

## CHAPTER 1

# WHAT, WHERE, HOW AND WHEN?

### Rasheeda's question

Rasheeda sat reading the newspaper. Suddenly, her eyes fell on a small headline: "One Hundred Years Ago." How, she wondered, could anyone know what had happened so many years ago?



### Finding out what happened

*Yesterday:* you could listen to the radio, watch television, read a newspaper.

*Last year:* ask somebody who remembers.

*But what about long, long ago?* Let us see how it can be done.

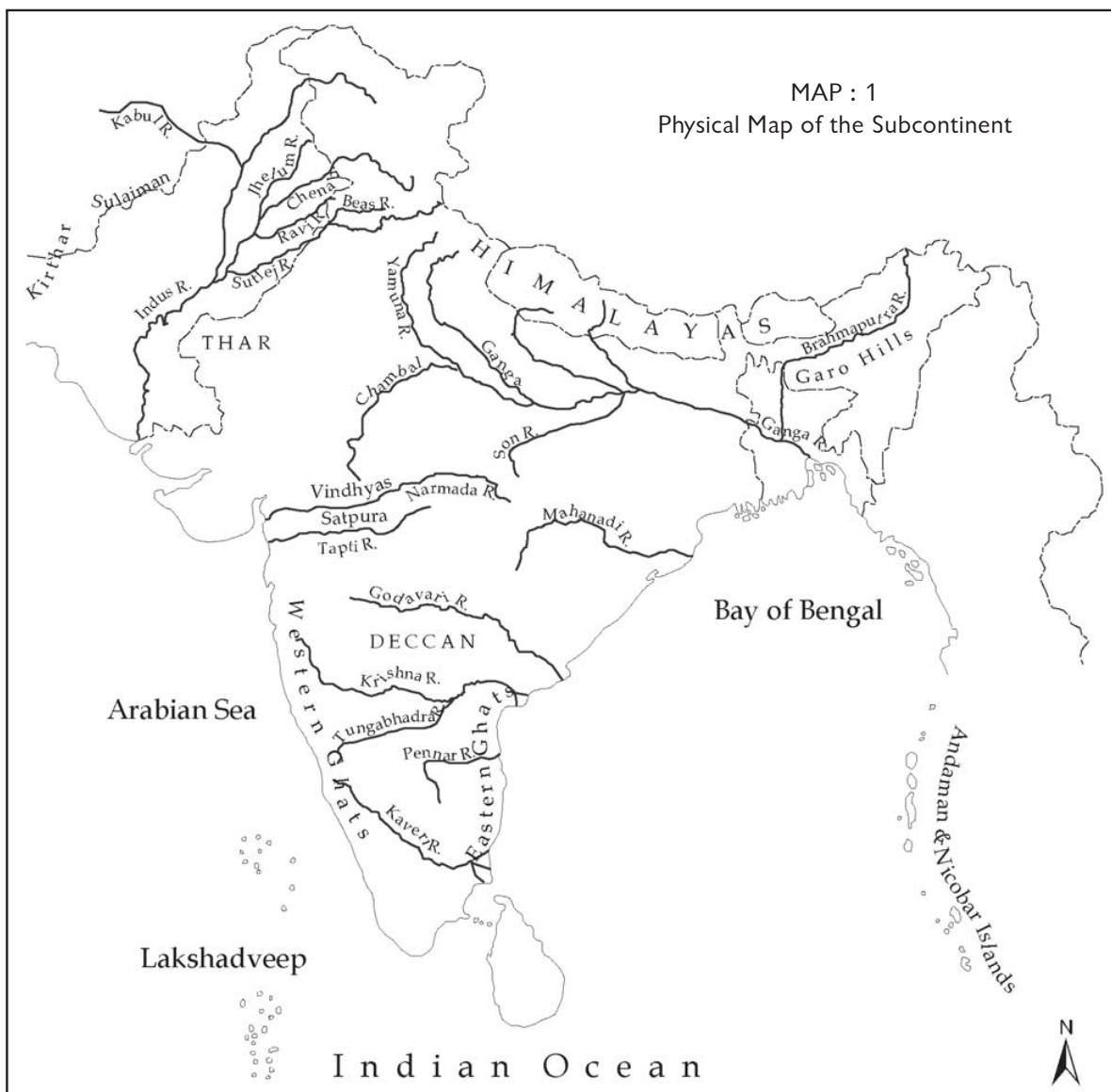
### What can we know about the past?

There are several things we can find out — what people ate, the kinds of clothes they wore, the houses in which they lived. We can find out about the lives of hunters, herders, farmers, rulers, merchants, priests, crafts persons, artists, musicians, and scientists. We can also find out about the games children played, the stories they heard, the plays they saw, the songs they sang.

### Where did people live?

Find the river Narmada on Map 1 (page 2). People have lived along the banks of this river for several hundred thousand years. Some of the earliest people who lived here were skilled *gatherers*, — that is, people who gathered their food. They knew about the vast wealth of plants in the surrounding forests, and collected roots, fruits and other forest produce for their food. They also *hunted* animals.

Now find the Sulaiman and Kirthar hills to the northwest. Some of the areas where women and men first began to *grow crops* such as wheat and barley about 8000 years ago are located here. People also began *rearing animals* like sheep, goat, and cattle, and lived in *villages*. Locate the Garo hills to the north-east and the Vindhya in central India. These were some of the other areas where



agriculture developed. The places where rice was first grown are to the north of the Vindhya range.

Trace the river Indus and its tributaries (tributaries are smaller rivers that flow into a larger river). About 4700 years ago, some of the earliest cities flourished on the banks of these rivers. Later, about 2500 years ago, cities developed on the banks of the Ganga and its tributaries, and along the seacoasts.

**Locate the Ganga and its tributary called the Son.** In ancient times the area along these rivers to the south of the Ganga was known as Magadha. Its rulers were very powerful, and set up a *large kingdom*. Kingdoms were set up in other parts of the country as well.

Throughout, people travelled from one part of the subcontinent to another. The hills and high mountains including the Himalayas, deserts, rivers and seas made journeys dangerous at times, but never impossible. So, men and women moved in search of livelihood, as also to escape from natural disasters like floods or droughts. Sometimes men marched in armies, conquering others' lands. Besides, merchants travelled with caravans or ships, carrying valuable goods from place to place. And religious teachers walked from village to village, town to town, stopping to offer instruction and advice on the way. Finally, some people perhaps travelled driven by a spirit of adventure, wanting to discover new and exciting places. All these led to the sharing of ideas between people.

#### **Why do people travel nowadays?**

Look at Map 1 once more. Hills, mountains and seas form the natural frontiers of the subcontinent. While it was difficult to cross these frontiers, those who wanted could and did scale the mountains and cross the seas. People from across the frontiers also came into the subcontinent and settled here.

Facing Page : This is a map of South Asia (including the present countries of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka) and the neighbouring countries of Afghanistan, Iran, China and Myanmar. South Asia is often called a subcontinent because although it is smaller than a continent, it is very large, and is separated from the rest of Asia by seas, hills and mountains.

These movements of people enriched our cultural traditions. People have shared new ways of carving stone, composing music, and even cooking food over several hundreds of years.

### Names of the land

Two of the words we often use for our country are India and Bharat. The word India comes from the Indus, called Sindhu in Sanskrit. **Find Iran and Greece in your atlas.** The Iranians and the Greeks who came through the northwest about 2500 years ago and were familiar with the Indus, called it the Hindus or the Indos, and the land to the east of the river was called India. The name Bharata was used for a group of people who lived in the northwest, and who are mentioned in the Rigveda, the earliest composition in Sanskrit (dated to about 3500 years ago). Later it was used for the country.

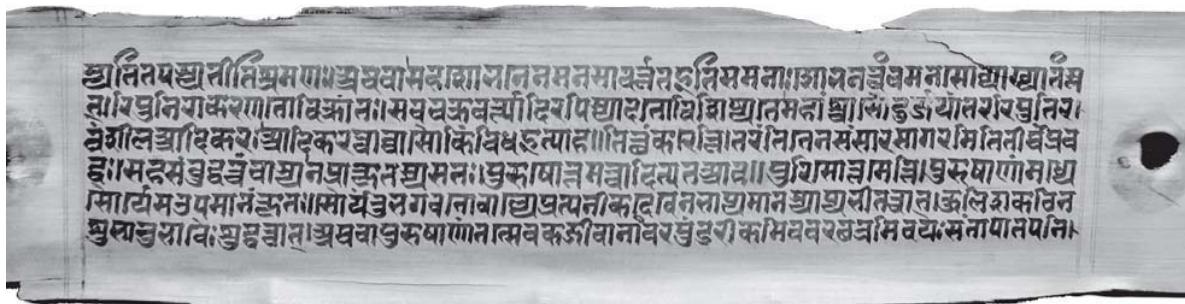
### Finding out about the past

A page from a palm leaf manuscript.

This manuscript was written about a thousand years ago. The palm leaves were cut into pages and tied together to make books. To see a birch bark manuscript, turn to page 45.

There are several ways of finding out about the past. One is to search for and read books that were written long ago. These are called *manuscripts*, because they were written by hand (this comes from the Latin word ‘*manu*’, meaning hand). These were usually written on palm leaf, or on the specially prepared bark of a tree known as the birch, which grows in the Himalayas.

Over the years, many manuscripts were eaten away by insects, some were destroyed, but many



have survived, often preserved in temples and monasteries. These books dealt with all kinds of subjects: religious beliefs and practices, the lives of kings, medicine and science. Besides, there were epics, poems, plays. Many of these were written in Sanskrit, others were in Prakrit (languages used by ordinary people) and Tamil.

We can also study *inscriptions*. These are writings on relatively hard surfaces such as stone or metal. Sometimes, kings got their orders inscribed so that people could see, read and obey them. There are other kinds of inscriptions as well, where men and women (including kings and queens) recorded what they did. For example, kings often kept records of victories in battle.

Can you think of the advantages of writing on a hard surface? And what could have been the difficulties?

There were many other things that were made and used in the past. Those who study these objects are called *archaeologists*. They study the remains of buildings made of stone and brick, paintings and sculpture. They also explore and *excavate* (dig under the surface of the earth) to find tools, weapons, pots, pans, ornaments and coins. Some of these objects may be made of stone, others of bone, baked clay or metal. Objects that are made of hard, imperishable substances usually survive for a long time.



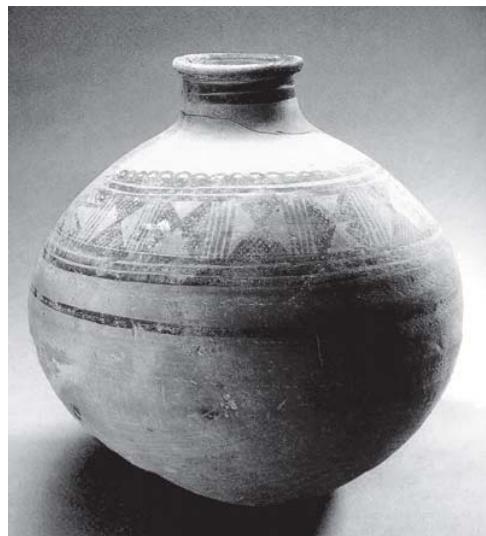
An old inscription. This inscription dates to about 2250 years ago, and was found in Kandahar, present-day Afghanistan. It was written on the orders of a ruler named Ashoka. You will read about him in Chapter 8. When we write anything, we use a script. Scripts consist of letters or signs. When we read what is written, or speak, we use a language. This inscription was written in two different scripts and languages, Greek (top) and Aramaic (below), which were used in this area.

Left : A pot from an old city.

Pots like these were used about 4700 years ago.

Right : An old silver coin. Coins such as this one were in use from about 2500 years ago.

*In what ways is the coin different from the ones we use today?*



Archaeologists also look for bones — of animals, birds, and fish — to find out what people ate in the past. Plant remains survive far more rarely — if seeds of grain or pieces of wood have been burnt, they survive in a charred form. **Do you think cloth is found frequently by archaeologists?**

*Historians*, that is, scholars who study the past, often use the word *source* to refer to the information found from manuscripts, inscriptions and archaeology. Once sources are found, learning about the past becomes an adventure, as we reconstruct it bit by bit. So historians and archaeologists are like detectives, who use all these sources like clues to find out about our pasts.

### One past or many?

Did you notice the title of this book, *Our Pasts*? We have used the word ‘pasts’ in plural to draw attention to the fact that the past was *different* for different groups of people. For example, the lives of herders or farmers were different from those of kings and queens, the lives of merchants were different from those of crafts persons, and so on. Also, as is true even today, people followed different practices and customs in different parts

of the country. For example, today most people living in the Andaman Islands get their own food by fishing, hunting, and collecting forest produce. By contrast, most people living in cities depend on others for supplies of food. Differences such as these existed in the past as well.

Besides, there is another kind of difference. We know a great deal about kings and the battles they fought because they kept records of their victories. Generally, ordinary people such as hunters, fishing folk, gatherers, farmers or herders did not keep records of what they did. While archaeology helps us to find out about their lives, there is much that remains unknown.

### **What do dates mean?**

If somebody asks you the date, you will probably mention the day, month and year, 2000 and something. These years are counted from the date generally assigned to the birth of Jesus Christ, the founder of Christianity. So, 2000 means 2000 years after the birth of Christ. All dates before the birth of Christ are counted backwards and usually have the letters BC (Before Christ) added on. In this book, we will refer to dates going back from the present, using 2000 as our starting point.

## Letters with dates

BC, we have seen stands for 'Before Christ.'

You will sometimes find AD before dates. This stands for two Latin words, 'Anno Domini', meaning 'in the year of the Lord' (i.e. Christ). So 2005 can also be written as AD 2005.

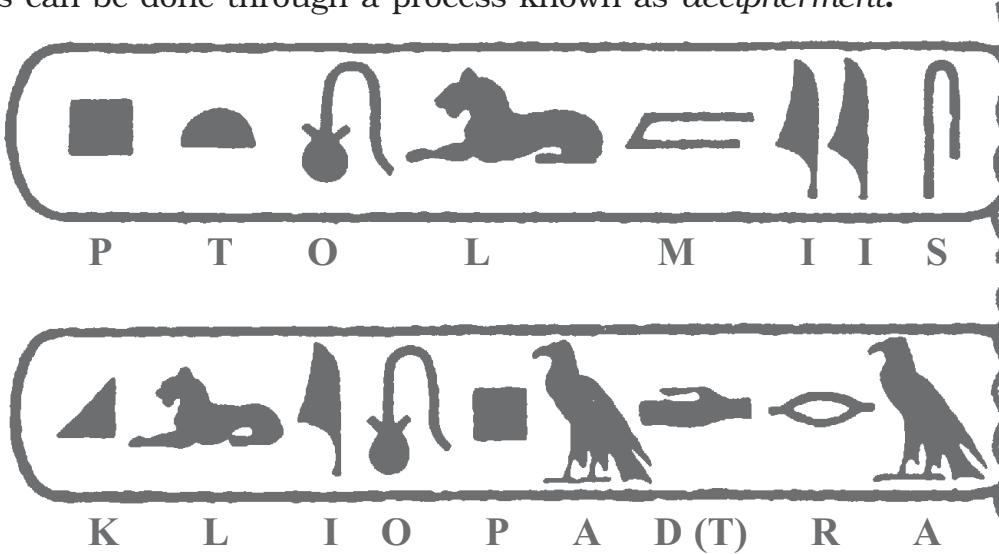
Sometimes CE is used instead of AD and BCE instead of BC. The letters CE stand for 'Common Era' and BCE for 'Before Common Era'. We use these terms because the Christian Era is now used in most countries of the world. In India we began using this form of dating from about two hundred years ago.

And sometimes, the letters BP meaning 'Before Present' are used.

Find two dates mentioned on page 3. Which set of letters would you use for them?

## Elsewhere

We have seen that inscriptions are written on hard surfaces. Many of these were written several hundreds of years ago. All inscriptions contain both scripts and languages. Languages which were used, as well as scripts, have changed over time. So how do scholars understand what was written? This can be done through a process known as *decipherment*.



One of the most famous stories of decipherment comes from Egypt, a country in north Africa where there were kings and queens about 5000 years ago.

Rosetta is a town on the north coast of Egypt, and here an inscribed stone was found, which contained inscriptions in three different languages and scripts (Greek, and two forms of Egyptian). Scholars who could read Greek figured out that the names of kings and queens were enclosed in a little frame, called a cartouche. They then placed the Greek and the Egyptian signs side by side, and identified the sounds for which the Egyptian letters stood. As you can see, a lion stood for L, and a bird for A. Once they knew what the letters stood for, they could read other inscriptions as well.

### Imagine

You have to interview an archaeologist. Prepare a list of five questions that you would like to ask her/him.

### Let's recall



1. Match the following:

Narmada Valley	The first big kingdom
Magadha	Hunting and gathering
Garo hills	Cities about 2500 years ago
Indus and its tributaries	Early agriculture
Ganga Valley	The first cities

2. List one major difference between manuscripts and inscriptions.

**KEYWORDS**  
travelling  
manuscript  
inscription  
archaeology  
historian  
source  
decipherment

### Let's discuss



3. Return to Rasheeda's question. Can you think of some answers to it?

## SOME IMPORTANT DATES

- ▶ the beginning of agriculture (8000 years ago)
- ▶ the first cities on the Indus (4700 years ago)
- ▶ cities in the Ganga valley, a big kingdom in Magadha (2500 years ago)
- ▶ the present (about 2000 AD/CE)

4. Make a list of all the objects that archaeologists may find. Which of these could be made of stone?
5. Why do you think ordinary men and women did not generally keep records of what they did?
6. Describe at least two ways in which you think the lives of kings would have been different from those of farmers.

## Let's do



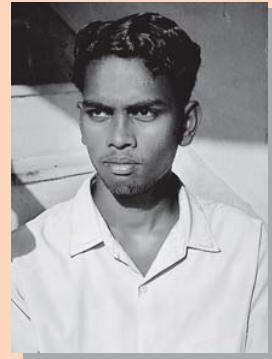
7. Find the word *crafts persons* on page 1. List at least five different crafts that you know about today. Are the crafts persons — (a) men (b) women (c) both men and women?
8. What were the subjects on which books were written in the past? Which of these would you like to read?

## CHAPTER 2

# ON THE TRAIL OF THE EARLIEST PEOPLE

### Tushar's train journey

Tushar was going from Delhi to Chennai for his cousin's wedding. They were travelling by train and he had managed to squeeze into the window seat, his nose glued to the glass pane. As he watched trees and houses fly past, his uncle tapped his shoulder and said: "Do you know that trains were first used about 150 years ago, and that people began using buses a few decades later?" Tushar wondered, when people couldn't travel quickly from one place to another, did they spend their entire lives wherever they were born? Not quite.



### The earliest people: why were they on the move?

We know about people who lived in the subcontinent as early as two million years ago. Today, we describe them as *hunter-gatherers*. The name comes from the way in which they got their food. Generally, they hunted wild animals, caught fish and birds, gathered fruits, roots, nuts, seeds, leaves, stalks and eggs. The immense variety of plants in a tropical land like ours meant that gathering plant produce was an extremely important means of obtaining food.

None of these things was easy to do. There are several animals that run faster than us, many that are stronger. To hunt animals or catch fish and birds, people need to be alert, quick, and have lots of presence of mind. To collect plant produce, you need to find out which plants or parts of plants are edible, that is, can be eaten, as many can be poisonous. You also need to find out about the seasons when the fruits ripen.

List the skills and knowledge that the children of these communities had.

**Do you have these skills and knowledge?**

There are at least four reasons why hunter-gatherers moved from place to place.

First, if they had stayed at one place for a long time, they would have eaten up all the available plant and animal resources. Therefore, they would have had to go elsewhere in search of food.

Second, animals move from place to place — either in search of smaller prey, or, in the case of deer and wild cattle, in search of grass and leaves. That is why those who hunted them had to follow their movements.

Third, plants and trees bear fruit in different seasons. So, people may have moved from season to season in search of different kinds of plants.

Fourth, people, plants and animals need water to survive. Water is found in lakes, streams and rivers. While many rivers and lakes are perennial (with water throughout the year) others are seasonal. People living on their banks would have had to go in search of water during the dry seasons (winter and summer). Besides, people may have travelled to meet their friends and relatives. Remember, they travelled on foot.

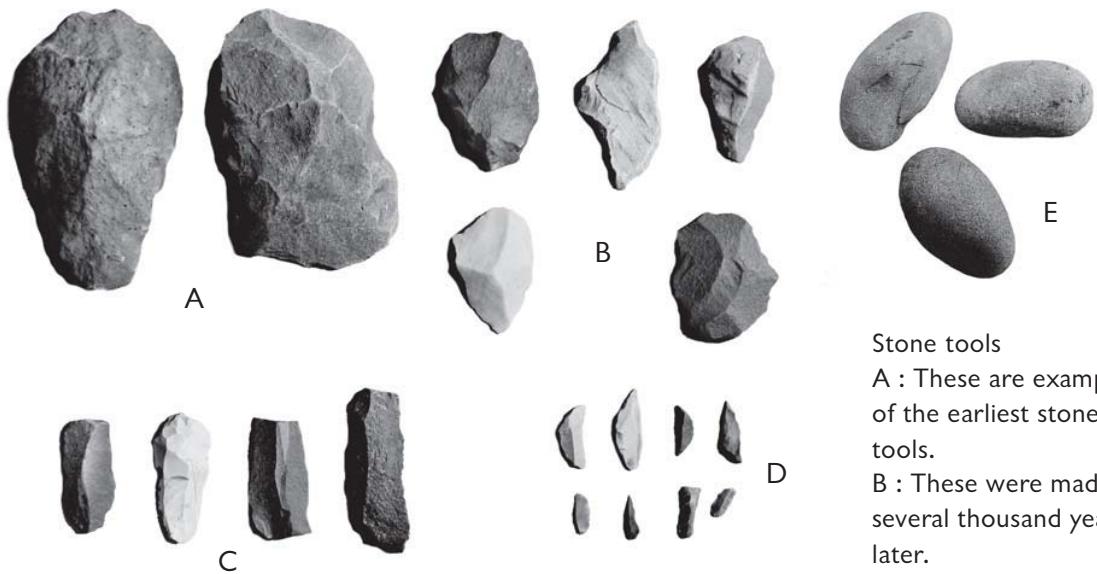
**How do you come to school?**

**How long would it take you to walk from your home to school?**

**How long would it take you if you took a bus or rode a bicycle?**

### **How do we know about these people?**

Archaeologists have found some of the things hunter-gatherers made and used. It is likely that people made and used tools of stone, wood and bone, of which stone tools have survived best.



#### Stone tools

A : These are examples of the earliest stone tools.

B : These were made several thousand years later.

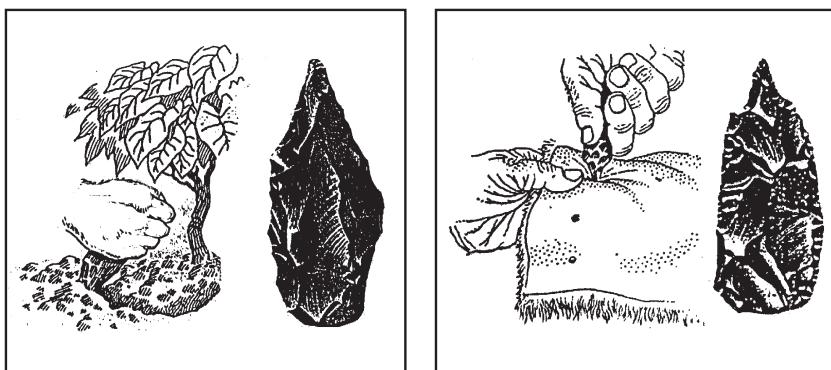
C : These were made later still.

D : These were made about 10,000 years ago.

E : These are natural pebbles.

Some uses of stone tools are given below. Make a list of what these tools were used for and try and decide which of these tasks could be performed using a natural pebble. Give reasons for your answer.

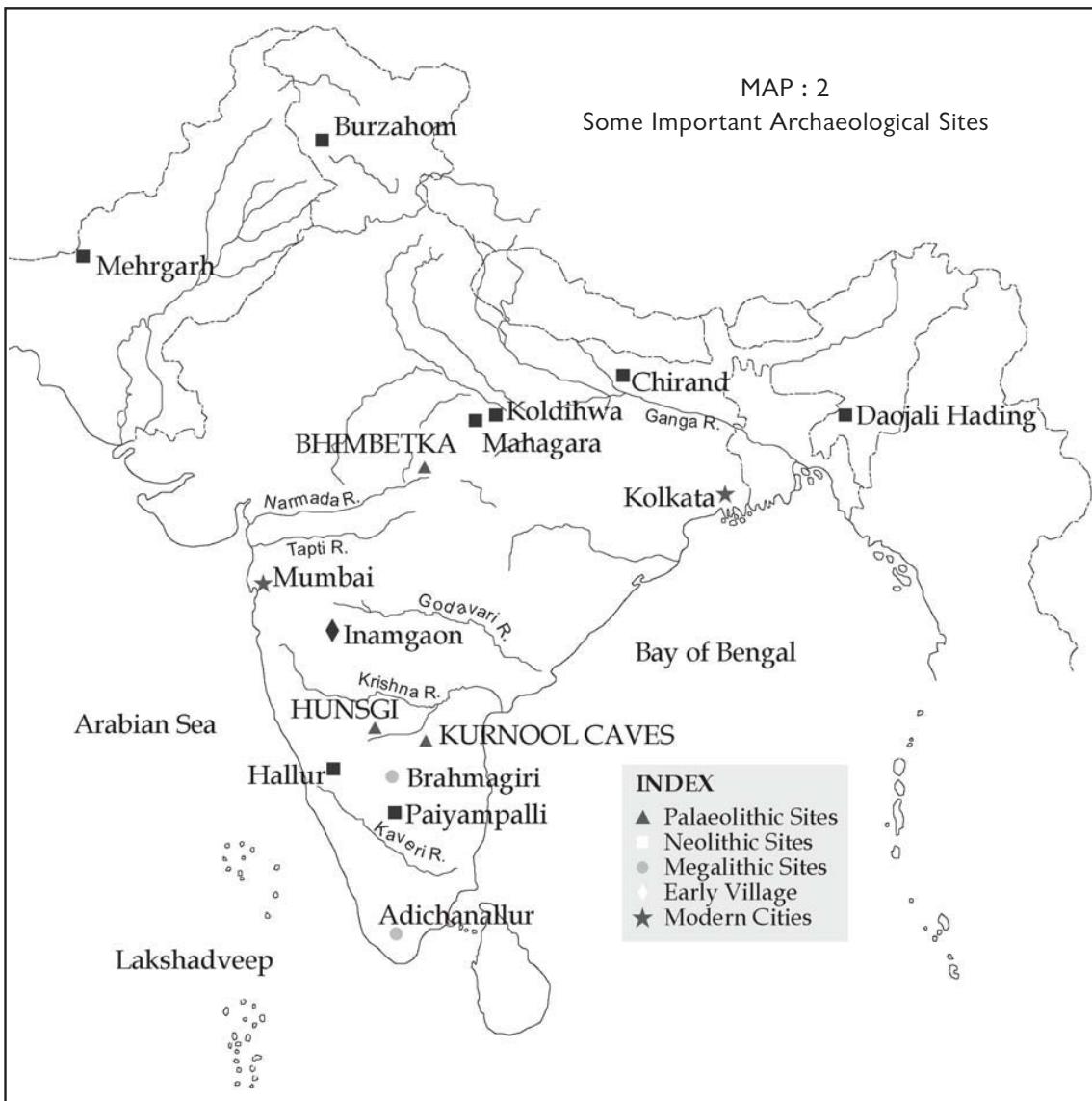
Some of these stone tools were used to cut meat and bone, scrape bark (from trees) and hides (animal skins), chop fruit and roots. Some may have been attached to handles of bone or wood, to make spears and arrows for hunting. Other tools were used to chop wood, which was used as firewood. Wood was also used to make huts and tools.



Stone tools may also have been used for :  
 Left : Digging the ground to collect edible roots.  
 Right : Stitching clothes made out of animal skin.

## Choosing a place to live in

Look at Map 2 below. All the places marked with red triangles are *sites* from which archaeologists have found evidence of hunter-gatherers. (Hunter-gatherers lived in many more places. Only some are shown on the map). Many sites were located near sources of water, such as rivers and lakes.



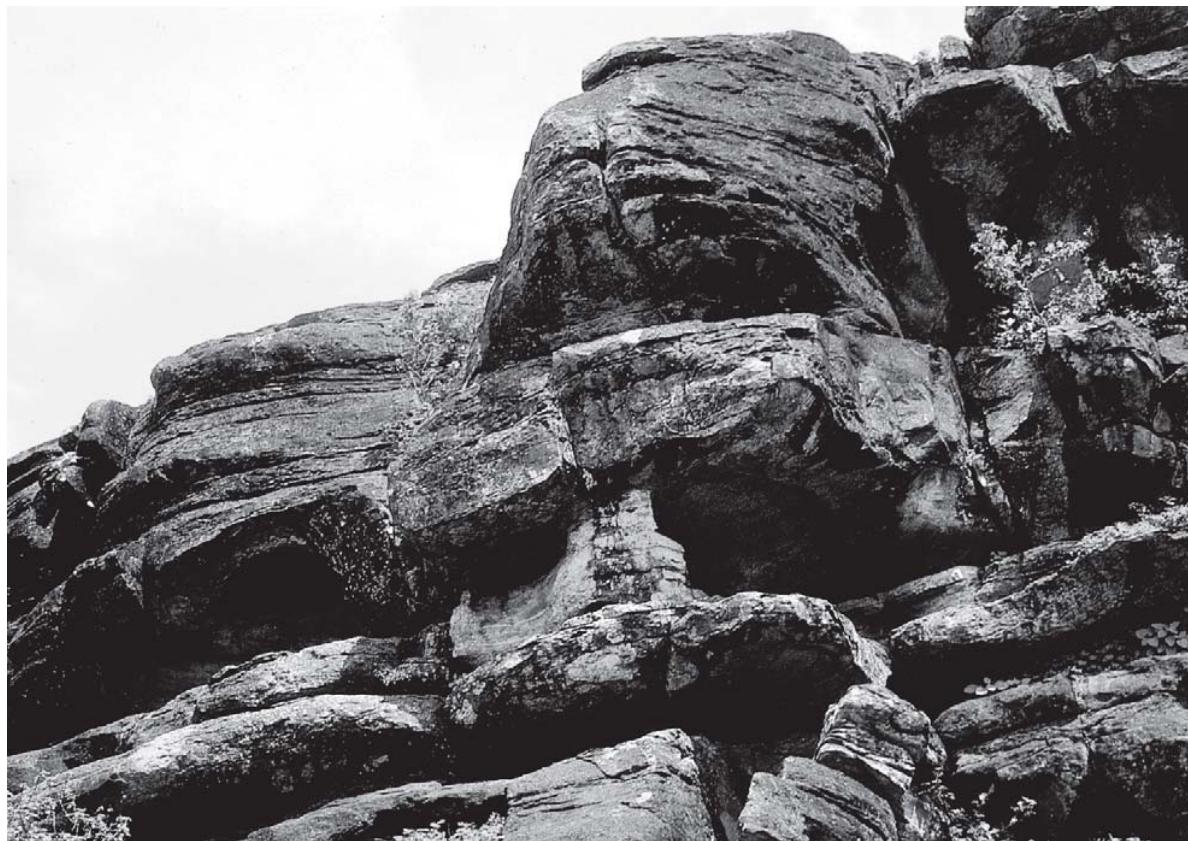
As stone tools were important, people tried to find places where good quality stone was easily available. Places where stone was found and where people made tools are known as *factory* sites.

How do we know where these factories were? Usually, we find blocks of stone, tools that were made and perhaps discarded because they were not perfect, and chips of waste stone left behind at these sites. Sometimes, people lived here for longer spells of time. These sites are called *habitation-cum-factory* sites.

If you had to describe the place you live in, which of the terms would you choose?

- (a) habitation
- (b) factory
- (c) habitation-cum-factory
- (d) any other

Bhimbetka (in present-day Madhya Pradesh). Some sites, known as habitation sites, are places where people lived. These include caves and rock shelters such as the one shown here. People chose these natural caves because they provided shelter from the rain, heat and wind. Natural caves and rock shelters are found in the Vindhyas and the Deccan plateau. These rock shelters are close to the Narmada valley. Can you think of why people chose to live here?

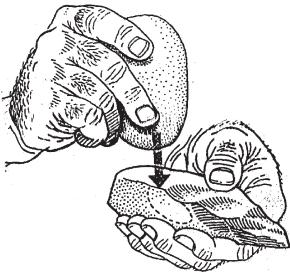


## Sites

are places where the remains of things (tools, pots, buildings etc.) were found. These were made, used and left behind by people. These may be found on the surface of the earth, buried under the earth, or sometimes even under water. You will learn more about different sites in later chapters.

## Making stone tools

Stone tools were probably made using two different techniques:



How stone tools were made : one of the two techniques is shown in the illustration.

*Try and identify it.*

1. The first is called stone on stone. Here, the pebble from which the tool was to be made (also called the core) was held in one hand. Another stone, which was used as a hammer was held in the other hand. The second stone was used to strike off flakes from the first, till the required shape was obtained.

2. Pressure flaking: Here the core was placed on a firm surface. The hammer stone was used on a piece of bone or stone that was placed on the core, to remove flakes that could be shaped into tools.

## Finding out about fire

Find the Kurnool caves on Map 2 (page 14). Traces of ash have been found here. This suggests that people were familiar with the use of fire. Fire could have been used for many things: as a source of light, to cook meat, and to scare away animals.  
**What do we use fire for today?**

## A changing environment

Around 12,000 years ago, there were major changes in the climate of the world, with a shift to relatively warm conditions. In many areas, this led to the development of grasslands. This in turn

led to an increase in the number of deer, antelope, goat, sheep and cattle, i.e. animals that survived on grass.

Those who hunted these animals now followed them, learning about their food habits and their breeding seasons. It is likely that this helped people to start thinking about herding and rearing these animals themselves. Fishing also became important.

This was also a time when several grain bearing grasses, including wheat, barley and rice grew naturally in different parts of the subcontinent. Men, women and children probably collected these grains as food, and learnt where they grew, and when they ripened. This may have led them to think about growing plants on their own.

### Names and dates

Archaeologists have given lengthy names for the time that we are studying. They call the earliest period the *Palaeolithic*. This comes from two Greek words, ‘*palaeo*’, meaning old, and ‘*lithos*’, meaning stone. The name points to the importance of finds of stone tools. The Palaeolithic period extends from 2 million years ago to about 12,000 years ago. This long stretch of time is divided into the Lower, Middle and Upper Palaeolithic. *This long span of time covers 99% of human history.*

The period when we find environmental changes, beginning about 12,000 years ago till about 10,000 years ago is called the *Mesolithic* (middle stone). Stone tools found during this period are generally tiny, and are called *microliths*. Microliths were probably stuck on to handles of bone or wood to make tools such as saws and sickles. At the same time, older varieties of tools continued to be in use.

**Look at the illustration on page 13. Do you notice any difference in the tools belonging to these periods?**

The next stage, from about 10,000 years ago, is known as the *Neolithic*. You will be learning about the Neolithic in Chapter 3.

**What do you think the term Neolithic means?**

We have also mentioned the name of some places. You will find the names of many more places in later chapters. Very often, we use present-day names of the places where people lived in the past, because we do not know what they called them.

## Rock paintings and what they tell us



A painting from a rock shelter.

Describe the painting.

Many of the caves in which these early people lived have paintings on the walls. Some of the best examples are from Madhya Pradesh and southern Uttar Pradesh. These paintings show wild animals, drawn with great accuracy and skill.

### Who did what?

We have seen that the earliest people hunted, gathered plant produce, made stone tools, and painted on cave walls. Is there any way of finding out whether women hunted, or men made stone tools, whether women painted or men gathered fruits and nuts? At present, we do not really know. However, there are at least two possibilities. It is likely that both men and women may have done many of these things together. It is also possible that some tasks were done only by women and others only by men. And again, there could have been different practices in different parts of the subcontinent.

### Ostriches in India!

Ostriches were found in India during the Palaeolithic period. Large quantities of ostrich egg shells were found at Patne in Maharashtra. Designs were engraved on some pieces, while beads were also made out of them.

What do you think the beads could have been used for?

Where do we find ostriches today?

