawar; at Dhaulī near Bhuvasvāra in the Puri district; at Jaugada in the Ganjam district; at Chitaldoorg in Mysore; at Rupnāth near Jabbalpur in Madhya Pradesh; at Sahasārām in Bihar; at Bairāt near Jaipur in Rājputāna; and at Māski in the Nizam’s dominions, now Hyderabad. Aśoka’s pillar edicts were found at Topra near Ambala in the Punjab; at Meerut; at Kausambi; at Lauria Nandangarh (Mathia), Lauriya Araraj and Rampurwa in the Champaran district; at Sanchi near Bhopal; at Sarnath near Benares; at Rummindei in Nepal and at Nīglīva in the Nepalese Tarai. Beside these edicts, several stūpas erected by Aśoka were found at various places, such as, in Kapis (Kafiristan), Nagar (Jalalabad) and Udyāna in the north-western Frontier Province (East Afghanistan). Chinese traveler, Hiuen Tsang, also noticed his stūpas near Tamralipti (Tamluk) and Karnasuvarna

50 http://www.historyfiles.co.uk/FeaturesFarEast/India-IronAge-Mauryas01.htm
Aśoka ruled for an estimated forty years. After his death (in 232 BCE), the Mauryan dynasty lasted just fifty more years. The names of several of his sons have come down to us from different sources of information. The Brahmanical, the Buddhist and the Jain works give the various names of his successors, who ascended the throne after him. The *Vayu Purāṇa* text states that: Kunala occupied the throne after Aśoka and reigned for about eight years. Then, Bandhupalita, his son became the next ruler. After that, some more persons and the last ruler of the Mauryan dynasty was Bṛihadratha. While the *Matsya Purāṇa* text writes that: Daśaratha, Samprati, Šatadhanvan and Bṛihadratha were Aśoka’s successors. The *Divyāvadāna* mentions the following names: Sampadi, Bṛhaspati, Vṛiṣasena, Puśyadharman and Puśyamitra. But according to the *Vishnu Purāṇa* text, seven kings who ascended the throne after Aśoka were Suyaśas, Daśaratha, Saṅgata, Śāliśūka, Somāśaram, Šatadhanvan and Bṛihadratha. From the statements found in the divergent versions of the Brahmanical, Buddhist and Jain works, it is difficult to draw a correct history of the later Mauryan dynasty immediately after the death of Aśoka. H. C. Raychaudhuri remarks: “Unfortunately, no Megasthenes or Kautilya has left any account of the later Mauryan. It is impossible to reconstruct a detailed history of Aśoka’s successors from the scanty data furnished by one or two inscriptions and a few Brahmanical, Buddhist and Jain works.”

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54 *Purāṇas* are the sacred books of ancient historical traditions belong to Jainism and Buddhism.


59 H. C., Raychaudhuri, *op. cit.*, 1938, p. 349.
Thus, the Mauryan dynasty was founded in 317 BCE by Chandragupta, who had overthrown the Nanda Dynasty and rapidly expanded his power westwards across central and western India. The power and influence of the dynasty reached its apex with King Aśoka. After the death of Aśoka, the Mauryan Empire declined due to the division among his sons, and ultimately it dissolved in 180 BCE with the foundation of the Suṅga’s dynasty in Magadha.

2.1.2. The Invasions by Foreigners into India

The Mauryan dynasty was not strong enough in its centralization; it was susceptible to disintegration after the death of Aśoka and the division among his sons. The two dynasties followed it and governed the plain along the Ganges, namely, the Suṅgas and Kānvas were rather Brahmanistic. The provinces in north-western India fell off one by one and the local princes declared their independence. This gave an opportunity for foreign leaders of Central Asia to invade India. The Greeks, who ruled in Syria and Bactria, availed themselves of this opportunity. They invaded Indian empire across the north-western gates and established their settlements which came to be known as the Indo-Greek or Indo-Bactrian kingdoms. In their state system, Greek institutions were adopted. These kings were equipped with Greek culture and subscribed to Greek religion, but some of them came to respect the Buddhist and Hindu faiths.

After the loss of Bactria, the Greeks ruled over central and southern Afghanistan and north-western India. In order to have control over these regions some princes who belonged to the houses of Euthydemos, Demetrios and Eukratides fought with each other. From the coins we know the names of thirty Indo-Bactrian Greek rulers who ruled over Afghanistan and north-

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western India. Of them Menander, who apparently belonged to the house of Demetrios, was regarded as the greatest and the most powerful ruler. A. K. Narain observes: “It is likely that it was the unsettled conditions of the time that produced a man of remarkable ability, who was destined to become the most famous of the Yavana kings in India; he was Menander, the Milinda of Indian tradition… who perhaps had some connection with Demetrios II and his family.”

The next person came to the throne was Menander who extended his kingdom from the Kabul valley in the west to the Ravi in the east and from the Swat valley in the north to Arachosia in the south. The extension of his dominions indicates that Indo-Greek power reached the zenith of glory during his reign. Plutarch refers to him as a Bactrian king. According to Strabo, Menander was a Bactrian Greek king.

Menander was not only the most famous of all the Greek kings of India, and a man of great personality, but also a scholar and a lover of Buddhism. He was able to secure a place in Indian Buddhist tradition. He is immortalized in the history of Buddhism for his services rendered to its cause. The Milindapañha recorded that: “In the whole of India there was no one like king Milanda in fortitude, speed, courage and wisdom. He was a man of great wealth and great prosperity; his armed forces were without end.”

After the death of Menander the glory and the power of his kingdom began to diminish. His successors were not able to control all their territories. They lost Afghanistan and Gandhāra. Agathocleia and Strato-I maintained their influence only over the Eastern Punjab. Towards the close

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63 Ibid., p. 97.
64 Loc. cit.
65 Loc. cit.
67 R. C., Mazumdar, op. cit., 1951, p. 117.
68 Ibid., p. 117.
of the 1st century BCE, the Sakas of East Iran occupied several parts of western India. Gandhāra and Afghanistan came under the control of the Eucratidian house.\textsuperscript{69} Like the Greeks, Sakas also patronized Buddhism and adopted Indian culture and before long they became strong propagators of Indian culture outside India.\textsuperscript{70} Some of the Greeks who settled in India professed Hinduism or Buddhism, but Puṣyamitra, the founder of the Suṅga dynasty persecuted Buddhism. The Sakas also had a similarly close connection with the development of Buddhism. There is an inscription at Mathurā mentioned the donation of a toraṇa by a minister of Śodāsa.\textsuperscript{71} However, the Sakas were in favour of Indian civilization and ideals and also introduced the same in Central Asia and the Far Eastern countries. The Sakas are referred to in the Epics as degraded Kṣatriyas along with the Kambojas and Yavanas. The reigning periods of the Scythians in India extended from the 1st century BCE to the time of Imperial Guptas. The Sakas sought the help of the Kuṣāṇa and thereby paved the way for the advent of the Kuṣāṇa rule in India.\textsuperscript{72}

