CHAPTER - V

THE MAURYAN PERIOD

( B.C. 320 to 185 )
I- **SOURCES** :-

Rock-paintings constitute the chief source of information for this period and we have numerous painted rock-shelters in our area. Particularly the paintings of Abchand rock-shelters abound in the depiction of symbols that possess religious character.

Numismatic evidence discovered during the excavations at Bhar has formed the second important source of our information for this period. The coins contain representations of symbols that have been attributed religious significance.

No less informative are Aśokan inscriptions in which some aspects of the contemporary religious life have been reflected. A copy of Minor Rock-Edict has been discovered in the area of our study.

Lastly we have the literary references available to us from ancient literature. Of course, they are not as valuable as the sources cited above but they certainly reveal some important facts connected with the subject of our enquiry.

II- **RELIGIOUS SECTS IN INSCRIPTIONS** :-

Note has been taken above that epigraphic records left by Aśoka contain valuable information regarding religion. Of course, only one inscription of Aśoka has been found in our area but as his records reflect the religious life of the whole Mauryan empire of which Bundelkhand was certainly a part, their information is important for the religious history of Bundelkhand.
Of supreme importance for us is the statement of Aśoka contained in his thirteenth rock-edict to which we have already made a reference in the foregoing chapter. He says, "And there is no country except that of the Yavanas, where there are not these orders, namely - the Brāhmaṇa and the Śramaṇa ascetics, and there is no place in any (such) country where man have no faith in one sect or another."¹

According to Dr. J. R. Bhandarkar, "The Brāhmaṇas seem to be recluse-s and mendicants, whose speculations and disciplines were in conformity with the Vedas, and Śramaṇa those, whose doctrines and practices were opposed to these Brahmānic scriptures."² Thus the Brāhmaṇas appear to be belonging to the Vedic tradition and the Śramaṇas to the heterodox sect of the Advinists and the Jainas. Encoing identical opinion on the subject Dr. J. J. Panley remarks, "the difference of scriptures and the attitude towards them was another of the dividing lines between the "Brāhmaṇa" and "Śramaṇa" ascetics."³

The other points of difference between the two were their attitudes towards secular life and caste.⁴

In pillar-edict VII we come across the following observations of Aśoka which are to our purpose, "some Mahāmātras were ordered by me to busy themselves with the affairs of the Saṅgha; likewise others were ordered by me to busy themselves also with the Brāhmaṇas and Śīvikaś; others were ordered by me to busy themselves also with the Nirgranthas; others were ordered by me to busy themselves also with various other sects. Thus different Mahāmātras are busy themselves specially with different congregations."⁵

³ Pande, G.V.: Ibid., P. 329.
⁵ चैन्द्राव्यः सप्त तत्त्वादिगुः प्राचेष्टाय यशोऽपि सत्त्वानि आकर्षित्व तत्त्वादिगुः प्राचेष्टाय यशोऽपि सत्त्वानि आकर्षित्व तत्त्वादिगुः प्राचेष्टाय यशोऽपि सत्त्वानि आकर्षित्व तत्त्वादिगुः प्राचेष्टाय यशोऽपि सत्त्वानि आकर्षित्व तत्त्वादिगुः प्राचेष्टाय यशोऽपि सत्त्वानि आकर्षित्व तत्त्वादिगुः प्राचेष्टाय यशोऽपि सत्त्वानि आकर्षित्व तत्त्वादिगुः प्राचेष्टाय यशोऽपि सत्त्वानि आकर्षित्व तत्त्वादिगुः प्राचेष्टाय यशोऽपि सत्त्वानि आकर्षित्व तत्त्वादिगुः प्राचेष्टाय यशोऽपि सत्त्वानि आकर्षित्व तत्त्वादिगुः प्राचेष्टाय यशोऽपि सत्त्वानि आकर्षित्व तत्त्वादिगुः प्राचेष्टाय यशोऽपि सत्त्वानि आकर्षित्व तत्त्वादिगुः प्राचेष्टाय यशोऽपि सत्त्वानि आकर्षित्व तत्त्वादिगुः प्राचेष्टाय यशोऽपि सत्त्वानि आकर्षित्व तत्त्वादिगुः प्राचेष्टाय यशोऽपि सत्त्वानि आकर्षित्व तत्त्वादिगुः प्राचेष्टाय यशोऽपि सत्त्वानि आकर्षित्व तत्त्वादिगुः प्राचेष्टाय यशोऽपि सत्त्वानि आकर्षित्व तत्त्वादिगुः प्राचेष्टाय यशोऽपि सत्त्वानि आकर्षित्व तत्त्वादिगुः प्राचेष्टाय यशोऽपि सत्त्वानि आकर्षित्व तत्त्वादिगुः प्राचेष्टाय यशोऽपि सत्त्वानि