### A closer look – Hunsgi

Find Hunsgi on Map 2 (page 14). A number of early Palaeolithic sites were found here. At some sites, a large number of tools, used for all sorts of activities, were found. These were probably

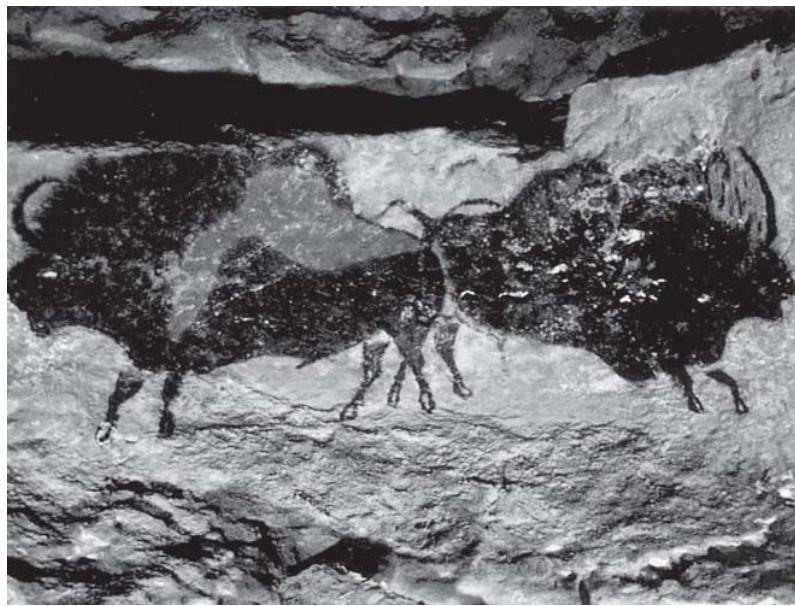
habitation-cum factory sites. In some of the other, smaller sites, there is evidence to suggest that tools were made. Some of the sites were close to springs. Most tools were made from limestone, which was locally available.

Can you think of a term for the second type of sites?

### Elsewhere

- Find France in your atlas. The painting below is from a cave in France. This site was discovered by four school children more than a hundred years ago. Paintings like this were made between 20,000 and 10,000 years ago. Many of these were of animals, such as wild horses, aurochs (an older, wild form of cattle), bison, woolly rhinoceros, reindeer and bear, painted in bright colours.
- These colours were made from minerals like ochre or iron ore, and charcoal. It is possible that these paintings were done on ceremonial occasions. Or perhaps they were made for special rituals, performed by hunters before they went in search of prey?

Can you think of any other reasons?



**KEYWORDS**

hunter-gatherer  
site  
habitation  
factory  
Palaeolithic  
Mesolithic  
microliths

## Imagine

You live in a rock shelter like the one shown on page 15 about 12,000 years ago. Your uncle is painting one of the inner walls of the cave and you want to help him. Will you mix the colours, draw the lines, fill in the colours? What are the stories he might tell you?

## Let's recall



1. Complete the sentences:
  - (a) Hunter-gatherers chose to live in caves and rock shelters because \_\_\_\_\_.
  - (b) Grasslands developed around \_\_\_\_\_ years ago.
  - (c) Early people painted on the \_\_\_\_\_ of caves.
  - (d) In Hunsgi, tools were made of \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Look at the present-day political map of the subcontinent on page 136. Find out the states where Bhimbetka, Hunsgi and Kurnool are located. Would Tushar's train have passed near any of these sites?

## Let's discuss



3. Why did the hunter-gatherers travel from place to place? In what ways are these similar to/different from the reasons for which we travel today?
4. What tools would you use today for cutting fruit? What would they be made of?
5. List three ways in which hunter-gatherers used fire (see page 16). Would you use fire for any of these purposes today?

## Let's do



### SOME IMPORTANT DATES

6. Make two columns in your notebook. In the left hand column, list the foods hunter-gatherers ate (see page 11). In the right hand column, list some of the foods you eat. Do you notice any similarities/differences?
7. If you had a natural pebble like the ones shown on page 13, what would you use it for?
8. List two tasks that are performed by both men and women at present. List another two that are performed only by women, and two that are performed only by men. Compare your list with that of any two of your classmates. Do you notice any similarities/differences in your lists?

- ▶ the Mesolithic period (12,000-10,000 years ago)
- ▶ the beginning of the Neolithic (10,000 years ago)

## CHAPTER 3

# FROM GATHERING TO GROWING FOOD



### Neinuo's lunch

Neinuo was eating her favourite food — boiled rice, squash, pumpkins, beans and meat. Her grandmother had grown the squash, pumpkin and beans in the little garden plot at the back of her house. She remembered the food had been so different when she had been to Madhya Pradesh as part of a school trip. It was hot and spicy. Why was that so?

### Varieties of foods

Today, most of our food such as fruit, vegetables, grain, milk and meat comes from plants that are grown and animals that are reared. Different plants grow in different conditions — rice, for example, requires more water than wheat and barley. This explains why farmers grow some crops in some areas and not in other areas. Different animals too, prefer different environments — for instance, sheep and goat can survive more easily than cattle in dry, hilly environments. But, as you saw in Chapter 2, women and men did not always produce their own food.

### The beginnings of farming and herding

We have seen in Chapter 2 that the climate of the world was changing, and so were plants and animals that people used as food. Men, women and children probably observed several things: the places where edible plants were found, how seeds broke off stalks, fell on the ground, and new plants sprouted from them. Perhaps they began looking after plants — protecting them from birds and animals so that they could grow and the seeds could ripen. In this way people became farmers.

Women, men and children could also attract and then tame animals by leaving food for them near their shelters. The first animal to be tamed was the wild ancestor of the dog. Later, people encouraged animals that were relatively gentle to come near the camps where they lived. These animals such as sheep, goat, cattle and also the pig lived in herds, and most of them ate grass. Often, people protected these animals from attacks by other wild animals. This is how they became herders.

Can you think of any reasons why the dog was perhaps the first animal to be tamed?

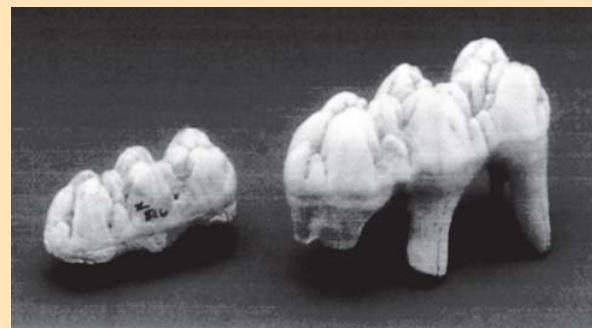
### Domestication

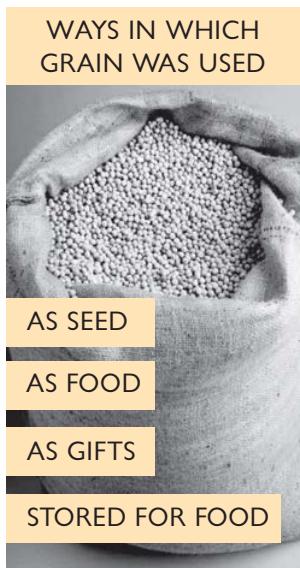
is the name given to the process in which people grow plants and look after animals. Very often, plants and animals that are tended by people become different from wild plants and animals. This is because people *select* plants and animals for domestication. For example, they select those plants and animals that are not prone to disease. They also select plants that yield large-size grain, and have strong stalks, capable of bearing the weight of the ripe grain. Seeds from selected plants are preserved and sown to ensure that new plants (and seeds) will have the same qualities.

Amongst animals, those that are relatively gentle are selected for breeding. As a result, gradually, domesticated animals and plants become different from wild animals and plants. For example, the teeth and horns of wild animals are usually much larger than those of domesticated animals.

Look at these two sets of teeth. Which do you think belongs to a wild pig and which to a domesticated animal?

Domestication was a gradual process that took place in many parts of the world. It began about 12,000 years ago. Virtually all the plant and animal produce that we use as food today is a result of domestication. Some of the earliest plants to be domesticated were wheat and barley. The earliest domesticated animals include sheep and goat.





## A new way of life

If you plant a seed, you will notice that it takes some time to grow. This may be for several days, weeks, months and in some cases years. When people began growing plants, it meant that they had to stay in the same place for a long time looking after the plants, watering, weeding, driving away animals and birds — till the grain ripened. And then, the grain had to be used carefully.

As grain had to be stored for both food and seed, people had to think of ways of storing it. In many areas, they began making large clay pots, or wove baskets, or dug pits into the ground. **Do you think hunter-gatherers would have made and used pots? Give reasons for your answer.**

## 'Storing' animals

Animals multiply naturally. Besides, if they are looked after carefully, they provide milk, which is an important source of food, and meat, whenever required. In other words, animals that are reared can be used as a 'store' of food.

**Apart from food, what are the other things that could have been obtained from animals?**

**What are animals used for today?**

## Finding out about the first farmers and herders

**Turn to Map 2 (page 14).** You will notice a number of blue squares. Each marks a site from where archaeologists have found evidence of early farmers and herders. These are found all over the subcontinent. Some of the most important ones are in the north-west, in present-day Kashmir, and in east and south India.

To find out whether these sites were settlements of farmers and herders, scientists study evidence

of plants and animal bones. One of the most exciting finds includes remains of burnt grain. (These may have been burnt accidentally or on purpose). Scientists can identify these grains, and so we know that a number of crops were grown in different parts of the subcontinent. They can also identify the bones of different animals.

Look at the table below to see where evidence of grain and bones of domesticated animals have been found.

<b>Grain and Bones</b>	<b>Sites</b>
Wheat, barley, sheep, goat, cattle	Mehrgarh (in present day-Pakistan)
Rice, fragmentary animal bones	Koldihwa (in present-day Uttar Pradesh)
Rice, cattle (hoof marks on clay surface)	Mahagara (in present-day Uttar Pradesh)
Wheat and lentil	Gufkral (in present-day Kashmir)
Wheat and lentil, dog, cattle, sheep, goat, buffalo,	Burzahom (in present-day Kashmir)
Wheat, green gram, barley, buffalo, ox	Chirand (in present-day Bihar)
Millet, cattle, sheep, goat, pig	Hallur (in present-day Andhra Pradesh)
Black gram, millet, cattle, sheep, pig	Paiyampalli (in present-day Andhra Pradesh)
These are just some of the sites from which grain and bones have been found.	

## Towards a settled life

Archaeologists have found traces of huts or houses at some sites. For instance, in Burzahom (in present-day Kashmir) people built pit-houses, which were dug into the ground, with steps leading into them. These may have provided shelter in cold weather. Archaeologists have also found cooking hearths both inside and outside the huts, which suggests that, depending on the weather, people could cook food either indoors or outdoors.

### Draw a pit house.

Stone tools have been found from many sites as well. Many of these are different from the earlier Palaeolithic tools and that is why they are called *Neolithic*. These include tools that were polished to give a fine cutting edge, and mortars and pestles used for grinding grain and other plant produce. Mortars and pestles are used for grinding grain even today, several thousand years later. At the same time, tools of the Palaeolithic types continued to be made and used, and remember, some tools were also made of bone.



New stone tools.  
Compare these with the  
tools shown on page 13  
(Chapter 2).  
Can you see any  
similarities or  
differences?

Many kinds of earthen pots have also been found. These were sometimes decorated, and were used for storing things. People began using pots

for cooking food, especially grains like rice, wheat and lentils that now became an important part of the diet. Besides, they began weaving cloth, using different kinds of materials, for example cotton, that could now be grown.

Did things change everywhere and all at once? Not quite. In many areas, men and women still continued to hunt and gather food, and elsewhere people adopted farming and herding slowly, over several thousand years. Besides, in some cases people tried to combine these activities, doing different things during different seasons.



What do you think could have been stored in this jar?

## What about other customs and practices?

Archaeology does not tell us directly about these. Scholars have studied the lives of present-day farmers who practise simple agriculture. They have also studied the lives of herders. Many of these farmers and herders live in groups called *tribes*. Scholars find that they follow certain customs and practices that may have existed earlier as well.

### Tribes

Usually two to three generations live together in small settlements or *villages*. Most families are related to one another and groups of such families form a tribe.

- Members of a tribe follow occupations such as hunting, gathering, farming, herding and fishing. Usually, women do most of the agricultural work, including preparing the ground, sowing seeds, looking after the growing plants and harvesting grain. Children often look after plants, driving away animals and birds that might eat them. Women also thresh, husk, and grind grain. Men usually lead large herds of animals in search of pasture. Children often look after small flocks. The cleaning of animals and milking, is done by both men and women. Both women and men make pots, baskets, tools and huts. They also take part in singing, dancing and decorating their huts.

- Some men are regarded as leaders. They may be old and experienced, or young, brave warriors, or priests. Old women are respected for their wisdom and experience.
- Tribes have rich and unique cultural traditions, including their own language, music, stories and paintings. They also have their own gods and goddesses.
- What makes tribes different from many other societies you will be studying about is that land, forests, grasslands and water are regarded as the wealth of the entire tribe, and everybody shares and uses these together. There are no sharp differences between the rich and the poor.

Make a list of all the activities performed by men in tribal societies.  
What do women do?

Are there any activities that are done by both men and women?

### **A closer look — (a) Living and dying in Mehrgarh**

Find Mehrgarh on Map 2 (page 14). This site is located in a fertile plain, near the Bolan Pass, which is one of the most important routes into Iran. Mehrgarh was probably one of the places where women and men learnt to grow barley and wheat, and rear sheep and goats for the first time in this area. It is one of the earliest villages that we know about.

Archaeologists who excavated the site found evidence of many kinds of animal bones from the earliest levels. These included bones of wild animals such as the deer and pig. In later levels, they found more bones of sheep and goat, and in still later levels, cattle bones are most common, suggesting that this was the animal that was generally kept by the people.

#### **Village**

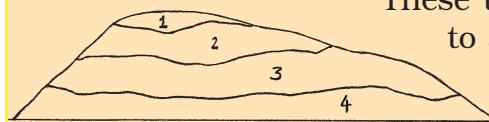
One of the distinctive features of a village is that most people who live there are engaged in food production.

## Earlier and later levels

When archaeologists are digging at an excavation site, how do they know which level is earlier and which is later?

Look at the illustration.

Suppose people first start living on flat land (layer 4). Over the years, the surface will gradually rise, because people discard waste material, and generally stay and rebuild houses in the same place. After hundreds of years, this leads to the formation of a mound. So, when this mound is dug up, what is found from the *upper* layers of the mound is generally from a *later* time than what is found from the *lower* layers of the mound, which are older.

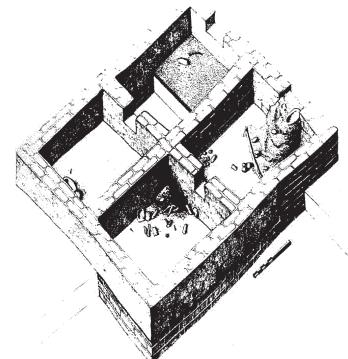


These upper and lower layers are often referred to as levels.

Look at layers 2 and 3. Which do you think is the earlier level?

Other finds at Mehrgarh include remains of square or rectangular houses. Each house had four or more compartments, some of which may have been used for storage.

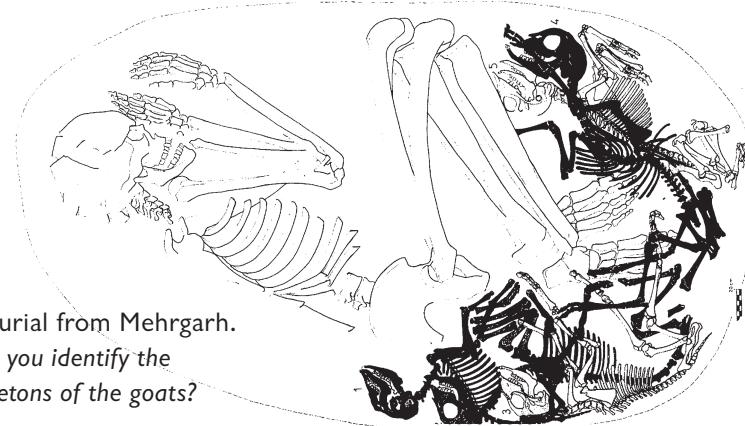
When people die, their relatives and friends generally pay respect to them. People look after them, perhaps in the belief that there is some form of life after death. Burial is one such arrangement. Several burial sites have been found at Mehrgarh. In one instance, the dead person was buried with goats, which were probably meant to serve as food in the next world.



A house in Mehrgarh.  
This is what a house in  
Mehrgarh may have  
looked like.

In what ways is this house  
similar to the one in which  
you live?

A burial from Mehrgarh.  
Can you identify the  
skeletons of the goats?



**KEYWORDS**  
domestication  
farmers  
herders  
Neolithic  
pots  
tribes  
village  
houses  
burials

## A closer look — (b) Daojali Hading

Find Daojali Hading on Map 2 (page 14). This is a site on the hills near the Brahmaputra Valley, close to routes leading into China and Myanmar. Here stone tools, including mortars and pestles, have been found. These indicate that people were probably growing grain and preparing food from it. Other finds include jadeite, a stone that may have been brought from China. Also common are finds of tools made of fossil wood (ancient wood that has hardened into stone), and pottery.

### Elsewhere

Find Turkey in your atlas. One of the most famous Neolithic sites, Catal Huyuk, was found in Turkey. Several things were brought from great distances — flint from Syria, cowries from the Red Sea, shells from the Mediterranean Sea — and used in the settlement. Remember, there were no carts — most things would have been carried on the backs of pack animals such as cattle or by people.

What do you think cowries and shells would have been used for?

### Imagine

You are in charge of a small plot of land and have to decide what food crops to grow. What are the plants you would choose? Where would you get the seeds from? How would you plant them? How would you look after your plants? And when would they be ready for harvesting?

## Let's recall



1. Why do people who grow crops have to stay in the same place for a long time?
2. Look at the table on page 25. If Neinuo wanted to eat rice, which are the places she should have visited?
3. Why do archaeologists think that many people who lived in Mehrgarh were hunters to start with and that herding became more important later?
4. State whether true or false:
  - (a) Millets have been found at Hallur.
  - (b) People in Burzahom lived in rectangular houses.
  - (c) Chirand is a site in Kashmir.
  - (d) Jadeite, found in Daojali Hading, may have been brought from China.

## SOME IMPORTANT DATES

- Beginnings of domestication (about 12,000 years ago)
- Beginning of settlement at Mehrgarh (about 8000 years ago)

## Let's discuss



5. List three ways in which the lives of farmers and herders would have been different from that of hunter-gatherers.
6. Make a list of all the animals mentioned in the table (page 25). For each one, describe what they may have been used for.

## Let's do

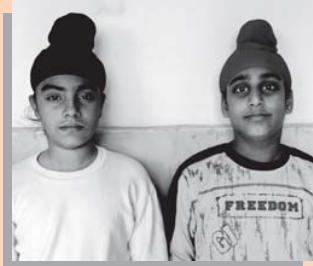


7. List the cereals that you eat.
8. Do you grow the cereals you have listed in answer no. 7? If yes, draw a chart to show the stages in growing them. If not, draw a chart to show how these cereals reach you from the farmers who grow them.

## CHAPTER 4

# IN THE EARLIEST CITIES

### Saving an old building



Jaspal and Harpreet were playing cricket in the lane outside their home when they noticed the people who were admiring the dilapidated old building that the children called the haunted house.

"Look at the architecture!" said one of the men.

"Have you seen the fine wood carving?" asked one of the women.

"We must write to the Minister so that she makes arrangements to repair and preserve this beautiful house." Why, they wondered, would anybody be interested in the old, run down house?

### The story of Harappa

Very often, old buildings have a story to tell. Nearly a hundred and fifty years ago, when railway lines were being laid down for the first time in the Punjab, engineers stumbled upon the site of Harappa in present-day Pakistan. To them, it seemed like a mound that was a rich source of ready made, high quality bricks. So they carried off thousands of bricks from the walls of the old buildings of the city to build railway lines. Many buildings were completely destroyed.

Then, about eighty years ago, archaeologists found the site, and realised that this was one of the oldest cities in the subcontinent. As this was the first city to be discovered, all other sites from where similar buildings (and other things) were found were described as Harappan. These cities developed about 4700 years ago.

Very often, old buildings are pulled down to make way for new construction. Do you think it is important to preserve old buildings?

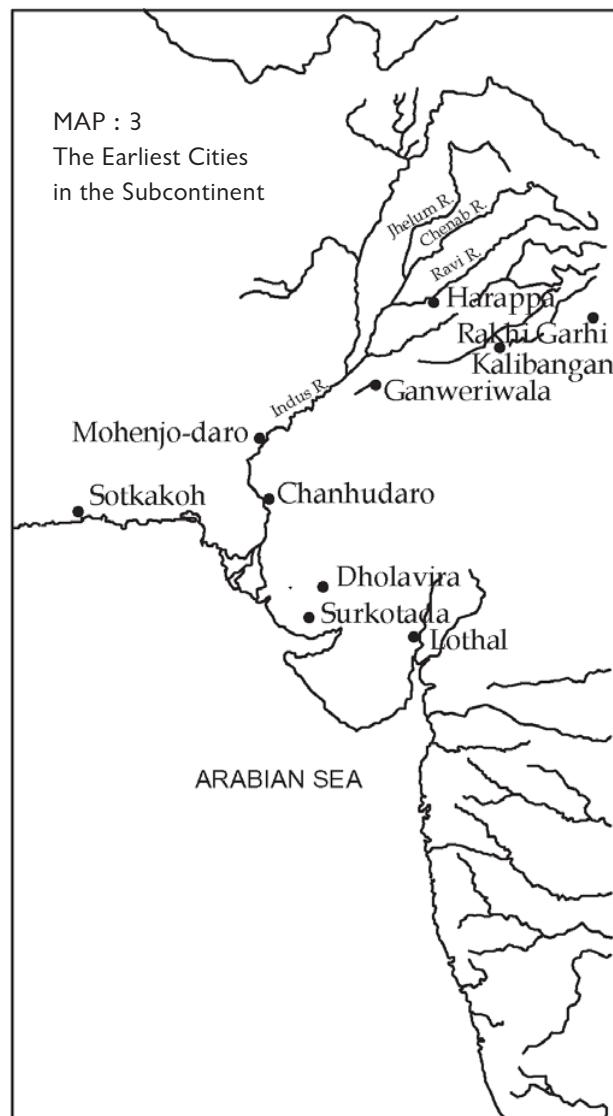
## What was special about these cities?

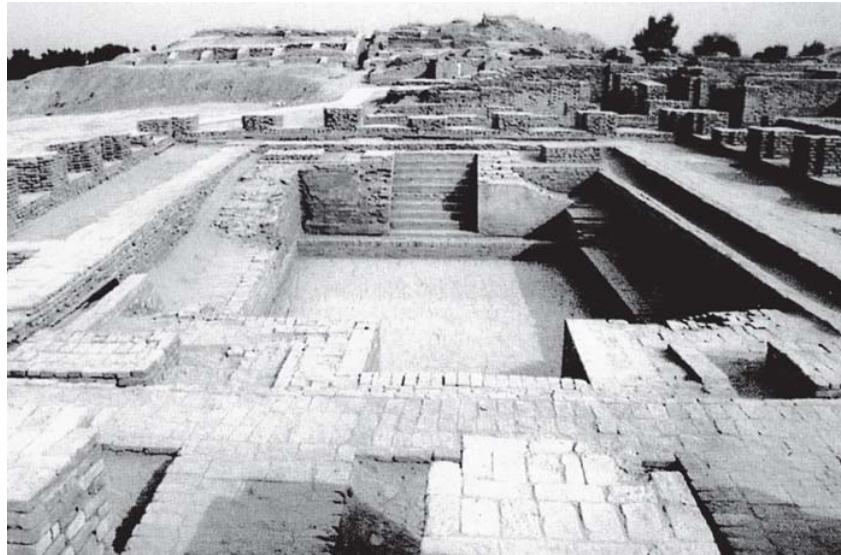
Many of these cities were divided into two or more parts. Usually, the part to the west was smaller but higher. Archaeologists describe this as the *citadel*. Generally, the part to the east was larger but lower. This is called the lower town. Very often walls of baked brick were built around each part. The bricks were so well made that they have lasted for thousands of years. The bricks were laid in an interlocking pattern and that made the walls strong.

In some cities, special buildings were constructed on the citadel. For example, in Mohenjodaro, a very special tank, which archaeologists call the Great Bath, was built in this area. This was lined with bricks, coated with plaster, and made water-tight with a layer of natural tar. There were steps leading down to it from two sides, while there were rooms on all sides. Water was probably brought in from a well, and drained out after use. Perhaps important people took a dip in this tank on special occasions.

Other cities, such as Kalibangan and Lothal had fire altars, where sacrifices may have been performed. And some cities like Mohenjodaro, Harappa, and Lothal had elaborate store houses.

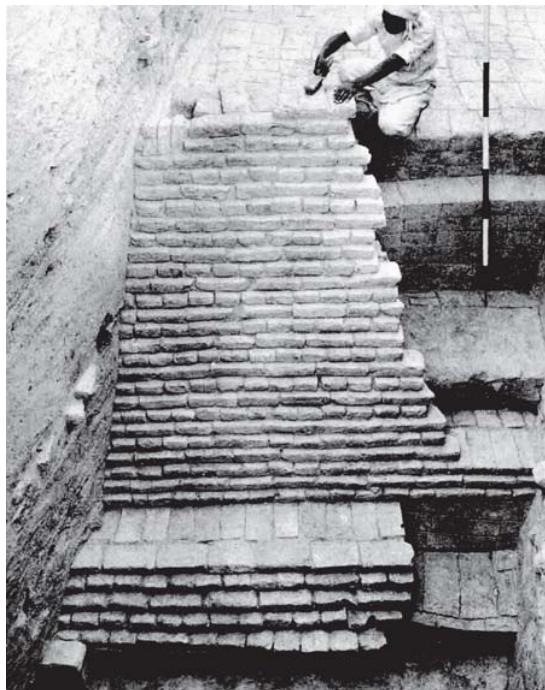
These cities were found in the Punjab and Sind in Pakistan, and in Gujarat, Rajasthan, Haryana and the Punjab in India. Archaeologists have found a set of unique objects in almost all these cities: red pottery painted with designs in black, stone weights, seals, special beads, copper tools, and long stone blades.





The Great Bath

How bricks were  
arranged to build walls in  
Harappan cities



### Houses, drains and streets

Generally, houses were either one or two storeys high, with rooms built around a courtyard. Most houses had a separate bathing area, and some had wells to supply water.

Many of these cities had covered drains. Notice how carefully these were laid out, in straight lines. Although you cannot see it, each drain had a gentle slope so that water could flow through it. Very often, drains in houses were connected to those on the streets and smaller drains led into bigger ones. As the drains were covered, inspection holes were provided at intervals to clean them. All three — houses, drains and streets — were probably planned and built at the same time.

List at least two differences between the houses described here and those that you studied about in Chapter 3.

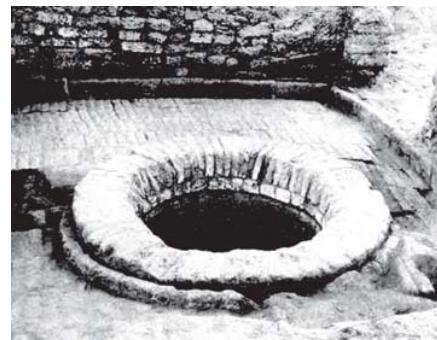
## Life in the city

A Harappan city was a very busy place. There were people who planned the construction of special buildings in the city. These were probably the *rulers*. It is likely that the rulers sent people to distant lands to get metal, precious stones, and other things that they wanted. They may have kept the most valuable objects, such as ornaments of gold and silver, or beautiful beads, for themselves. And there were *scribes*, people who knew how to write, who helped prepare the seals, and perhaps wrote on other materials that have not survived.

Besides, there were men and women, *crafts persons*, making all kinds of things — either in their own homes, or in special workshops. People were travelling to distant lands or returning with raw materials and, perhaps, stories. Many terracotta toys have been found and a long time ago children must have played with these.

Make a list of the people who lived in the city.

Were any of these people listed as living in villages such as Mehrgarh?



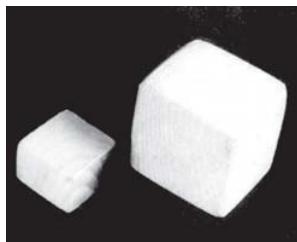
Top : A street in Mohenjodaro with a drain.  
Above : A well.



Far Left : A Harappan seal. The signs on the top of the seal are part of a script. This is the earliest form of writing known in the subcontinent.

Scholars have tried to read these signs but we still do not know exactly what they mean.

Left : Terracotta toys.



Top : Stone weights.  
Notice how carefully and precisely these weights are shaped. These were made of chert, a kind of stone. These were probably used to weigh precious stones or metals.

Right : Beads.  
Many of these were made out of carnelian, a beautiful red stone. The stone was cut, shaped, polished and finally a hole was bored through the centre so that a string could be passed through it.

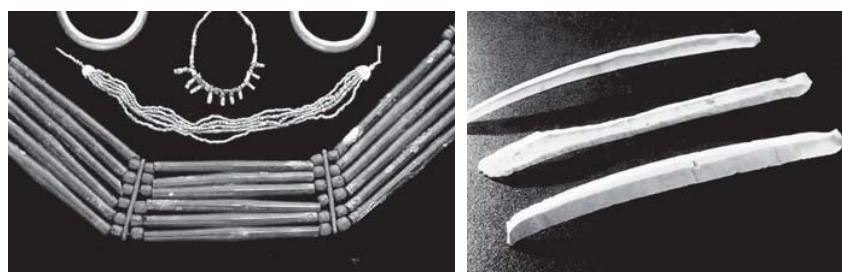
Far right : Stone blades.

Bottom Right :  
Embroidered cloth.  
A stone statue of an important man found from Mohenjodaro shows him wearing an embroidered garment.

## New crafts in the city

Let us look at some of the objects that were made and found in Harappan cities. Most of the things that have been found by archaeologists are made of stone, shell and metal, including copper, bronze, gold and silver. Copper and bronze were used to make tools, weapons, ornaments and vessels. Gold and silver were used to make ornaments and vessels.

Perhaps the most striking finds are those of beads, weights, and blades.



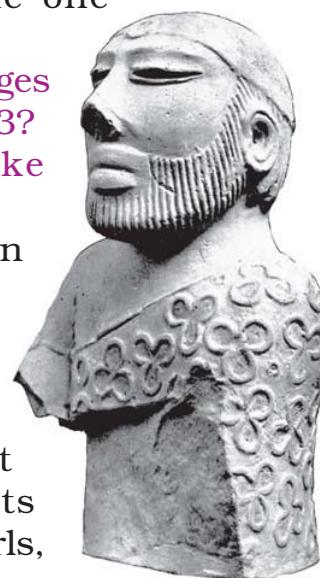
The Harappans also made seals out of stone. These are generally rectangular (See illustration on page 35) and usually have an animal carved on them.

The Harappans also made pots with beautiful black designs, such as the one shown on page 6.

Was metal used in the villages you learnt about in Chapter 3?

Was stone used to make weights?

Cotton was probably grown at Mehrgarh from about 7000 years ago. Actual pieces of cloth were found attached to the lid of a silver vase and some copper objects at Mohenjodaro. Archaeologists have also found spindle whorls,



## Faience

Unlike stone or shell, that are found naturally, faience is a material that is artificially produced. A gum was used to shape sand or powdered quartz into an object. The objects were then glazed, resulting in a shiny, glassy surface. The colours of the glaze were usually blue or sea green.

Faience was used to make beads, bangles, earrings, and tiny vessels.



made of terracotta and faience. These were used to spin thread.

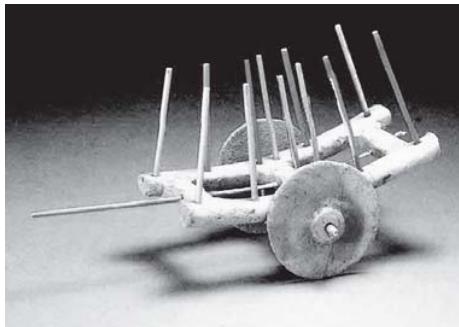
Many of the things that were produced were probably the work of specialists. A specialist is a person who is trained to do only one kind of work, for example, cutting stone, or polishing beads, or carving seals. Look at the illustration (page 36) and see how well the face is carved and how carefully the beard is shown. This must have been the work of an expert crafts person.

Not everybody could have been a specialist. We do not know whether only men were specialists or only women were specialists. Perhaps some women and men may have been specialists.

## In search of raw materials

*Raw materials* are substances that are either found naturally (such as wood, or ores of metals) or produced by farmers or herders. These are then processed to produce finished goods. For example, cotton, produced by farmers, is a raw material that may be processed to make cloth. While some of the raw materials that the Harappans used were available locally, many items such as copper, tin, gold, silver and precious stones had to be brought from distant places.

The Harappans probably got copper from present-day Rajasthan, and even from Oman in



How were goods carried from one place to another?

Look at the illustrations. One shows a toy and the other is a seal.

Can you suggest what the modes of transport used by the Harappans were?

Did you come across illustrations of wheeled vehicles in earlier lessons?

A toy plough.

Today, in many farming communities, only men use the plough. We do not know whether the Harappans followed such customs or not.



West Asia. Tin, which was mixed with copper to produce bronze, may have been brought from present-day Afghanistan and Iran. Gold could have come all the way from present-day Karnataka, and precious stones from present-day Gujarat, Iran and Afghanistan.



### Food for people in the cities

While many people lived in the cities, others living in the countryside grew crops and reared animals. These farmers and herders supplied food to crafts persons, scribes and rulers in the cities. We know from remains of plants that the Harappans grew wheat, barley, pulses, peas, rice, sesame, linseed and mustard.

A new tool, the *plough*, was used to dig the earth for turning the soil and planting seeds. While real ploughs, which were probably made of wood, have not survived, toy models have been found. As this region does not receive heavy rainfall, some form of *irrigation* may have been used. This means that water was stored and supplied to the fields when the plants were growing.

The Harappans reared cattle, sheep, goat and buffalo. Water and pastures were available around settlements. However, in the dry summer months large herds of animals were probably taken to greater distances in search of grass and water. They also collected fruits like

ber, caught fish and hunted wild animals like the antelope.

### A closer look — Harappan towns in Gujarat

The city of Dholavira was located on Khadir Beyt in the Rann of Kutch, where there was fresh water and fertile soil. Unlike some of the other Harappan cities, which were divided into two parts, Dholavira was divided into three parts, and each part was surrounded with massive stone walls, with entrances through gateways. There was also a large open area in the settlement, where public ceremonies could be held. Other finds include large letters of the Harappan script that were carved out of white stone and perhaps inlaid in wood. This is a unique find as generally Harappan writing has been found on small objects such as seals.

The city of Lothal stood beside a tributary of the Sabarmati, in Gujarat, close to the Gulf of Khambat. It was situated near areas where raw materials such as semi-precious stones were easily available. This was an important centre for making objects out of stone, shell and metal. There was also a store house in the city. Many seals and sealings (the impression of seals on clay) were found in this storehouse.

A dockyard at Lothal. This huge tank may have been a dockyard, where boats and ships came in from the sea and through the river channel. Goods were probably loaded and unloaded here.



A building that was found here was probably a workshop for making beads: pieces of stone, half made beads, tools for bead making, and finished beads have all been found here.



### Seals and sealings

Seals may have been used to stamp bags or packets containing goods that were sent from one place to another. After a bag was closed or tied, a layer of wet clay was applied on the knot, and the seal was pressed on it. The impression of the seal is known as a sealing.

If the sealing was intact, one could be sure that the goods had arrived safely.

**Seals are used even today. Find out what they are used for.**

### The mystery of the end

#### KEYWORDS

city  
citadel  
ruler  
scribe  
crafts person  
metal  
seal  
specialist  
raw material  
plough  
irrigation

Around 3900 years ago we find the beginning of a major change. People stopped living in many of the cities. Writing, seals and weights were no longer used. Raw materials brought from long distances became rare. In Mohenjodaro, we find that garbage piled up on the streets, the drainage system broke down, and new, less impressive houses were built, even over the streets.

Why did all this happen? We are not sure. Some scholars suggest that the rivers dried up. Others suggest that there was deforestation. This could have happened because fuel was required for baking bricks, and for smelting copper ores. Besides, grazing by large herds of cattle, sheep and goat may have destroyed the green cover. In some areas there were floods. But none of these reasons can explain the end of *all* the cities. Flooding, or a river drying up would have had an effect in only some areas.

It appears as if the rulers lost control. In any case, the effects of the change are quite clear. Sites in Sind and west Punjab (present-day Pakistan) were abandoned, while many people moved into newer, smaller settlements to the east and the south.

New cities emerged about 1400 years later. You will read about them in Chapters 6 and 9.

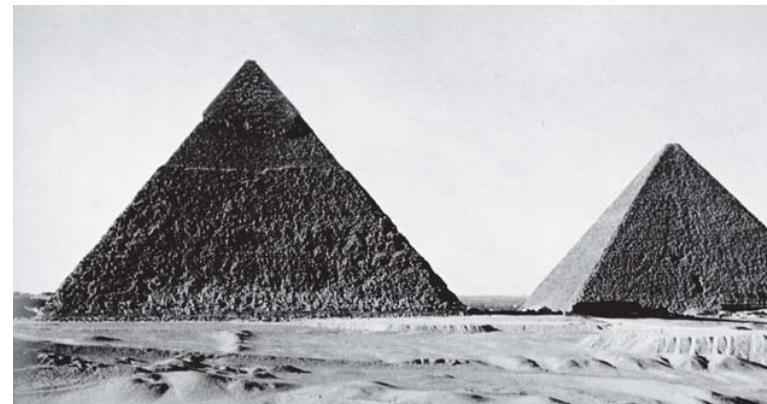
### Elsewhere

Find Egypt in your atlas. Most of Egypt is a dry desert, except for the lands along the river Nile.