After the Greeks and the Sakas, Parthians invaded North-western India. On the other hand, South India was immune to foreign invasion. Among southern kings, King Khāravela was victorious.\textsuperscript{73} The history of the Indo-Parthians or Pahlavas is still obscure. But a few facts may be gleaned from coins and inscriptions. The earliest prince of this dynasty was Vonones, who attained power in Arachosia and Seistan, and adopted the title of “great king of kings.”\textsuperscript{74} Vonones was succeeded by Spalirises, then Gondopharnes, who was regarded as the greatest Indo-Parthian monarch. He came to the throne in 19 CE and remained king at least till 45 CE. The

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., p. 118.
\textsuperscript{70} N., Dutt, \textit{op. cit.}, 2008, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{71} H., Nakamura, \textit{op. cit.}, 2007, p. 98.
\textsuperscript{72} N., Dutt, \textit{op. cit.}, 2003, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{73} H., Nakamura, \textit{Kodai Indoshiso}, Vol. 2.
epigraph further proves that the Peshawar district then owned his sway. His coin types indicate that he became master of the Saka-Pahlava dominions both in Eastern Iran and North-western India.\textsuperscript{75}

After the death of Gondopharnes, the empire faced many problems and there was none to rule the country with a strong hand. Practically, the whole empire was divided into several principalities and each had its own ruler who ruled independently. For the reason, the Kuśāṇa appeared to have wiped out the Parthian rule from the Gandhara region before 65 CE and 79 CE. They must have established their sway over a greater portion of northern India.\textsuperscript{76}

In short, from the 2\textsuperscript{nd} century BCE, North-western India gradually came under the rule of foreign powers and it lost its connections with other regions of India. After the fall of the Mauryan Empire, we see many establishments of foreign powers in northern, western and central parts of India. The arrival of the Yavana or the Greek invaders through the North-western gate of India was a great landmark in the history of ancient India. The withdrawal of the strong arm of the great emperor Aśoka led to the collapse of the Mauryan supremacy over Gandhara and the adjoining provinces in North-western India. It is one of the reasons why India went into a period of very grave political crisis.

2.1.3. The Invasion by the Kuśāṇas

After the invasions by the Greeks, the Sakas, and the Parthians, finally the Kuśāṇas invaded north-western India. The original Kuśāṇa belonged to the group of the great Yueh-chi (Yue-chi) race of north-west China. After leaving their ancestral abode, they carved out a kingdom for themselves at Ta-hia (Bactria). After that, the Yueh-chi kingdom was divided into five

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., p. 220.
\textsuperscript{76} Hazra, Kanailal, \textit{op. cit.}, 1984, p. 130.
principalities. About one hundred years after, Kujula Kadphises, the powerful
leader of the Kuei-shuang (one of the five principalities) brought the other
four principalities under his control and established himself as sole monarch
of the Yueh-chi nation. He thus founded the Kuṣāṇa kingdom and declared
himself as the first king.77 He brought the political unification of Ta-hia,
attacked the country of Parthians, captured the territory of Kapul, and
conquered the country of Butkhak, Kafiristan and its neighboring region.78
He became monarch of a vast empire extending from the frontiers of Persia
to the Indus. His reign may be assigned roughly to the period 15 – 65 CE.79

Kujula Kadphises was succeeded by his son, Wema Kadphises (65 –
75 CE).80 Wema Kadphises was an able ruler and he conquered a large part
of the Indian interior probably as far as Benares.81 Afterwards, King Kaniṣka
succeeded to the throne. Kaniṣka was regarded as the greatest emperor of the
Kuṣāṇa rulers in India. He ruled from 78 CE to 101 CE.82 He completed the
Kuṣāṇa conquest of India and abroad and ruled over a vast empire which
extended from “Bihar in the east to Khorasan in the west; and from Khotan
in the north to Konkan in the south.”83 T.Ramashankar said that: “Kaniṣka
ruled a vast empire. Outside India it certainly comprised Afghanistan, Bactria,
Kashgar, Khotan, and Yarkand. The inscriptions of Kaniṣka’s reign have
been discovered in Peshawar, Sui Vihar, Mathura, Sravasti, Kosambi, Sarnath;
and his coins are found all over northern India including Bihar and Bengal.
Thus, it appears from these spots and the tradition of his conquests that

77 Kumar, Baldev, The Early Kuṣāṇa, Delhi, 1973, p. 19.
78 H. C., Raychaudhuri, op. cit., 1938, p. 460.
80 H. C., Raychaudhuri, op. cit., 1938, p. 463.
83 R. C., Mazumdar, op. cit., 1951, p. 141.
Kaniška’s Indian possessions consisted of the Punjab, Kashmir, Sind, United Provinces, and perhaps the country still further to the east and the south. ⁸⁴

Like Tribal people and the Germans (who would invade the Roman Empire), Kaniśka and the Kuśāṇ adopted aspects of the civilization which they had conquered. Kaniśka himself seems to have embodied the strong, yet tolerant and diverse Kuśāṇa culture. As depicted in sculpture and on coins of the period, he presented a forceful image, i.e. one image in Mathura portrayed him in the costume of a warrior. But he also took an eclectic interest in religion and arts, as can be seen by the variety of deities that appear on his coins. Kaniśka’s empire prospered of both economy and culture. It is said that the wealth and wisdom of Kaniśka attracted merchants, artists, poets and musicians from all over Asia.

After his conversion to Buddhism, Kaniśka became a devout Buddhist and an active patron of Buddhism. He built many Buddhist monasteries and stūpas at the Purusapura capital. He also convened a Buddhist council which was attended by five hundred monks who were well-versed in the Tripiṭaka.⁸⁵ They took active parts in this council and did a splendid job for the reconciliation of the conflicting opinions of the different sects and for the settlement of the texts of the canonical literature.⁸⁶ It is the fourth Buddhist council which was held at Kundalavana (Kashmir) in the valley of Kaniśka, and the valuable work done in the council bears a testimony to its influence and popularity.

Thus, the rule of Kaniśka, the third Kuśāṇa emperor, who flourished from the late 1ˢᵗ to the early 2ⁿᵈ century CE, was administered from two capitals: Purusapura (now Peshawar), and Mathura in northern India. He controlled a large territory ranging from the Aral Sea through areas that

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⁸⁵ The five sciences are: grammar, mechanical arts, medicine, logic and religious philosophy.
⁸⁶ Hazra, Kanailal, op. cit., 1984, pp. 138-44.
include present-day Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan into northern India as far east as Benares and as far south as Sāñchi. It was also a period of great wealth marked by extensive mercantile activities and a flourishing of urban life, Buddhist thought, and the visual arts.

After the death of Kaniṣka, the successors were weak. The history recorded that, there were three people who inherited Kaniṣka’s throne, namely, Vasiska, Hwiska and Vasudeva. Like Kaniṣka, they were also patrons of Buddhism but they did not rule in India for a long time, and the Kuṣāṇa dynasty declined. After the completion of the Kuṣāṇa dynasty, the history of India mostly got enveloped in darkness, hidden from our view of the course of events, until we emerge into the light of the Gupta period.