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Now the word Saṅgha in above extract must denote here the Buddhist order and as Āsoka was himself a follower of that religion he naturally makes mention of it first and by this name. The sect named as Nigamthas by Āsoka stands for the followers of Mahāvīra and thus denoting the Jaina order. With regard to the sect of the Ājīvikas, Dr. D.K. Bhandarkar is of the view that there were two orders of them viz., one Brahmanical and other non-Brahmanical. The non-Brahmanical Ājīvikas were probably those who were associated and even connected with the Jaines. So he takes Mirgranthis of the inscription to be representing the Śramaṇa and the Ājīvikas, the Śramaṇa order of the religieux.¹ There is some difficulty in agreeing with Dr. D.K. Bhandarkar, for though the orders of the Śramaṇas and Ājīvikas have been named together, they seem to signify distinct sects, the former of them belonging to the Vedic tradition and the latter to that of the Jaines.

From the statement of Āsoka, quoted above, we note that there were other sects besides the four named above, but he does not mention them. It appears therefore that in his time those four had considerable prestige and following. We may presume that some of the sects, if not all, mentioned by Āsoka existed in Sambalpurd during the period.

The extract from Pillar-Edict VII further tells us that Āsoka used the word Hāsamja to denote these religious orders. According to Dr. D.K. Bhandarkar the Hāsamjas were divided into three classes: (1) Brahmanic (2) Brahmānic (3) and those which were neither Brahmanic nor Brahmānic... Possibly they denoted some form of non-āryan faith.²

2. Ibid., P.157.
III- RELIGIOUS POLICY OF AŚOKA :

That he was benevolent and tolerant towards all the sects existing in his empire stands attested to by his Rock-Edict VII in which he says, "King Devānapriya Priyadarśin desires that all sects may reside everywhere. For all these desire self control and purity of mind."¹ Thus Aśoka explicitly admits that there is inherent unity of ethical principles inculcated by each sect and so grants full freedom to them and to exist and pursue their aims.

Further confirmation of his catholic outlook is available to us in Pillar-Edict VII from which we have already noted above that in respect of appointing Dharma-Mahāmātras to look after the interest of various sects, he made no distinction among them. His personal religion was certainly Buddhism but he showed equal regard and respect towards other sects. The Ājīvikas, one of the prominent heretical sects of his time, are known to have enjoyed his patronage and he dedicated caves to them.²

As a matter of fact, the Dhamma that he has taught his subjects in his epigraphical records is not his personal faith Buddhism or any other cult but denotes a code of moral duties to which no sect could take exception. In Rock-Edict XIII Aśoka admits that the ethical practices on which he insists under the name Dhamma are something which all pāsāndas, whether of the Brāhmaṇa or Śramaṇa order teach in common. Again in Minor


². A.I.U., P.468.
Rock-Edict Brahmagiri he says that they form Porana Pakiti
dighavuse or the nature of man which is ancient and long-standing.
His Dhamma includes among other things, "rendering obedience to
mother and father and elders, compassion towards animals, speaking
of the truth, regard of the pupil for his master and suitable
behaviour to the relatives." 1 Needless to add that these moral
principles are common to all sects. Dr. Vincent Smith is right
when he characterises Asoka's Dhamma as a system of theocracy
without a god. 2

From his Rock-Edict IV we note that he fostered
and propagated his Dhamma among his subjects by showing them
spectacles of the Vimānas, hastins and agni or jyotin-skandhas.
According to Dr. D.K. Bhandarkar, "these represent the kinds of
heavenly bliss that are in store for the good and virtuous people
in their next birth when they become gods. 3

Thus Asoka exerted himself a great deal to effect
moral upliftment of his subjects without showing undue favour
to any sect and treating all at par. To him goes the credit of
inaugurating a policy of tolerance in respect of religion which
was followed, later on by the Gupta emperors and the Gurjara-
Pratihāra as well as the Candella monarchs. He offered positive
encouragement to all sects without distinction.