Around 5000 years ago, kings ruled over Egypt. These kings sent armies to distant lands to get gold, silver, ivory, timber, and precious stones. They also built huge tombs, known as pyramids.

When they died, the bodies of kings were preserved and buried in these pyramids. These carefully preserved bodies are known as 'mummies'. A large number of objects were also buried with them. These included food and drink, clothes, ornaments, utensils, musical instruments, weapons and animals. Sometimes even serving men and women were buried with the rulers. These are amongst the most elaborate burials known in world history.

Do you think kings would have needed these things after death?



### Imagine

You are travelling with your parents, about 4000 years ago, from Lothal to Mohenjodaro. Describe how you would travel, what your parents might carry with them, and what you would see in Mohenjodaro.

## SOME IMPORTANT DATES

- ▶ Cotton cultivation at Mehrgarh (about 7000 years ago)
- ▶ Beginning of cities (about 4700 years ago)
- ▶ Beginning of the end of these cities (about 3900 years ago)
- ▶ The emergence of other cities (about 2500 years ago)

## Let's recall



1. How do archaeologists know that cloth was used in the Harappan civilisation?
  2. Match the columns
- |                 |             |
|-----------------|-------------|
| Copper          | Gujarat     |
| Gold            | Afghanistan |
| Tin             | Rajasthan   |
| Precious stones | Karnataka   |
3. Why were metals, writing, the wheel, and the plough important for the Harappans?

## Let's discuss



4. Make a list of all the terracotta toys shown in the lesson. Which do you think children would have enjoyed playing with the most?
5. Make a list of what the Harappans ate, and put a tick mark against the things you eat today.
6. Do you think that the life of farmers and herders who supplied food to the Harappan cities was different from that of the farmers and herders you read about in Chapter 3? Give reasons for your answer.

## Let's do



7. Describe three important buildings in your city or village. Are they located in a special part of the settlement (e.g. the centre)? What are the activities that take place in these buildings?
8. Are there any old buildings in your locality? Find out how old they are and who looks after them.

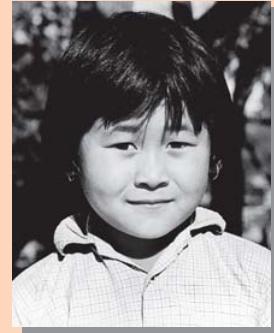
## CHAPTER 5

# WHAT BOOKS AND BURIALS TELL US

### Mary in the library

As the bell rang, the teacher asked the students to follow him, because they were going to the library for the first time. When Mary stepped inside, she found that the library was much larger than their classroom. And there were so many shelves, all full of books. In one corner was a cupboard filled with large, old volumes. Seeing her trying to open the cupboard, the teacher said, "That cupboard has very special books on different religions. Did you know that we have a set of the Vedas?"

What are the Vedas? Mary wondered. Let us find out.



### One of the oldest books in the world

You may have heard about the Vedas. There are four of them – the Rigveda, Samaveda, Yajurveda and Atharvaveda. The oldest Veda is the Rigveda, composed about 3500 years ago. The Rigveda includes more than a thousand hymns, called *sukta* or “well-said”. These hymns are in praise of various gods and goddesses. Three gods are especially important: Agni, the god of fire; Indra, a warrior god; and Soma, a plant from which a special drink was prepared.

These hymns were composed by sages (*rishis*). Priests taught students to recite and memorise each syllable, word, and sentence, bit by bit, with great care. Most of the hymns were composed, taught and learnt by men. A few were composed by women. The Rigveda is in old or Vedic Sanskrit, which is different from the Sanskrit you learn in school these days.

## Sanskrit and other languages

Sanskrit is part of a *family* of languages known as Indo-European. Some Indian languages such as Assamese, Gujarati, Hindi, Kashmiri and Sindhi, and many European languages such as English, French, German, Greek, Italian and Spanish belong to this family. They are called a family because they originally had words in common.

Take the words ‘*matr*’ (Sanskrit), ‘*ma*’ (Hindi) and ‘mother’ (English).

**Do you notice any similarities?**

Other languages used in the subcontinent belong to different families. For instance, those used in the north-east belong to the Tibeto-Burman family; Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam belong to the Dravidian family; and the languages spoken in Jharkhand and parts of central India belong to the Austro-Asiatic family.

**List the languages you have heard about and try and identify the families to which they belong.**

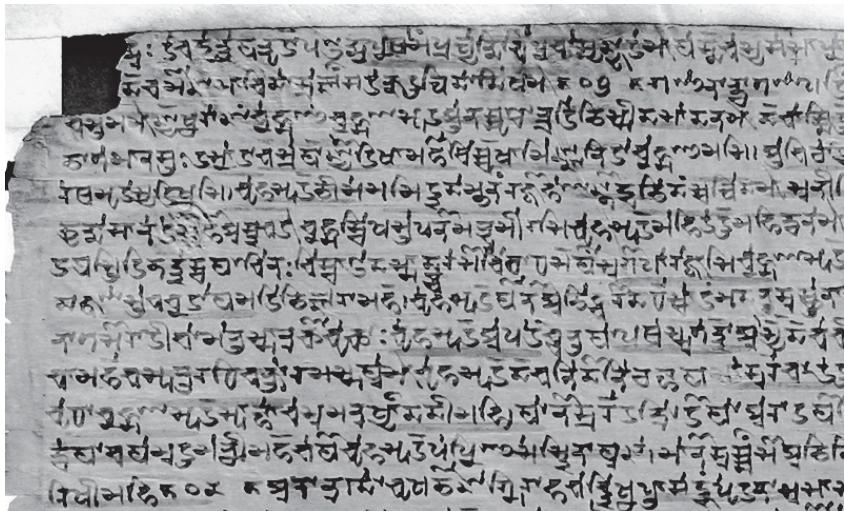
The books we use are written and printed. The Rigveda was recited and *heard* rather than read. It was written down several centuries after it was first composed, and printed less than 200 years ago.

## How historians study the Rigveda

Historians, like archaeologists, find out about the past, but, in addition to material remains, they examine written sources as well. Let us see how they study the Rigveda.

Some of the hymns in the Rigveda are in the form of dialogues. This is part of one such hymn, a dialogue between a sage named Vishvamitra, and two rivers, (Beas and Sutlej) that were worshipped as goddesses.

**Find the rivers on Map 1 (page 2), then read on:**



A page from a manuscript of the Rigveda.

This manuscript of the Rigveda, on birch bark, was found in Kashmir. About 150 years ago, it was used to prepare one of the earliest printed texts of the Rigveda, as well as an English translation. It is now preserved in a library in Pune, Maharashtra.

## Vishvamitra and the Rivers

**Vishvamitra:** O rivers, come down from the mountains like two swift horses, like two shining cows that lick their calves.

**You move like chariots to the sea,** through the power of Indra. You are full of water and wish to unite with one another.

**The rivers:** We, who are full of water, move along the path the gods have made for us. Once we start flowing, we cannot be stopped. Why do you pray to us, o sage?

**Vishvamitra:** O sisters, please listen to me, the singer who has come from a distance with his chariots and carts. Let your waters not rise above our axles, so that we can cross safely.

**The rivers:** We will listen to your prayers so that you can cross safely. Historians point out that this hymn was composed in the area where these rivers flow. They also suggest that the sage lived in a society where horses and cows were valued animals. That is why the rivers are compared to horses and cows.

Do you think chariots were also important? Give reasons for your answer. Read the verses and find out what are the modes of transport that are mentioned.

Other rivers, especially the Indus and its other tributaries, and the Sarasvati, are also named in the hymns. The Ganga and Yamuna are named only once.

Look at Map 1 (page 2) and list 5 rivers that are not mentioned in the Rigveda.

## Cattle, horses and chariots

There are many prayers in the Rigveda for cattle, children (especially sons), and horses. Horses were yoked to chariots that were used in battles, which were fought to capture cattle. Battles were also fought for land, which was important for pasture, and for growing hardy crops that ripened quickly, such as barley. Some battles were fought for water, and to capture people.

Some of the wealth that was obtained was kept by the leaders, some was given to the priests and the rest was distributed amongst the people. Some wealth was used for the performance of *yajnas* or sacrifices in which offerings were made into the fire. These were meant for gods and goddesses. Offerings could include ghee, grain, and in some cases, animals.

Most men took part in these wars. There was no regular army, but there were assemblies where people met and discussed matters of war and peace. They also chose leaders, who were often brave and skilful warriors.

## Words to describe people

There are several ways of describing people — in terms of the work they do, the language they speak, the place they belong to, their family, their communities and cultural practices. Let us see some of the words used to describe people found in the Rigveda.

There are two groups who are described in terms of their work — the priests, sometimes called *brahmins*, who performed various rituals and the *rajas*.

These *rajas* were not like the ones you will be learning about later. They did not have capital cities, palaces or armies, nor did they collect taxes.

Generally, sons did not automatically succeed fathers as rajas.

Read the previous section once more and see whether you can find out what the rajas did.

Two words were used to describe the people or the community as a whole. One was the word *jana*, which we still use in Hindi and other languages. The other was *vish*. The word *vaishya* comes from *vish*. You will learn more about this in Chapter 6.

Several *vish* or *jana* are mentioned by name. So we find reference to the Puru *jana* or *vish*, the Bharata *jana* or *vish*, the Yadu *jana* or *vish*, and so on.

#### Do any of these names sound familiar?

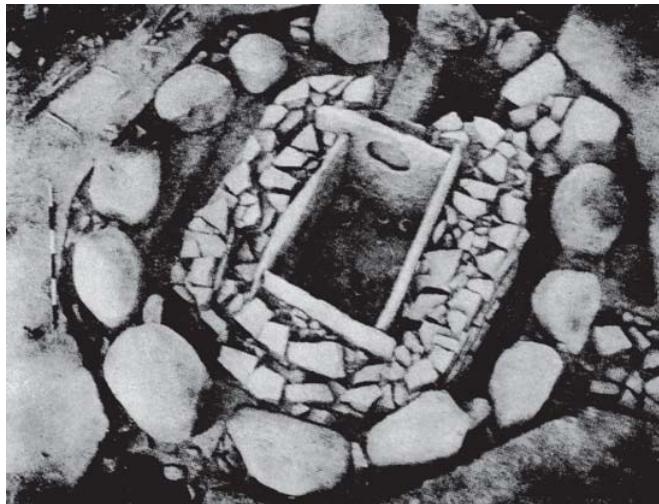
Sometimes, the people who composed the hymns described themselves as *Aryas* and called their opponents *Dasas* or *Dasyus*. These were people who did not perform sacrifices, and probably spoke different languages. Later, the term *dasa* (and the feminine *dasi*) came to mean *slave*. Slaves were women and men who were often captured in war. They were treated as the property of their owners, who could make them do whatever work they wanted.

While the Rigveda was being composed in the north-west of the subcontinent, there were other developments elsewhere. Let us look at some of these.

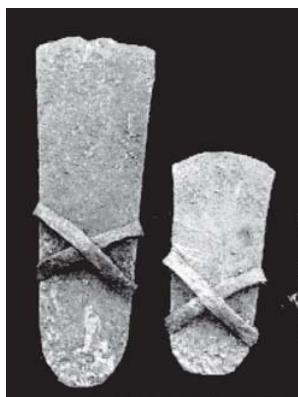
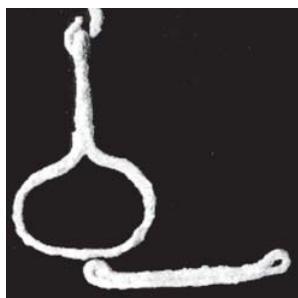
### Silent sentinels—the story of the megaliths

Look at the illustration on the next page.

These stone boulders are known as megaliths (literally big stones). These were carefully arranged by people, and were used to mark burial sites. The practice of erecting megaliths began about 3000 years ago, and was prevalent throughout the Deccan, south India, in the north-east and Kashmir.



Top : This type of megalith is known as a cist. Some cists, like the one shown here, have port-holes which could be used as an entrance.

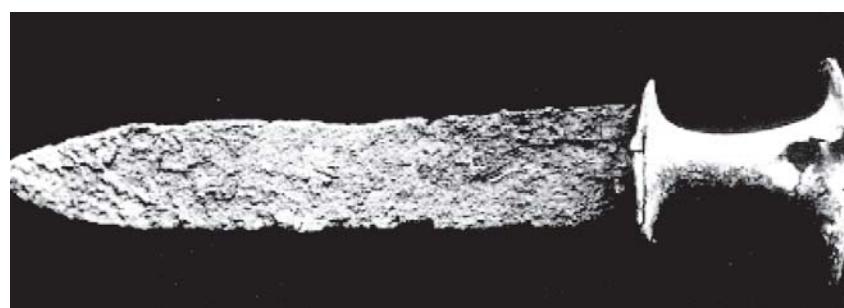


Iron equipment found from megalithic burials.

Left top : Horse equipment.

Left below : Axes.

Below : A dagger.



Some important megalithic sites are shown on Map 2 (page 14). While some megaliths can be seen on the surface, other megalithic burials are often underground.

Sometimes, archaeologists find a circle of stone boulders or a single large stone standing on the ground. These are the only indications that there are burials beneath.

**There were several things that people did to make megaliths. We have made a list here. Try and arrange them in the correct order: digging pits in the earth, transporting stones, breaking boulders, placing stones in position, finding suitable stone, shaping stones, burying the dead.**

All these burials have some common features. Generally, the dead were buried with distinctive pots, which are called Black and Red Ware. Also found are tools and weapons of *iron* and sometimes, skeletons of horses, horse equipment and ornaments of stone and gold.

### Was iron used in the Harappan cities?

## Finding out about social differences

Archaeologists think that objects found with a skeleton probably belonged to the dead person. Sometimes, more objects are found in one grave than in another. Find Brahmagiri on Map 2 (page 14). Here, one skeleton was buried with 33 gold beads, 2 stone beads, 4 copper bangles, and one conch shell. Other skeletons have only a few pots. These finds suggest that there was some difference in status amongst the people who were buried. Some were rich, others poor, some chiefs, others followers.

## Were some burial spots meant for certain families?

Sometimes, megaliths contain more than one skeleton. These indicate that people, perhaps belonging to the same family, were buried in the same place though not at the same time. The bodies of those who died later were brought into the grave through the portholes. Stone circles or boulders placed on the surface probably served as signposts to find the burial site, so that people could return to the same place whenever they wanted to.

## A special burial at Inamgaon

Find Inamgaon on Map 2 (page 14). It is a site on the river Ghod, a tributary of the Bhima. It was occupied between 3600 and 2700 years ago. Here, adults were generally buried in the ground, laid out straight, with the head towards the north. Sometimes burials were within the houses. Vessels that probably contained food and water were placed with the dead.

One man was found buried in a large, four legged clay jar in the courtyard of a five-roomed house (one of the largest houses at the site), in

the centre of the settlement. This house also had a granary. The body was placed in a cross-legged position.

**Do you think this was the body of a chief?  
Give reasons for your answer.**

### What skeletal studies tell us

It is easy to make out the skeleton of a child from its small size. However, there are no major differences in the bones of a girl and a boy.

Can we make out whether a skeleton was that of a man or a woman?

Sometimes, people decide on the basis of what is found with the skeleton. For instance, if a skeleton is found with jewellery, it is sometimes thought to be that of a woman. However, there are problems with this. Often, men also wore ornaments.

A better way of figuring out the sex of a skeleton is to look at the bone structure. The hip or the pelvic area of women is generally larger to enable child bearing.

These distinctions are based on modern skeletal studies.

About 2000 years ago, there was a famous physician named Charaka who wrote a book on medicine known as the Charaka Samhita. There he states that the human body has 360 bones. This is a much larger number than the 200 bones that are recognised in modern anatomy. Charaka arrived at this figure by counting the teeth, joints and cartilage.

**How do you think he found out about the human body in such great detail?**

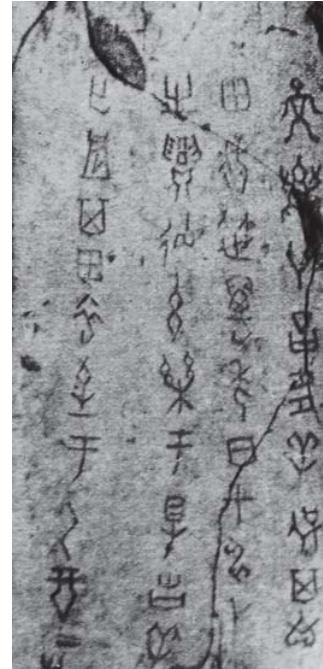
### Occupations at Inamgaon

Archaeologists have found seeds of wheat, barley, rice, pulses, millets, peas and sesame. Bones of a number of animals, many bearing cut marks that show they may have been used as food, have also been found. These include cattle, buffalo, goat, sheep, dog, horse, ass, pig, *sambhar*, spotted deer, blackbuck, antelope, hare, and mongoose, besides birds, crocodile, turtle, crab and fish. There is evidence that fruits such as *ber*, *amla*, *jamun*, dates and a variety of berries were collected.

Use this evidence to list the possible occupations of the people at Inamgaon.

### Elsewhere

- Find China in your atlas. Around 3500 years ago, we find some of the first evidence of writing in China. These writings were on animal bones. These are called oracle bones, because they were used to predict the future. Kings got scribes to write questions on the bones — would they win battles? Would the harvest be good? Would they have sons? The bones were then put into the fire, and they cracked because of the heat. Then fortunetellers studied these cracks, and tried to predict the future. As you may expect, they sometimes made mistakes.
- These kings lived in palaces in cities. They amassed vast quantities of wealth, including large, elaborately decorated bronze vessels. However, they did not know the use of iron.
- List one difference between the *raja* of the Rigveda and these kings.



### Imagine

You live in Inamgaon, 3000 years ago, and the chief has died last night. Today, your parents are preparing for the burial. Describe the scene, including how food is being prepared for the funeral. What do you think would be offered?

#### KEYWORDS

Veda  
language  
hymn  
chariot  
sacrifice  
*raja*  
slave  
megalith  
burial  
skeletal  
iron

## SOME IMPORTANT DATES

- ▶ Beginning of the composition of the Vedas (about 3500 years ago)
- ▶ Beginning of the building of megaliths (about 3000 years ago)
- ▶ Settlement at Inamgaon (between 3600 and 2700 years ago)
- ▶ Charaka (about 2000 years ago)

## Let's recall



### 1. Match the columns

Sukta	Stone boulder
Chariots	Sacrifice
Yajna	Well-said
Dasa	Used in battles
Megalith	Slave

### 2. Complete the sentences:

- (a) Slaves were used for \_\_\_\_\_
- (b) Megaliths are found in \_\_\_\_\_
- (c) Stone circles or boulders on the surface were used to \_\_\_\_\_
- (d) Port-holes were used for \_\_\_\_\_
- (e) People at Inamgaon ate \_\_\_\_\_

## Let's discuss



3. In what ways are the books we read today different from the Rigveda?
4. What kind of evidence from burials do archaeologists use to find out whether there were social differences amongst those who were buried?
5. In what ways do you think that the life of a *raja* was different from that of a *dasa* or *dasi*?

## Let's do



6. Find out whether your school library has a collection of books on religion, and list the names of five books from this collection.
7. Write down a short poem or song that you have memorised. Did you hear or read the poem or song? How did you learn it by heart?
8. In the Rigveda, people were described in terms of the work they did and the languages they spoke. In the table below, fill in the names of six people you know, choosing three men and three women. For each of them, mention the work they do and the language they speak. Would you like to add anything else to the description?

NAME	WORK	LANGUAGE	ANYTHING ELSE

## CHAPTER 6

# KINGDOMS, KINGS AND AN EARLY REPUBLIC



### Election day

Shankaran woke up to see his grandparents all ready to go and vote. They wanted to be the first to reach the polling booth. Why, Shankaran wanted to know, were they so excited? Somewhat impatiently, his grandfather explained: "We can choose our own rulers today."

### How some men became rulers

Choosing leaders or rulers by voting is something that has become common during the last fifty years or so. How did men become rulers in the past? Some of the *rajas* we read about in Chapter 5 were probably chosen by the *jana*, the people. But, around 3000 years ago, we find some changes taking place in the ways in which *rajas* were chosen. Some men now became recognised as *rajas* by performing very big sacrifices.

The *ashvamedha* or horse sacrifice was one such ritual. A horse was let loose to wander freely and it was guarded by the *raja*'s men. If the horse wandered into the kingdoms of other *rajas* and they stopped it, they had to fight. If they allowed the horse to pass, it meant that they accepted that the *raja* who wanted to perform the sacrifice was stronger than them. These *rajas* were then invited to the sacrifice, which was performed by specially trained priests, who were rewarded with gifts. The *raja* who organised the sacrifice was recognised as being very powerful, and all those who came brought gifts for him.

The *raja* was a central figure in these rituals. He often had a special seat, a throne or a tiger skin. His charioteer, who was his companion in the battle field and witnessed his exploits,

chanted tales of his glory. His relatives, especially his wives and sons, had to perform a variety of minor rituals. The other *rajas* were simply spectators who had to sit and watch the performance of the sacrifice. Priests performed the rituals including the sprinkling of sacred water on the king. The ordinary people, the *vish* or *vaishya*, also brought gifts. However, some people, such as those who were regarded as *shudras* by the priests, were excluded from many rituals.

Make a list of all those who would be present at the sacrifice. Which are the categories that are described in terms of their occupation?

### Varnas

We have many books that were composed in north India, especially in the areas drained by the Ganga and the Yamuna, during this period. These books are often called later Vedic, because they were composed after the Rigveda about which you learnt in Chapter 5. These include the Samaveda, Yajurveda and Atharvaveda, as well as other books. These were composed by priests, and described how rituals were to be performed. They also contained rules about society.

There were several different groups in society at this time — priests and warriors, farmers, herders, traders, crafts persons, labourers, fishing folk, and forest people. Some priests and warriors were rich, as were some farmers and traders. Others, including many herders, crafts persons, labourers, fishing folk and hunters and gatherers, were poor.

The priests divided people into four groups, called *varnas*. According to them, each *varna* had a different set of functions.

The first *varna* was that of the *brahmin*. *Brahmins* were expected to study (and teach) the Vedas, perform sacrifices and receive gifts.

In the second place were the rulers, also known as *kshatriyas*. They were expected to fight battles and protect people.

Third were the *vish* or the *vaishyas*. They were expected to be farmers, herders, and traders. Both the *kshatriyas* and the *vaishyas* could perform sacrifices.

Last were the *shudras*, who had to serve the other three groups and could not perform any rituals. Often, women were also grouped with the *shudras*. Both women and *shudras* were not allowed to study the Vedas.

The priests also said that these groups were decided on the basis of birth. For example, if one's father and mother were *brahmins* one would automatically become a *brahmin*, and so on. Later, they classified some people as *untouchable*. These included some crafts persons, hunters and gatherers, as well as people who helped perform burials and cremations. The priests said that contact with these groups was polluting.

Many people did not accept the system of *varna* laid down by the *brahmins*. Some kings thought they were superior to the priests. Others felt that birth could not be a basis for deciding which *varna* people belonged to. Besides, some people felt that there should be no differences amongst people based on occupation. Others felt that everybody should be able to perform rituals. And others condemned the practice of untouchability. Also, there were many areas in the subcontinent, such as the north-east, where social and economic differences were not very sharp, and where the influence of the priests was limited.

**Why did people oppose the system of *varnas*?**

Painted Grey Ware.  
Plates and bowls are the most common vessels made out of Painted Grey Ware. These are extremely fine to touch, with a nice, smooth surface. Perhaps these were used on special occasions, for important people, and to serve special food.



## Janapadas

The *rajas* who performed these big sacrifices were now recognised as being *rajas of janapadas* rather than *janas*. The word *janapada* literally means the land where the *jana* set its foot, and settled down. Some important *janapadas* are shown on Map 4 (page 57).

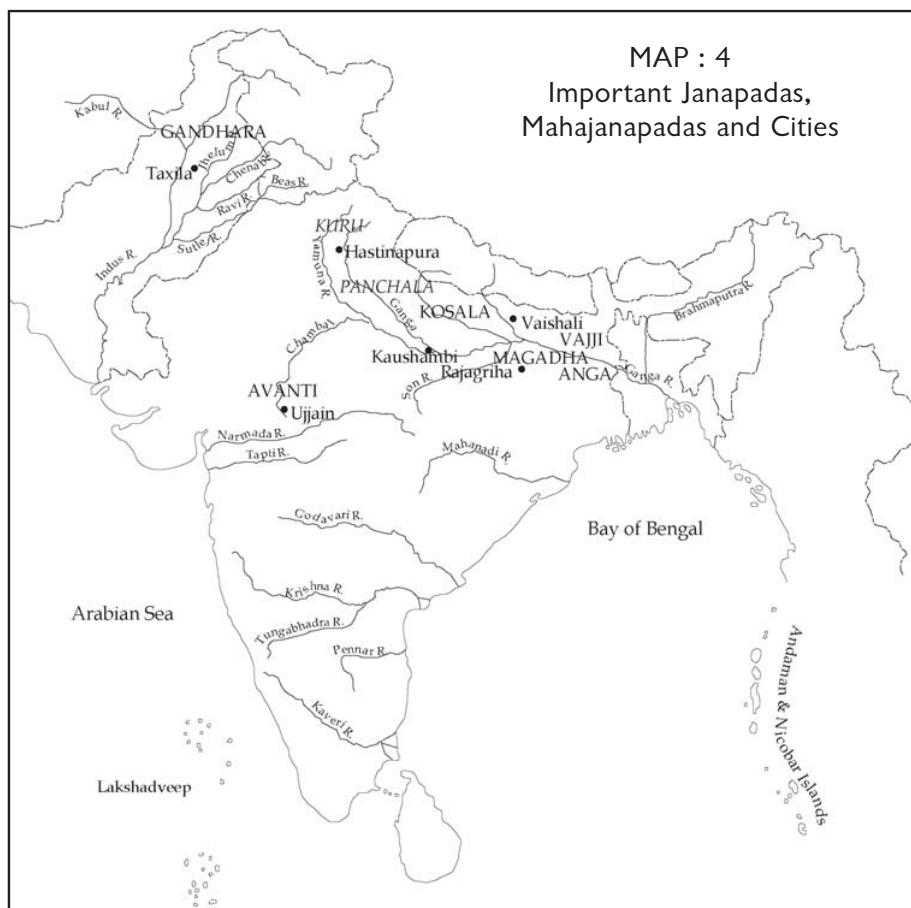
Archaeologists have excavated a number of settlements in these *janapadas*, such as Purana Qila in Delhi, Hastinapur near Meerut, and Atranjikhera, near Etah (the last two are in Uttar Pradesh). They found that people lived in huts, and kept cattle as well as other animals. They also grew a variety of crops — rice, wheat, barley, pulses, sugarcane, sesame and mustard.

**Is there a crop in this list that was not mentioned in Chapter 4?**

They made earthen pots. Some of these were grey in colour, others were red. One special type of pottery found at these sites is known as Painted Grey Ware. As is obvious from the name, these grey pots had painted designs, usually simple lines and geometric patterns.

### Mahajanapadas

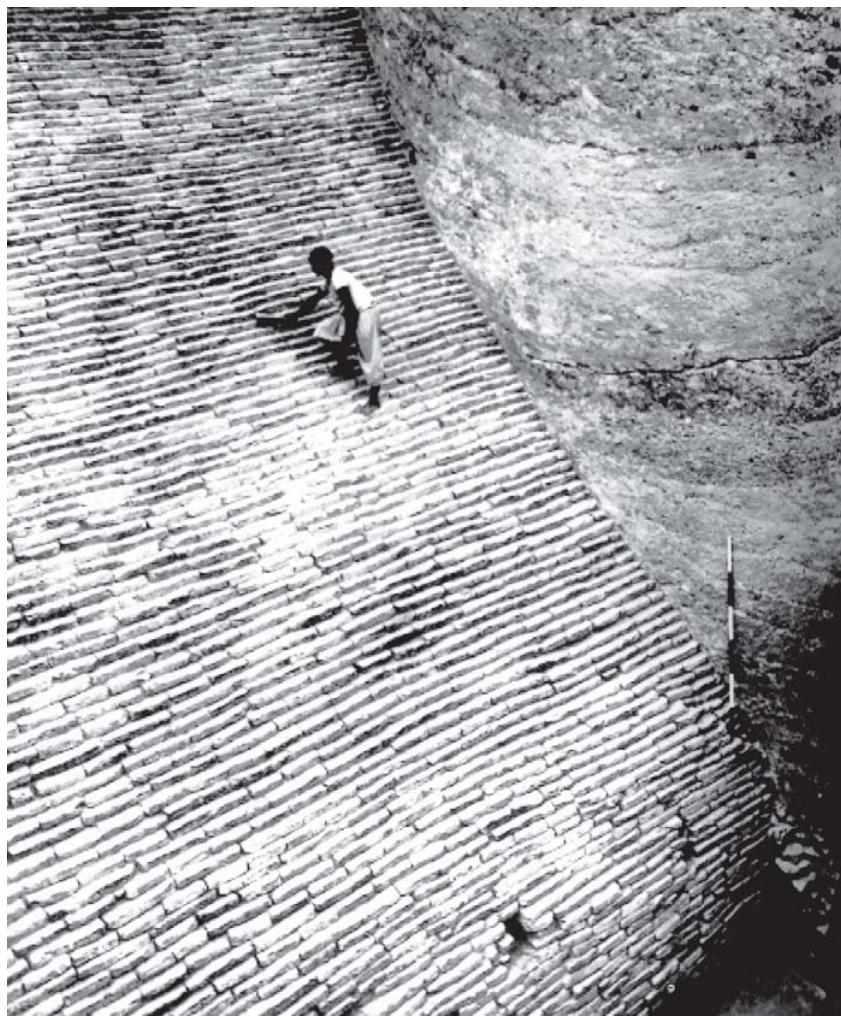
About 2500 years ago, some *janapadas* became more important than others, and were known as *mahajanapadas*. Some of these are shown on Map 4. Most *mahajanapadas* had a capital city, many of these were *fortified*. This means that huge walls of wood, brick or stone were built around them.



Forts were probably built because people were afraid of attacks from other kings and needed protection. It is also likely that some rulers wanted to show how rich and powerful they were by building really large, tall and impressive walls around their cities. Also in this way, the land and the people living inside the fortified area could be controlled more easily by the king. Building such huge walls required a great deal of planning. Thousands, if not lakhs of bricks or stone had to be prepared. This in turn meant enormous labour, provided, possibly, by thousands of men, women and children. And resources had to be found for all of this.

The fortification wall at Kaushambi.

This is a picture of remains of a wall made of brick, found near present-day Allahabad (Uttar Pradesh). A part of it was probably built about 2500 years ago.



The new *rajas* now began maintaining armies. Soldiers were paid regular salaries and maintained by the king throughout the year. Some payments were probably made using punch marked coins (see the illustration on page 92). You will read more about these coins in Chapter 9.

List two ways in which the *rajas* of the *mahajanapadas* were different from those mentioned in the Rigveda.

## Taxes

As the rulers of the *mahajanapadas* were (a) building huge forts (b) maintaining big armies, they needed more resources. And they needed officials to collect these. So, instead of depending on occasional gifts brought by people, as in the case of the *raja* of the *janapadas*, they started collecting regular *taxes*.

- Taxes on crops were the most important. This was because most people were farmers. Usually, the tax was fixed at 1/6<sup>th</sup> of what was produced. This was known as *bhaga* or a share.
- There were taxes on crafts persons as well. These could have been in the form of labour. For example, a weaver or a smith may have had to work for a day every month for the king.
- Herders were also expected to pay taxes in the form of animals and animal produce.
- There were also taxes on goods that were bought and sold, through trade.
- And hunters and gatherers also had to provide forest produce to the *raja*.

What do you think would have been provided by hunters and gatherers?

## Changes in agriculture

There were two major changes in agriculture around this time. One was the growing use of iron ploughshares. This meant that heavy, clayey soil could be turned over better than with a wooden ploughshare, so that more grain could be produced. Second, people began transplanting paddy. This meant that instead of scattering seed on the ground, from which plants would sprout, saplings were grown and then planted in the fields. This led to increased production, as many more plants survived. However, it was back breaking work. Generally, slave men and women, (*dasas* and *dasis*) and landless agricultural labourers (*kammakaras*) had to do this work.

Can you think why kings would encourage these changes?

### A closer look — (a) Magadha

Find Magadha on Map 4 (page 57). Magadha became the most important *mahajanapada* in about two hundred years. Many rivers such as the Ganga and Son flowed through Magadha. This was important for (a) transport, (b) water supplies (c) making the land fertile. Parts of Magadha were forested. Elephants, which lived in the forest, could be captured and trained for the army. Forests also provided wood for building houses, carts and chariots. Besides, there were iron ore mines in the region that could be tapped to make strong tools and weapons.

Magadha had two very powerful rulers, Bimbisara and Ajatasattu, who used all possible means to conquer other *janapadas*. Mahapadma Nanda was another important ruler. He extended his control up to the north-west part of the subcontinent. Rajagriha (present-day Rajgir) in Bihar was the capital of Magadha for several years.

Later the capital was shifted to Pataliputra (present-day Patna).

More than 2300 years ago, a ruler named Alexander, who lived in Macedonia in Europe, wanted to become a world conqueror. Of course, he didn't conquer the world, but did conquer parts of Egypt and West Asia, and came to the Indian subcontinent, reaching up to the banks of the Beas. When he wanted to march further eastwards, his soldiers refused. They were scared, as they had heard that the rulers of India had vast armies of foot soldiers, chariots and elephants.

In what ways were these armies different from those described in the Rigveda?

### A closer look — (b) Vajji

While Magadha became a powerful kingdom, Vajji, with its capital at Vaishali (Bihar), was under a different form of government, known as *gana* or *sangha*.

In a *gana* or a *sangha* there were not one, but many rulers. Sometimes, even when thousands of men ruled together, each one was known as a *raja*. These *rajas* performed rituals together. They also met in assemblies, and decided what had to be done and how, through discussion and debate. For example, if they were attacked by an enemy, they met to discuss what should be done to meet the threat. However, women, *dasas* and *kammakaras* could not participate in these assemblies.

Both the Buddha and Mahavira (about whom you will read in Chapter 7) belonged to *ganas* or *sanghas*. Some of the most vivid descriptions of life in the *sanghas* can be found in Buddhist books.

#### Gana

Is used for a group that has many members.

#### Sangha

Means organisation or association.

**KEYWORDS**

*raja  
ashvamedha  
varna  
janapada  
mahajanapada  
fortification  
army  
tax  
transplantation  
gana or sangha  
democracy*

This is an account of the Vajjis from the Digha Nikaya, a famous Buddhist book, which contains some of the speeches of the Buddha. These were written down about 2300 years ago.

### Ajatasattu and the Vajjis

Ajatasattu wanted to attack the Vajjis. He sent his minister named Vassakara to the Buddha to get his advice on the matter.

The Buddha asked whether the Vajjis met frequently, in full assemblies. When he heard that they did, he replied that the Vajjis would continue to prosper as long as:

- They held full and frequent public assemblies.
- They met and acted together.
- They followed established rules.
- They respected, supported and listened to elders.
- Vajji women were not held by force or captured.
- *Chaityas* (local shrines) were maintained in both towns and villages.
- Wise saints who followed different beliefs were respected and allowed to enter and leave the country freely.

In what ways was the Vajji *sangha* different from the other *mahajanapadas*? Try and list at least three differences.

*Rajas* of powerful kingdoms tried to conquer the *sanghas*. Nevertheless, these lasted for a very long time, till about 1500 years ago, when the last of the *ganas* or *sanghas* were conquered by the Gupta rulers, about whom you will read in Chapter 11.

## Elsewhere

Find Greece and Athens in your atlas.

Around 2500 years ago, the people of Athens set up a form of government, which was called a democracy, which lasted for about 200 years.

All free men over the age of 30 were recognised as full citizens.

There was an assembly that met at least 40 times a year to decide on important matters.

All citizens could attend these meetings.

Appointments for many positions were made through lottery. All those who wanted to be chosen gave in their names, and then some were selected through lottery.

Citizens were expected to serve in the army and the navy.

However, women were not considered citizens.

Also, many foreigners, who lived and worked in Athens as merchants and crafts persons did not have rights as citizens.

Besides, there were several thousand slaves in Athens, who worked in mines, fields, households and workshops. They too were not treated as citizens.

Do you think this was a true democracy?

## Imagine

You are peeping through a crack in the walls of the assembly of Vaishali, where a meeting is in progress to discuss ways to deal with an attack by the king of Magadha. Describe what you might hear.