Thus the Kuṣāṇa period can be regarded as an important epoch in Indian history. Literature, science, philosophy, art and architecture received a great impetus and development, especially in the age of the Kaniṣka. The age was marked by a great religious activity. This period witnessed the greatest development in the Indo-Greek school of Buddhist art and the rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism. It was the period in which the Buddha for the first time was represented by images. In China as well as in Central Asia people were converted to the religion of Śākyamuni. H. C. Raychaudhuri, one of the eminent historians has rightly observed that “The Kuṣāṇa age was a period of great literary activity and it proved by the works of Aśvaghoṣa and others. It was also a period of religious fervor and missionary activity. It witnessed the development of Śaivism and the allied cult of Kārttikeya, of Mahāyāna form of Buddhism and the colts of Mihira and of Vāsudeva-Krishṇa, and it saw the introduction of Buddhism into China by Kāśyapa Mātanga (61 – 63 CE). The dynasty of Kaniṣka opened the way for Indian civilization to Central and Eastern Asia.”

87 H. C., Raychaudhuri, op. cit., 1938, p. 478.
2.2. Economic Condition

2.2.1. Trade and Commerce

During the Mauryan dynasty (317 – 180 BCE), Indian economy had remarkable changes and developments. It was for the first time that Indian continent was unified under one ruler. The political unity and military security allowed a common economic system, enhanced trade and commerce with increased agricultural produces.

With an empire at peace, the trade routes throughout India became more secure. Thereby reducing the risk associated with the transportation of goods. The empire spent considerable resources to build roads and maintaining them throughout India; it also tried to improve infrastructure combined with increased security, greater uniformity in measurements, and increasing usage of coins as currency trade. Besides, the existence of a stable government leader, it caused the industry to develop. Trade received a major boost as did various craft-guilds. The able administration ensured that trade became easier, and the craft-guilds soon developed into small-scale industries. The craft-guilds’ development was an important step in trade and commerce of Indian economy. The craft-guilds were large organizations which employed labour for the particular commodity that they were producing. Over time employment became hereditary with consecutive generations. Artisans willingly joined the craft-guilds because it provided steady employment. The government also found the craft-guilds convenient to the development of a better state. They also made the process of tax collection and administration easier. Ramāśankara Tripāthi also accepts the importance of craft-guilds and he said that: “Craft-guilds were a normal feature of the age.”

During this time, the *Arthaśāstra* text (science of the state) was written by the Cāṇakya, an adviser of Chandragupta. The *Arthaśāstra* is one of the most important texts on economics, politics and administration of ancient India. It was a treatise on how to maintain and expand power, obtain material gain, and administer an empire. It contains many clear and detailed rules regarding the governing of an empire. The exhaustive account of the economic ideas embedded in the *Arthaśāstra*, it has been given by Ratan Lal Basu in his famous work “Ancient Indian Economic Thought: Relevance for Today.”

The trade relations had developed extensive and dealt with several countries like Syria, Egypt and several others in the west. Ramāśankara Tripāthi also said that, the ships from the west, laden with merchandise, visited the ports of Broach, Sopārā and Kalyān. The foreign traders took up residence in Mauryan cities, so there was a separate committee to look after them. There was a variety of goods being exported and imported. The Mauryan kings used to import wines, figs, clothes and beautiful vessels made out of silver. The Mauryan exports were chiefly items of luxury like fine muslin cloth. The development of trade soon became profitable for the empire, and eventually a separate department which looked after trade and commerce came into society. Thus, a transparent system was put in place. Standard, weights and measures were used and all goods bore the official stamp. Towards the later Mauryan dynasty, sea trade began to take place, and there is an interesting story behind it. It is how some Indian navigators were blown by storms and eventually reached abroad. It is often said that some of the greatest inventions were accidents. Similarly through a series of ventures and a few lucky accidents, the various sea routes were discovered and sea trade began to take place. The Mauryans soon built ships and hired them out for trade to merchants.

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Under the friendship treaty of Indo-Greek, and during Aśoka’s reign, an international network of trade expanded. The Khyber Pass, the modern boundary of Pakistan and Afghanistan, became an important port of trade and intercourse with the outside world. Greek states and Hellenic kingdoms in West-Asia became important trade partners of India. Trade also extended through the Malay’s peninsula into south-east Asia. Indian merchants exported elephants, silk, spices, cotton and perfume to China and the Hellenistic cities.91 The empire was enriched further with an exchange of scientific knowledge and technology with Europe and West-Asia. Aśoka also sponsored the construction of thousands of roads, waterways, canals, hospitals, rest-houses and other public works. The easing of many over-rigorous administrative practices, including those regarding taxation and crop collection, helped increase productivity and economic activity across the empire.

In short, under the Chandragupta dynasty and his successors, the internal and external trade thrived and expanded across India. It created a single and efficient system of finance, administration, and security. It can be said that, the economic situation of the Mauryan Empire at that time is analogous to the Roman Empire several centuries later, both had extensive trade connections and both had organizations similar to corporations. While Rome had organizational entities which were largely used for public state-driven projects, Maurya had private commercial entities. These existed purely for private commerce and developed before the Mauryan Empire itself.92

After the decline of the Mauryan Empire (the 2nd century BCE), South Asia became a college of regional powers with overlapping boundaries. This period (200 BCE to 100 CE) also witnessed remarkable achievements of

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intellect and art, which are influenced by various cultures, such as the Indo-
Greeks, the Shakas, the Parthians and other nomadic people. Because a
number of foreigners came to different parts of India in successive waves of
migrations, they brought their own cultural flavor and mingled with the local
cultures, it enriched the ethos of Indian culture. Of them, with the exception
of the Greeks, all others came from Central Asia.

Moreover, under the Kuśāṇa dynasty, north-west India and adjoining
regions participated both in sea-going trade and commerce along the Silk
Road to China. With the Kuśāṇa Empire occupied a key position on the
trade-routes between the Roman Empire, India, and China, so it controlled a
critical part of the legendary Silk Road. Kaniṣka was the most noteworthy
Kuśāṇa ruler. His empire was the largest in South-Asia since Aśoka’s time.
Therefore, it was very favorable for the trade and commerce.

2.2.2. Economic Position in Society

Under Mauryan dynasty, Indian economy was a settled agrarian economy.
The agriculture was the main occupation during this period. Megasthenes
mentions that “majority of the people were agriculturists, peasants and
farmers.”93 Kautilya has given a description of “ploughed, unploughed and
rocky lands; the land was tilled with the help of oxen; the manure made of
the mixture of ghee, honey, fats, cowdung and powdered fish.”94 Therefore,
there were great advancements in the field of agriculture, such as irrigation,
dam, lake, well and so on. Besides, the animal rearing and forest were also
important occupations.