2. Smith, V. : " Asoka " P.33-34.
IV - SYMBOL WORSHIP

In the foregoing chapter we have noted that symbol worship was one of the earliest manifestation of religion and the chalcholithic pottery from Ura of Sarn contains depiction of some symbols religious in character. It is not altogether impossible that the civilized man has adopted some of the symbols worshipped by the primitive cave dwellers.

Painted rock-shelters of Abchand provide us with the depiction of Cross-symbol (Sketch No. 8, Fig. 3) according to Dr. S.K. Pande this cross symbol was undoubtedly worshipped in the form of a god though the identification of this god is not possible. It should be noted here that cross symbols at Abchand are without worshippers associated with them whereas those from Paanchmachi are accompanied by them. It follows, therefore, that either this cross symbol was independently worshipped or represented a deity for the worshippers. To quote, an eminent scholar on the subject, "Human mind learnt to conceive of the Highest Divinity not in the absolute likeness of him but rather in aniconic representations from very early times. These aniconic representations had such meanings and implications as would help us to differentiate them from purely decorative or artistic forms." Sometimes the cross symbol is represented in the form of hollow bums which has been taken by some scholars to represent the Vedi or fire-pit prepared for the performance of Yajña.

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Depiction of Svastika has also taken place in rock-paintings of Abchand (Sketch No. 9, Fig. No. 7). An idea has often been aired that this cross symbol is the primitive form of the Svastika. But nowhere it has been found to be associated with worshippers like the cross. Shri S.K. Dixit is of the view that occurrence of Svastika on ancient funerary pottery as well as its Sanskrit name (conferring welfare) suggests that it had some auspicious significance attributed to it by the simple primitive mind.1

It is interesting to note that association of trident with cross has also been found at some places.2 It may not be altogether impossible that this cross symbol originally stood for Śiva the god of the non-āryan races. Going further than this would be construed as flight of fancy. According to Shri S.K. Dixit Cross is the oldest sign used to represent the earth. He thinks that it might be a combination of two serpents representing the male and female principles in nature.

From the excavations at Eran a large number of punch-marked coins were discovered. The earlier of them have been assigned by Prof. K.D. Bajpai to the beginning of 3rd century B.C.3 thus falling in the Mauryan period. They are mostly copper and a few with silver coating. Rectangular or circular in shape, they bear representation of numerous symbols on their obverse. Noteworthy among these are Sun, Crescent, Sadaradakra, hill, taurine, tree-in-railing, caduceus, and vajra symbol. Almost all of them are

3. I.N.S., P.7.
religious symbols. Of these the first and the last certainly stand for Sūrya and Indra of whom we have made a mention in the preceding chapter. Of the remaining, hill or mountain symbol has been identified with the mother-goddess and Sadāračakra with six ṛtus. The tree-in-railing of course, symbolises the cult of the tree which is associated with the worship of the Mother-Goddess.  

V - GUTARRA INSCRIPTION:

At Gutarra in Datia district on a granite rock at the foot of a hill is incised a copy of the Minor Rock-Edict of Aśoka. It constitutes the first epigraphical record in the area of our study. It is noteworthy that it is second among his records to contain his personal name Aśoka, the first being that of Maski.

The proclamation contained in the inscription was issued by him when he had been on tour for 256 days. Talking about his association with the Saṅgha and his exertion in the cause of Dharma he says, "men(subjects) in Jambudvīpa, who had been unminglel with the gods during this period were made (by him) minglel with the gods." The emperor says that the rich men alone are not entitled to a place in the great heaven. If the poor exert themselves in the cause of Dharma and discharged duties associated therewith, observing utmost restraint in respect of all living beings, can attain the great heaven. He exhorts, therefore, both the rich and the poor to effect their association with the gods by practising Dharma and discharging duties associated therewith.

2. Ibid. P.85.
3. L.I., Vol.XXXI, Pt.V, P.208; यापों, रा.ज़ही: कसरी के जन्तुप्रिय, पृ. ७०. --- लेखन वारेन्ज यंजुदीपरिष्ठ देवांगपित(स) ज्ञानं वेदं सौवं पुनित मितरं वेदा कटा।
Now a lively controversy rages round the exact import of the words "the commingling of men with gods" understood and interpreted in diverse ways by the scholars. The interpretation of Dr. D.R. Bhandarkar is most satisfactory, and so, acceptable on the subject. He says, "the commingling of men and gods must be so explained as to show that it was tantamount to the achievement of heaven. This is possible only if we say that by following Aśoka's Dharma men became so virtuous that they attained to heaven and were associated with the gods. The idea that in the days of yore men and gods lived together is known to Brahmanical literature also."  