### Let's recall



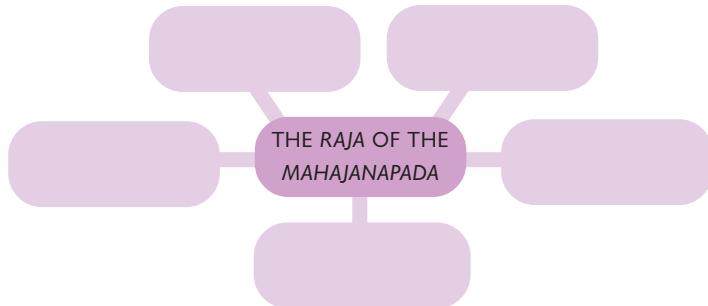
1. State whether true or false:
  - (a) Rajas who let the *ashwamedha* horse pass through their lands were invited to the sacrifice.
  - (b) The charioteer sprinkled sacred water on the king.
  - (c) Archaeologists have found palaces in the settlements of the *janapadas*.
  - (d) Pots to store grain were made out of Painted Grey Ware.
  - (e) Many cities in *mahajanapadas* were fortified.

## SOME IMPORTANT DATES

- ▶ New kinds of *rajas* (about 3000 years ago)
- ▶ Mahajanapadas (about 2500 years ago)
- ▶ Alexander's invasion, composition of the Digha Nikaya (about 2300 years ago)
- ▶ End of the *ganas* or *sanghas* (about 1500 years ago)

2. Fill in the chart given below with the terms: hunter-gatherers, farmers, traders, crafts persons, herders.

### THOSE WHO PAID TAXES



3. Who were the groups who could not participate in the assemblies of the *ganas*?

### Let's discuss



4. Why did the *rajas* of *mahajanapadas* build forts?
5. In what ways are present-day elections different from the ways in which rulers were chosen in *janapadas*?

### Let's do



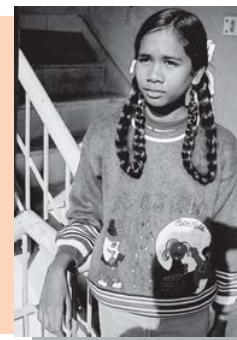
6. Find the state in which you live in the political map on page 136. Were there any *janapadas* in your state? If yes, name them. If not, name the *janapadas* that would have been the closest to your state, and mention whether they were to the east, west, north or south.
7. Find out whether any of the groups mentioned in answer 2 pay taxes today.
8. Find out whether the groups mentioned in answer 3 have voting rights at present.

## CHAPTER 7

# NEW QUESTIONS AND IDEAS

### Anagha's school trip

This was the first time Anagha was going on a school trip. They boarded the train from Pune (in Maharashtra) late at night, to go all the way to Varanasi (in Uttar Pradesh). Her mother, who came to see her off at the station, told the teacher: "Do tell the children about the Buddha, and take them to see Sarnath as well."

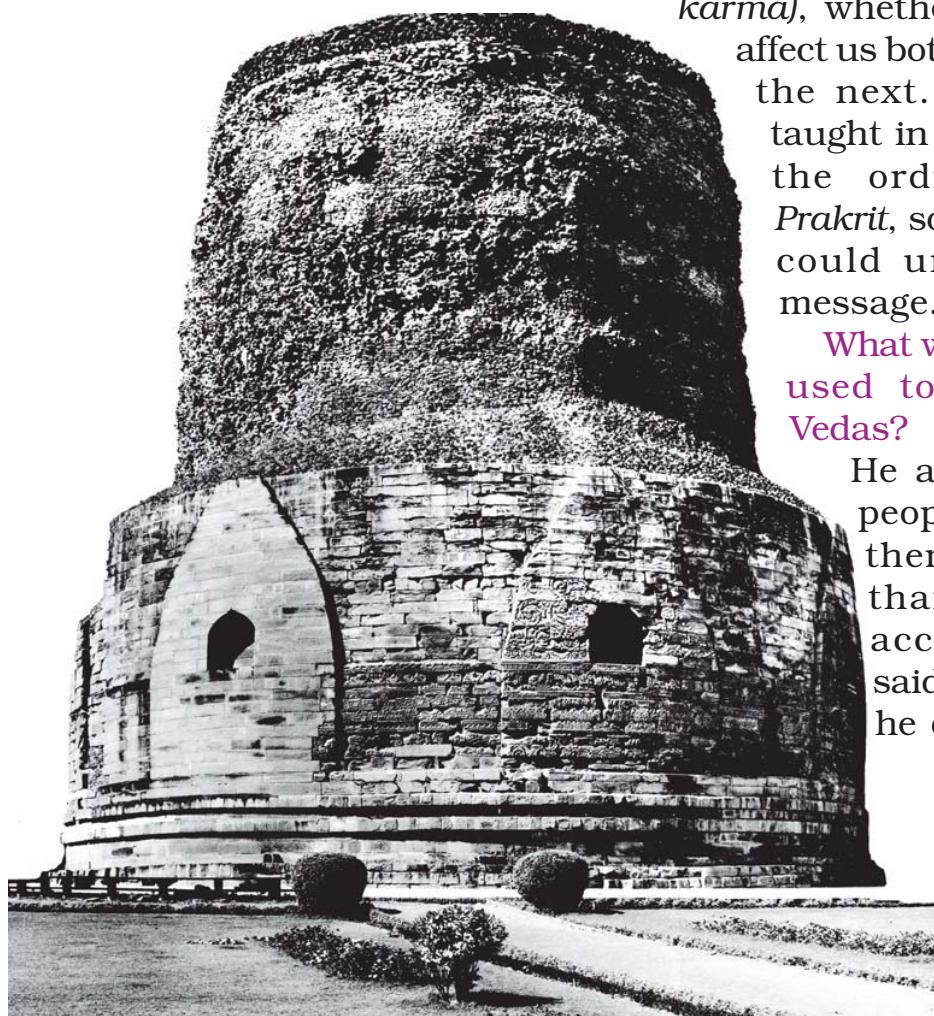


### The story of the Buddha

Siddhartha, also known as Gautama, the founder of Buddhism, was born about 2500 years ago. This was a time of rapid change in the lives of people. As you saw in Chapter 6, some kings in the *mahajanapadas* were growing more powerful. New cities were developing, and life was changing in the villages as well (see Chapter 10). Many thinkers were trying to understand these changes in society. They also wanted to try and find out the true meaning of life.

The Buddha belonged to a small *gana* known as the Sakya *gana*, and was a *kshatriya*. When he was a young man, he left the comforts of his home in search of knowledge. He wandered for several years, meeting and holding discussions with other thinkers. He finally decided to find his own path to realisation, and meditated for days on end under a *peepal* tree at Bodh Gaya in Bihar, where he attained enlightenment. After that, he was known as the *Buddha* or the Wise One. He then went to Sarnath, near Varanasi, where he taught for the first time. He spent the rest of his life travelling on foot, going from place to place, teaching people, till he passed away at Kusinara.

The stupa at Sarnath. This building, known as a stupa, was built to mark the place where the Buddha first taught his message. You will learn more about stupas in Chapter 12.



The Buddha taught that life is full of suffering and unhappiness. This is caused because we have cravings and desires (which often cannot be fulfilled). Sometimes, even if we get what we want, we are not satisfied, and want even more (or want other things). The Buddha described this as thirst or *tanha*. He taught that this constant craving could be removed by following moderation in everything.

He also taught people to be kind, and to respect the lives of others, including animals. He believed that the results of our actions (called *karma*), whether good or bad, affect us both in this life and the next. The Buddha taught in the language of the ordinary people, *Prakrit*, so that everybody could understand his message.

**What was the language used to compose the Vedas?**

He also encouraged people to think for themselves rather than to simply accept what he said. Let us see how he did this.

## The story of Kisagotami

Here is a famous story about the Buddha.

Once there was a woman named Kisagotami, whose son had died. She was so sad that she roamed through the streets of the city carrying the child with her, asking for help to bring him back to life. A kind man took her to the Buddha.

The Buddha said: "Bring me a handful of mustard seeds, and I will bring your child back to life."

Kisagotami was overjoyed and started off at once, but the Buddha gently stopped her and added: "The seeds must come from the house of a family where nobody has died."

Kisagotami went from door to door, but wherever she went, she found out that someone or the other — father, mother, sister, brother, husband, wife, child, uncle, aunt, grandfather, grandmother — had died.

**What was the Buddha trying to teach the sorrowing mother?**

## Upanishads

Around the time that the Buddha was preaching and perhaps a little earlier, other thinkers also tried to find answers to difficult questions. Some of them wanted to know about life after death, others wanted to know why sacrifices should be performed. Many of these thinkers felt that there was something permanent in the universe that would last even after death. They described this as the *atman* or the individual soul and the *brahman* or the universal soul. They believed that ultimately, both the *atman* and the *brahman* were one.

Many of their ideas were recorded in the Upanishads. These were part of the later Vedic texts. Upanishad literally means 'approaching and sitting near' and the texts contain conversations between teachers and students. Often, ideas were presented through simple dialogues.

## The wise beggar

Here is a dialogue based on a story from one of the most famous Upanishads, the Chhandoga Upanishad.

Shaunaka and Abhipratarin were two sages who worshipped the universal soul.

Once, as they sat down to eat, a beggar came and asked for some food. "We cannot spare anything for you," Shaunaka said.

"Learned sirs, whom do you worship?" the beggar asked.

"The universal soul," Abhipratarin replied.

"Ah! It means that you know that the universal soul fills the entire world."

"Yes, yes. We know that." The sages nodded.

"If the universal soul fills the whole world, it fills me too. Who am I, but a part of the world?" the beggar asked.

"You speak the truth, O young *brahmin*."

"Then, O sages, by not giving me food, you are actually denying food to the universal soul."

The sages realised the truth of what the beggar said, and shared their food with him.

**How did the beggar convince the sages to share their food with him?**

Most Upanishadic thinkers were men, especially *brahmins* and *rajas*. Occasionally, there is mention of women thinkers, such as Gargi, who was famous for her learning, and participated in debates held in royal courts. Poor people rarely took part in these discussions. One famous exception was Satyakama Jabala, who was named after his mother, the slave woman Jabali. He had a deep desire to learn about reality, was accepted as a student by a *brahmin* teacher named Gautama, and became one of the best-known thinkers of the time. Many of the ideas of the Upanishads were later developed by the famous thinker Shankaracharya, about whom you will read in Class VII.

## Panini, the grammarian

This was also the time when other scholars were at work. One of the most famous was Panini, who prepared a grammar for Sanskrit. He arranged the vowels and the consonants in a special order, and then used these to create formulae like those found in Algebra. He used these to write down the rules of the language in short formulae (around 3000 of them!).

## Jainism

The most famous thinker of the Jainas, Vardhamana Mahavira, also spread his message around this time, i.e. 2500 years ago. He was a *kshatriya* prince of the Lichchhavis, a group that was part of the *Vajji sangha*, about which you read in Chapter 6. At the age of thirty, he left home and went to live in a forest. For twelve years he led a hard and lonely life, at the end of which he attained enlightenment.

He taught a simple doctrine: men and women who wished to know the truth must leave their homes. They must follow very strictly the rules of *ahimsa*, which means not hurting or killing living beings. “All beings,” said Mahavira “long to live. To all things life is dear.” Ordinary people could understand the teachings of Mahavira and his followers, because they used Prakrit. There were several forms of Prakrit, used in different parts of the country, and named after the regions in which they were used. For example, the Prakrit spoken in Magadha was known as Magadhi.

Followers of Mahavira, who were known as *Jainas*, had to lead very simple lives, begging for food. They had to be absolutely honest, and were especially asked not to steal. Also, they had to observe celibacy. And men had to give up everything, including their clothes.

### Jaina

The word Jaina comes from the term Jina, meaning conqueror. Why do you think the term Jina was used for Mahavira?

It was very difficult for most men and women to follow these strict rules. Nevertheless, thousands left their homes to learn and teach this new way of life. Many more remained behind and supported those who became monks and nuns, providing them with food.

Jainism was supported mainly by traders. Farmers, who had to kill insects to protect their crops, found it more difficult to follow the rules. Over hundreds of years, Jainism spread to different parts of north India, and to Gujarat, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. The teachings of Mahavira and his followers were transmitted orally for several centuries. They were written down in the form in which they are presently available at a place called Valabhi, in Gujarat, about 1500 years ago (see Map 7, page 113).

### The sangha

Both the Mahavira and the Buddha felt that only those who left their homes could gain true knowledge. They arranged for them to stay together in the *sangha*, an association of those who left their homes.

The rules made for the Buddhist *sangha* were written down in a book called the Vinaya Pitaka. From this we know that there were separate branches for men and women. All men could join the *sangha*. However, children had to take the permission of their parents and slaves that of their masters. Those who worked for the king had to take his permission and debtors that of creditors. Women had to take their husbands' permission.

Men and women who joined the *sangha* led simple lives. They meditated for most of the time, and went to cities and villages to beg for food during fixed hours. That is why they were known as *bhikkhus* (the Prakrit word for beggar) and

*bhikkhunis*. They taught others, and helped one another. They also held meetings to settle any quarrels that took place within the *sangha*.

Those who joined the *sangha* included *brahmins*, *kshatriyas*, merchants, labourers, barbers, courtesans and slaves. Many of them wrote down the teachings of the Buddha. Some of them also composed beautiful poems, describing their life in the *sangha*.

**List at least two ways in which the *sangha* described in this lesson was different from the one mentioned in Chapter 6. Were there any similarities?**

## Monasteries

To begin with, both Jaina and Buddhist monks went from place to place throughout the year, teaching people. The only time they stayed in one place was during the rainy season, when it was very difficult to travel. Then, their supporters built temporary shelters for them in gardens, or they lived in natural caves in hilly areas.

As time went on, many supporters of the monks and nuns, and they themselves, felt the need for more permanent shelters and so monasteries were built. These were known as *viharas*. The earliest

A cave hollowed out in the hills.

This is a cave in Karle, present-day Maharashtra. Monks and nuns lived and meditated in these shelters.



*viharas* were made of wood, and then of brick. Some were even in caves that were dug out in hills, especially in western India.

### A Buddhist text tells us:

Just as the waters of rivers lose their names and separateness when they flow into the mighty ocean, so are *varna* and ranks and family forgotten when the followers of the Buddha join the order of monks.

Very often, the land on which the *vihara* was built was donated by a rich merchant or a landowner, or the king. The local people came with gifts of food, clothing and medicines for the monks and nuns. In return, they taught the people. Over the centuries, Buddhism spread to many parts of the subcontinent and beyond. You will learn more about this in Chapter 10.

### The system of ashramas

Around the time when Jainism and Buddhism were becoming popular, *brahmins* developed the system of *ashramas*.

Here, the word *ashrama* does not mean a place where people live and meditate.

It is used instead for a stage of life.

Four *ashramas* were recognised: *brahmacharya*, *grihastha*, *vanaprastha* and *samnyasa*.

*Brahmin*, *kshatriya* and *vaishya* men were expected to lead simple lives and study the Vedas during the early years of their life (*brahmacharya*).

Then they had to marry and live as householders (*grihastha*).

Then they had to live in the forest and meditate (*vanaprastha*).

Finally, they had to give up everything and become *samnyasins*.

The system of *ashramas* allowed men to spend some part of their lives in meditation. Generally, women were not allowed to study the Vedas, and they had to follow the *ashramas* chosen by their husbands.

In what way was the system of *ashramas* different from life in the sangha?

What are the *varnas* mentioned here? Were all four *varnas* allowed to participate in the system of *ashramas*?

## Elsewhere

Find Iran in your atlas. Zoroaster was an Iranian prophet. His teachings are contained in a book called the Avesta. The language of the Avesta, and the practices described in it are very similar to those of the Vedas. The basic teachings of Zoroaster are contained in the maxim “Good thoughts, Good Words and Good Deeds.” Here is a verse from the Zend Avesta:

“Lord, grant strength and the rule of truth and good thinking, by means of which one shall create peace and tranquillity.”

For more than a thousand years, Zoroastrianism was a major religion in Iran. Later, some Zoroastrians migrated from Iran and settled down in the coastal towns of Gujarat and Maharashtra. They were the ancestors of today's Parsis.

## Imagine

You want to go to listen to one of the preachers who lived about 2500 years ago. Describe your conversation with your parents as you try to persuade them to let you go.

### Let's recall



1. Describe the ways in which the Buddha tried to spread his message to the people.
2. Write whether true or false:
  - (a) The Buddha encouraged animal sacrifices.
  - (b) Sarnath is important because it was the place where the Buddha taught for the first time.
  - (c) The Buddha taught that *karma* has no effect on our lives.
  - (d) The Buddha attained enlightenment at Bodh Gaya.

### KEYWORDS

*tanha*  
*Prakrit*  
*Upanishad*  
*atman*  
*brahman*  
*ahimsa*  
*Jaina*  
*sangha*  
*bhikkhu*  
*vihara*  
*monastery*  
*ashrama*

## SOME IMPORTANT DATES

- ▶ Upanishadic thinkers, the Jaina teacher Mahavira and the Buddha (about 2500 years ago)
- ▶ Writing down of the Jaina texts (about 1500 years ago)

- e. Upanishadic thinkers believed that the *atman* and *brahman* were ultimately one.
3. What were the questions that Upanishadic thinkers wanted to answer?
4. What were the main teachings of the Mahavira?

## Let's discuss



5. Why do you think Anagha's mother wanted her to know the story of the Buddha?
6. Do you think it would have been easy for slaves to join the *sangha*? Give reasons for your answer.

## Let's do



7. Make a list of at least five ideas and questions mentioned in this lesson. Choose three from the list and discuss why you think they are important even today.
8. Find out more about men and women who renounce the world today. Where do they live, what kinds of clothes do they wear, what do they eat? Why do they renounce the world?

## CHAPTER 8

# ASHOKA, THE EMPEROR WHO GAVE UP WAR

### Roshan's rupees

Roshan clutched the crisp notes that her grandfather had given her on her birthday. While she badly wanted to buy a new cassette, she also wanted to just see and feel the brand new notes. It was then that she noticed that all of them had a smiling face of Gandhiji printed on the right, and a tiny set of lions on the left. What were the lions there for, she wondered.



### A very big kingdom = an empire

The lions that we see on our notes and coins have a long history. They were carved in stone, and placed on top of a massive stone pillar at Sarnath (about which you read in Chapter 7).

Ashoka was one of the greatest rulers known to history and on his instructions inscriptions were carved on pillars, as well as on rock surfaces. Before we find out what was written in these inscriptions, let us see why his kingdom was called an empire.

The empire that Ashoka ruled was founded by his grandfather, Chandragupta Maurya, more than 2300 years ago. Chandragupta was supported by a wise man named Chanakya or Kautilya. Many of Chanakya's ideas were written down in a book called the Arthashastra.



The lion capital

### Dynasty

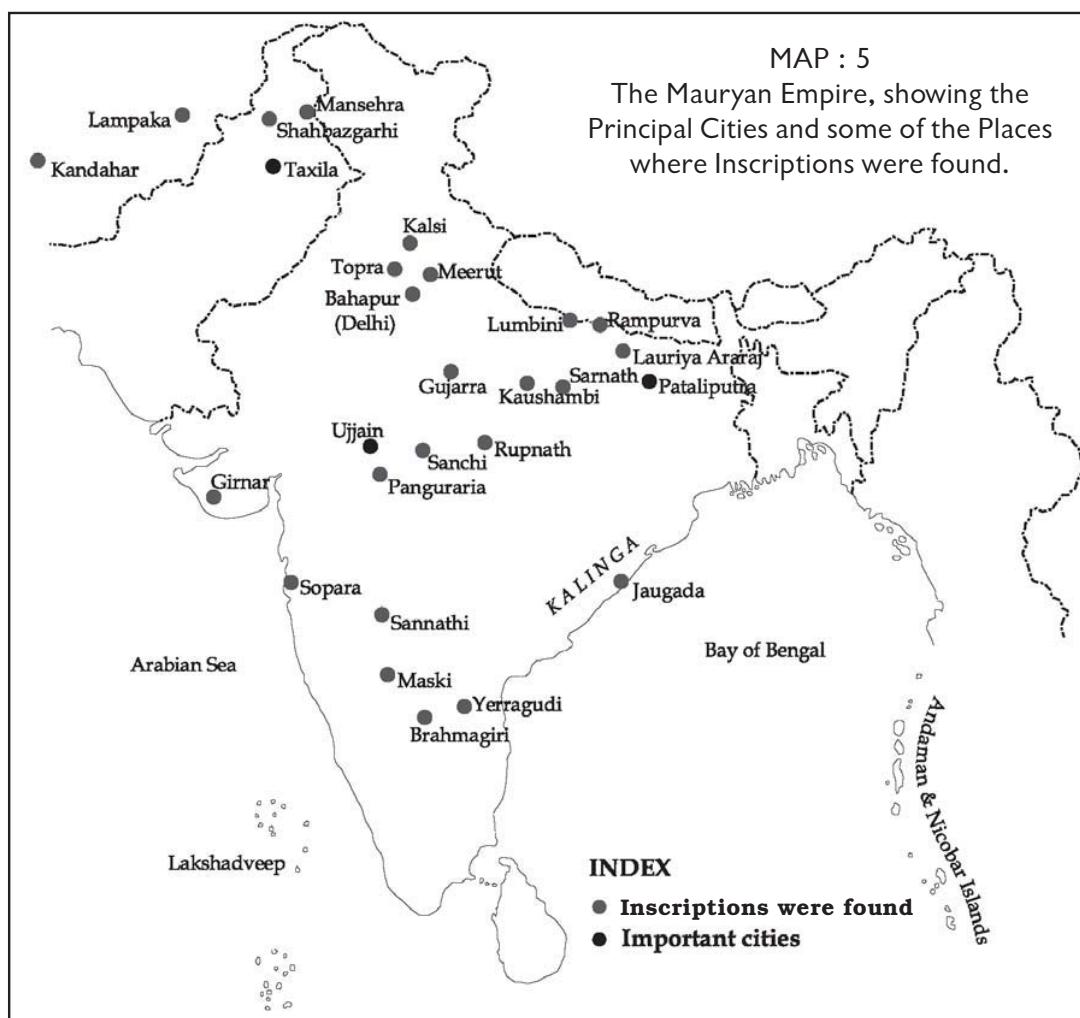
When members of the same family become rulers one after another, the family is often called a dynasty. The Mauryas were a dynasty with three important rulers — Chandragupta, his son Bindusara, and Bindusara's son, Ashoka.

The places where inscriptions of Ashoka have been found are marked with red dots. These were included within the empire.

Name the countries where Ashokan inscriptions have been found. Which Indian states were outside the empire?

There were several cities in the empire (marked with black dots on the map). These included the capital Pataliputra, Taxila, and Ujjain. Taxila was a gateway to the northwest, including Central Asia, while Ujjain lay on the route from north to south India. Merchants, officials and crafts persons probably lived in these cities.

In other areas there were villages of farmers and herders. In some areas such as central India, there were forests where people gathered forest produce and hunted animals for food. People in different parts of the empire spoke different



languages. They probably ate different kinds of food, and wore different kinds of clothes as well.

### How are empires different from kingdoms?

- Emperors need more resources than kings because empires are larger than kingdoms, and need to be protected by big armies.
- So also they need a larger number of officials who collect taxes.

### Ruling the empire

As the empire was so large, different parts were ruled differently. The area around Pataliputra was under the direct control of the emperor. This meant that officials were appointed to collect taxes from farmers, herders, crafts persons and traders, who lived in villages and towns in the area. Officials also punished those who disobeyed the ruler's orders. Many of these officials were given salaries. Messengers went to and fro, and spies kept a watch on the officials. And of course the emperor supervised them all, with the help of members of the royal family, and senior ministers.

There were other areas or provinces. Each of these was ruled from a provincial capital such as Taxila or Ujjain. Although there was some amount of control from Pataliputra, and royal princes were often sent as governors, local customs and rules were probably followed.

Besides, there were vast areas between these centres. Here the Mauryas tried to control roads and rivers, which were important for transport, and to collect whatever resources were available as tax and tribute. For example, the Arthashastra tells us that the north-west was important for blankets, and south India for its gold and precious stones. It is possible that these resources were collected as tribute.

### Tribute

Unlike taxes, which were collected on a regular basis, tribute was collected as and when it was possible from people who gave a variety of things, more or less willingly.

There were also the forested regions. People living in these areas were more or less independent, but may have been expected to provide elephants, timber, honey and wax to Mauryan officials.

### The emperor and the capital city

Megasthenes was an ambassador who was sent to the court of Chandragupta by the Greek ruler of West Asia named Seleucus Nicator.

Megasthenes wrote an account about what he saw. Here is a part of his description:

"The occasions on which the emperor appears in public are celebrated with grand royal processions. He is carried in a golden palanquin. His guards ride elephants decorated with gold and silver. Some of the guards carry trees on which live birds, including a flock of trained parrots, circle about the head of the emperor. The king is normally surrounded by armed women. He is afraid that someone may try to kill him. He has special servants to taste the food before he eats. He never sleeps in the same bedroom for two nights."

And about Pataliputra (modern Patna) he wrote:

"This is a large and beautiful city. It is surrounded by a massive wall. It has 570 towers and 64 gates. The houses, of two and three storeys, are built of wood and mud brick. The king's palace is also of wood, and decorated with stone carvings. It is surrounded with gardens and enclosures for keeping birds."

Why do you think the king had special servants to taste the food he ate?

In what ways was Pataliputra different from Mohenjodaro? (hint: see Chapter 4)

## Ashoka, a unique ruler

The most famous Mauryan ruler was Ashoka. He was the first ruler who tried to take his message to the people through inscriptions. Most of Ashoka's inscriptions were in Prakrit and were written in the Brahmi script.

## Ashoka's war in Kalinga

Kalinga is the ancient name of coastal Orissa (see Map 5, page 76). Ashoka fought a war to conquer Kalinga. However, he was so horrified when he saw the violence and bloodshed that he decided not to fight any more wars. He is the only king in the history of the world who gave up conquest after winning a war.

### Ashoka's inscription describing the Kalinga war

This is what Ashoka declared in one of his inscriptions:

“Eight years after becoming king I conquered Kalinga.

About a lakh and a half people were captured. And more than a lakh of people were killed.

This filled me with sorrow. Why?

Whenever an independent land is conquered, lakhs of people die, and many are taken prisoner. Brahmins and monks also die.

People who are kind to their relatives and friends, to their slaves and servants die, or lose their loved ones.

That is why I am sad, and have decided to observe *dhamma*, and to teach others about it as well.

I believe that winning people over through *dhamma* is much better than conquering them through force.

I am inscribing this message for the future, so that my son and grandson after me should not think about war.

Instead, they should try to think about how to spread *dhamma*.“

**How did the Kalinga war bring about a change in Ashoka's attitude towards war?**

(‘Dhamma’ is the Prakrit word for the Sanskrit term ‘Dharma’).

## What was Ashoka's dhamma?

Ashoka's *dhamma* did not involve worship of a god, or performance of a sacrifice. He felt that just as a father tries to teach his children, he had a duty to instruct his subjects. He was also inspired by the teachings of the Buddha (Chapter 7).

The Rampurwa bull. Look at this finely polished stone sculpture. This was part of a Mauryan pillar found in Rampurwa, Bihar, and has now been placed in Rashtrapati Bhavan. It is an example of the skill of the sculptors of the time.



There were a number of problems that troubled him. People in the empire followed different religions, and this sometimes led to conflict. Animals were sacrificed. Slaves and servants were ill treated. Besides, there were quarrels in families and amongst neighbours. Ashoka felt it was his duty to solve these problems. So, he appointed officials, known as the *dhamma mahamatta* who went from place to place teaching people about *dhamma*. Besides, Ashoka got his messages inscribed on rocks and pillars, instructing his officials to read his message to those who could not read it themselves.

Ashoka also sent messengers to spread ideas about *dhamma* to other lands, such as Syria, Egypt, Greece and Sri Lanka (see Map 6, pages 84-85). He built roads, dug wells, and built rest houses. Besides, he arranged for medical treatment for both human beings and animals.

### Ashoka's messages to his subjects:

"People perform a variety of rituals when they fall ill, when their children get married, when children are born, or when they go on a journey.

These rituals are not useful.

If instead, people observe other practices, this would be more fruitful. What are these other practices?

These are: being gentle with slaves and servants. Respecting one's elders.

Treating all creatures with compassion.

Giving gifts to brahmins and monks."

"It is both wrong to praise one's own religion or criticise another's.

Each one should respect the other's religion.

If one praises one's own religion while criticising another's, one is actually doing greater harm to one's own religion.

Therefore, one should try to understand the main ideas of another's religion, and respect it."

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, wrote: "His edicts (instructions) still speak to us in a language we can understand and we can still learn much from them."

Identify the parts of Ashoka's message that you think are relevant today.

Below : The Brahmi script.

Most modern Indian scripts have developed from the Brahmi script over hundreds of years. Here you can see the letter 'a' written in different scripts.



Early Brahmi



Devanagari (Hindi)



Bengali



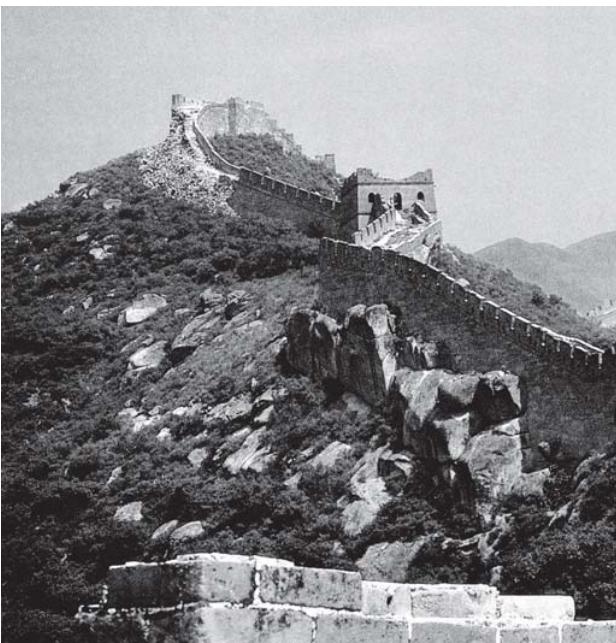
Malayalam



Tamil

## Elsewhere

Somewhat before the time of the Mauryan empire, about 2400 years ago, emperors in China began building the Great Wall.



It was meant to protect the northern frontier of the empire from pastoral people. Additions to the wall were made over a period of 2000 years because the frontiers of the empire kept shifting. The wall is about 6400 km long, and is made of stone and brick, with a road along the top. Several thousand people worked to build the wall. There are watch towers all along, at distances of about 100-200 m.

In what ways do you think Ashoka's attitude toward neighbouring peoples was different from that of the Chinese emperors?

## Imagine

You live in Kalinga, and your parents have suffered in the war. Messengers from Ashoka have just arrived with the new ideas about *dhamma*. Describe the dialogue between them and your parents.

### Let's recall



1. Make a list of the occupations of the people who lived within the Mauryan empire.
2. Complete the following sentences:
  - (a) Officials collected \_\_\_\_\_ from the area under the direct control of the ruler.
  - (b) Royal princes often went to the provinces as \_\_\_\_\_

- (c) The Mauryan rulers tried to control \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ which were important for transport.
- (d) People in forested regions provided the Mauryan officials with \_\_\_\_\_
3. State whether true or false:
- (a) Ujjain was the gateway to the north-west.
- (c) Chandragupta's ideas were written down in the Arthashastra.
- (d) Kalinga was the ancient name of Bengal.
- (e) Most Ashokan inscriptions are in the Brahmi script.

#### KEYWORDS

empire  
capital  
province  
*dhamma*  
messenger  
official

#### Let's discuss



4. What were the problems that Ashoka wanted to solve by introducing *dhamma*?
5. What were the means adopted by Ashoka to spread the message of *dhamma*?
6. Why do you think slaves and servants were ill-treated? Do you think the orders of the emperor would have improved their condition? Give reasons for your answer.

#### SOME IMPORTANT DATES

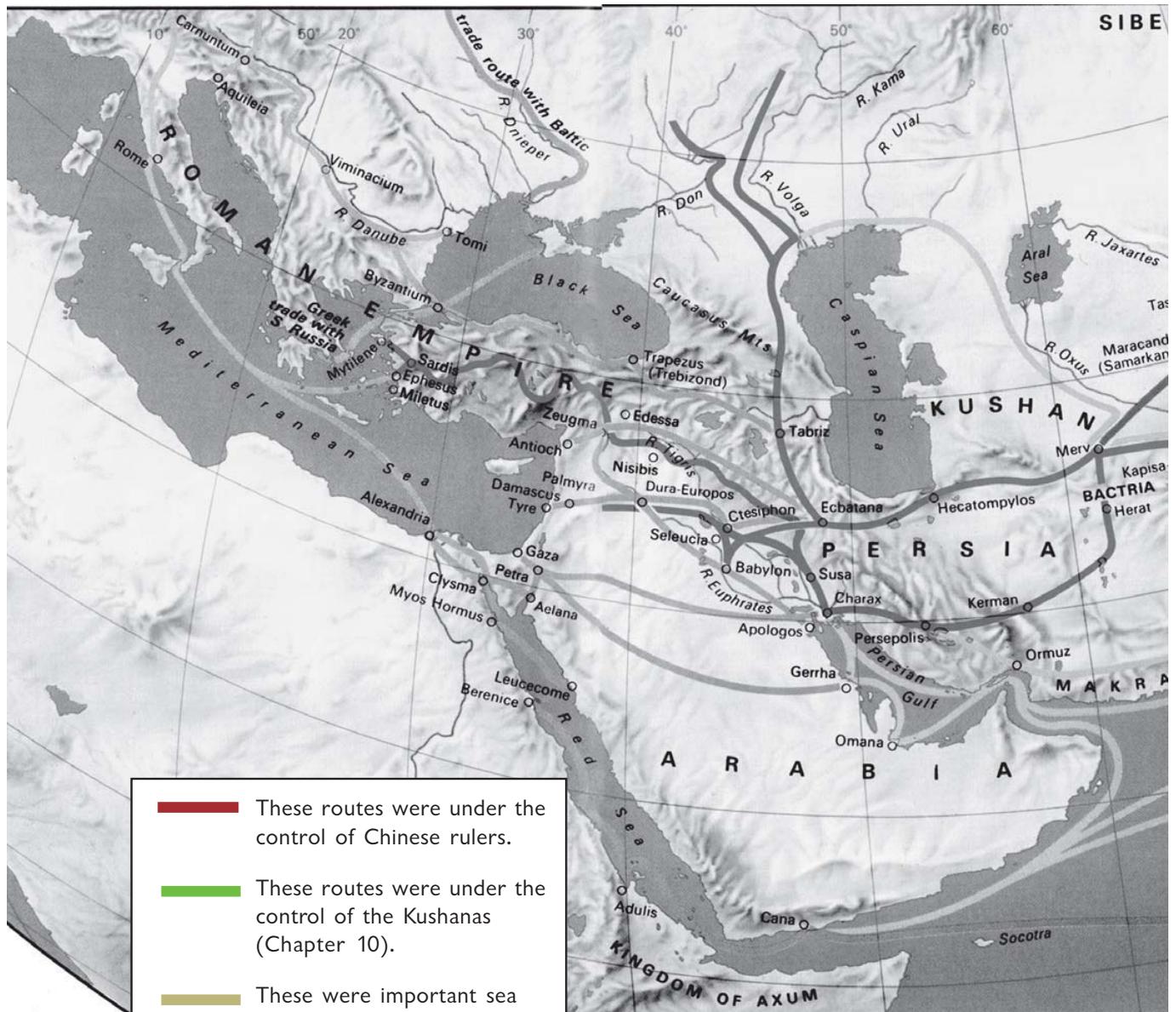
- Beginning of the Mauryan empire (more than 2300 years ago)

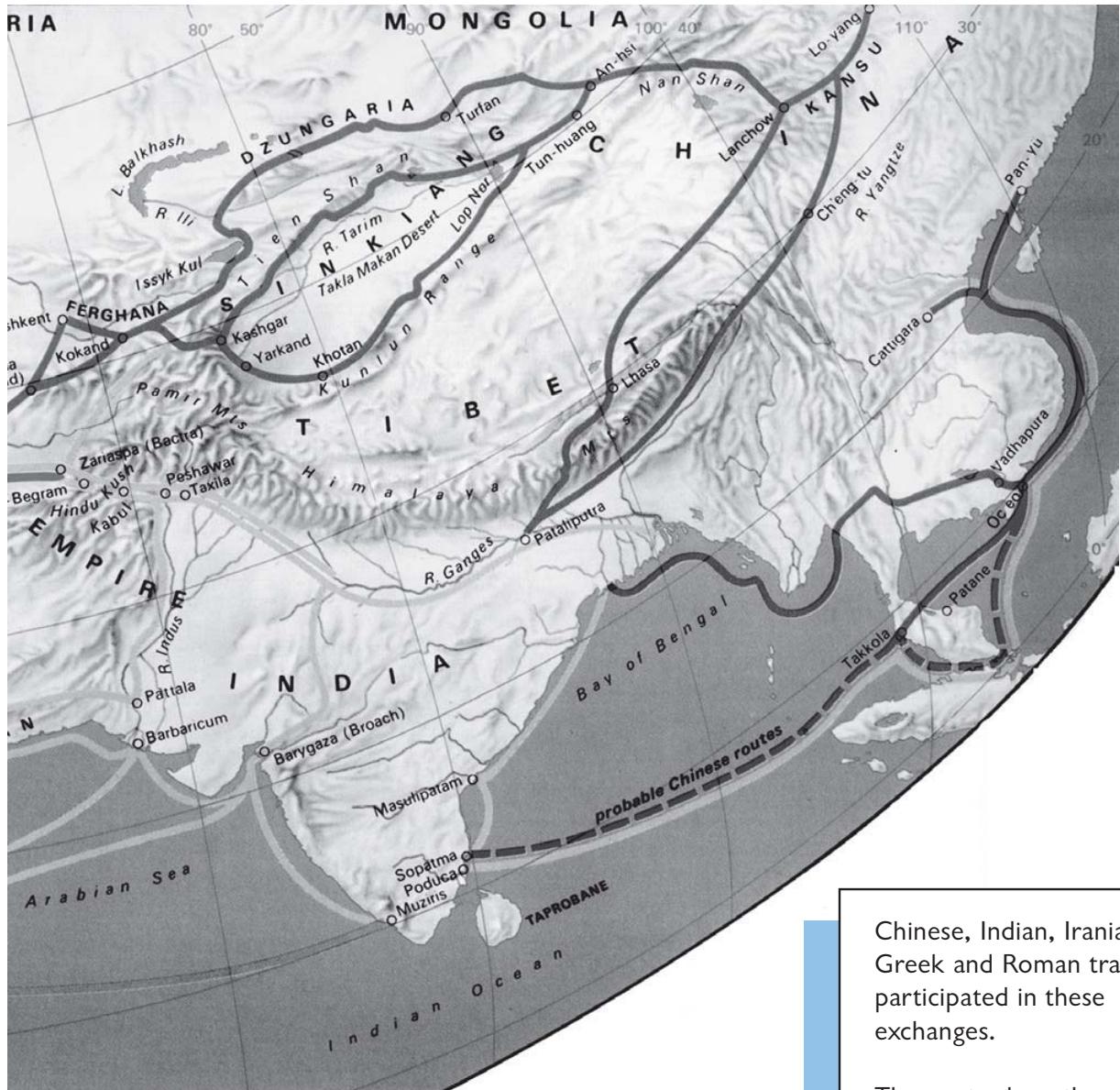
#### Let's do



7. Write a short paragraph explaining to Roshan why the lions are shown on our currency notes. List at least one other object on which you see them.
8. Suppose you had the power to inscribe your orders, what four commands would you like to issue?

