conclusion
CONCLUSION

The sources of the history of the Śuṅga period reveal a fairly clear picture of the conditions, as they existed in the country. It was undoubtedly a period of great creative activity. It is a fact that the social order of this period was basically the same as it existed during the age of the sūtras but the importance of the Śuṅga period lies in the renewed emphasis on the superiority of the Brahmanical traditions as against the ārama traditions with the result, that out of all the four varnas, the Brāhmaṇas received special attention as the foremost varna in the works of this period. The age long rivalry between the Brāhmaṇas and the kṣatriyas for the highest social recognition culminated in the assertion in the Manusmṛti that Brahmanas even though of ten years is more respectable than a kṣatriya of hundred years as a corollary of the re-establishment of the Brahmanical traditions. The gṛhasthāśrama came to be regarded with greater emphasis as the most important āśrama. In fact it became the source of sustenance for the other three āśramas.

The social problem created by the advocacy of unrestrained mass reunification of the world on the part of the Buddhist teachers was solved by the Brahmanical injunction that it was the sin to renounce the world without completely fulfilling one's social obligations. Thus marriage came to be treated as a social obligation. The care of the women folk and the aged in the family came to be regarded as a social duty on the part of the house holders.
To bring about the re-orientation of the Brahmanical values, the utility of the sixteen samskāras was re-emphasised. Among these the upanayana samskāra received maximum attention of the law givers during this period. The value of education was again and again emphasised in the re-creation of man and the moulding of the society. Teacher as the pivot of any educational system was single out as the most important factor in it. This explains why he became the object of great esteem on the part of the law givers. As importance and functions were re-spelled out in this period, the teacher and student relationship became an important theme of discussion during this period. If Patañjali is to be believed, higher female education was brought into book during this period.

It was re-emphasised that the four purushārthas do not pull apart. They constitute a system of an integrated life. Aytha and Kāma are to be persuaded but they are not to be transgressed the boundaries of Dharma and moksha.

The economic life of the country does not appear to be any different from that of the previous periods. Agriculture continued to be the main vocation of the period. However, it did not found favour with the Brāhmaṇas who were expected to dedicate their total life to the preservation of higher values of life. Allied with the agriculture was the profession of cattle rearing which too seems to have been in a prosperous state. The mention of the commodities of trade and commerce, of coins and of co-operative activities leave us in no doubt that the economic conditions of the country were fairly good.
The Buddhist sources, which describe Pushyamitra Śuṅga as a religious bigot and persecutor are extremely of dubious character. There is hardly any other source to show that the society of the Śuṅga period was redeemed with religious strife. The Manusmṛti, the Mahābhāṣya, the Mahābhārata and the Bharhut stūpa, the railing of which was constructed during this period abundantly indicate that the period enjoyed the religious peace and tolerance.

The Śuṅga period enjoys the distinction of freeing art from royal tutelage. The Mauryan art was mostly patronised by the monarchs. It found expression in palaces and pillars but during the Śuṅga period art gave expression to popular ideas. The Stūpas at Bharhut Bodh-Gayā and Sāñchī contain very little that is royal but much that is popular and belong to the life outside the course. The Śuṅga terracotta also treats with great abundance the popular themes. All this proves that the Sunga period has its own distinctive character.