Industry also flourished during this period. Some other occupations
and the centers of business emerge, such as metallurgy, occupation of cloth,
skins and hides, drinks, and coinage. These were described detailed in the

94 Ibid., pp. 26-7.
Arthaśāstra, one of the most important texts on economics, politics and administration of Mauryan dynasty.⁹⁵

With the development of a strong empire, an organized system of taxation began to evolve. With agriculture being the backbone of the economy, it was quickly realized that land revenue was going to be a major source of income from the government. Land was subjected to regular assessments to determine its production capability, and an appropriate level of tax was levied. Industries and enterprises were also taxed, using a vast mix of techniques, all of which were derived from the revenue tax system. This entire system was the brainchild of Kauṭilya, the prime minister of Chandragupta Maurya.

On the basis of the foregoing evidences we can say that the economic life under the Mauryan dynasty occupied a unique and prominent place in the entire history of ancient India.

After Mauryan dynasty, agriculture, industry and trade also continue flourishing. For the contact toward foreigners, it enriched the peasant landlords, artisans and merchant who formed the economic foundation of society. Until the time of Kuśāṇa dynasty, especially king Kaniṣṭha, agricultural technique was systematized into a separate discipline. The irrigation and knowledge of fertilizing agents were cared and increased yields. Kaniṣṭha promoted irrigational activity by building tanks and canals through Central Asia and Afghanistan. This led to a flourishing trade, such as, facilitated by a coinage; a credit and banking system; transport and trade-routes; and a lucrative market. Economic activities were supported by the state which participated in them, and also aimed at controlling and promoting them. The contact with the Western world, Central Asia and South-East Asia helped the growth of trade and industry. The economic

⁹⁵ Ibid., pp. 27-8.
prosperity thus generated provided the necessary support for cultural efflorescence in various fields.

Longhurst, who excavated Nāgārjuna-konda, remarks that: “The devotees of the good law were recruited from the commercial classes. They supported their royal masters to raise monuments of such magnificence as those at Nāgārjunakonda and at Amarāvati.”

It is interesting to note that sculpture has some urbanity and reflected the luxuriant life led by its patrons.

2.2.3. Economic Support to Buddhism

We have early referred to the development of trade and commerce in India since the 3rd century BCE. This is the time that India enjoyed an era of social harmony. With stable political system and developed economy, so the mass of people had tendency toward spiritual life and religious faith. Especially kings and majority of their people were Buddhist devotees and supported so much for Buddhism. Most of the Buddhists were descended from the rich classes. This caused Buddhism develops further and has new movements.

As we knew, under the reign of Aśoka, with his patronage, Buddhism developed and reached its apex. King Aśoka fervent converts to Buddhism and strove to spread it among his empire. After Aśoka embraced the Buddha’s teachings, he used Buddhist ethics as the guiding principle of his rule, so the mass of his communities follow Buddhism. Peter Harvey also admitted that: “under the reign of the emperor Aśoka, Buddhism spread more widely, reaching most of the Indian sub-continent, and beyond.”

On the other hand, in order to express his respect for the Buddha, Aśoka greatly aided towards the Buddhist Saṅgha. The Buddhist Saṅgha now became wealthy due to the support of kings and rich classes. Therefore, the disciplines of

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96 A. H., Longhurst, Memoirs of Archaeological Survey of India, No. 54, p. 17.
monastic life became lazy and began to decline. Hirakawa Akira also said that: “Aśoka greatly aided the Buddhist Order, recognizing that it contained people who put the Dharma into practice. However, as the Buddhist Order became wealthy, the discipline of those in it may well have begun to decline. Large gifts to the Order became burdensome to the nation’s economy.”

Besides, Aśoka built many stūpas and Buddhist monuments; established many monasteries; and so on. Indeed, he put a strain on the economy and the government by his strong support of Buddhism. The appraisal recorded his numerous edicts and inscriptions. It can be said that, Buddhism, in that time, became major faith of the mass of people. A. K. Anand, in his work also quoted that “under the loving enthusiasm of Aśoka, the Buddhist faith predominated over all other faiths in the 3rd century BCE.”

After the time of Aśoka, Buddhism lost royal patronage. But Indian economy still continued flourishing, so Buddhism was also supported by rich Buddhists merchants. Namely, in the Suṅga dynasty (the 2nd – 1st century BCE), the huge stūpas were built under the support of rich devotees. In his article, K.G. Goswami, describes that:

At Bharhut in Nagod State and Sañci in Bhopal State there was in each of these places a stūpa at the centre surrounded by stone railings leaving an intervening space for pradakṣinā or circumambulation with approaches from four cardinal points through four gateways. The stone railing consisting of a number of pillars is joined together by a number of Sucis or lenticular cross-bars and overlaid by coping stone.

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In this period too, there began to grow the art of excavating caves, caitya halls and monasteries for the Buddhist monks in different parts of India, such as, Bhājā (near Pune), Nāsik (District Nasik), Mānmada (Junnār) and Nānaghāt (District Pune). The cave architecture received a strong support from the Buddhists and it shows steady progress of Indian economy and Buddhism during this period.

Moreover, the discovery of the Buddha images, coins, inscriptions and historical sources in Kaniṣka’s time (1st century CE) gives us sufficient evidence to show that the king, nobles and common people patronized Buddhism. And they extended their whole-hearted co-operation to its progress. Hazra, Kanailal also wrote:

Kaniṣka’s gold and copper coins reflect the religious ideas of his monarch. The obverse shows Kaniṣka performing a sacrifice over an altar, while the reverse contains the name of ‘Boddo’ (Buddha). The discovery of the images of the Buddha at Hotimardan and Mathura, the dedication of stone image of the Bodhisattva by Bhikṣu Bala at Sarnath, a caitya slab showing a stūpa at Amaravati of the second century CE prove the popularity of Buddhism during Kaniṣka’s rule.

It can be said that, this was the most prosperous period and strong activity of Buddhism. Therefore, Buddhism became major spiritual refuge of the common people at that time. The adherents absolutely believed in the cult, prayer and salvation of the Buddha’s power. So, merchants often brought canonical texts; Buddhist symbols; and even invited monks to go along with their ships to pray for them on trade routes. Perhaps, Buddhism was spread by this road to a few Asian countries, for example, as Vietnam (by the sea-going trade), China (by the Silk Road).

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101 Ibid., p. 311.
In short, during this time (the 3rd century BCE – 1st century CE), Indian economy flourished and remarkable development. Most people who were rich became devotees. Especially, Buddhism received so much favors from kings and their subjects. India, in this period, had two remarkable kings, namely, Aśoka and Kaniṣka. They not only occupied an important role in the Indian history, but also in Buddhist history, especially, their patronage to the third and the fourth Buddhist Council and their subsequent zeal to the propagation of Buddhism. The economic support to Buddhism is also one of the causes that led to the movement of Buddhism far away from its original form.