**MAP : 6**  
**Showing Important Trade Routes including the Silk Route**





Based on *The Times Atlas of World History*,  
(ed. Geoffrey Barraclough) Hammond Inc,  
New Jersey, 1986, pp 70-71.

Chinese, Indian, Iranian, Arab, Greek and Roman traders participated in these exchanges.

The ports along the coast of south India were important centres for the export of pepper and other spices.

Find Poduca (south India) on the map. This was the Roman name for Arikamedu (Chapter 9).

## LOOKING AHEAD

The Mauryan empire collapsed about 2200 years ago. In its place (and elsewhere) rose several new kingdoms. In the north-west, and in parts of north India, kings known as the Indo-Greeks ruled for about one hundred years. They were followed

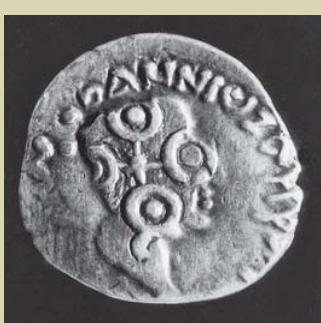


An Indo-Greek coin

by a Central Asian people known as the Shakas, who set up kingdoms in the north-west, north and western India. Some of these kingdoms lasted for about 500 years, till the Shakas were defeated by the Gupta kings (Chapter 11). The Shakas in turn were followed by the Kushanas (about 2000 years ago). You will learn more about the Kushanas in Chapter 10.

In the north, and in parts of central India, a general of the Mauryas, named Pushyamitra Shunga, set up a kingdom. The Shungas were followed by another dynasty, known as the Kanvas, and by rulers from other families till the establishment of the Gupta empire about 1700 years ago.

The Shakas who ruled over parts of western India fought several battles with the Satavahanas, who ruled over western and parts of central India. The Satavahana kingdom, which was established about 2100 years ago, lasted for about 400 years. Around 1700 years ago, a new ruling family, known as the Vakatakas, became powerful in central and western India.



A Shaka coin

In south India, the Cholas, Cheras and Pandyas ruled between 2200 and 1800 years ago. And, about 1500 years ago, there were two large kingdoms, those of the Pallavas and the Chalukyas. There were several other kingdoms and kings as well. We know about them from their coins and inscriptions, as well as from books.

There were other changes that were taking place, in which ordinary men and women played a major role. These included the spread of agriculture and the growth of new towns, craft production and

trade. Traders explored land routes within the subcontinent and outside, and sea routes to West Asia, East Africa and South East Asia (see Map 6) were also opened up. And many new buildings were built — including the earliest temples and *stupas*, books were written, and scientific discoveries were made. These developments took place *simultaneously*, i.e. at the same time. Keep this in mind as you read the rest of the book.



A Kushana coin



A Satavahana coin

## CHAPTER 9

# VITAL VILLAGES, THRIVING TOWNS

### Prabhakar at the blacksmith's shop

Prabhakar sat watching the smiths at the local shop. There was a small bench on which iron tools like axes and sickles were laid out, ready for sale. A bright fire was burning, and two men were heating and beating metal rods into shape. It was very hot and noisy, and yet it was fascinating to watch what was happening.



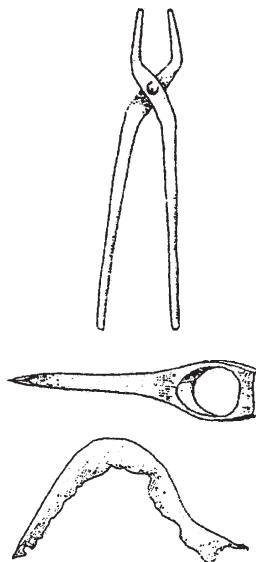
### Iron tools and agriculture

We often take the use of iron for granted today. Things made of iron (and steel) are a part of our daily lives. The use of iron began in the subcontinent around 3000 years ago. Some of the largest collections of iron tools and weapons were found in the megalithic burials, about which you read in Chapter 5.

Around 2500 years ago, there is evidence for the growing use of iron tools. These included axes for clearing forests, and the iron ploughshare. As we had seen (Chapter 6) the ploughshare was useful for increasing agricultural production.

### Other steps to increase production: irrigation

The kings and kingdoms you have been reading about could not have existed without the support of flourishing villages. While new tools and the system of transplantation (Chapter 6) increased production, irrigation was also used. Irrigation works that were built during this time included canals, wells, tanks, and artificial lakes.



Iron tools.

Here is a set of captions.  
Choose the right one for  
each of the pictures.

Sickle, tongs, axe.

Prepare a list of at least  
five objects made of iron  
or steel that you use almost  
everyday.

If you look at the chart, you will find that some of the stages in the construction of irrigation works are mentioned.

Fill in the rest by using the following phrases:

- Labour is provided by the people.
- Farmers also benefit because crop production is more certain.
- Farmers have to increase production to pay taxes.
- Kings provide money and plan irrigation works.

1. Kings need money for armies, palaces, forts.

2. They demand taxes from farmers.

3.

4. This is possible with irrigation.

5.

6.

7. Production increases.

8. So does revenue.

9.

### Who lived in the villages?

There were at least three different kinds of people living in most villages in the southern and northern parts of the subcontinent. In the Tamil region, large landowners were known as *vellalar*, ordinary ploughmen were known as *uzhavar*, and landless labourers, including slaves, were known as *kadaisiyar* and *adimai*.

In the northern part of the country, the village headman was known as the *grama bhojaka*. Usually, men from the same family held the position for generations. In other words, the post was hereditary. The *grama bhojaka* was often the largest landowner. Generally, he had slaves and hired workers to cultivate the land. Besides, as he was powerful, the king often used him to collect taxes from the village. He also functioned as a judge, and sometimes as a policeman.

Apart from the *gramabhojaka*, there were other independent farmers, known as *grihapatis*, most of whom were smaller landowners. And then there were men and women such as the *dasa karmakara*, who did not own land, and had to earn a living working on the fields owned by others.

In most villages there were also some crafts persons such as the blacksmith, potter, carpenter and weaver.

### The earliest Tamil compositions

Some of the earliest works in Tamil, known as *Sangam* literature, were composed around 2300 years ago. These texts were called *Sangam* because they were supposed to have been composed and compiled in assemblies (known as *sangams*) of poets that were held in the city of Madurai (see Map 7, page 113). The Tamil terms mentioned above are found in *Sangam* literature.

### Finding out about cities: stories, travellers, sculpture and archaeology

You may have heard of the Jatakas. These were stories that were probably composed by ordinary people, and then written down and preserved by Buddhist monks. Here is part of a Jataka story, which tells us how a poor man gradually became rich.

## The clever poor man

Once upon a time, there was a clever poor young man who lived in a city. His only resource was a dead rat. He started off by selling it for a coin to a hotel, for their cat.

Then one day, there was a storm. The king's garden was littered with branches and leaves, and the gardener was at a loss as to how to clear the mess. The young man offered to clean the garden if he could keep the wood and leaves. The gardener agreed at once.

The young man rounded up all the children who were playing, with an offer of sweets for every stick and leaf that they could collect. In no time, every scrap had been neatly piled near the entrance. Just then, the king's potter was on the look out for fuel with which to bake his pots. So he took the whole lot and paid the young man for it.

Our young man now thought of another plan. He carried a jar full of water to the city gate, and offered water to 500 grass cutters. They were pleased and said: "You have done us a good turn. Tell us, what can we do for you?"

He replied, "I'll let you know when I need your help."

He then made friends with a trader. One day, the trader told him: "Tomorrow, a horse dealer is coming to town with 500 horses." Hearing this, our young man went back to the grass cutters. He said: "Please give me a bundle of grass each, and don't sell your grass till mine is sold." They agreed, and gave him 500 bundles of grass.

When the horse dealer could not buy grass anywhere else, he purchased the young man's grass for a thousand coins. ...

**List the occupations of the persons mentioned in the story.**

**For each one, try and decide whether they would have lived (a) only in the city (b) only in villages (c) in both cities and villages.**

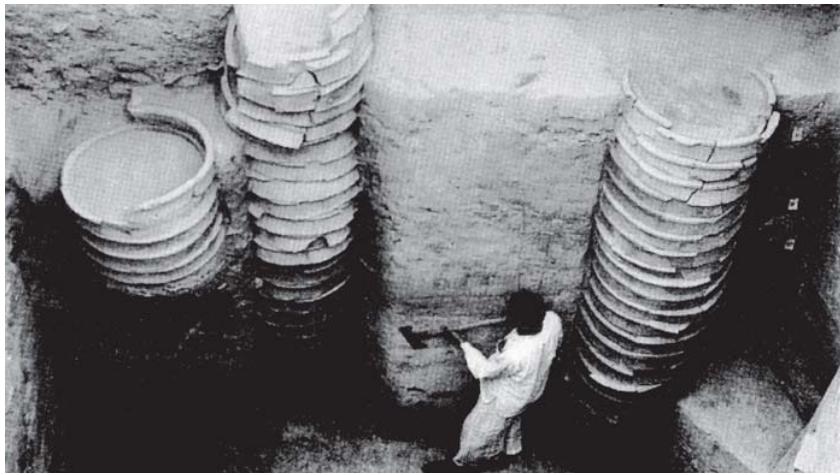
**Why do you think the horse dealer was coming to the city?**

**Do you think women could have taken up the occupations mentioned in the story? Give reasons for your answer.**

Facing Page : Ring well found in Delhi.

*In what ways do you think this system of drainage was different from that of the Harappans?*

We can use other kinds of evidence to find out about life in some of these early cities. Sculptors carved scenes depicting peoples' lives in towns and villages, as well as in the forest. Many of these sculptures were used to decorate railings, pillars and gateways of buildings that were visited by people.



Many of the cities that developed from about 2500 years ago were capitals of the *mahajanapadas* that you learnt about in Chapter 6. As we had seen, some of these cities were surrounded by massive fortification walls.

In many cities, archaeologists have found rows of pots, or ceramic rings arranged one on top of the other. These are known as ring wells. These seem to have been used as toilets in some cases, and as drains and garbage dumps. These ring wells are usually found in individual houses.

We have hardly any remains of palaces, markets, or of homes of ordinary people. Perhaps some are yet to be discovered by archaeologists. Others, made of wood, mud brick and thatch, may not have survived.

Another way of finding out about early cities is from the accounts of sailors and travellers who visited them. One of the most detailed accounts that has been found was by an unknown Greek sailor. He described all the ports he visited. Find

Below : A sculpture from Sanchi.

This is a sculpture from Sanchi, a site with *stupas*, in Madhya Pradesh, showing the scene in a city. You will learn more about Sanchi in Chapter 12. Notice the way walls are shown. Are they made of brick, wood or stone? Now look at the railings. Are they made of wood? Describe the roofs of the buildings.



Bharuch on Map 7 (page 113) and then read his description of the city.

### The story of Barygaza (the Greek name for Bharuch)

The gulf is very narrow at Barygaza, and very hard to navigate for those coming from the sea.

Ships had to be steered in by skilful and experienced local fishermen who were employed by the king.

The imports into Barygaza were wine, copper, tin, lead, coral, topaz, cloth, gold and silver coins.

Exports from the town included plants from the Himalayas, ivory, agate, carnelian, cotton, silk and perfumes.

Special gifts were brought by merchants for the king. These included vessels of silver, singing boys, beautiful women, fine wines and fine cloth.

Make a list of all the things imported and exported from Barygaza. Underline at least two things that were not in use during Harappan times.

Why do you think merchants brought gifts for the king?

### Coins

You may have noticed how wealth is measured in terms of coins in the story on page 90. Archaeologists have found several thousands of coins belonging to this period. The earliest coins which were in use for about 500 years were punch marked coins, such as the one shown below. They have been given this name because the designs were punched on to the metal — silver or copper.



### Other means of exchange

Read this short poem from the Sangam collection:

As they carry the white paddy of their land  
To exchange it for the salt of another,  
Crossing the long roads in carts,  
Through sands white as moonlight,  
Taking whole families,  
Who hate to be left behind,  
The departure of the salt merchants  
Leaves the city empty.

Salt was produced plentifully along the sea coast.

What are the merchants planning to exchange it with?

How are they travelling?

### Cities with many functions

Very often, a single town was important for a variety of reasons. Let us look at the example of Mathura (Map 7, page 113).

Mathura has been an important settlement for more than 2500 years. It was important because it was located at the cross roads of two major routes of travel and trade — from the northwest to the east and from north to south. There were fortifications around the city, and several shrines. Farmers and herders from adjoining areas provided food for people in the city. Mathura was also a centre where some extremely fine sculpture was produced.

Around 2000 years ago Mathura became the second capital of the Kushanas, about whom you will be reading in Chapter 10. Mathura was also a religious centre — there were Buddhist monasteries, Jaina shrines, and it was an important centre for the worship of Krishna.

Several inscriptions on surfaces such as stone slabs and statues have been found in Mathura.

Generally, these are short inscriptions, recording gifts made by men (and sometimes women) to monasteries and shrines. These were made by kings and queens, officers, merchants, and crafts persons who lived in the city. For instance, inscriptions from Mathura mention goldsmiths, blacksmiths, weavers, basket makers, garland makers, perfumers.

**Make a list of the occupations of people who lived in Mathura. List one occupation that was not practised in Harappan cities.**

### Crafts and crafts persons

We also have archaeological evidence for crafts. These include extremely fine pottery, known as the Northern Black Polished Ware. It gets its name from the fact that it is generally found in the northern part of the subcontinent. It is usually black in colour, and has a fine sheen.

Remember that the archaeological evidence for many crafts may not have survived. We know from texts that the manufacture of cloth was important. There were famous centres such as Varanasi in the north, and Madurai in the south. Both men and women worked in these centres.

Many crafts persons and merchants now formed associations known as *shrenis*. These *shrenis* of crafts persons provided training, procured raw material, and distributed the finished product. Then *shrenis* of merchants organised the trade. *Shrenis* also served as banks, where rich men and women deposited money. This was invested, and part of the interest was returned or used to support religious institutions such as monasteries.

## Rules for spinning and weaving

These rules are from the *Arthashastra*, mentioned in Chapter 8. They describe how spinning and weaving could be done in workshops under the supervision of a special official.

“Widows, young women who are differently abled, nuns, mothers of courtesans, retired women servants of the king, women who have retired from service in temples, may be used for processing wool, bark, cotton, hemp and flax.

They should be paid according to the quality and quantity of work.

Women who are not permitted to leave their homes can send maid-servants to bring the raw material from the superintendent, and take the finished work back to him.

Women who can visit the workshop should go at dawn to give their work and receive their wages. There should be enough light to examine the work. In case the superintendent looks at the woman or talks about anything other than the work, he should be punished.

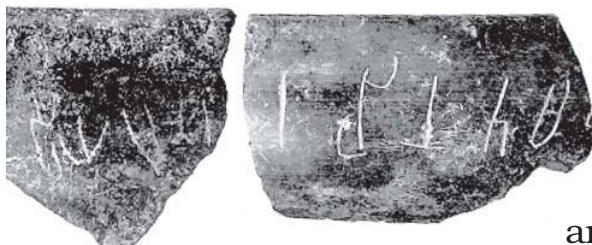
If a woman does not complete her work, she will have to pay a fine, and her thumbs can be cut off.”

**Make a list of all the women who could be employed by the superintendent.**

**Do you think women would have faced any problems while working?**

## A closer look — Arikamedu

Find Arikamedu (in Pondicherry) on Map 7 (page 113), and read the box on Rome on page 96. Between 2200 and 1900 years ago, Arikamedu was a coastal settlement where ships unloaded goods from distant lands. A massive brick structure, which may have been a warehouse, was found at the site. Other finds include pottery from the Mediterranean region, such as amphorae (tall double-handled jars that contained liquids such as wine or oil) and stamped red-glazed pottery, known as Arretine Ware, which was named after a city in Italy. This was made by pressing wet clay into a stamped mould. There was yet another kind of pottery which was made locally, though Roman designs were used. Roman lamps, glassware and gems have also been found at the site.



Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions.  
Several pieces of pottery  
have inscriptions in  
Brahmi, which was used  
to write Tamil.

Small tanks have been found that were probably dyeing vats, used to dye cloth. There is plenty of evidence for the making of beads from semi-precious stones and glass.

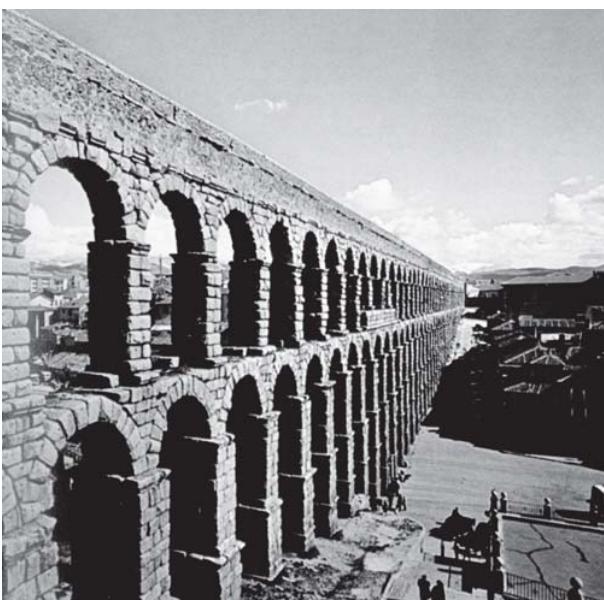
**List the evidence that indicates that there was contact with Rome.**

### Elsewhere

Find Rome on Map 6 (page 84). This is one of the oldest cities in Europe, and developed around the same time as the cities in the Ganga valley. Rome was the capital of one of the largest empires —

one that spread across Europe, North Africa, and West Asia. Augustus, one of the most important emperors, who ruled about 2000 years ago, said that he found Rome a city of brick, and made it into a city of marble. He, and later rulers, built temples and palaces.

They also built huge amphitheatres — open arenas surrounded by tiers of seats — where citizens could watch all kinds of shows, and public baths (with separate timings for men and women), where people met and relaxed.



An aqueduct

Huge aqueducts — channels to supply water — were built to bring water to the city — for the baths, fountains and toilets.

**Why do you think the amphitheatres and aqueducts have survived?**

## Imagine

You live in Barygaza and are visiting the port. Describe what you would see there.

### Let's recall



1. Fill in the blanks:
  - (a) \_\_\_\_\_ was a word used for large landowners in Tamil.
  - (b) The *gramabhojaka* often got his land cultivated by the \_\_\_\_\_.
  - (c) Ploughmen were known as \_\_\_\_\_ in Tamil.
  - (d) Most *grihapatis* were \_\_\_\_\_ landowners.
2. Describe the functions of the *gramabhojaka*. Why do you think he was powerful?
3. List the crafts persons who would have been present in both villages and cities.
4. Choose the correct answer:
  - (a) Ring wells were used for:
    1. bathing
    2. washing clothes
    3. irrigation
    4. drainage
  - (b) Punch marked coins were made of:
    1. silver
    2. gold
    3. tin
    4. ivory

#### KEYWORDS

iron  
irrigation  
village  
port  
ring well  
city  
*shreni*  
*Sangam*

## SOME IMPORTANT DATES

- ▶ Beginning of the use of iron in the subcontinent (about 3000 years ago)
- ▶ Increase in the use of iron, cities, punch marked coins (about 2500 years ago)
- ▶ Beginning of the composition of Sangam literature (about 2300 years ago)
- ▶ Settlement in Arikamedu (between 2200 and 1900 years ago)

(c) Mathura was an important:

1. village
2. port
3. religious centre
4. forested area

(d) Shrenis were associations of:

1. rulers
2. crafts persons
3. farmers
4. herders

## Let's discuss



5. Which of the iron tools shown on page 87 would have been important for agriculture? What would the other tools have been used for?
6. Compare the drainage system in your locality with that of the cities mentioned in the lesson. What similarities and differences do you notice?

## Let's do



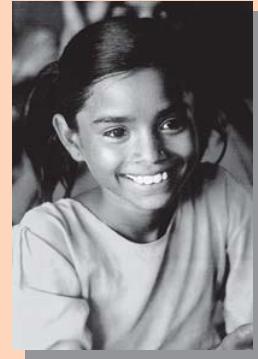
7. If you have seen crafts persons at work, describe in a short paragraph what they do. (Hint: how do they get the raw materials, what kind of equipment do they use, how do they work, what happens to the finished product).
8. List the functions performed by men and women who live in your city or village. In what ways are these similar to those performed by people who lived in Mathura? In what ways are they different?

## CHAPTER 10

# TRADERS, KINGS AND PILGRIMS

### Jagini at the market

Jagini looked forward to the fair in the village. She loved to see and touch the pots and pans of shiny steel, bright plastic buckets, cloth printed with brilliant floral designs, and clockwork toys, all of which came from the city. The men who spread out their wares came in buses and trucks and went back at the end of the day. Why were they always on the move? She wondered. Her mother explained that they were traders — people who bought things where they were made, and sold them elsewhere.



### How to find out about trade and traders

You read about the Northern Black Polished Ware in Chapter 9. This fine pottery, especially bowls and plates, were found from several archaeological sites throughout the subcontinent. How do you think it reached these places? Traders may have carried them from the places where they were made, to sell them at other places.

South India was famous for gold, spices, especially pepper, and precious stones. Pepper was particularly valued in the Roman Empire, so much so that it was known as black gold. So, traders carried many of these goods to Rome in ships, across the sea, and by land in caravans. There must have been quite a lot of trade as many Roman gold coins have been found in south India.

Can you think of how and why these reached India?

### A poem about trade

We can find evidence of trade in the Sangam poems.

Here is one which describes the goods brought into Puhar, an important port on the east coast:

"(Here are brought)  
Swift, prancing horses by sea in ships,  
Bales of black pepper in carts,  
Gems and gold born in the Himalayas,  
Sandalwood born in the western hills,  
The pearls of the southern seas  
And corals from the eastern oceans  
The yield of the Ganga and the crops from the Kaveri,  
Foodstuffs from Sri Lanka, pottery from Myanmar,  
And other rare and rich imports."

Make a list of all the things that are mentioned.  
What would they be used for?

Traders explored several sea routes. Some of these followed the coasts. There were others across the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal, where sailors took advantage of the monsoon winds to cross the seas more quickly. So, if they wanted to reach the western coast of the subcontinent from East Africa or Arabia, they chose to sail with the south-west monsoon. And sturdy ships had to be built for these long journeys.

### New kingdoms along the coasts

The southern half of the subcontinent is marked by a long coastline, and with hills, plateaus, and river valleys. Amongst the river valleys, that of the Kaveri is the most fertile. Chiefs and kings who controlled the river valleys and the coasts became rich and powerful. Sangam poems mention the *muvendar*. This is a Tamil word meaning three chiefs, used for the heads of three

ruling families, the Cholas, Cheras, and Pandyas (see Map 7, page 113), who became powerful in south India around 2300 years ago.

Each of the three chiefs had two centres of power: one inland, and one on the coast. Of these six cities, two were very important: Puhar or Kaveripattinam, the port of the Cholas, and Madurai, the capital of the Pandyas.

The chiefs did not collect regular taxes. Instead, they demanded and received gifts from the people. They also went on military expeditions, and collected tribute from neighbouring areas. They kept some of the wealth and distributed the rest amongst their supporters, including members of their family, soldiers, and poets. Many poets whose compositions are found in the Sangam collection composed poems in praise of chiefs who often rewarded them with precious stones, gold, horses, elephants, chariots, and fine cloth.

Around 200 years later a dynasty known as the Satavahanas became powerful in western India (see Map 7, page 113). The most important ruler of the Satavahanas was Gautamiputra Shri Satakarni. We know about him from an inscription composed by his mother, Gautami Balashri. He and other Satavahana rulers were known as lords of the *dakshinapatha*, literally the route leading to the south, which was also used as a name for the entire southern region. He sent his army to the eastern, western and southern coasts.

**Why do you think he wanted to control the coasts?**

### **The story of the Silk Route**

The rich, glossy colours of silk, as well as its smooth texture, make it a highly valued fabric in most societies. Making silk is a complicated process. Raw silk has to be extracted from the

cocoons of silk worms, spun into thread and then woven into cloth. Techniques of making silk were first invented in China around 7000 years ago. While the methods remained a closely guarded secret for thousands of years, some people from China who went to distant lands on foot, horseback, and on camels, carried silk with them. The paths they followed came to be known as the Silk Route.

Sometimes, Chinese rulers sent gifts of silk to rulers in Iran and west Asia, and from there, the knowledge of silk spread further west. About 2000 years ago, wearing silk became the fashion amongst rulers and rich people in Rome. It was very expensive, as it had to be brought all the way from China, along dangerous roads, through mountains and deserts. People living along the route often demanded payments for allowing traders to pass through.

Look at Map 6 (pages 84-85) which shows the Silk Route and its branches. Some kings tried to control large portions of the route. This was because they could benefit from taxes, tributes and gifts that were brought by traders travelling along the route. In return, they often protected the traders who passed through their kingdoms from attacks by robbers.

The best-known of the rulers who controlled the Silk Route were the Kushanas, who ruled over central Asia and north-west India around 2000 years ago. Their two major centres of power were Peshawar and Mathura. Taxila was also included in their kingdom. During their rule, a branch of the Silk Route extended from Central Asia down to the seaports at the mouth of the river Indus, from where silk was shipped westwards to the Roman Empire. The Kushanas were amongst the earliest rulers of the subcontinent to issue gold

coins. These were used by traders along the Silk Route.

Why do you think it would have been difficult to use carts along the Silk Route?

Silk was also sent from China by sea. Trace the routes on Map 6 (pages 84-85). What do you think would have been the advantages and problems in transporting silk by sea?

### The spread of Buddhism

The most famous Kushana ruler was Kanishka, who ruled around 1900 years ago. He organised a Buddhist council, where scholars met and discussed important matters.

Ashvaghosha, a poet who composed a biography of the Buddha, the Buddhacharita, lived in his court. Ashvaghosha and other Buddhist scholars now began writing in Sanskrit.

A new form of Buddhism, known as Mahayana Buddhism, now developed. This had two distinct features. Earlier, the Buddha's presence was shown in sculpture by using certain signs. For instance, his attainment of enlightenment was shown by sculptures of the *peepal* tree.

Now, statues of the Buddha were made. Many of these were made in Mathura, while others were made in Taxila.

The second change was a belief in *Bodhisattvas*. These were supposed to be persons who had attained enlightenment. Once they attained enlightenment, they could live in complete

A sculpture from the *stupa* at Sanchi.  
Look at the tree and the empty seat below it.

Sculptors carved this to indicate that the Buddha had attained enlightenment while meditating under the tree.



isolation and meditate in peace. However, instead of doing that, they remained in the world to teach and help other people. The worship of Bodhisattvas became very popular, and spread throughout Central Asia, China, and later to Korea and Japan.

Buddhism also spread to western and southern India, where dozens of caves were hollowed out of hills for monks to live in.

Some of these caves were made on the orders of kings and queens, others by merchants and farmers. These were often located near passes through the Western Ghats. Roads connecting prosperous ports on the coast with cities in the Deccan ran through these passes. Traders probably

Below left : An image of the Buddha from Mathura.

Right : An image of the Buddha from Taxila.

*Look at these and note the similarities and differences that you may find.*



halted in these cave monasteries during their travels.

Buddhism also spread south eastwards, to Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, and other parts of Southeast Asia including Indonesia. The older form of Buddhism, known as Theravada Buddhism was more popular in these areas.

Read page 100 once more. Can you think of how Buddhism spread to these lands?



A cave at Karle,  
Maharashtra

### The quest of the pilgrims

As traders journeyed to distant lands in caravans and ships, *pilgrims* often travelled with them.

#### Pilgrims

are men and women who undertake journeys to holy places in order to offer worship.

The best-known of these are the Chinese Buddhist pilgrims, Fa Xian, who came to the subcontinent about 1600 years ago, Xuan Zang (who came around 1400 years ago) and I-Qing, who came about 50 years after Xuan Zang. They came to visit places associated with the life of the Buddha (Chapter 7) as well as famous monasteries.

Each of these pilgrims left an account of his journey. They wrote of the dangers they encountered on their travels, which often took years, of the countries and the monasteries that they visited, and the books they carried back with them.

## How Fa Xian returned to China

Fa Xian began his journey back home from Bengal. He boarded a ship belonging to some merchants. They had barely travelled for two days when they were caught in a storm. The merchants began throwing their merchandise overboard so as to lighten the load and save the ship from sinking. Fa Xian threw away his meagre personal belongings, but clung to his books and the statues of the Buddha that he had collected. Finally, the storm subsided after 13 days. This is how he describes the sea:

“The sea itself is boundless in extent — it is impossible to know east or west, except by observing the sun, moon, or stars in their motions. If it is dark, rainy weather, the only plan is to steer by the wind.”

It took him more than 90 days to reach Java, where he halted for five months, before boarding another merchant ship that took him to China.

Try and trace the route Fa Xian took on Map 6 (page 85).

Why do you think he did not want to throw away his books and statues?

Xuan Zang, who took the land route back to China (through the north-west, and Central Asia) carried back with him statues of the Buddha made of gold, silver and sandalwood, and over 600 manuscripts loaded on the backs of 20 horses. Over 50 manuscripts were lost when the boat on which he was crossing the Indus capsized. He spent the rest of his life translating the remaining manuscripts from Sanskrit into Chinese.

## Nalanda – A unique centre of Buddhist learning

Xuan Zang, and other pilgrims spent time studying in Nalanda, (Bihar) the most famous Buddhist monastery of the period. This is how he describes it:

“The teachers are men of the highest ability and talent. They follow the teachings of the Buddha in all sincerity. The rules of the monastery are strict, and everyone has to follow them. Discussions are held throughout the day, and the old and the young mutually help one another. Learned men from different cities come here to settle their doubts. The gatekeeper asks new entrants difficult questions. They are allowed to enter only after they have been able to answer these. Seven or eight out of every ten are not able to answer.”

List the reasons why Xuan Zang wanted to study in Nalanda.

## The beginning of Bhakti

This was also the time when the worship of certain deities, which became a central feature of later Hinduism, gained in importance. These deities included Shiva, Vishnu, and goddesses such as Durga.

These deities were worshipped through *Bhakti*, an idea that became very popular at this time. *Bhakti* is generally understood as a person's devotion to his or her chosen deity. Anybody, whether rich or poor, belonging to the so-called 'high' or 'low' castes, man or woman, could follow the path of *Bhakti*.

The idea of *Bhakti* is present in the *Bhagavad Gita*, a sacred book of the Hindus, which is included in the *Mahabharata* (see Chapter 12). In this Krishna the god, asks Arjuna, his devotee and friend, to abandon all *dharma*s and take refuge in him, as only he can set Arjuna free from every evil. This form of worship gradually spread to different parts of the country.

Those who followed the system of *Bhakti* emphasised devotion and individual worship of a god or goddess, rather than the performance of elaborate sacrifices.

According to this system of belief, if a devotee worships the chosen deity with a pure heart, the deity will appear in the form in which he or she may desire. So, the deity could be thought of as a human being, lion, tree or any other form. Once this idea gained acceptance, artists made beautiful images of these deities.

Vishnu as Varaha — an image from Eran, Madhya Pradesh.

This magnificent statue is of a special form of Vishnu, the *Varaha* or boar. According to the *Puranas* (see Chapter 12) Vishnu took the shape of a boar in order to rescue the earth, which had sunk into water. Here the earth is shown as a woman.



## Bhakti

Comes from the Sanskrit term *bhaj* meaning ‘to divide or share.’ This suggests an intimate, two-way relationship between the deity and the devotee. Bhakti is directed towards Bhagavat, which is often translated as god, but also means one who possesses and shares *bhaga*, literally good fortune or bliss. The devotee, known as the *bhakta* or the *bhagavata*, shares his or her chosen deity’s *bhaga*.

### A poem by a bhakta

Most Bhakti literature tells us that riches, learning and high status do not automatically ensure a close relationship with the deity. This is part of a poem composed in Tamil by Appar, a devotee of Shiva, who lived about 1400 years ago. Appar was a *vellala* (Chapter 9).

“The leper with rotting limbs,  
The man who is regarded as low by the *brahmin*, even the scavenger

...  
Even these men, if they are servants (i.e. devotees)  
Of him who shelters the Ganga in his long hair (i.e. Shiva)  
I worship them,  
They are gods to me.”

What does the poet regard as more valuable, social status or devotion?

Because the deities were special, these images of the deity were often placed within special homes, places that we describe as temples. You will learn more about these temples in Chapter 12.

Bhakti inspired some of the best expressions in art — sculpture, poetry and architecture.

## Hindu

The word ‘Hindu’, like the term ‘India’ is derived from the river Indus. It was used by Arabs and Iranians to refer to people who lived to the east of the river, and to their cultural practices, including religious beliefs.

## Elsewhere

- About 2000 years ago, Christianity emerged in West Asia. Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem, which was then part of the Roman empire. Christ's teachings were that He was the Saviour of the world. He also taught people to treat others with love and trust others, just as they themselves wanted to be treated.
- Here are a few verses from the Bible, the holy book that contains the teachings of Christ:

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
For they shall be filled.  
Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.  
Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.  
Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God."

Christ's teachings appealed to ordinary people, and spread through West Asia, Africa and Europe. The first Christian preachers came from West Asia to the west coast of the subcontinent within a hundred years of Christ's death.
- Look at Map 6 (pages 84-85) and trace out the route that they may have used.
- The Christians of Kerala, known as Syrian Christians because they probably came from West Asia, are amongst the oldest Christian communities in the world.

## Imagine

You have a manuscript which a Chinese pilgrim would like to carry back with him. Describe your conversation.

### Let's recall



- Match the following:

Muvendar	Mahayana Buddhism
Lords of the <i>dakshinapatha</i>	Buddhacharita
Ashvaghosha	Satavahana rulers
Bodhisattvas	Chinese pilgrim
Xuan Zang	Cholas, Cheras and Pandyas

### KEYWORDS

trader

*muwendar*

route

silk

Kushanas

Mahayana

Buddhism

Theravada

Buddhism

Bodhisattva

pilgrim

*Bhakti*

## SOME IMPORTANT DATES

- ▶ Discovery of silk making (about 7000 years ago)
- ▶ The Cholas, Cheras and Pandyas (about 2300 years ago)
- ▶ Growing demand for silk in the Roman Empire (about 2000 years ago)
- ▶ Kanishka, the Kushana ruler (about 1900 years ago)
- ▶ Fa Xian comes to India (about 1600 years ago)
- ▶ Xuan Zang comes to India, Appar composes devotional poems in praise of Shiva (about 1400 years ago)

2. Why did kings want to control the Silk Route?
3. What kinds of evidence do historians use to find out about trade and trade routes?
4. What were the main features of Bhakti?

### Let's discuss



5. Discuss the reasons why the Chinese pilgrims came to India.
6. Why do you think ordinary people were attracted to Bhakti?