1. Dr. H.P. Shastri took the word 'Deva' of the 4th line to mean "the Brahmānas" whereas Sylvan Levi and Filliaux translated it as 'śv'a king'. F.W. Thomas is of the view that Aśoka brought the Brahmanical gods to the knowledge of wild tribes and other backward people, who had formerly no knowledge of them, but Dr. D.C. Sircar rightly remarks that Aśoka's Dharma had little to do with the Brahmanical gods.


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Explaining identical expression from the Brahmagiri Minor Rock-Edict, Hultzsch says "this enigmatical sentence can be explained by comparing a similar but more explicit statement in the fourth rock-Edict. It refers to certain religious shows at which Aśoka had exhibited to his subjects in effigie the gods whose abodes they would be able to reach by the zealous practice of Dharma. Thus the word Deva corresponds to the 'divyānī rūpānī in the Girnar Edict.'


Noteworthy also is the interpretation of Dr. V.S. Agrawala who says while explaining the sculptures of the Stupa of Bharhut, "The higher religion of the Buddha and popular cult of the Yaksas were shaking hands in a strange fraternising spirit and the people offered their homage equally to both of them. This seems to be the meaning of Aśoka's statement that by his forging contact with the people in the countryside and questioning them on matters of religion the mingled (lower gods became mingled with the upper ones."

Indian Art, P. 115.

with Aśoka Buddhism must have entered Bundelkhand
and though we do not possess any independent evidence attesting
to its existence in our area during the period, we may presume that
it had some following after the visit of Aśoka.

VI- Jainism :-

According to Dr. A. M. Ghate the spread of Jainism
was more a case of successive migrations than of continuous
expansion. Dr. R. K. Mukherji mentions the unanimous Jain tradition
according to which Čandragupta Maurya in his old age abdicated and
followed the Jaina Saint Bhadrabāhu as his teacher. Both the
teacher and the pupil then travelled towards south and settled
down at a place called Sravana-Belgolā. The tradition is recorded
with minor variations in a number of documents, both literary and
epigraphic.

Noteworthy for us is the fact that this Jaina
migration is the initial fact of the Digambara tradition. The
Jaina community was undivided for long. It was with Bhadrabāhu
that the Digambara separated from the Śvetāmbaras. It is not
unlikely that while travelling from the north to the south
Bhadrabāhu and Čandragupta Maurya may have passed through Bundelkhand
and introducing Jainism here, for we shall see that Śvetāmbaras are
conspicuous by their absence in Bundelkhand and all archaeological
evidence pertaining to Jainism belongs to the Digambara sect.

1. A.I.U., P.417.
VII - VAISNAVISM :

We do not possess any evidence attesting to the existence of Vaisnavism in Bundelkhand during the period. But the discovery of the remains of a Vishnu temple at Vindhyā datable to 4th-3rd centuries B.C. is worth noting here. As Vindhyā is not far from the boundaries of Bundelkhand, it is not unlikely that some followers of Vishnu may have resided in Bundelkhand also.

VIII- FOLK CULTS :

In his Rock-Edict IX Aśoka makes the following observations. "Men are practising various ceremonies during illness, at the marriage of a son or a daughter, at the birth of a child and when setting out on a journey. On these and other such occasions men are practising many ceremonies. But in such cases women are practising many and various offensive and useless ceremonies. Now ceremonies should certainly be practised. But these ceremonies bear little fruit indeed. But the following bears much fruit, indeed viz., the practice of morality." The observations, quoted above throw light on another phase of popular beliefs and superstitions existing during the time of Aśoka. They point to the continuance of the worship of Yakṣas, Cāityās, Gandharvās, Nāgās, and so forth about which we read so much in Buddhist and Pali scriptures.

2. G.I.I., Vol.1, P.60. — जरि जलिमेण्टें नंदतं करोंित अर्थ की की सिवने पक्षदत्त घरसे आस्वे अस्वे च सदिशिले नाम च मेरे हरोंित। का तु स्वियक अनु वन्दिष्ठं व सुलिन व विनारतियं च मंगलं करोंित। सों कलते न च लों मंगल। अनलरतं तु लों नरं भरं तु सों मरल येथयंगत.......