2.3. Religious Condition

2.3.1. The developing religions of Contemporary India

India, at that time, was a society with many different religions. Because the empire united, economy developed, so religious faith became a necessary part of the spiritual life of the masses. Beside Buddhism, the religions flourished in this period were Jainism and Hinduism.

a. Jainism

Jainism is one of the three most ancient religious traditions of India. It has a rich literary heritage of spirit and culture. According to the Jainas, their religion is very old and the first tīrthankara (one who provides the ship to cross the world of saṃsāra) was Ṛṣabhadeva. But modern historians think that, probably Pārśvanātha, the twenty-third tīrthankara, is the first historical person, who flourished about 250 years before Gautama Buddha.

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103 Three the most ancient religious traditions of India are Janism, Hinduism and Buddhism.
According to the historical record, Indian religion has two main streams: Brāhmaṇic and Śramaṇic, but Jainism and Buddhism belong to the Śramaṇic stream. And the Jain tradition is regarded as an independent phenomenon; it is not a Hindu sect or Buddhist heresy, as early scholars believed.

Jainism has a great faith. The ideal of Jainism puts special emphasis on renunciation of enjoyment, worldly belongings and emancipate the cycle of birth and death. According to Jainism, there is no God or Creator. The emancipation of man from suffering does not depend upon his grace, but depend on his self. ‘Self’ is the creator of happiness and suffering, and also destroyer of them. Man, alone, is responsible for all that is good or bad in his life. The purity of Jaina’s ethics may be directly attributed to the belief that man is totally responsible for himself, and partially responsible for others, in so far as it is essential for him to avoid doing any harm to others. By living a virtuous life of purity and austerity, man can escape from suffering and attain salvation. According to Jainism, salvation can be obtained by freeing the soul from earthly bondage. When man has right faith (Samyag darśana), right knowledge (Samyag jñāna), and right action (Samyag caritra), he can be free from earthly bondage. These three are called the three jewels of Jainism.

The fundamental doctrine of Jainism is ahimsā (non-violence). The Jainas held that “all inanimate objects have consciousness because they are endowed with soul; they can feel hurt by bad treatment, so they need be protected. Therefore, we do not allow injury to living and non-living beings.” It is a system of ethical behavior and purity of mind. Consequently, all the religious rites of Jainism were formulated around non-violence.

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In the Mauryan dynasty, Jainism flourished and was patronized by the royal families. Chandragupta, the first Emperor of Mauryan dynasty, embraced Jainism. Even at an older age, he renounced his throne and material possessions to join a wandering group of Jain monks. The Jain scriptures claim that “Chandragupta at the end of his reign accepted Jainism and abdicated and died as a Jain ascetic.”\textsuperscript{108}

However, his successor, Bindusāra, was a follower of Hinduism; Aśoka was a follower of Buddhism; Samprati (grandson of Aśoka) also embraced Jainism. It is said that, Indian religions, Jainism, Hinduism and Buddhism, tremendously rose during Mauryan dynasty. Kanailal Hazra also said: “Jainism was not the only religion that flourished in Chandragupta’s kingdom, under his patronage, other religions also progressed on their usual courses.”\textsuperscript{109}

Like Aśoka, Samprati built many Jain Temples across India. Some of them are still found in the towns of Ahmedabad, Viramgam, Ujjain and Palitana. And he sent messengers and preachers to Greece, Persia and Middle-East to spread Jainism. Thus, Jainism became a vital force under the Mauryan dynasty. King Chandragupta and Samprati are credited for the spread of Jainism in Southern India. Jainism began its golden period during the reign of emperor Kharavela of Kalinga in the 2nd century BCE.

Even in the Kuśāṇa period, Jainism flourished and played a very significant role in the development of art, especially Mathura art in the 1st century CE. V. K. Agnihotri also said: “During the Kuśāṇa period, Mathura was a great centre of Jain art.”\textsuperscript{110} However, after that, due to lack of the royal patronage and its strict principles, along with the rise of Śaṅkarācārya

\textsuperscript{108} C. L., Shah, \textit{op. cit.}, 1932, p. 136.
\textsuperscript{109} Hazra, Kanailal, \textit{op. cit.}, 1984, p. 55.
and Rāmānujācārya, Jainism, one of the major religions of southern India, began to decline.

b. Hinduism

The second religion which flourished in this period was Hinduism. Hinduism is a religion that is the most basic and enduring of the Indian religions, at the same time it matured and triumphed during the classical age. The origins of Hinduism can be found in Aryan religious traditions, or Brahmanism as revealed in the Vedas or hymns to the gods.

According to historians, Hinduism did not have any specific founder. There is also no point in time when it could be said to have begun. It has grown through the years by the seers and sages. But this does not mean that it lacked stalwart leaders. There was hardly an age in which leaders have not sprung up and taught the people. Hinduism does not require their adherents accept any ideal. It also has not got creedal, but only a contemporaneous history and the people, with which adherents are associated. In ancient times, Hinduism was called ‘Brahmanism’ or ‘Vedāntism.’ It is also called ‘Śanātana dharma.’ It has neither a beginning nor an end. It is external and everlasting and its beginning can not be fixed in terms of time and its originator.

Hinduism is, perhaps, the religious tradition that includes in its theoretical premises and practical expressions. It is like a compilation of religions. Y. Masih in his work also wrote: “Hinduism is a blanket term which stands for Brahmanism, Buddhism, Jainism and even the aboriginal religions of India.” The defining characteristics of Hinduism may be called the four-fold pillar or *Karma-Saṃsāra-Jñāna-Mukti* (liberation). But each term is found in various meanings.

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113 Y., Masih, *op. cit.*, 2010, p. 149.
In the Mauryan dynasty, Hinduism developed parallel with Jainism and Buddhism. Emperor Bindusāra was a follower of Hinduism. Hindu priests and ministers used to be an important part of the emperor’s court. However in the time of Aśoka, the Brahmanic religion also began to undergo an evident change from the worship of Vedic gods to the worship of Viṣṇu and Śiva. Also in this period, the earliest Hindu stone images appear not in the form of any god, but of monumental statutes of the male and female tree spirits. The people worshiped, in general, Hindu gods and seemed to have inclined towards the faith of Hinduism. Therefore, after embracing Buddhism, Aśoka retained the members of Hinduism, the priests and ministers of Brahmanism in his court. At a time when various religions were in competition for converts, he urged mutual respect and tolerance. Peter Harvey says that:

Aśoka supported not only Buddhist monks and nuns, but also Brahmins, Jain wanderers, and Ajivaka ascetics, in accordance with a pattern that later Buddhist and Hindu rulers also followed. He saw all religious traditions as contributing in some way to spiritual development, and his twelfth rock edict holds that a common basis for religions is that, praising one’s own tradition and criticizing others should be held in check.

Mauryan society began embracing the philosophy of ahimsā, and given the increased prosperity and improved law enforcement, crime and internal conflicts reduced dramatically. Mauryan people began to absorb the ideals and values of Jain and Buddhist teachings along with traditional Vedic-Hindu teachings. When Greeks invaded India, some kings as equipped with Greek culture, subscribed to Greek religion, but some of them came to respect the Buddhist and Hindu faiths.