### Let's do



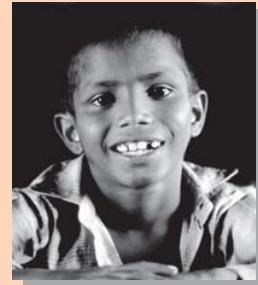
7. List five things that you buy from the market. Which of these are made in the city/village in which you live, and which are brought by traders from other areas?
8. There are several major pilgrimages performed by people in India today. Find out about any one of them, and write a short description. (Hint: who can go on the pilgrimage — men, women or children? How long does it take? How do people travel? What do they take with them? What do they do when they reach the holy place? Do they bring anything back with them?)

## CHAPTER 11

# NEW EMPIRES AND KINGDOMS

### Arvind plays a king

Arvind had been chosen to act as a king in the school play. He had expected to march solemnly in splendid robes, to twirl his moustaches and wield the silver-paper wrapped sword with gusto. Imagine his surprise when he was told he would also have to sit and play a *veena*, and recite poetry! A musician-king? Who was that? he wondered.



### Prashastis and what they tell us

Arvind was supposed to be acting as Samudragupta, a famous ruler of a dynasty known as the Guptas. We know about Samudragupta from a long inscription, actually a poem in Sanskrit, composed by his court poet, Harishena nearly 1700 years ago. This was inscribed on the Ashokan pillar at Allahabad.

This inscription is of a special kind known as a *prashasti*, a Sanskrit word, meaning ‘in praise of’. While *prashastis* were composed for some of the rulers you read about in Chapter 10, such as Gautamiputra Shri Satakarni, they became far more important from the time of the Guptas.

### Samudragupta’s prashasti

Let us see what Samudragupta’s *prashasti* tells us. The poet praised the king in glowing terms — as a warrior, as a king who won victories in battle, who was learned and the best of poets. He is also described as equal to the gods. The *prashasti* was composed in very long sentences. Here is part of one such sentence:

## Samudragupta the warrior

Whose body was most charming, being covered with the plenteous beauty of the marks of hundreds of scars caused by battle-axes, arrows, spikes, spears, barbed darts, swords, iron clubs, javelins, barbed arrows, long arrows and many other weapons.

What does this description tell you about the king? And also about how kings fought wars?



The king who played the veena.

Some other qualities of Samudragupta are shown on coins such as this one, where he is shown playing the veena.

If you look at Map 7 (page 113), you will notice an area shaded in green. You will also find a series of red dots along the east coast. And you will find areas marked in purple and blue as well.

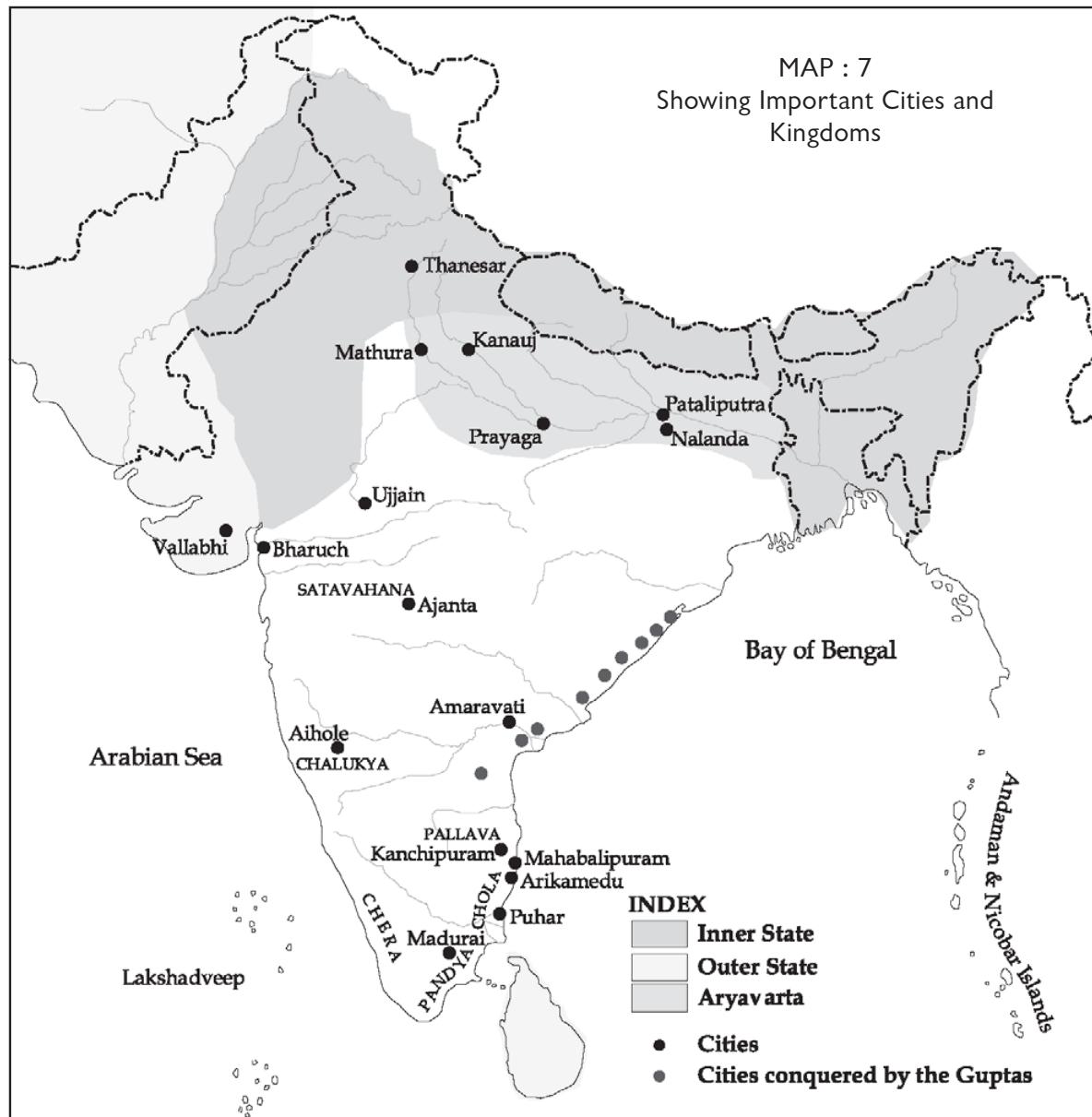
This map is based on the information provided in the *prashasti*. Harishena describes four different kinds of rulers, and tells us about Samudragupta's policies towards them.

1. The rulers of *Aryavarta*, the area shaded in green on the map. Here there were nine rulers who were uprooted, and their kingdoms were made a part of Samudragupta's empire.
2. The rulers of *Dakshinapatha*. Here there were twelve rulers, some of whose capitals are marked with red dots on the map. They surrendered to Samudragupta after being defeated and he then allowed them to rule again.
3. The inner circle of neighbouring states, including Assam, coastal Bengal, Nepal, and a number of *gana sanghas* (remember Chapter 6) in the north-west, marked in purple on the map. They brought tribute, followed his orders, and attended his court.
4. The rulers of the outlying areas, marked in blue on the map, perhaps the descendants of the Kushanas and Shakas, and the ruler of Sri Lanka, who submitted to him and offered daughters in marriage.

Find Prayaga (the old name for Allahabad), Ujjain and Pataliputra (Patna) on the map. These were important centres of the Gupta rulers.

What was the difference between the way in which Samudragupta treated the rulers of Aryavarta and Dakshinapatha?

Can you suggest any reasons for this difference?



## Genealogies

Most *prashastis* also mention the ancestors of the ruler. This one mentions Samudragupta's great grandfather, grandfather, father and mother. His mother, Kumara devi, belonged to the Lichchhavi *gana*, while his father, Chandragupta, was the first ruler of the Gupta dynasty to adopt the grand title of *maharaj-adhiraja*, a title that Samudragupta also used. His great grandfather and grandfather are mentioned simply as *maharajas*. It seems as if the family gradually rose to importance.

Arrange these titles in order of importance: *raja*, *maharaj-adhiraja*, *maha-raja*.

Samudragupta in turn figures in the genealogies (lists of ancestors) of later rulers of the dynasty, such as his son, Chandragupta II. We know about him from inscriptions and coins. He led an expedition to western India, where he overcame the last of the Shamas. According to later belief, his court was full of learned people, including Kalidasa the poet, and Aryabhata the astronomer, about whom you will read more in Chapter 12.

## Harshavardhana and the Harshacharita

While we can learn about the Gupta rulers from their inscriptions and coins, we can find out about some kings from biographies. Harshavardhana, who ruled nearly 1400 years ago, was one such ruler. His court poet, Banabhatta, wrote his biography, the *Harshacharita*, in Sanskrit. This gives us the genealogy of Harsha, and ends with his becoming king. Xuan Zang, about whom you read in Chapter 10, also spent a lot of time at Harsha's court and left a detailed account of what he saw.

Harsha was not the eldest son of his father, but became king of Thanesar after both his father and elder brother died. His brother-in-law was

the ruler of Kanauj (see Map 7) and he was killed by the ruler of Bengal. Harsha took over the kingdom of Kanauj, and then led an army against the ruler of Bengal.

Although he was successful in the east, and conquered both Magadha and Bengal, he was not as successful elsewhere. He tried to cross the Narmada to march into the Deccan, but was stopped by a ruler belonging to the Chalukya dynasty, Pulakeshin II.

Look at Map 8 (page 136) and list the present-day states which Harshavardhana passed through when he went (a) to Bengal and (b) up to the Narmada.

### **The Pallavas, Chalukyas and Pulakeshin's *prashasti***

The Pallavas and Chalukyas were the most important ruling dynasties in south India during this period. The kingdom of the Pallavas spread from the region around their capital, Kanchipuram, to the Kaveri delta, while that of the Chalukyas was centred around the Raichur Doab, between the rivers Krishna and Tungabhadra.

Aihole, the capital of the Chalukyas, was an important trading centre (see Map 7). It developed as a religious centre, with a number of temples. The Pallavas and Chalukyas frequently raided one another's lands, especially attacking the capital cities, which were prosperous towns.

The best-known Chalukya ruler was Pulakeshin II. We know about him from a *prashasti*, composed by his court poet Ravikirti. This tells us about his ancestors, who are traced back through four generations from father to son. Pulakeshin evidently got the kingdom from his uncle.

According to Ravikirti, he led expeditions along both the west and the east coasts. Besides, he

checked the advance of Harsha. There is an interesting play of words in the poem. Harsha means happiness. The poet says that after this defeat, Harsha was no longer Harsha! Pulakeshin also attacked the Pallava king, who took shelter behind the walls of Kanchipuram.

But the Chalukya victory was short-lived. Ultimately, both the Pallavas and the Chalukyas gave way to new rulers belonging to the Rashtrakuta and Chola dynasties, about which you will study in Class VII.

**Who were the other rulers who tried to control the coasts and why? (Hint: see Chapter 10).**

### **How were these kingdoms administered?**

As in the case of earlier kings, land revenue remained important for these rulers, and the village remained the basic unit of administration.

There were some new developments as well. Kings adopted a number of steps to win the support of men who were powerful, either economically, or socially, or because of their political and military strength. For instance:

- Some important administrative posts were now hereditary. This means that sons succeeded fathers to these posts. For example, the poet Harishena was a *maha-danda-nayaka*, or chief judicial officer, like his father.
- Sometimes, one person held many offices. For instance, besides being a *maha-danda-nayaka*, Harishena was a *kumaramatya*, meaning an important minister, and a *sandhi-vigrahika*, meaning a minister of war and peace.
- Besides, important men probably had a say in local administration. These included the *nagara-shreshthi* or chief banker or merchant of the city, the *sarthavaha* or leader of the merchant caravans, the *prathama-kulika* or the chief craftsman, and the head of the *kayasthas* or scribes.

These policies were reasonably effective, but sooner or later, some of these powerful men grew strong enough to set up independent kingdoms.

What do you think may have been the advantages and disadvantages of having hereditary officers?

### A new kind of army

Like earlier rulers, some of these kings maintained a well-organised army, with elephants, chariots, cavalry and foot soldiers. Besides, there were military leaders who provided the king with troops whenever he needed them. They were not paid regular salaries. Instead, some of them received grants of land. They collected revenue from the land and used this to maintain soldiers and horses, and provide equipment for warfare. These men were known as *samantas*. Whenever the ruler was weak, *samantas* tried to become independent.

### Assemblies in the southern kingdoms

The inscriptions of the Pallavas mention a number of local assemblies. These included the *sabha*, which was an assembly of *brahmin* land owners. This assembly functioned through sub-committees, which looked after irrigation, agricultural operations, making roads, local temples, etc.

The *ur* was a village assembly found in areas where the land owners were not *brahmins*. And the *nagaram* was an organisation of merchants. It is likely that these assemblies were controlled by rich and powerful landowners and merchants. Many of these local assemblies continued to function for centuries.

## Ordinary people in the kingdoms

We can catch an occasional glimpse of the lives of ordinary people from plays, and other accounts. Let us look at some of these.

Kalidasa is known for his plays depicting life in the king's court. An interesting feature about these plays is that the king and most *brahmins* are shown as speaking Sanskrit, while women and men other than the king and *brahmins* use Prakrit. His most famous play, *Abhijnana Shakuntalam*, is the story of the love between a king named Dushyanta and a young woman named Shakuntala. We find an interesting description of the plight of a poor fisherman in this play.

### A fisherman finds a ring

A fisherman found a precious ring, which the king had given to Shakuntala, but which had been accidentally swallowed by a fish. When he went to the palace with it, the gatemen accused him of theft, and the chief police officer was rather rude. However, the king was happy when he saw the ring and sent a reward for the fisherman. Then, the police officer and the gatemen decided to take a share of the reward, and went along with the fisherman to have a drink.

Do you think that if a poor man finds something and reports this to the police he would be treated like this today?

Name a famous man who taught in Prakrit and a king who issued inscriptions in Prakrit (hint: see Chapters 7 and 8)

The Chinese pilgrim Fa Xian noticed the plight of those who were treated as untouchables by the high and mighty. They were expected to live on the outskirts of the city. He writes: "If such a man enters a town or a market place, he strikes a piece of wood, in order to keep himself separate; people, hearing this sound, know what it means and avoid touching him or brushing against him."

And Banabhatta provides us with a vivid picture of the king's army on the move:

### The king's army

The king travelled with an enormous amount of equipment. Apart from weapons, there were things of daily use such as pots, pans, furniture, golden footstools, food, including animals such as goat, deer, rabbits, vegetables, spices, carried on carts or loaded on to pack animals such as camels and elephants. This huge army was accompanied by musicians beating drums, and others playing horns and trumpets.

Villagers had to provide hospitality along the way. They came with gifts of curds, *gur* and flowers, and provided fodder for the animals. They also tried to meet the king, and place their complaints and petitions before him.

The army left a trail of destruction behind. Elephants often trampled down the huts of villagers, and the oxen yoked to the caravans of merchants ran away, scared by the tumult.

As Banabhatta says: "The whole world was swallowed up in dust."

**Make a list of all the things that were carried with the army.**

**What did the villagers bring for the king?**

## Elsewhere

Find Arabia on Map 6 (pages 84-85). Although it is a desert, it was at the hub of communications for centuries. In fact, Arab merchants and sailors played an important role in the sea trade between India and Europe (see page 100). Others who lived in Arabia were the Bedouins, pastoral tribes depending mainly on like hardy animals camels, that could survive in the desert.

Around 1400 years ago, Prophet Muhammad introduced a new religion, Islam, in Arabia. Like Christianity, Islam was a religion that laid stress on the equality and unity of all before Allah, the one supreme god. Here is a verse from the Quran, the sacred book of Islam:

“For Muslim men and women, for believing men and women, for devout men and women, for true men and women, for men and women who are patient and constant, for men and women who humble themselves, for men and women who give in charity, for men and women who fast, for men and women who guard their chastity, and for men and women who engage much in Allah’s remembrance, for them has Allah prepared forgiveness and great reward.”

Within a hundred years Islam spread to north Africa, Spain, Iran and India. Arab sailors, who were already familiar with the coastal settlements of the subcontinent, now brought the new religion with them. Arabs soldiers conquered Sind (in present-day Pakistan) about 1300 years ago.

Trace the routes that would have been taken by these sailors and soldiers on Map 6.

## Imagine

Harshavardhana's army will visit your village next week. Your parents are preparing for the visit. Describe what they say and do.

### Let's recall



1. State whether true or false:
  - (a) Harishena composed a *prashasti* in praise of Gautamiputra Shri Satakarni.
  - (b) The rulers of Aryavarta brought tribute for Samudragupta.
  - (c) There were twelve rulers in Dakshinapatha.

- (d) Taxila and Madurai were important centres under the control of the Gupta rulers.
- (e) Aihole was the capital of the Pallavas.
- (f) Local assemblies functioned for several centuries in south India.
2. Mention three authors who wrote about Harshavardhana.
3. What changes do you find in the army at this time?
4. What were the new administrative arrangements during this period?

### Let's discuss



5. What do you think Arvind would have to do if he was acting as Samudragupta?
6. Do you think ordinary people would have read and understood the *prashastis*? Give reasons for your answer.

### Let's do



7. If you had to make a genealogy for yourself, who are the people you would include in it? How many generations would you like to show? Make a chart and fill it.
8. How do you think wars affect the lives of ordinary people today?

### KEYWORDS

*prashasti*

Aryavarta

Dakshinapatha

genealogy

hereditary officer

*samanta*

assembly

*nagaram*

### SOME IMPORTANT DATES

- ▶ Beginning of the Gupta dynasty (about 1700 years ago)
- ▶ The rule of Harshavardhana (about 1400 years ago)

## CHAPTER 12

# BUILDINGS, PAINTINGS AND BOOKS



### Marutasami and the iron pillar

Marutasami was so excited. His brother had propelled his wheelchair all along the dusty, stony path, past the towering Qutb Minar, and up the metal ramp. It had been tough, but now he was here, in front of the famous iron pillar. It was an unforgettable experience.

### The iron pillar

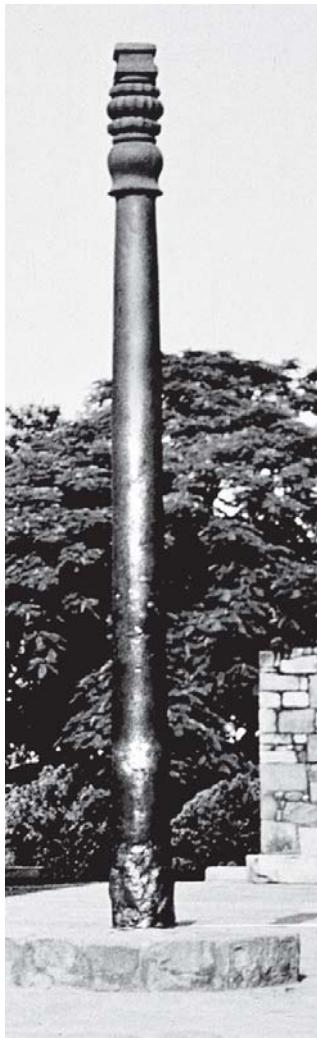
The iron pillar at Mehrauli, Delhi, is a remarkable example of the skill of Indian crafts persons. It is made of iron, 7.2. m high, and weighs over 3 tonnes. It was made about 1500 years ago. We know the date because there is an inscription on the pillar mentioning a ruler named Chandra, who probably belonged to the Gupta dynasty (Chapter 11). What is amazing is the fact that the pillar has not rusted in all these years.

### Buildings in brick and stone

The skills of our crafts persons are also apparent in the buildings that have survived, such as *stupas*. The word *stupa* means a mound. While there are several kinds of *stupas*, round and tall, big and small, these have certain common features. Generally, there is a small box placed at the centre or heart of the *stupa*. This may contain bodily remains (such as teeth, bone or ashes) of the Buddha or his followers, or things they used, as well as precious stones, and coins.

This box, known as a relic casket, was covered with earth. Later, a layer of mud brick or baked brick was added on top. And then, the dome like structure was sometimes covered with carved stone slabs.

The iron pillar



Often, a path, known as the *pradakshina patha*, was laid around the *stupa*. This was surrounded with railings. Entrance to the path was through gateways. Devotees walked around the *stupa*, in a clockwise direction, as a mark of devotion. Both railings and gateways were often decorated with sculpture.

Find Amaravati on Map 7 (page 113). This was a place where a magnificent *stupa* once existed. Many of the stone carvings for decorating the *stupa* were made about 2000 years ago.

Other buildings were hollowed out of rock to make artificial caves. Some of these were very elaborately decorated with sculptures and painted walls.

Some of the earliest Hindu temples were also built at this time. Deities such as Vishnu, Shiva, and Durga were worshipped in these shrines. The most important part of the temple was the room known as the *garbhagriha*, where the image of the chief deity was placed. It was here that priests performed religious rituals, and devotees offered worship to the deity.

Often, as at Bhitargaon, a tower, known as the *shikhara*, was built on top of the



Top : The Great Stupa at Sanchi, Madhya Pradesh. Stupas like this one were built over several centuries. While the brick mound probably dates to the time of Ashoka (Chapter 8), the railings and gateways were added during the time of later rulers.  
Left : Sculpture from Amaravati.  
Look at the picture and describe what you see.





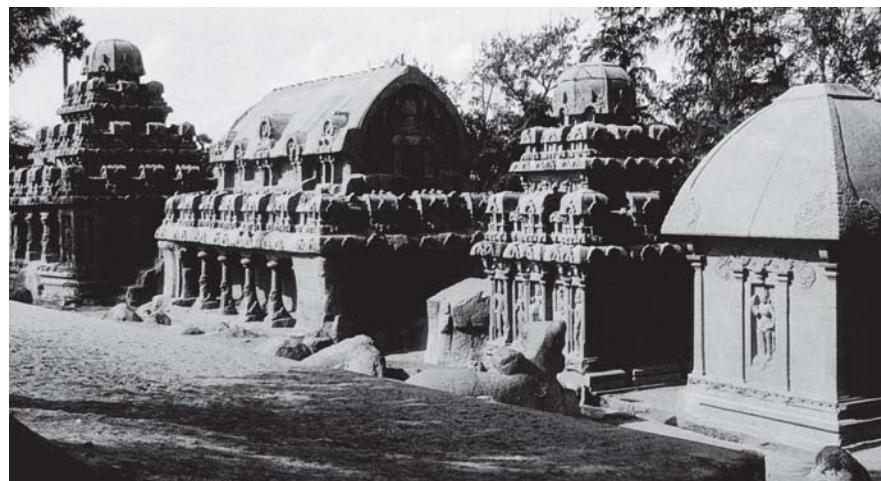
Top : An early temple at Bhitargaon, Uttar Pradesh.

This was built about 1500 years ago, and was made of baked brick and stone.

Top Right : Monolithic temples at Mahabalipuram. Each of these was carved out of a huge, single piece of stone (that is why they are known as monoliths). While brick structures are built up by adding layers of bricks from the bottom upwards, in this case the stone cutters had to work from top downwards.

List the problems that stone cutters may have faced.

Right : The Durga temple at Aihole, built about 1400 years ago.



*garbhagriha*, to mark this out as a sacred place. Building *shikharas* required careful planning. Most temples also had a space known as the *mandapa*. It was a hall where people could assemble.

Find Mahabalipuram and Aihole on Map 7 (page 113). Some of the finest stone temples were built in these towns. Some of these are shown here.



## How were stupas and temples built?

There were several stages in building a *stupa* or a temple. Usually, kings or queens decided to build these as it was an expensive affair. First, good quality stone had to be found, quarried, and transported to the place that was often carefully chosen for the new building. Here, these rough blocks of stone had to be shaped and carved into pillars, and panels for walls, floors and ceilings. And then these had to be placed in precisely the right position.



Kings and queens probably spent money from their treasury to pay the crafts persons who worked to build these splendid structures.

Besides, when devotees came to visit the temple or the *stupa*, they often brought gifts, which were used to decorate the buildings. For example, an association of ivory workers paid for one of the beautiful gateways at Sanchi.

Among the others who paid for decorations were merchants, farmers, garland makers, perfumers, smiths, and hundreds of men and

Left : A Jaina monastery from Orissa.

This two storey building was carved out of the rock surface. Notice the entrance to the rooms. Jaina monks lived and meditated in these rooms.

*In what ways is the cave shown here different from the illustration on p. 15?*

Below : A sculpture from the National Museum, New Delhi.

*Can you see how some of the caves may have been hollowed out?*





Paintings from Ajanta.  
Describe what you see in  
each of these paintings.

women who are known only by their names which were inscribed on pillars, railings and walls. So when you get a chance to visit any of these buildings, remember how several hundreds of people probably worked to construct and decorate them.

Make a diagram like the one on page 88 (Chapter 9) to show the stages in the building of a temple or stupa.

### Painting

Find Ajanta on Map 7 (page 113). This is a place where several caves were hollowed out of the hills over centuries. Most of these were monasteries for Buddhist monks, and some of them were decorated with paintings. Here are some examples.

As the caves are dark inside, most of these paintings were done in the light of torches. The colours, which are vivid even after 1500 years, were made of plants and minerals. The artists who created these splendid works of art remain unknown.



## The world of books

Some of the best-known *epics* were written during this period. Epics are grand, long compositions, about heroic men and women, and include stories about gods.

A famous Tamil epic, the *Silappadikaram*, was composed by a poet named Ilango, around 1800 years ago. It is the story of a merchant named Kovalan, who lived in Puhar and fell in love with a courtesan named Madhavi, neglecting his wife Kannagi. Later, he and Kannagi left Puhar and went to Madurai, where he was wrongly accused of theft by the court jeweller of the Pandya king. The king sentenced Kovalan to death. Kannagi, who still loved him, was full of grief and anger at this injustice, and destroyed the entire city of Madurai.

### A description from the *Silappadikaram*

Here is how the poet describes Kannagi's grief:

"O witness of my grief, you cannot console me. Is it right that your body, fairer than pure gold, lies unwashed here in the dust? Is it just that in the red glow of the twilight, your handsome chest, framed with a flower wreath, lies thrown down on the bare earth, while I remain alone, helpless and abandoned to despair? Is there no god? Is there no god in this country? Can there be a god in a land where the sword of the king is used for the murder of innocent strangers? Is there no god, no god?"

Another Tamil epic, the *Manimekalai* was composed by Sattanar around 1400 years ago. This describes the story of the daughter of Kovalan and Madhavi. These beautiful compositions were lost to scholars for many centuries, till their manuscripts were rediscovered, about a hundred years ago.

Other writers, such as Kalidasa, (about whom you read in Chapter 11) wrote in Sanskrit.

### A verse from the Meghaduta

Here is a verse from Kalidasa's best-known poem, the Meghaduta, in which a monsoon cloud is imagined to be a messenger between lovers who are separated from one another.

See how the poet describes the breeze that will carry the cloud northwards:

“A cool breeze, delightful as it is touched  
With the fragrance of the earth  
Swollen by your showers,  
Inhaled deeply by elephants,  
And causing the wild figs to ripen,  
Will blow gently as you go.”

**Do you think Kalidasa can be described as a lover of nature?**

### Recording and preserving old stories

A number of Hindu religious stories that were in circulation earlier were written down around the same time. These include the Puranas. *Purana* literally mean old. The Puranas contain stories about gods and goddesses, such as Vishnu, Shiva, Durga or Parvati. They also contain details on how they were to be worshipped. Besides, there are accounts about the creation of the world, and about kings.

The Puranas were written in simple Sanskrit verse, and were meant to be heard by everybody, including women and *shudras*, who were not allowed to study the Vedas. They were probably recited in temples by priests, and people came to listen to them.

Two Sanskrit epics, the Mahabharata and Ramayana had been popular for a very long time. Some of you may be familiar with these stories. The Mahabharata is about a war fought between the Kauravas and Pandavas, who were cousins.

This was a war to gain control of the throne of the Kurus, and their capital, Hastinapur. The story itself was an old one, but was written down in the form in which we know it today, about 1500 years ago. Both the Puranas and the Mahabharata are supposed to have been compiled by Vyasa. The Bhagavad Gita, about which you learnt in Chapter 10, was also included in the Mahabharata.

The Ramayana is about Rama, a prince of Kosala, who was sent into exile. His wife Sita was abducted by the king of Lanka, named Ravana, and Rama had to fight a battle to get her back. He won and returned to Ayodhya, the capital of Kosala, after his victory. Like the Mahabharata, this was an old story that was now written down. Valmiki is recognised as the author of the Sanskrit Ramayana.

There are several versions (many of which are performed) of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, popular amongst people in different parts of the subcontinent. Find out about a version in your state.

### **Stories told by ordinary people**

Ordinary people also told stories, composed poems and songs, sang, danced, and performed plays. Some of these are preserved in collections of stories such as the Jatakas and the Panchatantra, which were written down around this time. Stories from the Jatakas were often shown on the railings of stupas and in paintings in places such as Ajanta.

Here is one such story:

## The story of the monkey king

Once upon a time there was a great monkey king, who lived on the banks of the Ganga in the Himalayas, with 80,000 followers. They fed on the fruit of a special mango tree, which were very sweet. Such exquisite mangoes did not grow on the plains. One day, a ripe mango fell into the river and floated all the way to Varanasi. There the king of the city who was bathing in the river found it, and was amazed when he tasted it. He asked the foresters of his kingdom whether they could find the tree for him, and they led him all the way to the Himalayas. There, the king and his courtiers had their fill of mangoes. At night, the king discovered that the monkeys were also feasting on the fruit, and decided to kill them.



However, the king of the monkeys worked out a plan to save his followers. He broke off branches of the mango tree, and tied them to form a 'bridge' across the river, and held on to one end till all his followers crossed over.

Exhausted with the effort, he fell down and lay dying.

The human king saw what had happened, and tried unsuccessfully to revive the monkey. When he died, the king mourned his death and paid him full respect.

This story is shown on a piece of sculpture found from a *stupa* at Bharhut in central India. Can you identify which parts of the story are shown in the sculpture?

Why do you think these were chosen?

## Writing books on science

This was also the time when Aryabhata, a mathematician and astronomer, wrote a book in Sanskrit known as the Aryabhatiyam. He stated that day and night were caused by the rotation of the earth on its axis, even though it seems as if the sun is rising and setting everyday. He developed a scientific explanation for eclipses as well. He also found a way of calculating the circumference of a circle, which is nearly as accurate as the formula we use today.

### KEYWORDS

stupa  
temple  
painting  
epic  
story  
Purana  
science  
mathematics

### Zero

While numerals had been used earlier, mathematicians in India now invented a special symbol for zero. This system of counting was adapted by the Arabs and then spread to Europe. It continues to be in use throughout the world.

The Romans used a system of counting without using zero. Try and find out more about it.

### Elsewhere

Paper has become a part of our daily lives. The books we read are printed on paper, and we use paper for writing. Paper was invented in China about 1900 years ago, by a man named Cai Lun. He beat plant fibres, cloth, rope and the bark of trees, soaked these in water, and then pressed, drained and dried the pulp to create paper. Even today, hand made paper is made through a similar process.

The technique of making paper was a closely guarded secret for centuries. It reached Korea about 1400 years ago, and spread to Japan soon after. It was known in Baghdad about 1800 years ago. From Baghdad it spread to Europe, Africa, and other parts of Asia including the subcontinent.

What were manuscripts in early India made out of? (Hint: See Chapter 1)

## SOME IMPORTANT DATES

- ▶ beginning of stupa building (2300 years ago)
- ▶ Amaravati (2000 years ago)
- ▶ Kalidasa (1600 years ago)
- ▶ Iron pillar, Temple at Bhitargaon, Paintings at Ajanta, Aryabhata (1500 years ago)
- ▶ Durga temple (1400 years ago)

## Imagine

You are sitting in a *mandapa* of a temple. Describe the scene around you.



## Let's recall

1. Match the following

<i>Stupa</i>	Place where the image of the deity is installed
<i>Shikhara</i>	Mound
<i>Mandapa</i>	Circular path around the stupa
<i>Garbhagriha</i>	Place in temples where people could assemble
<i>Pradakshina patha</i>	Tower

2. Fill in the blanks:

- (a) \_\_\_\_\_ was a great astronomer.
- (b) Stories about gods and goddesses are found in the \_\_\_\_\_
- (c) \_\_\_\_\_ is recognised as the author of the Sanskrit Ramayana.
- (d) \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ are two Tamil epics.

## Let's discuss



3. Make a list of the chapters in which you find mention of metal working. What are the metals objects mentioned or shown in those chapters?
4. Read the story on page 130. In what ways is the monkey king similar to or different from the kings you read about in Chapters 6 and 11?

5. Find out more and tell a story from one of the epics.

### Let's do



6. List some steps that can be taken to make buildings and monuments accessible to differently abled people.
7. Try and list as many uses of paper as you can.
8. If you could visit any one of the places described in this chapter, which would you choose and why?

## THEME ONE

# BRICKS, BEADS AND BONES

## THE HARAPPAN CIVILISATION

The Harappan seal (Fig. 1.1) is possibly the most distinctive artefact of the Harappan or Indus valley civilisation. Made of a stone called **steatite**, seals like this one often contain animal motifs and signs from a script that remains undeciphered. Yet we know a great deal about the lives of the people who lived in the region from what they left behind – their houses, pots, ornaments, tools and seals – in other words, from archaeological evidence. Let us see *what* we know about the Harappan civilisation, and *how* we know about it. We will explore *how* archaeological material is interpreted and *how* interpretations sometimes change. Of course, there are some aspects of the civilisation that are as yet unknown and may even remain so.



Fig. 1.1  
A Harappan seal

### Terms, places, times

The Indus valley civilisation is also called the Harappan culture. Archaeologists use the term “culture” for a group of objects, distinctive in style, that are usually found together within a specific geographical area and period of time. In the case of the Harappan culture, these distinctive objects include seals, beads, weights, stone blades (Fig. 2.2) and even baked bricks. These objects were found from areas as far apart as Afghanistan, Jammu, Baluchistan (Pakistan) and Gujarat (Map 1).

Named after Harappa, the first site where this unique culture was discovered (p. 6), the civilisation is dated between c. **2600 and 1900 BCE**. There were earlier and later cultures, often called Early Harappan and Late Harappan, in the same area. The Harappan civilisation is sometimes called the Mature Harappan culture to distinguish it from these cultures.

Fig. 1.2  
Beads, weights, blades



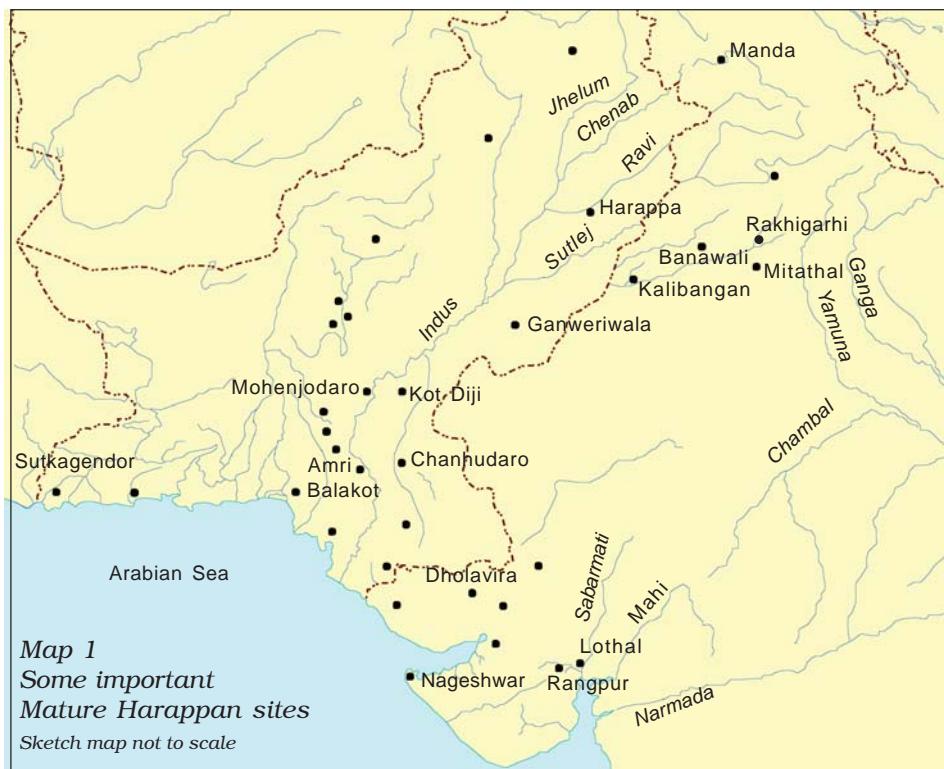
You will find certain abbreviations, related to dates, in this book.

**BP** stands for Before Present

**BCE** stands for Before Common Era

**CE** stands for the Common Era. The present year is 2007 according to this dating system.

**c.** stands for the Latin word circa and means "approximate."



## Early and Mature Harappan cultures

Look at these figures for the number of settlements in Sind and Cholistan (the desert area of Pakistan bordering the Thar Desert).

