CHAPTER VI

THE INTERIM PERIOD

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

So far as Bundelkhand is concerned our sources of information for this period are meagre and much less than what we had for the preceding period. The inscriptions of Śākya Muni throw a flood of light on the contemporary religious life and practices and we had at least one of his records in the area of our study. But for the period under review we draw a blank from this source with not a single epigraphic record available to us for the period.

Numismatic evidence recovered from coins constitutes the chief source of our information. Likewise rock-paintings also supply us with some symbols that possess religious character.

The period under review witnesses the construction of two very beautiful and magnificent Buddhist monuments in central India. Of course, they are not located within the area of our study but so close they are to the boundaries of Bundelkhand that their importance in religious history of our region cannot be underestimated.

On literary plane we possess the Mahābhāṣya of Patanjali that contains useful information regarding religion in contemporary India.

II- SYMBOL WORSHIP :-

That symbol worship remained dominant in the realms of religion is evident as much from coins as from rock-paintings. It is interesting to note that some of the symbols have been supplied by both the sources.
Cunningham found a fairly good number of Punch-marked, die-struck and cast coins at Eran. These coins bear a variety of symbols such as elephant, horse, tree-in-railing, Indra-dhvaja and Ujjain-symbol and river with fishes.¹

Of these the placing of elephant and horse on coins should not be construed as motivated by decorative purpose but the existence of Zoo-morphic deities during the period. Of these the elephant symbolises Indra as many deities were first represented as aniconically and theriomorphically, before attaining their anthropomorphomorphic form. S.K. Dixit associates elephant with the mother-goddess on the basis of a passage in Atharvaveda. He remarks that though she may choose at a particular place some particular animals as her favourites, she essentially remains the mistress of all beasts and birds.² As regards tree-in-railing on coins, Dr. J.N. Bannerji says, they may stand for Vrksha-Caityas or Sthala-Vrkshas.³ The meaning of Indra-dhvaja is clear from its very name and we have noted the tradition that Vasu, the first king of Bundelkhand, was given by Indra a bamboo-staff in honour of which, a festival known as Indramaha came into being. On one coin the elephant stands before Indra-dhvaja significantly. Mention may be made here that rock-paintings of Abonand also contain representation of Vajra. The Cross of the Ujjain symbol has been taken to mean the union or unification of male and female principles of Nature; and the balls, standing for the female principle, may, therefore, only serve to indicate the predominance of the Goddess.⁴

¹. INS. P.6.
³. DHJ, PP.108-9.
Cunningham also discovered a few die-stuck coins that bore in Brāhmi characters of 2nd century B.C. the old name of Eran. These coins contain representation of semi-circle design, crescent, Swastika, tree-in-railing, ċakra, bull and the Ujjain-symbol.¹ About the representation of bull we may recall the words of Dr.J.N.Bannerji, who says that some of the animals appearing on coins may stand for theriomorphic representations of deities.² The remaining symbols have been already explained.

As regards the ċakra it may be pointed out that this symbol is available to us from the contemporary rock-paintings also. At Abchand we get this symbol.³ (Sketch No.8 Fig.4) Macdonell is of the view that the wheel in various ritual performances was employed as symbol of the Sun as representing both its shape and its motion.⁴ According to Dr.J.N.Bannerji, "The wheel, lotus and rayed disc may well be accepted as depicting the Sun god."⁵ So this symbol appears to be associated with Sun.

That Sūrya was represented aniconically is clear from other independent and unmistakable evidence also. The Sun-dial of Unao (Dist.Datia) enshrined in a temple is actually an aniconic representation of the deity. It is said to be of the high antiquity. Definitely it belongs to a period when anthropomorphic form of the god had not come into being and so may be assigned to this period. It is a circular piece of stone deeply embedded in a high platform in the sanctum. Save for some raised points at the periphery which were not sculptured, it has nothing remarkable to offer. Note may be taken that the temple containing the Sun-dial is hardly a century old.

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1. I.N.S., P.6.
Interesting as it may seem, we have a terracotta figure in which Sūrya has been represented as a goddess. The piece is included in the collection of state Museum, Dhuleka. (Dist. Chhatarpur) What is striking and important about it here is the face of the figure which perfectly resembles the Sun-dial. Instead of making the natural human face with nose, eyes etc. the artist gave it the shape of dial, whereas the hands and legs have been appropriately rendered. Barring the head, the rest of the body is fully anthropomorphic. Adorned with armlets and anklets, the goddess is naked except for the lower garment or ornament. Standing with legs wide apart, she holds her hands high near head. It has been identified as goddess Uṣā. Nowhere we come across the female representation of Sūrya, yet in the opinion of S.K. Dikshit, "It has been already granted by some that the Sun may be either a father-god or a mother-goddess."¹ and so he was inclined to associate the representation of Sun on the ancient coins of India with the cult of the Mother-goddess.

Be that as it may, it is interesting to find that in addition to the coins, rock-paintings of the period also contain symbolic representation of the Sun, (Skateh No.1. Fig. 4) along with that of Śakra to which we have already attributed solar character. In rock-painting Sun has been delineated as a hollow circle and encircled by a number of semi-circular rays, it definitely shows the deity in its most primitive conception. Taking all the evidence cited above, collectively into consideration we can say that the cult of Sun was prominent and popular in the region of our study during the period. The god was bidding farewell to his uniconic form and acquiring an anthropomorphic one.