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116 Peter, Harvey, *op. cit.*, 2005, p. 76.
In the Kuṣāṇa period, Hinduism also flourished and developed. Even Brahmanism also changed its focus from actual to symbolic sacrifice and developed theistic tendencies centre on the gods Viṣṇu and Siva. Due to the invasion of foreigners, art and architecture began to reveal the effect of new influence through Greek culture and the Roman Empire. The cult of Viṣṇu, Rudra (who developed into the god Siva), and Goddess, were the three most important cults. Many of the principal Hindu deities appear for the first time in the art of the Kuṣāṇa rulers of Northern India from 100 BCE to 300 CE. Shrines, temples, and religious icons also became common during this period.

In short, during this time (the 3rd century BCE – 1st century CE) Indian society had many religions which flourished and developed along with Buddhism. Here, this research not concerned with the deep study of the history of these religions, but only try to show some salient features of them at the time of the rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

2.3.2. Changes and Early Developments in Buddhism

a. The Buddhist Saṅgha after the Buddha’s Nirvāṇa

Immediately after the Buddha’s Mahāparinirvāṇa, schismatic tendencies in the Buddhist Saṅgha began to arise. These manifested in the utterances of monks who openly admitted that they were happy at the Buddha’s death, and they could now act as they liked without anybody can remonstrate them. Ven. Mahākassapa was worried about troubles of Dharmas, so he assembled whole Saṅgha in order to recite together all the Buddha’s teachings, Dharma (sūtra) and monastic rules (vinaya). It is the first Buddhist Council that was held at Rājagaha (about 486 BCE) under the patronage of Ajātasatru, king of Magadha. The aim of the council was to maintain the true Dharmas and

118 Loc. cit.
Vinayas; and prevent the false ones.\textsuperscript{119} After that, Buddha’s great disciples spread Buddhism from central India to the south-west along the Southern Route and to the western India, where it flourished in Mathura.\textsuperscript{120} The dissemination of Buddhism during the century after the Buddha’s nirvāṇa led to an increase in the numbers of monks and its diffusion over a broader geographical area. Though Buddhism had a wider spread, monastic rules of Saṅgha life were to on the decrease.

About one hundred years (or one hundred and ten years in some versions) after the Buddha’s Mahāparinirvāṇa (386 or 376 BCE), under the guidance of Yasa and the patronage of king Kālāśoka, the second Buddhist Council was held at Vaisālī\textsuperscript{121} with seven hundred monks in order to settle the disputes concerning the doctrines and practices of Saṅgha life. The cause of the disputes was that: Before prepare to enter into nirvāṇa, the Buddha told Ānanda that: “the monastic principle could abolish some minor rules, if it is to fit the bill.” However, Ānanda was very sad at the time, so he did not ask which rules they were. Thus, the leader of the Saṅgha, Ven. Mahākāssapa, adjudicated that the rules should be best left unchanged. But after that, a group of the Vajjiputtaka monks (who were dwelling in Vaisālī and have progressive tendency), held that the Saṅgha needed to change some minor rules to suit to social circumstances at that time. Therefore, they adopted ten new practices which violated the precepts (vinaya). While the Orthodox monks (who were known as the conservative monks) as being opposite to this view, they followed what was believed to be the original teachings as agreed at the first Council. In addition, at this time, there was the appearance of Mahādeva, an eminent monk at Pāṭaliputra, who was well-versed in Sūtra and Vinayapiṭaka, and was respected by everybody. After


\textsuperscript{120} Akira, Hirakawa, \textit{op. cit.}, 1993, pp. 78-9.

having attained the *Arhanthood*, he came out a new doctrine that consisted of five matters concerned with the nature of the *Arhat*. The almost all followers of the Vajjiputtaka group recognized the new doctrine of Mahādeva. This led to controversies about doctrine between the two groups.

The agreement in the Council could not be reached, and a schism occurred. As a result, the group of the Vajjiputtaka monks left the Orthodox Order, and assembled together at Pāṭaliputra to hold another Council which was called the Mahāsaṅgīti (Great Council). This group formed their Order and called themselves as the Mahāsaṅghika. The group of the Orthodox monks formed another Order which was called the Sthaviravāda.

The *Dīpavamsa*, a text of Sthaviravāda school that preserves some events and authentic records, states that: After the Vaisālī assembly, the monks of the East sect (Vajjiputtaka monks) did not agree their ten practices were illegal; they were not reconciled to the decision of the assembly. Therefore, they convened together at another place and held a new Council, which was called the Mahāsaṅgīti, at there they altered the *Tripiṭaka* to suit their own views and added new texts."

The Sri Lankan chronicles also mention the same thing: “The findings were not accepted by all the Vajjiputtaka monks, some of whom held another Council that included in it all monks, *Arhat* and non-*Arhat*, and decided matters according to their own wisdom. This assembly was called Mahāsaṅghika or Mahāsaṅgīti.”

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122 According to *Mahāvibhāsā Sāstra*, the five viewpoints of doctrine advanced by Mahādeva may be have added to the controversy surrounding the first schism. Mahādeva taught that, (1) *arhat* may be seduced by another person, (2) *arhat* can have a residue of ignorance, (3) *arhat* may be doubts, (4) *arhat* may attain enlightenment through the help of others, and (5) the path is attained with an exclamatory remark. See Akira, Hirakawa, *op. cit.*, 1993, p. 82.

123 Peter, Harvey, *op. cit.*, 2005, pp. 73-5; & Akira, Hirakawa, *op. cit.*, 1993, pp. 79-82.

124 We have the story of this council as described in the *Dīpavamsa*. See A. K., Warder, *op. cit.*, 2000, p. 207.

Thus, the Buddhist *Saṅgha* for the first time was divided into two schools, namely, Mahāsaṅghika (the group of the progressive monks) and Sthaviravāda (the group of the conservative monks). Sthaviravāda school, at a later time, used Pāli language as their religious language, so this school was called Theravāda Buddhism\(^{126}\) (it was also called Nikāya Buddhism, Pāli Buddhism, or Southern Buddhism; this is because Theravāda believes only in the teachings of the Buddha preserving in the Nikāyas; its canonical texts are written and chanted in the Pāli language; and their school developed and spread to the countries belonging to the southern India).\(^{127}\)

About exact date of the schism and the formation of two schools is not clear. Some scholars hold that, the schools split immediately after the Vaisālī assembly; while other sources assert that, the date is after Vaisālī assembly and before the period of Aśoka.\(^{128}\)

About the cause of the schism there are two distinct traditions. The Southern tradition says that the basic schism was caused by the “ten un-vinayic practices” (*dasa-vathuni*) of the Vajjiputtaka monks.\(^{129}\) The Northern tradition, in the *Samayabhedoraracanacakra* (Chinese *I-pu-tsung lun lun*) by Vasumitra, asserts that the basic schism within the *Saṅgha* was “Five Points” of the monk Mahādeva.\(^{130}\) While recent scholars hold that, probable the cause of the schism was an attempt to slightly expand the number of monastic rulers which relate to matters such as, deportment, dress and behaviour in public of the monks. These matters seem to have been