	SIND	CHOLISTAN
Total number of sites	106	239
Early Harappan sites	52	37
Mature Harappan sites	65	136
Mature Harappan settlements on new sites	43	132
Early Harappan sites abandoned	29	33

## 1. BEGINNINGS

There were several archaeological cultures in the region prior to the Mature Harappan. These cultures were associated with distinctive pottery, evidence of agriculture and pastoralism, and some crafts. Settlements were generally small, and there were virtually no large buildings. It appears that there was a break between the Early Harappan and the Harappan civilisation, evident from large-scale burning at some sites, as well as the abandonment of certain settlements.

## 2. SUBSISTENCE STRATEGIES

If you look at Maps 1 and 2 you will notice that the Mature Harappan culture developed in some of the areas occupied by the Early Harappan cultures. These cultures also shared certain common elements including subsistence strategies. The Harappans ate a wide range of plant and animal products, including fish. Archaeologists have been able to reconstruct dietary practices from finds of charred grains and seeds. These are studied by archaeo-botanists, who are specialists in ancient plant remains. Grains

found at Harappan sites include wheat, barley, lentil, chickpea and sesame. Millets are found from sites in Gujarat. Finds of rice are relatively rare.

Animal bones found at Harappan sites include those of cattle, sheep, goat, buffalo and pig. Studies done by archaeo-zoologists or zoo-archaeologists indicate that these animals were domesticated. Bones of wild species such as boar, deer and gharial are also found. We do not know whether the Harappans hunted these animals themselves or obtained meat from other hunting communities. Bones of fish and fowl are also found.

## 2.1 Agricultural technologies

While the prevalence of agriculture is indicated by finds of grain, it is more difficult to reconstruct actual agricultural practices. Were seeds broadcast (scattered) on ploughed lands? Representations on seals and terracotta sculpture indicate that the bull was known, and archaeologists extrapolate from this that oxen were used for ploughing. Moreover, terracotta models of the plough have been found at sites in Cholistan and at Banawali (Haryana). Archaeologists have also found evidence of a ploughed field at Kalibangan (Rajasthan), associated with Early Harappan levels (see p. 20). The field had two sets of furrows at right angles to each other, suggesting that two different crops were grown together.

Archaeologists have also tried to identify the tools used for harvesting. Did the Harappans use stone blades set in wooden handles or did they use metal tools?

Most Harappan sites are located in semi-arid lands, where irrigation was probably required for agriculture. Traces of canals have been found at the Harappan site of Shortughai in Afghanistan, but not in Punjab or Sind. It is possible that ancient

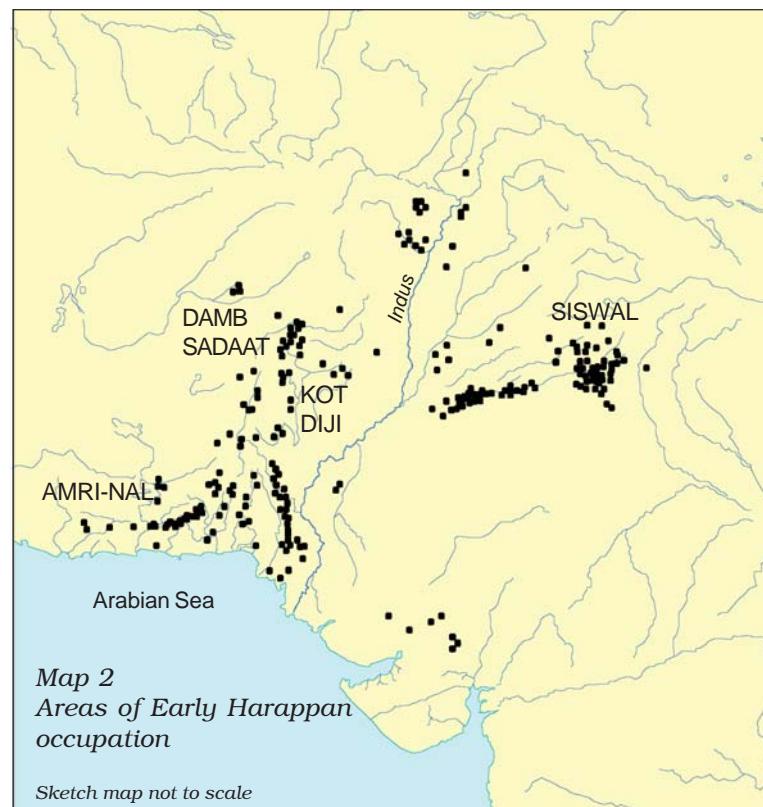


Fig. 1.3  
A terracotta bull



### Discuss...

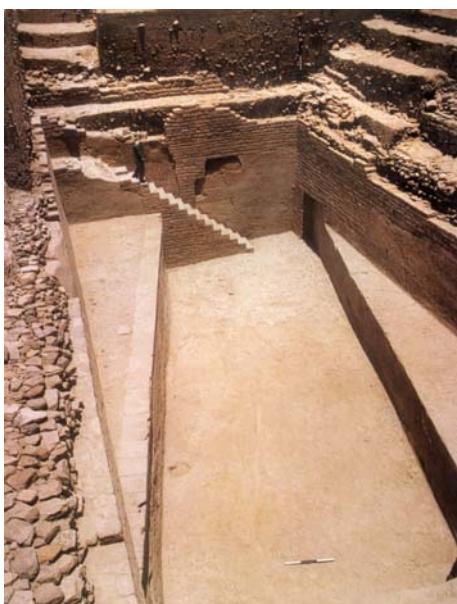
Are there any similarities or differences in the distribution of settlements shown on Maps 1 and 2?



*Fig. 1.4  
Copper tools*

➲ Do you think these tools could have been used for harvesting?

*Fig. 1.5  
Reservoir at Dholavira  
Note the masonry work.*



### ➲ Discuss...

What is the evidence used by archaeologists to reconstruct dietary practices?

canals silted up long ago. It is also likely that water drawn from wells was used for irrigation. Besides, water reservoirs found in Dholavira (Gujarat) may have been used to store water for agriculture.

*Source 1*

### How artefacts are identified

Processing of food required grinding equipment as well as vessels for mixing, blending and cooking. These were made of stone, metal and terracotta. This is an excerpt from one of the earliest reports on excavations at Mohenjodaro, the best-known Harappan site:

Saddle querns ... are found in considerable numbers ... and they seem to have been the only means in use for grinding cereals. As a rule, they were roughly made of hard, gritty, igneous rock or sandstone and mostly show signs of hard usage. As their bases are usually convex, they must have been set in the earth or in mud to prevent their rocking. Two main types have been found: those on which another smaller stone was pushed or rolled to and fro, and others with which a second stone was used as a pounder, eventually making a large cavity in the nether stone. Querns of the former type were probably used solely for grain; the second type possibly only for pounding herbs and spices for making curries. In fact, stones of this latter type are dubbed "curry stones" by our workmen and our cook asked for the loan of one from the museum for use in the kitchen.

FROM ERNEST MACKAY, Ixuwkhu# H{fdydwlrv# dw Prkhqmrgd, 1937.



*Fig. 1.6  
Saddle quern*

➲ Archaeologists use present-day analogies to try and understand what ancient artefacts were used for. Mackay was comparing present-day querns with what he found. Is this a useful strategy?

### 3. MOHENJODARO

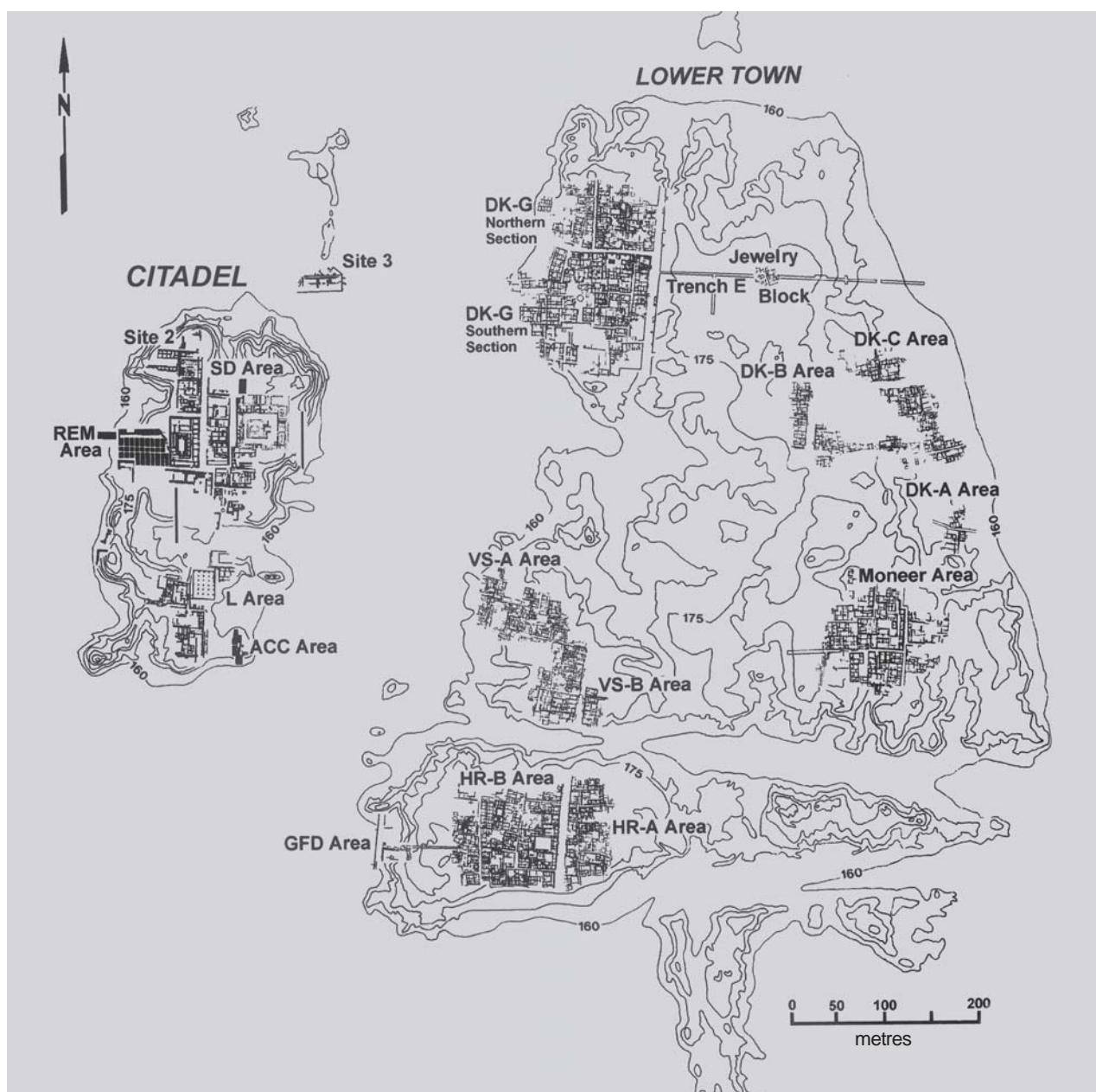
#### A PLANNED URBAN CENTRE

Perhaps the most unique feature of the Harappan civilisation was the development of urban centres. Let us look at one such centre, Mohenjodaro, more closely. Although Mohenjodaro is the most well-known site, the first site to be discovered was Harappa.

The settlement is divided into two sections, one smaller but higher and the other much larger but

*Fig. 1.7  
Layout of Mohenjodaro*

➲ How is the Lower Town different from the Citadel?



### The plight of Harappa

Although Harappa was the first site to be discovered, it was badly destroyed by brick robbers. As early as 1875, Alexander Cunningham, the first Director-General of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), often called the father of Indian archaeology, noted that the amount of brick taken from the ancient site was enough to lay bricks for "about 100 miles" of the railway line between Lahore and Multan. Thus, many of the ancient structures at the site were damaged. In contrast, Mohenjodaro was far better preserved.

lower. Archaeologists designate these as the Citadel and the Lower Town respectively. The Citadel owes its height to the fact that buildings were constructed on mud brick platforms. It was walled, which meant that it was physically separated from the Lower Town.

The Lower Town was also walled. Several buildings were built on platforms, which served as foundations. It has been calculated that if one labourer moved roughly a cubic metre of earth daily, just to put the foundations in place it would have required four million person-days, in other words, mobilising labour on a very large scale.

Consider something else. Once the platforms were in place, all building activity within the city was restricted to a fixed area on the platforms. So it seems that the settlement was first planned and then implemented accordingly. Other signs of planning include bricks, which, whether sun-dried or baked, were of a standardised ratio, where the length and breadth were four times and twice the height respectively. Such bricks were used at all Harappan settlements.

#### 3.1 Laying out drains

One of the most distinctive features of Harappan cities was the carefully planned drainage system. If you look at the plan of the Lower Town you will notice that roads and streets were laid out along an approximate "grid" pattern, intersecting at right angles. It seems that streets with drains were laid out first and then houses built along them. If domestic waste water had to flow into the street drains, every house needed to have at least one wall along a street.

*Fig. 1.8  
A drain in Mohenjodaro  
Notice the huge opening of the drain.*



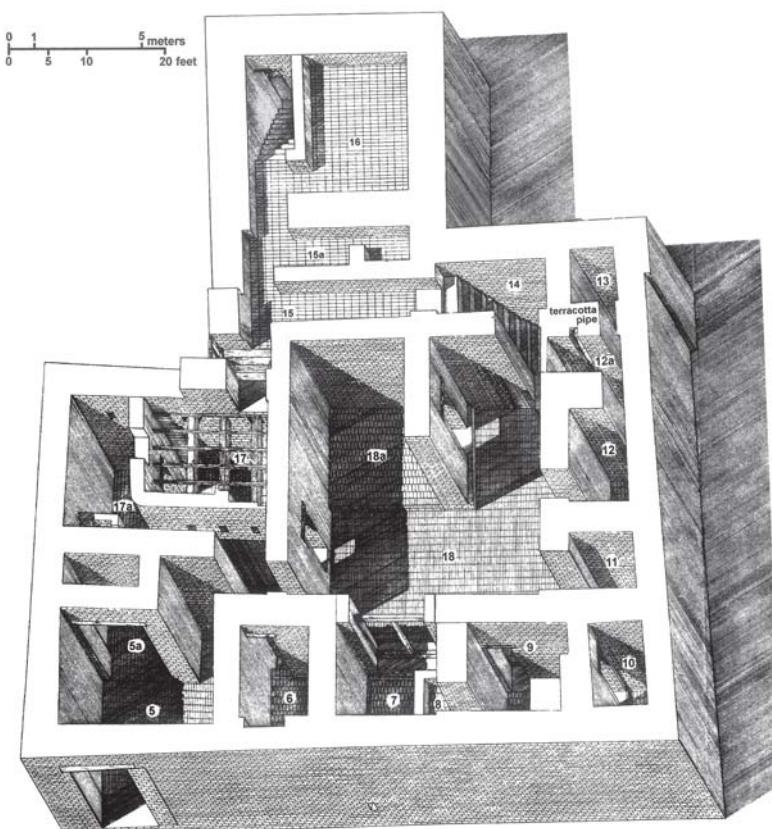
### Citadels

While most Harappan settlements have a small high western part and a larger lower eastern section, there are variations. At sites such as Dholavira and Lothal (Gujarat), the entire settlement was fortified, and sections within the town were also separated by walls. The Citadel within Lothal was not walled off, but was built at a height.

### 3.2 Domestic architecture

The Lower Town at Mohenjodaro provides examples of residential buildings. Many were centred on a courtyard, with rooms on all sides. The courtyard was probably the centre of activities such as cooking and weaving, particularly during hot and dry weather. What is also interesting is an apparent concern for privacy: there are no windows in the walls along the ground level. Besides, the main entrance does not give a direct view of the interior or the courtyard.

Every house had its own bathroom paved with bricks, with drains connected through the wall to the street drains. Some houses have remains of staircases to reach a second storey or the roof. Many houses had wells, often in a room that could be reached from the outside and perhaps used by passers-by. Scholars have estimated that the total number of wells in Mohenjodaro was about 700.



➲ Where is the courtyard? Where are the two staircases? What is the entrance to the house like?

### Source 2

#### The most ancient system yet discovered

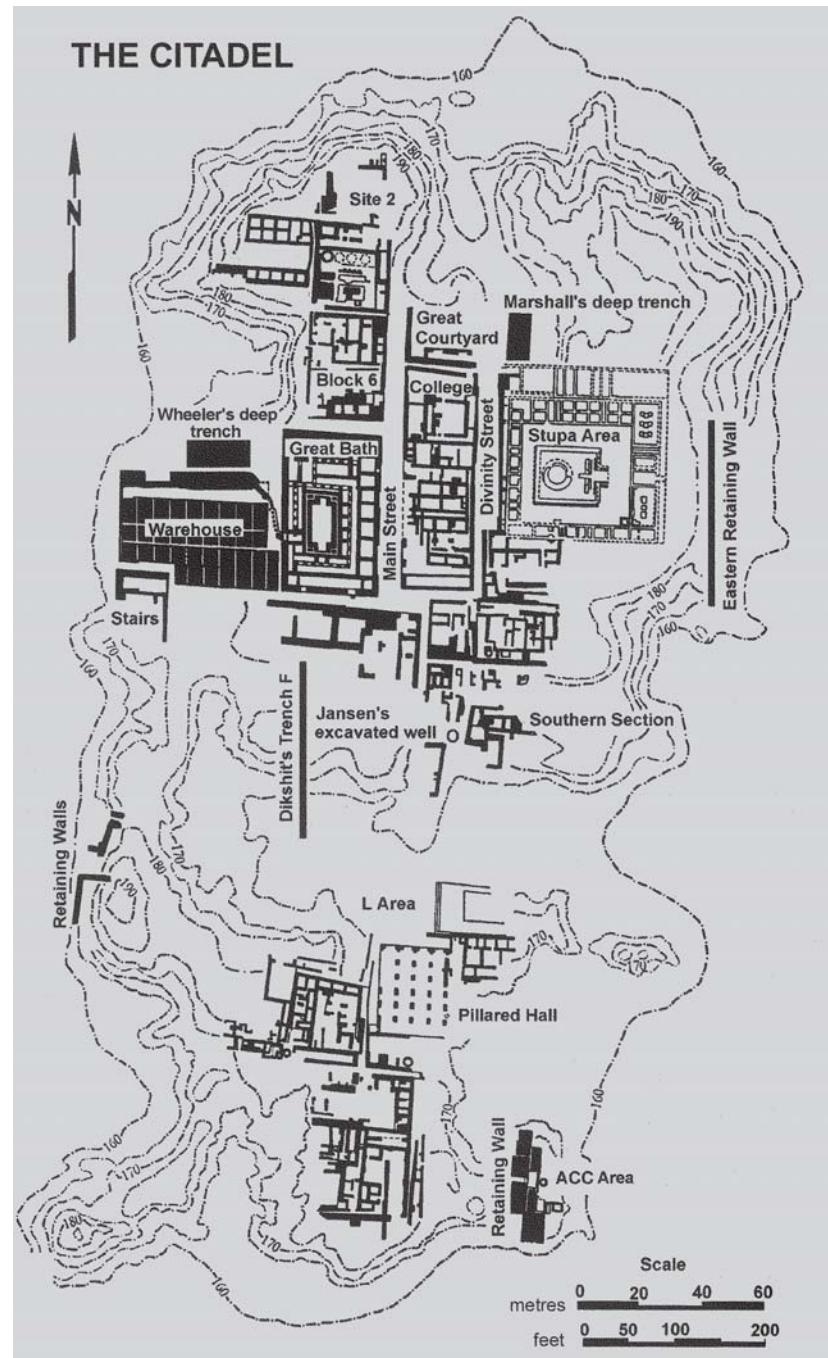
About the drains, Mackay noted: "It is certainly the most complete ancient system as yet discovered." Every house was connected to the street drains. The main channels were made of bricks set in mortar and were covered with loose bricks that could be removed for cleaning. In some cases, limestone was used for the covers. House drains first emptied into a sump or cesspit into which solid matter settled while waste water flowed out into the street drains. Very long drainage channels were provided at intervals with sumps for cleaning. It is a wonder of archaeology that "little heaps of material, mostly sand, have frequently been found lying alongside drainage channels, which shows ... that the debris was not always carted away when the drain was cleared".

FROM ERNEST MACKAY, *Hduo | #Logv Flylolvdwlrq*, 1948.

Drainage systems were not unique to the larger cities, but were found in smaller settlements as well. At Lothal for example, while houses were built of mud bricks, drains were made of burnt bricks.

*Fig. 1.9*

*This is an isometric drawing of a large house in Mohenjodaro. There was a well in room no 6.*



*Fig. 1.10  
Plan of the Citadel*

### Discuss...

Which of the architectural features of Mohenjodaro indicate planning?

to suggest that it was meant for some kind of a special ritual bath.

Are there other structures on the Citadel apart from the warehouse and the Great Bath?

### 3.3 The Citadel

It is on the Citadel that we find evidence of structures that were probably used for special public purposes. These include the warehouse – a massive structure of which the lower brick portions remain, while the upper portions, probably of wood, decayed long ago – and the Great Bath.

The Great Bath was a large rectangular tank in a courtyard surrounded by a corridor on all four sides. There were two flights of steps on the north and south leading into the tank, which was made watertight by setting bricks on edge and using a mortar of gypsum. There were rooms on three sides, in one of which was a large well. Water from the tank flowed into a huge drain. Across a lane to the north lay a smaller building with eight bathrooms, four on each side of a corridor, with drains from each bathroom connecting to a drain that ran along the corridor. The uniqueness of the structure, as well as the context in which it was found (the Citadel, with several distinctive buildings), has led scholars

## 4. TRACKING SOCIAL DIFFERENCES

### 4.1 Burials

Archaeologists generally use certain strategies to find out whether there were social or economic differences amongst people living within a particular culture. These include studying burials. You are probably familiar with the massive pyramids of Egypt, some of which were contemporaneous with the Harappan civilisation. Many of these pyramids were royal burials, where enormous quantities of wealth was buried.

At burials in Harappan sites the dead were generally laid in pits. Sometimes, there were differences in the way the burial pit was made – in some instances, the hollowed-out spaces were lined with bricks. Could these variations be an indication of social differences? We are not sure.

Some graves contain pottery and ornaments, perhaps indicating a belief that these could be used in the afterlife. Jewellery has been found in burials of both men and women. In fact, in the excavations at the cemetery in Harappa in the mid-1980s, an ornament consisting of three shell rings, a jasper (a kind of semi-precious stone) bead and hundreds of micro beads was found near the skull of a male. In some instances the dead were buried with copper mirrors. But on the whole, it appears that the Harappans did not believe in burying precious things with the dead.

### 4.2 Looking for “luxuries”

Another strategy to identify social differences is to study artefacts, which archaeologists broadly classify as utilitarian and luxuries. The first category includes objects of daily use made fairly easily out of ordinary materials such as stone or clay. These include querns, pottery, needles, flesh-rubbers (body scrubbers), etc., and are usually found distributed throughout settlements. Archaeologists assume objects were luxuries if they are rare or made from costly, non-local materials or with complicated technologies. Thus, little pots of faience (a material made of ground sand or silica mixed with colour and a gum and then fired) were probably considered precious because they were difficult to make.

The situation becomes more complicated when we find what seem to be articles of daily



*Fig. 1.11  
A copper mirror*

*Fig. 1.12  
A faience pot*



**Hoards** are objects kept carefully by people, often inside containers such as pots. Such hoards can be of jewellery or metal objects saved for reuse by metalworkers. If for some reason the original owners do not retrieve them, they remain where they are left till some archaeologist finds them.

### Discuss...

What are the modes of disposal of the dead prevalent at present? To what extent do these represent social differences?

use, such as spindle whorls made of rare materials such as faience. Do we classify these as utilitarian or luxuries?

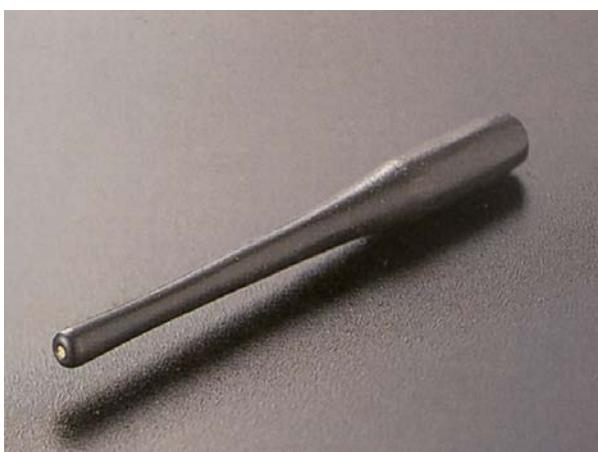
If we study the distribution of such artefacts, we find that rare objects made of valuable materials are generally concentrated in large settlements like Mohenjodaro and Harappa and are rarely found in the smaller settlements. For example, miniature pots of faience, perhaps used as perfume bottles, are found mostly in Mohenjodaro and Harappa, and there are none from small settlements like Kalibangan. Gold too was rare, and as at present, probably precious – all the gold jewellery found at Harappan sites was recovered from hoards.

## 5. FINDING OUT ABOUT CRAFT PRODUCTION

Locate Chanhudaro on Map 1. This is a tiny settlement (less than 7 hectares) as compared to Mohenjodaro (125 hectares), almost exclusively devoted to craft production, including bead-making, shell-cutting, metal-working, seal-making and weight-making.

The variety of materials used to make beads is remarkable: stones like carnelian (of a beautiful red colour), jasper, crystal, quartz and steatite; metals like copper, bronze and gold; and shell, faience and terracotta or burnt clay. Some beads were made of two or more stones, cemented together, some of stone with gold caps. The shapes were numerous – disc-shaped, cylindrical, spherical, barrel-shaped, segmented. Some were decorated by incising or painting, and some had designs etched onto them.

Fig. 1.13  
A tool and beads



Techniques for making beads differed according to the material. Steatite, a very soft stone, was easily worked. Some beads were moulded out of a paste made with steatite powder. This permitted making a variety of shapes, unlike the geometrical forms made out of harder stones. How the steatite micro bead was made remains a puzzle for archaeologists studying ancient technology.

Archaeologists' experiments have revealed that the red colour of carnelian was obtained by firing the yellowish raw material and beads at various stages of production. Nodules were chipped into rough shapes, and then finely flaked into the final form. Grinding, polishing and drilling completed the process. Specialised drills have been found at Chanhudaro, Lothal and more recently at Dholavira.

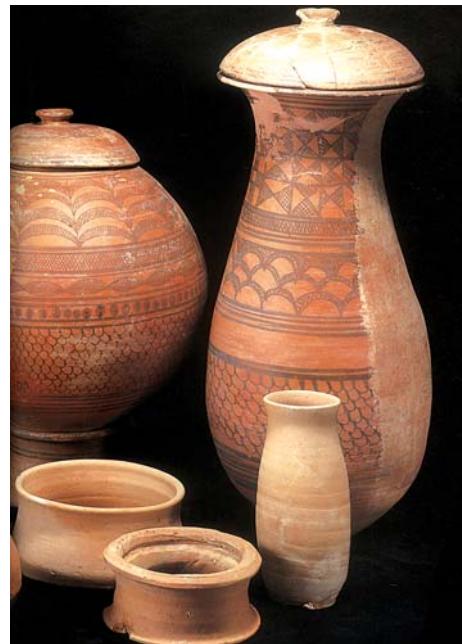
If you locate Nageshwar and Balakot on Map 1, you will notice that both settlements are near the coast. These were specialised centres for making shell objects – including bangles, ladles and inlay – which were taken to other settlements. Similarly, it is likely that finished products (such as beads) from Chanhudaro and Lothal were taken to the large urban centres such as Mohenjodaro and Harappa.



### 5.1 Identifying centres of production

In order to identify centres of craft production, archaeologists usually look for the following: raw material such as stone nodules, whole shells, copper ore; tools; unfinished objects; rejects and waste material. In fact, waste is one of the best indicators of craft work. For instance, if shell or stone is cut to make objects, then pieces of these materials will be discarded as waste at the place of production.

*Fig. 1.15  
A terracotta figurine*



*Fig. 1.14*

#### Pottery

Some of these can be seen in the National Museum, Delhi or in the site museum at Lothal.

#### Discuss...

Should the stone artefacts illustrated in the chapter be considered as utilitarian objects or as luxuries? Are there any that may fall into both categories?



*Fig. 1.16  
Copper and bronze vessels*

Sometimes, larger waste pieces were used up to make smaller objects, but minuscule bits were usually left in the work area. These traces suggest that apart from small, specialised centres, craft production was also undertaken in large cities such as Mohenjodaro and Harappa.

## 6. STRATEGIES FOR PROCURING MATERIALS

As is obvious, a variety of materials was used for craft production. While some such as clay were locally available, many such as stone, timber and metal had to be procured from outside the alluvial plain. Terracotta toy models of bullock carts suggest that this was one important means of transporting goods and people across land routes. Riverine routes along the Indus and its tributaries, as well as coastal routes were also probably used.

### 6.1 Materials from the subcontinent and beyond

The Harappans procured materials for craft production in various ways. For instance, they established settlements such as Nageshwar and Balakot in areas where shell was available. Other such sites were Shortughai, in far-off Afghanistan, near the best source of lapis lazuli, a blue stone that was apparently very highly valued, and Lothal which was near sources of carnelian (from Bharuch in Gujarat), steatite (from south Rajasthan and north Gujarat) and metal (from Rajasthan).

Another strategy for procuring raw materials may have been to send expeditions to areas such as the Khetri region of Rajasthan (for copper) and south India (for gold). These expeditions established communication with local communities. Occasional finds of Harappan artefacts such as steatite micro beads in these areas are indications of such contact. There is evidence in the Khetri area for what archaeologists call the Ganeshwar-Jodhpura culture, with its distinctive non-Harappan pottery and an unusual wealth of copper objects. It is possible that the inhabitants of this region supplied copper to the Harappans.



## 6.2 Contact with distant lands

Recent archaeological finds suggest that copper was also probably brought from Oman, on the south-eastern tip of the Arabian peninsula. Chemical analyses have shown that both the Omani copper and Harappan artefacts have traces of nickel, suggesting a common origin. There are other traces of contact as well. A distinctive type of vessel, a large Harappan jar coated with a thick layer of black clay has been found at Omani sites. Such thick coatings prevent the percolation of liquids. We do not know what was carried in these vessels, but it is possible that the Harappans exchanged the contents of these vessels for Omani copper.

Mesopotamian texts datable to the third millennium BCE refer to copper coming from a region called Magan, perhaps a name for Oman, and interestingly enough copper found at

*Fig. 1.17  
A Harappan jar found in Oman*

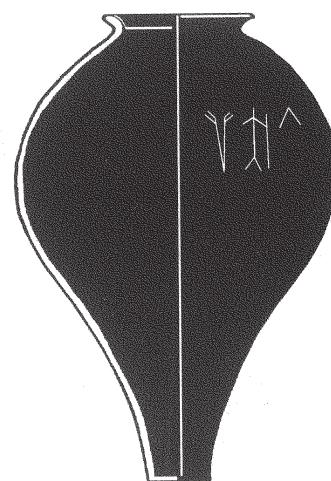




Fig. 1.18

This is a cylinder seal, typical of Mesopotamia, but the humped bull motif on it appears to be derived from the Indus region.

Fig. 1.19

The round "Persian Gulf" seal found in Bahrain sometimes carries Harappan motifs. Interestingly, local "Dilmun" weights followed the Harappan standard.



Fig. 1.20

Seal depicting a boat

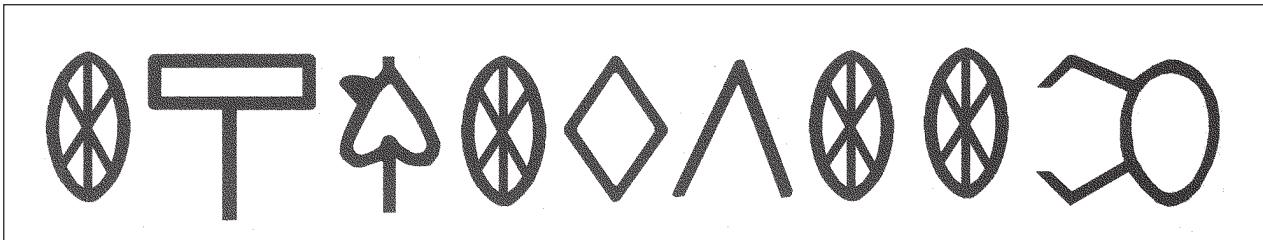


### Discuss...

What were the possible routes from the Harappan region to Oman, Dilmun and Mesopotamia?

Mesopotamian sites also contain traces of nickel. Other archaeological finds suggestive of long-distance contacts include Harappan seals, weights, dice and beads. In this context, it is worth noting that Mesopotamian texts

mention contact with regions named Dilmun (probably the island of Bahrain), Magan and Meluhha, possibly the Harappan region. They mention the products from Meluhha: carnelian, lapis lazuli, copper, gold, and varieties of wood. A Mesopotamian myth says of Meluhha: "May your bird be the *haja*-bird, may its call be heard in the royal palace." Some archaeologists think the *haja*-bird was the peacock. Did it get this name from its call? It is likely that communication with Oman, Bahrain or Mesopotamia was by sea. Mesopotamian texts refer to Meluhha as a land of seafarers. Besides, we find depictions of ships and boats on seals.



*Fig. 1.21  
Letters on an ancient signboard*

## 7. SEALS, SCRIPT, WEIGHTS

### 7.1 Seals and sealings

Seals and sealings were used to facilitate long-distance communication. Imagine a bag of goods being sent from one place to another. Its mouth was tied with rope and on the knot was affixed some wet clay on which one or more seals were pressed, leaving an impression. If the bag reached with its sealing intact, it meant that it had not been tampered with. The sealing also conveyed the identity of the sender.

### 7.2 An enigmatic script

Harappan seals usually have a line of writing, probably containing the name and title of the owner. Scholars have also suggested that the motif (generally an animal) conveyed a meaning to those who could not read.

Most inscriptions are short, the longest containing about 26 signs. Although the script remains undeciphered to date, it was evidently not alphabetical (where each sign stands for a vowel or a consonant) as it has just too many signs – somewhere between 375 and 400. It is apparent that the script was written from right to left as some seals show a wider spacing on the right and cramping on the left, as if the engraver began working from the right and then ran out of space.

Consider the variety of objects on which writing has been found: seals, copper tools, rims of jars, copper and terracotta tablets, jewellery, bone rods, even an ancient signboard! Remember, there may have been writing on perishable materials too. Could this mean that literacy was widespread?

### 7.3 Weights

Exchanges were regulated by a precise system of weights, usually made of a stone called chert and generally cubical (Fig. 1.2), with no markings. The



*Fig. 1.22  
A sealing from Ropar*

➲ How many seals are impressed on this piece of clay?

### ➲ Discuss...

What are some of the present-day methods used for long-distance exchange of goods? What are their advantages and problems?

lower denominations of weights were binary (1, 2, 4, 8, 16, 32, etc. up to 12,800), while the higher denominations followed the decimal system. The smaller weights were probably used for weighing jewellery and beads. Metal scale-pans have also been found.

## 8. ANCIENT AUTHORITY



*Fig. 1.23  
A "priest-king"*

There are indications of complex decisions being taken and implemented in Harappan society. Take for instance, the extraordinary uniformity of Harappan artefacts as evident in pottery (Fig. 1.14), seals, weights and bricks. Notably, bricks, though obviously not produced in any single centre, were of a uniform ratio throughout the region, from Jammu to Gujarat. We have also seen that settlements were strategically set up in specific locations for various reasons. Besides, labour was mobilised for making bricks and for the construction of massive walls and platforms.

Who organised these activities?

### 8.1 Palaces and kings

If we look for a centre of power or for depictions of people in power, archaeological records provide no immediate answers. A large building found at Mohenjodaro was labelled as a palace by archaeologists but no spectacular finds were associated with it. A stone statue was labelled and continues to be known as the "priest-king". This is because archaeologists were familiar with Mesopotamian history and its "priest-kings" and have found parallels in the Indus region. But as we will see (p.23), the ritual practices of the Harappan civilisation are not well understood yet nor are there any means of knowing whether those who performed them also held political power.

Some archaeologists are of the opinion that Harappan society had no rulers, and that everybody enjoyed equal status. Others feel there was no single ruler but several, that Mohenjodaro had a separate ruler, Harappa another, and so forth. Yet others argue that there was a single state, given the similarity in artefacts, the evidence for planned settlements, the standardised ratio of brick size, and the establishment of settlements near sources of raw

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### Discuss...

Could everybody in Harappan society have been equal?

material. As of now, the last theory seems the most plausible, as it is unlikely that entire communities could have collectively made and implemented such complex decisions.