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Patanjali mentions that the gods of constellations, the Sun and the Moon were venerated.¹

Among the folk-cults, that of the tree seems to have been very popular in Bundelkhand during the period under review. Representation of Tree-in-railing on the coins has been mentioned above. Somewhat identical symbol we get from the rock-paintings also in which Tree-with-platform is available to us. (Sketch No.8. Fig. C) At Abchand the depiction of Sun has taken place in company with tree and star symbols. (Sketch No.8. Fig. 3) As a matter of fact, attribution of spirit qualities to plants and objects produced nature worship and other corollaries to it, such as ancestor-worship. Tree-spirits were not clearly worshipped but like the Serpent and the Yakṣa they were objects of popular veneration down the ages. According to Dr. U. P. Shana, "A sacred tree with a platform erected at base (piled up) or enclosed in a railing being an object of worship came to be called a Āḍītya or Āḍītya-vṛkṣa."² At Sanchi we have scenes depicting tree worship. In Atharvaveda we come across association of Yakṣa with the motif of Tree-of-Life.³ According to Dr. C. C. Pande,⁴ "The Yakṣas were spirits often connected with trees and granted worldly desires, especially progeny and wealth."

As regards the cult of Yakṣa we do not have any positive or direct evidence of its existence in our area but at Pawaya and Besanagar were found independent plastic representations of the yakṣas that rank among the earliest stone (cult) icons of

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¹ Puri, B.N. : India in the time of Patanjali, P.161.
³ Vide- Mishra, R.N. : Development of Yakṣa cult (thesis) University of Sagar, P.54.
⁴ Ibid. P.318.
India. At Bharhut we meet with several representations of the Yākṣa. All these places being close to our area, it is probable that this folk-cult of the Yākṣa was prevalent in Bundelkhand also during the period under review.

III- BUDDHISM :-

In the preceding chapter we have mentioned that Asoka personally came to Bundelkhand, and so, we presumed that with him Buddhism must have acquired some followers here. During the period under review, Buddhism seems to have dominated the religious life of central India as can be made out from the erection of magnificent stūpas at Sanchi and Bharhut. Within our area we do not possess any evidence testifying to the existence of Buddhism, but the very fact that these stūpas stand close to us, one on each side, proves that Buddhism must have commanded some influence here. Local traditions of Datia district aver that the caves and hillocks of Copeśvara and Chhoti Bedoni were occupied by Mahāyāni monks from early centuries of the Christian era. About the stūpa of Bharhut, Dr. Max Mullar has said, "In the sculptures and inscriptions of Bharhut we shall have in future a real landmark in the religious and literary history of India and many theories hitherto held by Sanskrit scholars will have to modify accordingly." The sculptures of Bharhut attest to the existence of folk cults such as those of the yakṣa, nāga and the tree. Some yakṣa icons have also been found there with their names inscribed below. The sculptures thus prove that Buddhism had successfully affiliated to it most of the folk cults of central India, some of which may have existed in Bundelkhand also during the period.

1. A.I.J., P.517.
2. साप्ताहिकायांति, वलिया, कें १५५, वर्ष १२,४२, म. ब. -(सम्पादकीय-संस्कृति के सूच)
IV- **Ajívikas** :

An isolated reference contained in the Jain Brhadávatí Sūtra is of interest and importance for us. It is mentioned there that the Ajívikas had shifted their center of activities to the Kusåra country at the foot of the Vindhya mountain and that in their pantheon were included many Vedic and non-Vedic gods. Two of these were Puruñabhadra (Puruñabhadra) and Manibhadra (Manibhadra). Their worshippers are mentioned in the list of Nidesa quoted in one of the preceding chapters. Scholars are agreed on the point that these were Yajñas though the Nidesa passage distinguished them from the Yajñas. At Pawaya near Gwalior was found an inscribed statue of Manibhadra datable to 1st century B.C. Perhaps, later on, he was adopted by the Ajívikas into their pantheon.

The passage from the Brhadávatí Sūtra leaves no doubt that Ajívikas resided somewhere in Andrédhnad or in the region adjoining to it during this period.

V- **Vaishnavism** :

No positive evidence we possess in the area of our study attesting to the existence of Vaishnavism during the period. Nevertheless, the Besanagar Garuḍa Pillar inscription of Heliodorus belonging to this period is important for us. It is found not far from the boundaries of Andrédhnad and it attests to the fact that Vidisha was a prominent center of Vaishnavism. Heliodorus was a Greek ambassador who embraced the cult of Viṣṇu. It is not unlikely therefore, that a few followers of Viṣṇu must have resided in our area during the period.

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1. A.I.U., P.463-64.
2. See - PP.110-111.
3. A.P.R., 1908, P.126.
At Tumain in Guna district, a fine icon of Balarāma assignable to 2nd century A.D. has been found which attests to the fact that Vaisnavism had some appeal there. And Tumain is close to the district of Sagar. In Patanjali's work Kṛṣṇa figures prominently.\(^1\)

As regards Saivism we have no evidence. Patanjali mentions a few names of Śiva such as Bhāva, Sarva, Giriḍa, Mahādeva and Trayambaka. It may be noted that these are included in the list of names of Śiva given in the Atharvaveda.\(^2\) Patanjali has also referred to the sacrifices of Agnisṭoma, Rājasūya and Vājapaya that were current during the period.\(^3\)

\(^1\) Puri, B.N. : India in the Time of Patanjali, P.161.
\(^2\) Ibid., P.180.
\(^3\) Ibid., P.168.