\(^{126}\) Both *Sthavīra* (Skt.) and *Thera* (Pāli) literally mean “the Elders”. The school has been using the name Theravāda for itself in a written form since at least the 4th century, when the term appears in the *Dīpavamsa*.


based in western regions of India, where Buddhism was spreading, this would have been important to them.\textsuperscript{131} But, I agree with N. Dutt’s view that, both the causes were responsible for the schism, because both of them indicate the advent of the broad division of Buddhism into Hinayāna and Mahāyāna.\textsuperscript{132}

In short, after the Buddha’s nirvāṇa, though Buddhism had spread widely, the Buddhist Saṅgha began to have disagreements. The schismatic tendencies began to develop within them. And within one century, it divided into two different schools of thought and practice, namely, Mahāsaṅghika and Sthaviravāda. The cause that led to the schism was “ten un-vinayic practices” and “Five Points” of Mahādeva. Nevertheless, noteworthy that, all members of the Saṅgha were people who had full zeal for the propagation of the Buddha’s teachings, at the same time, under the royal patronage, Buddhism, therefore, was still flourishing.

b. The Early Buddhist Schools and their Development

After the second Buddhist Council, the cleavage in the Buddhist Saṅgha became wider and wider. One century later, it gave rise to as many as eighteen or more sub-sects. This period was called the period of Buddhist sects or Nikāya Buddhism. Of the genesis of these schools and their relationships there are several different accounts.

According to the I-pu-tsung-lun-lun by Vasumitra (the source of the Northern tradition) Mahāsaṅghika split into eight sects in four continuous schisms. In the first schism, it split into Ekavyavahārika, Lokottarvādin and Kaukkuṭika. After that, Bahuśrutīya issued out of Mahāsaṅghika, then Prajñaptivādin, and then Caitika, Aparaśaila and Uttaraśaila also issued out of Mahāsaṅghika in the fourth schism in the end of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} century after

\textsuperscript{131} Peter, Harvey, \textit{op. cit.}, 2005, pp. 74-5.
\textsuperscript{132} N., Dutt, \textit{op. cit.}, 1978, p. 30.
Buddha’s *nirvāṇa* (about 286 BCE). In total, Mahāsaṅghika and its eight sub-sects were nine in number. While Sthaviravāda split into eleven sub-sects in seven continuous schisms, from 200 years to 300 years after the Buddha’s *nirvāṇa* (about 286 to 186 BCE). The eleven sects of Sthaviravāda are as follows:

1. The first schism: Sarvāstivādin or Hetuvādin
2. The second schism: Vātsīputrīya
3. The third schism: Dharmottarīya, Bhadrayānīya, Sammatīya and Śaṅnagarika.
4. The fourth schism: Mahīśāsaka
5. The fifth schism: Dharmaguptaka
6. The sixth schism: Kāśyapīya or Suvarṣaka
7. The seventh schism: Sautrāntika or Saṅkrāntika

But According to the *Kathāvatthu* (the source of the Southern tradition) Mahāsaṅghika split into ten sects. In the first schism, it split into Gokulika, Ekavyohārika, Cetiyavāda and Andhaka. After that, from Gokulika arose Paññativāda and Bahulika (Bahussutaka); then from Andhaka arose Rājagiriya, Siddhatthaka, Pubbaseliya, Aparaseliya and Apararājagirika (Vājirīya). While, Sthaviravāda split into fourteen sects, namely: Mahiṃsāsaka, Vajjiputtaka, Sabbatthavāda, Dhammaguttika, Dhammuttariya, Bhadrayānīka, Chandāgārika, Saṃmitīya, Hemavata, Dhammaruci, sāgaliya, Kassapiya, Saṅkantika and Suttavāda.

Thus, from 100 to 300 years after the Buddha’s *nirvāṇa* (386 – 186 BCE), Buddhism split into 18 or 20 sects (according to the Northern tradition), or 24 sects (according to the Southern tradition). Then Sthaviravāda (Theravāda) sects chose Kashmir of North-India as a center for

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134 *Loc. cit.*
the propagation of Buddhism. Mahāsaṅghika sects chose the Central-India region (Magadha) as the center for the propagation of Buddhism. After that, Mahāsaṅghika sects migrated from Magadha and divided into two streams, one towards the North and the other towards the South. Their extension and development followed two ways – the Northern and the Southern India. Moreover, due to the geographical locations, they gradually added some doctrinal views in order to suit social circumstance present in different regions. Consequently, thoughts of both groups gradually became different which paved the way for the appearance of Mahāyāna Buddhism.\textsuperscript{136}

Moreover, at that time, under the patronage of King Aśoka (268 – 232 BCE), Buddhism was widely developed. It had its impressive existence in Kashmir, South-India and most spread all over the India and beyond Indian continent. The Sri Lankan chronicles also recorded: “During Aśoka’s reign missionaries were sent to various parts of India.”\textsuperscript{137} In addition, Aśoka built many stūpas, vihāra and monuments, the most famous of them being the great stūpa in Sañchi. It was constructed in the 3rd century BCE and was considered as the finest example of the Buddhist art in India.\textsuperscript{138} According to the Aśokavadana text, King Aśoka visited not only the four prescribed sites, but also the thirty-two important places concerned with the Buddha’s life and his spiritual master, the monk Upagupta, altogether. At each place, Aśoka built a commemorative monument.\textsuperscript{139} With royal patronage, Buddhism spread to both within and beyond his empire. Aśoka helped to promote the metamorphosis of Buddhism into a world religion that spread peacefully across the face of Asia.


\textsuperscript{138} Akira, Hirakawa, \textit{op. cit.}, 1993, pp. 95-7.

Because Buddhism was received with much favors and patronage from kings and rich Buddhist merchants, many people happened to become monks only for the offer of residing in monasteries with the aim of an easy way of life. Therefore, the heretics benefited by this opportunity entered into the Saṅgha. Consequently, the Saṅgha become impure, the disputes arose, the uposatha (the recite of rules in the monthly) did not be held. In order to correct such abuses, president Moggaliputtatissa, with the support of king Aśoka, assembled one thousand monks and held a Council to compile the Dharma. It was the third Buddhist Council that was held at Pāṭaliputra, in 250 BCE. The aim of the council was to settle the canon of the Scriptures or to specify orthodox doctrinal positions and to purify the Saṅgha.

This question was recorded in the Sri Lankan sources that:

During the reign of the king Aśoka, the Buddhist Saṅgha flourished with his financial support. Then, many people became monks only because monasteries offered an easy way of life. Monastic rules were not closely observed, religious practice was neglected and disputes arose in the Saṅgha. Not even the uposatha was held. To correct such abuses, Moggaliputtatissa with the support of Aśoka assembled one thousand Arhants to compile the Dharma and purged the Saṅgha. Those who agreed that Buddhism was vibhajjavāda (the teaching of discrimination) were accepted as Buddhist monks; Those who disagreed were expelled from the Saṅgha. This was the Third Council.

According to the Sri Lankan sources too, Moggaliputtatissa compiled the Kathāvatthu to explain the orthodox position. Kātyāyanīputra compiled the Abhidharma-jñānaprasthāna-sāstra to oppose the new doctrine of Mahāsaṅghika and on the other hand to attack two doctrines of

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141 The Sri Lankan Therevāda school understood Buddhism as the “teaching of discrimination” (vibhajjavāda).
142 Kātyāyanīputra is person who founded Sarvāstivāda school from the Theravāda and adopted Abhidharm-pitaka as the principal treatise of the Sarvāstivāda.
heretics that were flourishing and disparaging Buddhism at that time.\textsuperscript{143} The specialty of this council was the Buddha’s teachings included into Tripiṭaka (Sūtrapiṭaka, Vinayapiṭaka and Abhidharmapiṭaka) for the first time.

Following the council, the king Aśoka sent emissaries, missionaries, including his own children, prince Mahinda and princess Sanghamitra to spread Buddhism beyond India, throughout the Central Asia and Sri Lanka. The \textit{Mahāvaṃsa} also records that, after the third Buddhist Council, king Aśoka sent Buddhist missions to various parts of India and to Sri Lanka.\textsuperscript{144} It is more obvious in the second Aśoka’s rock edict that, king Aśoka sent out Buddhist missionaries to Kashmir and Gandhara in the Northwest, the Yavana regions of the Hellenistic kingdom of Bactria (modern Afghanistan), the Himalaya region, the Aparantaka region in Western Punjab, and Karala, Suvarnabhumi (the coast of Burma and possibly Cambodia), and Lanka (modern Sri Lanka).\textsuperscript{145} Generally speaking, Aśoka provided a great impetus to Buddhism and made it become a truly universal religion. This period marks the first propagation of Buddhism beyond India to other countries.

After the decline of the Mauryan Aśoka, India was frequently invaded by foreigners. Puṣyamitra, the founder of the Suṅga dynasty (succeeded the Mauryas in Magadha), revived Brāhmanism and seriously suppressed Buddhism. The \textit{Divyāvadāna} recoded that: “Puṣyamitra had the stūpas and vihāras that built by Aśoka razed to the ground. He put the price of 100 dinaras for the head of a Buddhist monk.”\textsuperscript{146} Therefore, the Brāhmanism was a living force in this period, and the performance of Vedic sacrifices was common.\textsuperscript{147} Consequently, Buddhism became weak in the Central-India, but, prominent monks in the Central-India partly went abroad to

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\textsuperscript{143} Thich Thanh Kiem (ed.), \textit{op. cit.}, 1989.
\textsuperscript{147} A. Kumar, Anand, \textit{op. cit.}, 2012, pp. 92-3.
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spread the Buddha’s teaching. That is the reason why outside the Central-India Buddhism is still flourishing.

However, during this time, Buddhism underwent a movement and got split into many forces. These include the schools of Mahāsaṅghika and Sthaviravāda. These different branches in Buddhism were the result of divergence of opinions and practices of the Saṅgha. Each school thought that its interpretation was origin and sought to undermine the other school. Ultimate result was a conflict about doctrine among various schools. This was really a phase of transition that was remarkable in Buddhist history.

Until Kuśāṇa period, Buddhism continued to flourish again in the Central-India, Mathura and broadly spread to East. Buddhism developed to its apex and spread to Central-Asia during the Kanishka’s dynasty because it was strongly upheld by the king himself. This period witnessed activities and developments of Buddhism which were encouraged by Kanishka, such as, art, culture, spirit and literature, especially the Gândhâra art and the rise of Mahâyâna Buddhism. S. N. Sadasivan said that, in Purushapura (modern Peshwar), the capital city of Kanishka, Kanishka raised a grand stûpa 400 ft. high and named it after him. The epigraphic data and the numismatic evidence show how Buddhism was popular in the Kuśâṇa empire. Through the predominance of Buddhist faith in Kanishka’s dynasty showed the devotion of king and community. Yet Jainism and other religions also flourished in this period. Some scholars say that: “Buddhism dominated the Kaniska’s court and in the cities of his empire, while Brahmin families still maintained orthodox Hinduism.” In general, the Kuśâṇa rulers were often Buddhists devotees. Especially, Kaniska was extremely tolerant of different faiths and assured full freedom of their propagation.

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Like Asoka, Kaniṣka did not only promote the propagation and development of Buddhism, but also convened an assembly of Buddhism. It was the time when Kaniṣka being perplexed by the different sectarian interpretations of Buddha’s teachings. Therefore, he invited the learned Bodhisattvas, such as, Vasumitra, Aśvagoṣha (spiritual instructor of Kaniṣka), Parshva and the monks of all sects, came to Kashmir to assemble Buddhist canons. The aim of the Council was to unify different thoughts of the eighteen Buddhist sects with correct meaning of the Buddha’s teachings. It was the fourth Buddhist Council that was held in Kashmir in 100 CE with Aśvagoṣha as its vice-president, and it took twelve years to complete. According to Hsuan-tsang, Kaniṣka built a monastery for accommodation of the learned Bodhisattvas and called upon them to write commentaries on the Tripiṭaka. The commentary of each Piṭaka was written in 100000 slokas. These commentaries were known as a huge work that called the Mahāvibhāṣā-śāstras. Then Aśvaghoṣa compiled the Buddhacarita (a verse biography of the Buddha), and the Saundarananda (an account in verse of the conversion of the Nanda, Buddha’s half-brother). Especially, in this council the Tripiṭaka were completed in the written form by Sanskrit language. The sūtras, vinayas and sāstras which Hsuan-tsang brought back and translated into Chinese language, belong mostly to the version of the canon compiled at this assembly. It is also remarkable that, Kaniṣka made a significant change, by converting earlier Prakrit versions into Sanskrit. And this Council was regarded as a momentous turning-point and prepared the ground for the appearance of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

151 Ibid., p. 11.
154 Nan, Huai-Chin, op. cit., 1997, p. 76.
In short, about one hundred years after the Buddha’s nirvāṇa, Buddhism for the first time had the schism and change. Especially, from the time of the king Aśoka to the king Kaniṣka, Buddhism had undergone a great development. It was a movement of Buddhism and a period of transition to Mahāyāna Buddhism as well as the propagation of Buddhism abroad. This period marked the important events in the history of Buddhism, in general, and Indian Buddhism, in particular.

The aim of Buddhism is to bring true happiness to all human beings, so, to satisfy this goal, Buddhism had changed and adjusted its doctrines and practice. This is known as the cause that led to the rise of the Buddhist schools. Though Buddhism has many different forms, but each one of them are based on the Buddha’s life and his teachings. The devotion and the belief of Buddhists contributed a lot to the movement and development of Buddhism. Through sculptural and art works of Buddhism, such as, the huge stūpas, monasteries, commemorative monuments, magnificent and famous caves (Ajanta and Ellora in the Deccan jungles), they showed the devotion and the faith of Buddhists. Most of these art works reflect on the growth of Buddhism during the time of the rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism as well as the extension of Buddhism in other countries.