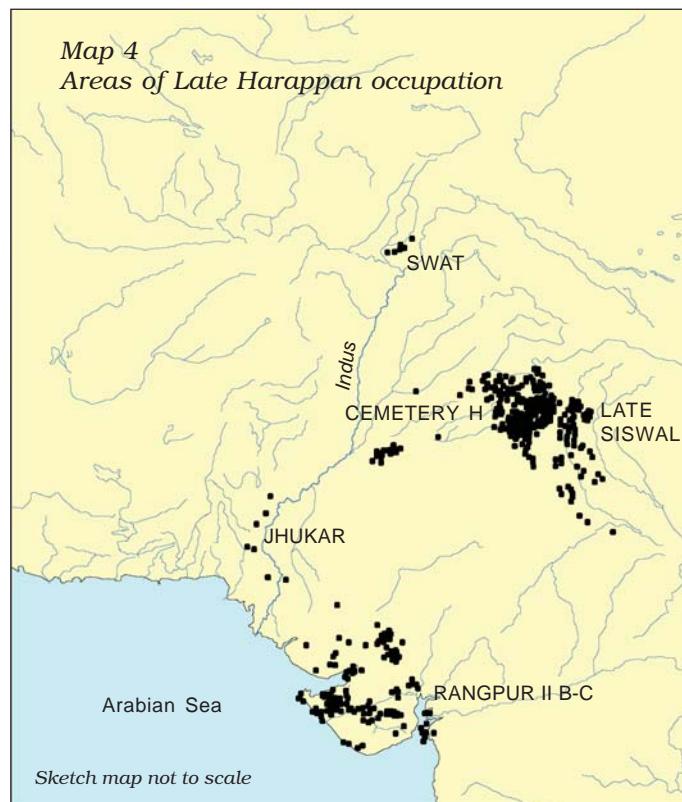
## 9. THE END OF THE CIVILISATION

There is evidence that by c. 1800 BCE most of the Mature Harappan sites in regions such as Cholistan had been abandoned. Simultaneously, there was an expansion of population into new settlements in Gujarat, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh.

In the few Harappan sites that continued to be occupied after 1900 BCE there appears to have been a transformation of material culture, marked by the disappearance of the distinctive artefacts of the civilisation – weights, seals, special beads. Writing, long-distance trade, and craft specialisation also disappeared. In general, far fewer materials were used to make far fewer things. House construction techniques deteriorated and large public structures were no longer produced. Overall, artefacts and settlements indicate a rural way of life in what are called “Late Harappan” or “successor cultures”.

What brought about these changes? Several explanations have been put forward. These range from climatic change, deforestation, excessive floods, the shifting and/or drying up of rivers, to overuse of the landscape. Some of these “causes” may hold for certain settlements, but they do not explain the collapse of the entire civilisation.

It appears that a strong unifying element, perhaps the Harappan state, came to an end. This is evidenced by the disappearance of seals, the script, distinctive beads and pottery, the shift from a standardised weight system to the use of local weights; and the decline and abandonment of cities. The subcontinent would have to wait for over a millennium for new cities to develop in a completely different region.



Source 3

### Evidence of an “invasion”

Deadman Lane is a narrow alley, varying from 3 to 6 feet in width ... At the point where the lane turns westward, part of a skull and the bones of the thorax and upper arm of an adult were discovered, all in very friable condition, at a depth of 4 ft 2 in. The body lay on its back diagonally across the lane. Fifteen inches to the west were a few fragments of a tiny skull. It is to these remains that the lane owes its name.

FROM JOHN MARSHALL, Prkhqmrqdur#dog#wkh#Lgpxv#Flylolvdwlrq, 1931.

Sixteen skeletons of people with the ornaments that they were wearing when they died were found from the same part of Mohenjodaro in 1925.

Much later, in 1947, R.E.M. Wheeler, then Director-General of the ASI, tried to correlate this archaeological evidence with that of the Uljyhg#the earliest known text in the subcontinent. He wrote:

The Uljyhg mentions sxu, meaning rampart, fort or stronghold. Indra, the Aryan war-god is called sxudpgdud, the fort-destroyer.

Where are – or were – these citadels? It has in the past been supposed that they were mythical ... The recent excavation of Harappa may be thought to have changed the picture. Here we have a highly evolved civilisation of essentially non-Aryan type, now known to have employed massive fortifications ... What destroyed this firmly settled civilisation? Climatic, economic or political deterioration may have weakened it, but its ultimate extinction is more likely to have been completed by deliberate and large-scale destruction. It may be no mere chance that at a late period of Mohenjodaro men, women, and children, appear to have been massacred there. On circumstantial evidence, Indra stands accused.

FROM R.E.M. WHEELER, “Harappa 1946”, Dqflhq#Lgpld/# 1947.

In the 1960s, the evidence of a massacre in Mohenjodaro was questioned by an archaeologist named George Dales. He demonstrated that the skeletons found at the site did not belong to the same period:

Whereas a couple of them definitely seem to indicate a slaughter, ý the bulk of the bones were found in contexts suggesting burials of the sloppiest and most irreverent nature. There is no destruction level covering the latest period of the city, no sign of extensive burning, no bodies of warriors clad in armour and surrounded by the weapons of war. The citadel, the only fortified part of the city, yielded no evidence of a final defence.

FROM G.F. DALES, “The Mythical Massacre at Mohenjodaro”, H{shglwrq#1964.

As you can see, a careful re-examination of the data can sometimes lead to a reversal of earlier interpretations.

### Discuss...

What are the similarities and differences between Maps 1, 2 and 4?

## 10. DISCOVERING THE HARAPPAN CIVILISATION

So far, we have examined facets of the Harappan civilisation in the context of how archaeologists have used evidence from material remains to piece together parts of a fascinating history. However, there is another story as well – about how archaeologists “discovered” the civilisation.

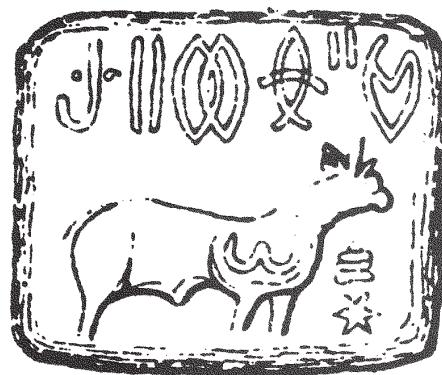
When Harappan cities fell into ruin, people gradually forgot all about them. When men and women began living in the area millennia later, they did not know what to make of the strange artefacts that occasionally surfaced, washed by floods or exposed by soil erosion, or turned up while ploughing a field, or digging for treasure.

### 10.1 Cunningham's confusion

When Cunningham, the first Director-General of the ASI, began archaeological excavations in the mid-nineteenth century, archaeologists preferred to use the written word (texts and inscriptions) as a guide to investigations. In fact, Cunningham's main interest was in the archaeology of the Early Historic (c. sixth century BCE-fourth century CE) and later periods. He used the accounts left by Chinese Buddhist pilgrims who had visited the subcontinent between the fourth and seventh centuries CE to locate early settlements. Cunningham also collected, documented and translated inscriptions found during his surveys. When he excavated sites he tended to recover artefacts that he thought had cultural value.

A site like Harappa, which was not part of the itinerary of the Chinese pilgrims and was not known as an Early Historic city, did not fit very neatly within his framework of investigation. So, although Harappan artefacts were found fairly often during the nineteenth century and some of these reached Cunningham, he did not realise how old these were.

A Harappan seal was given to Cunningham by an Englishman. He noted the object, but unsuccessfully tried to place it within the time-frame with which he was familiar. This was because he, like many others, thought that Indian history began with the first cities in the Ganga valley (see Chapter 2). Given his specific focus, it is not surprising that he missed the significance of Harappa.



*Fig. 1.24  
Cunningham's sketch of the first-known seal from Harappa*

## Sites, mounds, layers

Archaeological sites are formed through the production, use and discarding of materials and structures. When people continue to live in the same place, their constant use and reuse of the landscape results in the build up of occupational debris, called a *prologue*. Brief or permanent abandonment results in alteration of the landscape by wind or water activity and erosion. Occupations are detected by traces of ancient materials found in soil, which differ from one another in colour, texture and the artefacts that are found in them. Abandonment or desertions, what are called "sterile layers", can be identified by the absence of such traces.

Generally, the lowest layers are the oldest and the highest are the most recent. The study of these layers is called stratigraphy. Artefacts found in layers can be assigned to specific *contexts* and can thus provide the *context* for a site.

### 10.2 A new old civilisation

Subsequently, seals were discovered at Harappa by archaeologists such as Daya Ram Sahni in the early decades of the twentieth century, in layers that were definitely much older than Early Historic levels. It was then that their significance began to be realised. Another archaeologist, Rakhal Das Banerji found similar seals at Mohenjodaro, leading to the conjecture that these sites were part of a single archaeological culture. Based on these finds, in 1924, John Marshall, Director-General of the ASI, announced the discovery of a new civilisation in the Indus valley to the world. As S.N. Roy noted in *The Story of Indian Archaeology*, "Marshall left India three thousand years older than he had found her." This was because similar, till-then-unidentified seals were found at excavations at Mesopotamian sites. It was then that the world knew not only of a new civilisation, but also of one contemporaneous with Mesopotamia.

In fact, John Marshall's stint as Director-General of the ASI marked a major change in Indian archaeology. He was the first professional archaeologist to work in India, and brought his experience of working in Greece and Crete to the field. More importantly, though like Cunningham he too was interested in spectacular finds, he was equally keen to look for patterns of everyday life.

Marshall tended to excavate along regular horizontal units, measured uniformly throughout the mound, ignoring the stratigraphy of the site. This meant that all the artefacts recovered from the same unit were grouped together, even if they were found at different stratigraphic layers. As a result, valuable

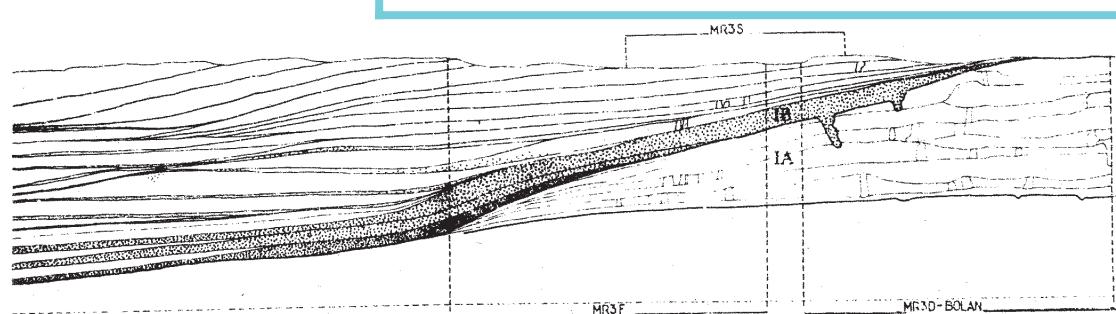


Fig. 1.25

The stratigraphy of a small mound

Notice that the layers are not exactly horizontal.

information about the context of these finds was irretrievably lost.

### 10.3 New techniques and questions

It was R.E.M. Wheeler, after he took over as Director-General of the ASI in 1944, who rectified this problem. Wheeler recognised that it was necessary to follow the stratigraphy of the mound rather than dig mechanically along uniform horizontal lines. Moreover, as an ex-army brigadier, he brought with him a military precision to the practice of archaeology.

The frontiers of the Harappan civilisation have little or no connection with present-day national boundaries. However, with the partition of the subcontinent and the creation of Pakistan, the major sites are now in Pakistani territory. This has spurred Indian archaeologists to try and locate sites in India. An extensive survey in Kutch has revealed a number of Harappan settlements and explorations in Punjab and Haryana have added to the list of Harappan sites. While Kalibangan, Lothal, Rakhi Garhi and most recently Dholavira have been discovered, explored and excavated as part of these efforts, fresh explorations continue.

Over the decades, new issues have assumed importance. Where some archaeologists are often keen to obtain a cultural sequence, others try to understand the logic underlying the location of specific sites. They also grapple with the wealth of artefacts, trying to figure out the functions these may have served.

Since the 1980s, there has also been growing international interest in Harappan archaeology. Specialists from the subcontinent and abroad have been jointly working at both Harappa and Mohenjodaro. They are using modern scientific techniques including surface exploration to recover traces of clay, stone, metal and plant and animal remains as well as to minutely analyse every scrap of available evidence. These explorations promise to yield interesting results in the future.

#### Discuss...

Which of the themes in this chapter would have interested Cunningham? Which are the issues that have been of interest since 1947?

### Wheeler at Harappa

Early archaeologists were often driven by a sense of adventure. This is what Wheeler wrote about his experience at Harappa:

It was, I recall, on a warm May night in 1944 that a four miles' wrqjd-ride brought me as the newly appointed Director General of the Archaeological Survey with my local Muslim officer from a little railway-station labelled "Harappa" along a deep sand track to a small rest-house beside the moonlit mounds of the ancient site. Warned by my anxious colleague that we must start our inspection at 5.30 next morning and finish by 7.30 "after which it would be too hot", we turned in with the dark figure of the sxqnd-zdood crouched patiently in the entrance and the night air rent by innumerable jackals in the neighbouring wilderness.

Next morning, punctually at 5.30, our little procession started out towards the sandy heaps. Within ten minutes I stopped and rubbed my eyes as I gazed upon the tallest mound, scarcely trusting my vision. Six hours later my embarrassed staff and I were still toiling with picks and knives under the blazing sun, the mad sahib (I am afraid) setting a relentless pace.

FROM R.E.M. WHEELER,  
P|#Dufkdhrorj1fd0#Plvvlrq  
wr#Logld#dg##Sdhlwqd/# 1976.

## 11. PROBLEMS OF PIECING TOGETHER THE PAST

As we have seen, it is not the Harappan script that helps in understanding the ancient civilisation. Rather, it is material evidence that allows archaeologists to better reconstruct Harappan life. This material could be pottery, tools, ornaments, household objects, etc. Organic materials such as cloth, leather, wood and reeds generally decompose, especially in tropical regions. What survive are stone, burnt clay (or terracotta), metal, etc.

It is also important to remember that only broken or useless objects would have been thrown away. Other things would probably have been recycled. Consequently, valuable artefacts that are found intact were either lost in the past or hoarded and never retrieved. In other words, such finds are accidental rather than typical.

### 11.1 Classifying finds

Recovering artefacts is just the beginning of the archaeological enterprise. Archaeologists then classify their finds. One simple principle of classification is in terms of material, such as stone, clay, metal, bone, ivory, etc. The second, and more complicated, is in terms of function: archaeologists have to decide whether, for instance, an artefact is a tool or an ornament, or both, or something meant for ritual use.

An understanding of the function of an artefact is often shaped by its resemblance with present-day things – beads, querns, stone blades and pots are obvious examples. Archaeologists also try to identify the function of an artefact by investigating the context in which it was found: was it found in a house, in a drain, in a grave, in a kiln?

Sometimes, archaeologists have to take recourse to indirect evidence. For instance, though there are traces of cotton at some Harappan sites, to find out about clothing we have to depend on indirect evidence including depictions in sculpture.

Archaeologists have to develop frames of reference. We have seen that the first Harappan seal that was found could not be understood till archaeologists had a context in which to place it – both in terms of the cultural sequence in which it was found, and in terms of a comparison with finds in Mesopotamia.

### 11.2 Problems of interpretation

The problems of archaeological interpretation are perhaps most evident in attempts to reconstruct religious practices. Early archaeologists thought that certain objects which seemed unusual or unfamiliar may have had a religious significance. These included terracotta figurines of women, heavily jewelled, some with elaborate head-dresses. These were regarded as mother goddesses. Rare stone statuary of men in an almost standardised posture, seated with one hand on the knee – such as the “priest-king” – was also similarly classified. In other instances, structures have been assigned ritual significance. These include the Great Bath and fire altars found at Kalibangan and Lothal.

Attempts have also been made to reconstruct religious beliefs and practices by examining seals, some of which seem to depict ritual scenes. Others, with plant motifs, are thought to indicate nature worship. Some animals – such as the one-horned animal, often called the “unicorn” – depicted on seals seem to be mythical, composite creatures. In some seals, a figure shown seated cross-legged in a “yogic” posture, sometimes surrounded by animals, has been regarded as a depiction of “proto-Shiva”, that is, an early form of one of the major deities of Hinduism. Besides, conical stone objects have been classified as *lingas*.

Many reconstructions of Harappan religion are made on the assumption that later traditions provide parallels with earlier ones. This is because archaeologists often move from the known to the unknown, that is, from the present to the past. While this is plausible in the case of stone querns and pots, it becomes more speculative when we extend it to “religious” symbols.

Let us look, for instance, at the “proto-Shiva” seals. The earliest religious text, the *Rigveda* (compiled c. 1500–1000 BCE) mentions a god named Rudra, which is a name used for Shiva in later Puranic traditions (in the first millennium CE; see also Chapter 4). However, unlike Shiva, Rudra in the *Rigveda* is neither depicted as Pashupati (lord of animals in general and cattle in particular), nor as a yogi. In other words, this depiction does not match the description of Rudra in the *Rigveda*. Is this, then, possibly a shaman as some scholars have suggested?



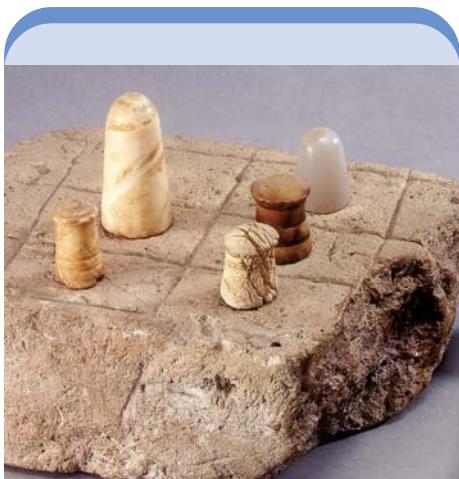
Fig. 1.26  
Was this a mother goddess?



Fig. 1.27  
A “proto-Shiva” seal

A *linga* is a polished stone that is worshipped as a symbol of Shiva.

Shamans are men and women who claim magical and healing powers, as well as an ability to communicate with the other world.



*Fig. 1.28  
Gamesmen or lingas?*

This is what Mackay, one of the earliest excavators, had to say about these stones:

Various small cones made of lapis lazuli, jasper, chalcedony, and other stones, most beautifully cut and finished, and less than two inches in height, are also thought to be *olqjdv*. On the other hand, it is just as possible that they were used in the board-games ...

FROM ERNEST MACKAY, *Hduo Logxv#Flylolvdwlrg*, 1948.

What has been achieved after so many decades of archaeological work? We have a fairly good idea of the Harappan economy. We have been able to tease out social differences and we have some idea of how the civilisation functioned. It is really not clear how much more we would know if the script were to be deciphered. If a bilingual inscription is found, questions about the languages spoken by the Harappans could perhaps be put to rest.

Several reconstructions remain speculative at present. Was the Great Bath a ritual structure? How widespread was literacy? Why do Harappan cemeteries show little social differentiation? Also unanswered are questions on gender – did women make pottery or did they only paint pots (as at present)? What about other craftspersons? What were the terracotta female figurines used for? Very few scholars have investigated issues of gender in the context of the Harappan civilisation and this is a whole new area for future work.



*Fig. 1.29  
A terracotta cart*

### Discuss...

What are the aspects of Harappan economy that have been reconstructed from archaeological evidence?

## TIMELINE 1

### MAJOR PERIODS IN EARLY INDIAN ARCHAEOLOGY

2 million BP (BEFORE PRESENT)	Lower Palaeolithic
80,000	Middle Palaeolithic
35,000	Upper Palaeolithic
12,000	Mesolithic
10,000	Neolithic (early agriculturists and pastoralists)
6,000	Chalcolithic (first use of copper)
2600 BCE	Harappan civilisation
1000 BCE	Early iron, megalithic burials
600 BCE-400 CE	Early Historic

*(Note: All dates are approximate. Besides, there are wide variations in developments in different parts of the subcontinent. Dates indicated are for the earliest evidence of each phase.)*

## TIMELINE 2

### MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS IN HARAPPAN ARCHAEOLOGY

#### Nineteenth century

1875	Report of Alexander Cunningham on Harappan seal
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#### Twentieth century

1921	M.S. Vats begins excavations at Harappa
1925	Excavations begin at Mohenjodaro
1946	R.E.M. Wheeler excavates at Harappa
1955	S.R. Rao begins excavations at Lothal
1960	B.B. Lal and B.K. Thapar begin excavations at Kalibangan
1974	M.R. Mughal begins explorations in Bahawalpur
1980	A team of German and Italian archaeologists begins surface explorations at Mohenjodaro
1986	American team begins excavations at Harappa
1990	R.S. Bisht begins excavations at Dholavira



*Fig. 1.30  
A Harappan burial*



### ANSWER IN 100-150 WORDS

1. List the items of food available to people in Harappan cities. Identify the groups who would have provided these.
2. How do archaeologists trace socio-economic differences in Harappan society? What are the differences that they notice?
3. Would you agree that the drainage system in Harappan cities indicates town planning? Give reasons for your answer.
4. List the materials used to make beads in the Harappan civilisation. Describe the process by which any one kind of bead was made.
5. Look at Fig. 1.30 and describe what you see. How is the body placed? What are the objects placed near it? Are there any artefacts on the body? Do these indicate the sex of the skeleton?



### WRITE A SHORT ESSAY (ABOUT 500 WORDS) ON THE FOLLOWING:

6. Describe some of the distinctive features of Mohenjodaro.
7. List the raw materials required for craft production in the Harappan civilisation and discuss how these might have been obtained.
8. Discuss how archaeologists reconstruct the past.
9. Discuss the functions that may have been performed by rulers in Harappan society.



### MAP WORK

10. On Map 1, use a pencil to circle sites where evidence of agriculture has been recovered. Mark an X against sites where there is evidence of craft production and R against sites where raw materials were found.



### PROJECT (ANY ONE)

11. Find out if there are any museums in your town. Visit one of them and write a report on any ten items, describing how old they are, where they were found, and why you think they are on display.
12. Collect illustrations of ten things made of stone, metal and clay produced and used at present. Match these with the pictures of the Harappan civilisation in this chapter, and discuss the similarities and differences that you find.



**If you would like to know more, read:**

Raymond and Bridget Allchin. 1997. *Ruljgv#ri#Flylol}dwlrq1*. Viking, New Delhi.

G.L. Possehl. 2003. *Wkh#Logxv#Flylol}dwlrq1*. Vistaar, New Delhi.

Shereen Ratnagar. 2001. *Xqghuvwdqglqj#Kdudssd1*. Tulika, New Delhi.



**For more information, you could visit:**  
<http://www.harappa.com/har/harres0.html>

## THEME TWO

# KINGS, FARMERS AND TOWNS

## EARLY STATES AND ECONOMIES

### (c. 600 BCE-600 CE)

There were several developments in different parts of the subcontinent during the long span of 1,500 years following the end of the Harappan civilisation. This was also the period during which the *Rigveda* was composed by people living along the Indus and its tributaries. Agricultural

settlements emerged in many parts of the subcontinent, including north India, the Deccan Plateau, and parts of Karnataka. Besides, there is evidence of pastoral populations in the Deccan and further south. New modes of disposal of the dead, including the making of elaborate stone structures known as megaliths, emerged in central and south India from the first millennium BCE. In many cases, the dead were buried with a rich range of iron tools and weapons.

From c. sixth century BCE, there is evidence that there were other trends as well. Perhaps the most visible was the emergence of early states, empires and kingdoms. Underlying these political processes were other changes, evident in the ways in which agricultural production was organised. Simultaneously, new towns appeared almost throughout the subcontinent.

Historians attempt to understand these developments by drawing on a range of sources – inscriptions, texts, coins and visual material. As we will see, this is a complex process. You will also notice that these sources do not tell the entire story.



Fig. 2.1  
An inscription, Sanchi  
(Madhya Pradesh),  
c. second century BCE

### 1. PRINSEP AND PIYADASSI

Some of the most momentous developments in Indian epigraphy took place in the 1830s. This was when James Prinsep, an officer in the mint of the East India Company, deciphered Brahmi and Kharosthi, two scripts used in the earliest inscriptions and coins. He found that most of these mentioned a king referred to as Piyadassi – meaning “pleasant to behold”; there were a few inscriptions which also

**Epigraphy** is the study of inscriptions.

referred to the king as Asoka, one of the most famous rulers known from Buddhist texts.

This gave a new direction to investigations into early Indian political history as European and Indian scholars used inscriptions and texts composed in a variety of languages to reconstruct the lineages of major dynasties that had ruled the subcontinent. As a result, the broad contours of political history were in place by the early decades of the twentieth century.

Subsequently, scholars began to shift their focus to the *context* of political history, investigating whether there were connections between political changes and economic and social developments. It was soon realised that while there were links, these were not always simple or direct.

## 2. THE EARLIEST STATES

### 2.1 The sixteen *mahajanapadas*

The sixth century BCE is often regarded as a major turning point in early Indian history. It is an era associated with early states, cities, the growing use of iron, the development of coinage, etc. It also witnessed the growth of diverse systems of thought, including Buddhism and Jainism. Early Buddhist and Jaina texts (see also Chapter 4) mention, amongst other things, **sixteen states known as *mahajanapadas***. Although the lists vary, some names such as Vajji, Magadha, Koshala, Kuru, Panchala, Gandhara and Avanti occur frequently. Clearly, these were amongst the most important *mahajanapadas*.

While most *mahajanapadas* were ruled by kings, some, known as *ganas* or *sanghas*, were oligarchies (p. 30), where power was shared by a number of men, often collectively called *rajas*. Both Mahavira and the Buddha (Chapter 4) belonged to such *ganas*. In some instances, as in the case of the Vajji *sangha*, the *rajas* probably controlled resources such as land collectively. Although their histories are often difficult to reconstruct due to the lack of sources, some of these states lasted for nearly a thousand years.

Each *mahajanapada* had a capital city, which was often fortified. Maintaining these fortified cities as well as providing for incipient armies and bureaucracies required resources. From c. sixth

### Inscriptions

Inscriptions# are writings engraved on hard surfaces such as stone, metal or pottery. They usually record the achievements, activities or ideas of those who commissioned them and include the exploits of kings, or donations made by women and men to religious institutions. Inscriptions are virtually permanent records, some of which carry dates. Others are dated on the basis of sdodhrjudsk|# or styles of writing, with a fair amount of precision. For instance, in f. 250 BCE the letter "a" was written like this: . By f. 500 CE, it was written like this: .

The earliest inscriptions were in Prakrit, a name for languages used by ordinary people. Names of rulers such as Ajatasattu and Asoka, known from Prakrit texts and inscriptions, have been spelt in their Prakrit forms in this chapter. You will also find terms in languages such as Pali, Tamil and Sanskrit, which too were used to write inscriptions and texts. It is possible that people spoke in other languages as well, even though these were not used for writing.

*Janapada*, meaning the land where a *jana* (a people, clan or tribe) sets its foot or settles. It is a word used in both Prakrit and Sanskrit.



➲ Which were the areas where states and cities were most densely clustered?

**Oligarchy** refers to a form of government where power is exercised by a group of men. The Roman Republic, about which you read last year, was an oligarchy in spite of its name.

century BCE onwards, Brahmanas began composing Sanskrit texts known as the Dharmasutras. These laid down norms for rulers (as well as for other social categories), who were ideally expected to be Kshatriyas (see also Chapter 3). Rulers were advised to collect taxes and tribute from cultivators, traders and artisans. Were resources also procured from pastoralists and forest peoples? We do not really know. What we do know is that **raids on neighbouring states were recognised as a legitimate means of acquiring wealth**. Gradually, some states acquired standing armies and maintained regular bureaucracies. Others continued to depend on militia, recruited, more often than not, from the peasantry.

## 2.2 First amongst the sixteen: Magadha

Between the sixth and the fourth centuries BCE, Magadha (in present-day Bihar) became the most powerful *mahajanapada*. Modern historians explain this development in a variety of ways: Magadha was a region where agriculture was especially productive. Besides, iron mines (in present-day Jharkhand) were accessible and provided resources for tools and weapons. Elephants, an important component of the army, were found in forests in the region. Also, the Ganga and its tributaries provided a means of cheap and convenient communication. However, early Buddhist and Jaina writers who wrote about Magadha attributed its power to the policies of individuals: ruthlessly ambitious kings of whom Bimbisara, Ajatasattu and Mahapadma Nanda are the best known, and their ministers, who helped implement their policies.

Initially, Rajagaha (the Prakrit name for present-day Rajgir in Bihar) was the capital of Magadha. Interestingly, the old name means “house of the king”. Rajagaha was a fortified settlement, located amongst hills. Later, in the fourth century BCE, the capital was shifted to Pataliputra, present-day Patna, commanding routes of communication along the Ganga.

### ➲ Discuss...

What are the different explanations offered by early writers and present-day historians for the growth of Magadhan power?

*Fig. 2.2  
Fortification walls at Rajgir*

➲ Why were these walls built?



### Languages and scripts

Most Asokan inscriptions were in the Prakrit language while those in the northwest of the subcontinent were in Aramaic and Greek. Most Prakrit inscriptions were written in the Brahmi script; however, some, in the northwest, were written in Kharosthi. The Aramaic and Greek scripts were used for inscriptions in Afghanistan.



Fig. 2.3  
The lion capital

➲ Why is the lion capital considered important today?

## 3. AN EARLY EMPIRE

The growth of Magadha culminated in the emergence of the Mauryan Empire. Chandragupta Maurya, who founded the empire (c. 321 BCE), extended control as far northwest as Afghanistan and Baluchistan, and his grandson Asoka, arguably the most famous ruler of early India, conquered Kalinga (present-day coastal Orissa).

### 3.1 Finding out about the Mauryas

Historians have used a variety of sources to reconstruct the history of the Mauryan Empire. These include archaeological finds, especially sculpture. Also valuable are contemporary works, such as the account of Megasthenes (a Greek ambassador to the court of Chandragupta Maurya), which survives in fragments. Another source that is often used is the *Arthashastra*, parts of which were probably composed by Kautilya or Chanakya, traditionally believed to be the minister of Chandragupta. Besides, the Mauryas are mentioned in later Buddhist, Jaina and Puranic literature, as well as in Sanskrit literary works. While these are useful, the inscriptions of Asoka (c. 272/268-231 BCE) on rocks and pillars are often regarded as amongst the most valuable sources.

Asoka was the first ruler who inscribed his messages to his subjects and officials on stone surfaces – natural rocks as well as polished pillars. He used the inscriptions to proclaim what he understood to be *dharma*. This included respect towards elders, generosity towards Brahmanas and those who renounced worldly life, treating slaves and servants kindly, and respect for religions and traditions other than one's own.

### 3.2 Administering the empire

There were five major political centres in the empire – the capital Pataliputra and the provincial centres of Taxila, Ujjayini, Tosali and Suvarnagiri, all mentioned in Asokan inscriptions. If we examine the content of these inscriptions, we find virtually the same message engraved everywhere – from the present-day North West Frontier Provinces of Pakistan, to Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and Uttaranchal in India. Could this vast empire have had a uniform administrative system? Historians have increasingly come to realise that



this is unlikely. The regions included within the empire were just too diverse. Imagine the contrast between the hilly terrain of Afghanistan and the coast of Orissa.

It is likely that administrative control was strongest in areas around the capital and the provincial centres. These centres were carefully chosen, both Taxila and Ujjayini being situated on important long-distance trade routes, while Suvarnagiri (literally, the golden mountain) was possibly important for tapping the gold mines of Karnataka.

➲ Could rulers have engraved inscriptions in areas that were not included within their empire?

## Source 1

### What the king's officials did

Here is an excerpt from the account of Megasthenes:

Of the great officers of state, some ... superintend the rivers, measure the land, as is done in Egypt, and inspect the sluices by which water is let out from the main canals into their branches, so that every one may have an equal supply of it. The same persons have charge also of the huntsmen, and are entrusted with the power of rewarding or punishing them according to their deserts. They collect the taxes, and superintend the occupations connected with land; as those of the woodcutters, the carpenters, the blacksmiths, and the miners.

➲ Why were officials appointed to supervise these occupational groups?

### Discuss...

Read the excerpts from Megasthenes and the *Arthashastra* (Sources 1 and 2). To what extent do you think these texts are useful in reconstructing a history of Mauryan administration?

Communication along both land and riverine routes was vital for the existence of the empire. Journeys from the centre to the provinces could have taken weeks if not months. This meant arranging for provisions as well as protection for those who were on the move. It is obvious that the army was an important means for ensuring the latter. Megasthenes mentions a committee with six subcommittees for coordinating military activity. Of these, one looked after the navy, the second managed transport and provisions, the third was responsible for foot-soldiers, the fourth for horses, the fifth for chariots and the sixth for elephants. The activities of the second subcommittee were rather varied: arranging for bullock carts to carry equipment, procuring food for soldiers and fodder for animals, and recruiting servants and artisans to look after the soldiers.

Asoka also tried to hold his empire together by propagating *dharma*, the principles of which, as we have seen, were simple and virtually universally applicable. This, according to him, would ensure the well-being of people in this world and the next. Special officers, known as the *dharma mahamatta*, were appointed to spread the message of *dharma*.

### 3.3 How important was the empire?

When historians began reconstructing early Indian history in the nineteenth century, the emergence of the Mauryan Empire was regarded as a major landmark. India was then under colonial rule, and was part of the British empire. Nineteenth and early twentieth century Indian historians found the possibility that there was an empire in early India both challenging and exciting. Also, some of the archaeological finds associated with the Mauryas, including stone sculpture, were considered to be examples of the spectacular art typical of empires. Many of these historians found the message on Asokan inscriptions very different from that of most other rulers, suggesting that Asoka was more powerful and industrious, as also more humble than later rulers who adopted grandiose titles. So it is not surprising that nationalist leaders in the twentieth century regarded him as an inspiring figure.

Yet, how important was the Mauryan Empire? It lasted for about 150 years, which is not a very long time in the vast span of the history of the subcontinent. Besides, if you look at Map 2, you will notice that the empire did not encompass the entire subcontinent. And even within the frontiers of the empire, control was not uniform. By the second century BCE, new chiefdoms and kingdoms emerged in several parts of the subcontinent.

## 4. NEW NOTIONS OF KINGSHIP

### 4.1 Chiefs and kings in the south

The new kingdoms that emerged in the Deccan and further south, including the **chiefdoms of the Cholas, Cheras and Pandiyas in Tamilakam** (the name of the ancient Tamil country, which included parts of present-day Andhra Pradesh and Kerala, in addition to Tamil Nadu), proved to be stable and prosperous.

#### Chiefs and chiefdoms

A **#khi** is a powerful man whose position may or may not be hereditary. He derives support from his kinfolk. His functions may include performing special rituals, leadership in warfare, and arbitrating disputes. He receives gifts from his subordinates (unlike kings who usually collect taxes) and often distributes these amongst his supporters. Generally, there are no regular armies and officials in chiefdoms.

We know about these states from a variety of sources. For instance, the early Tamil Sangam texts (see also Chapter 3) contain poems describing chiefs and the ways in which they acquired and distributed resources.

Many chiefs and kings, including the **Satavahanas** who ruled over parts of **western and central India** (c. second century BCE-second century CE) and the **Shakas**, a people of Central Asian origin who established kingdoms in the **north-western** and western parts of the subcontinent, derived revenues from long-distance trade. Their social origins were often obscure, but, as we will see in the case of the Satavahanas (Chapter 3), once they acquired power they attempted to claim social status in a variety of ways.

### Source 2

#### Capturing elephants for the army

The Duwdvdkdwud lays down minute details of administrative and military organisation. This is what it says about how to capture elephants:

Guards of elephant forests, assisted by those who rear elephants, those who enchain the legs of elephants, those who guard the boundaries, those who live in forests, as well as by those who nurse elephants, shall, with the help of five or seven female elephants to help in tethering wild ones, trace the whereabouts of herds of elephants by following the course of urine and dung left by elephants.

According to Greek sources, the Mauryan ruler had a standing army of 600,000 foot-soldiers, 30,000 cavalry and 9,000 elephants. Some historians consider these accounts to be exaggerated.

Restraint consisting of a rope

➲ If the Greek accounts were true, what kinds of resources do you think the Mauryan ruler would have required to maintain such a large army?

Source 3

### The Pandya chief Senguttuvan visits the forest

This is an excerpt from the *VilodssdgIndup* an epic written in Tamil:

(When he visited the forest) people came down the mountain, singing and dancing ... just as the defeated show respect to the victorious king, so did they bring gifts – ivory, fragrant wood, fans made of the hair of deer, honey, sandalwood, red ochre, antimony, turmeric, cardamom, pepper, etc. ... they brought coconuts, mangoes, medicinal plants, fruits, onions, sugarcane, flowers, areca nut, bananas, baby tigers, lions, elephants, monkeys, bear, deer, musk deer, fox, peacocks, musk cat, wild cocks, speaking parrots, etc. ...

➲ Why did people bring these gifts? What would the chief have used these for?

### 4.2 Divine kings

One means of claiming high status was to identify with a variety of deities. This strategy is best exemplified by the Kushanas (c. first century BCE–first century CE), who ruled over a vast kingdom extending from Central Asia to northwest India. Their history has been reconstructed from inscriptions and textual traditions. The notions of kingship they wished to project are perhaps best evidenced in their coins and sculpture.

Colossal statues of Kushana rulers have been found installed in a shrine at Mat near Mathura (Uttar Pradesh). Similar statues have been found in a shrine in Afghanistan as well. Some historians feel this indicates that the Kushanas considered themselves godlike. Many Kushana rulers also adopted the title *devaputra*, or “son of god”, possibly inspired by Chinese rulers who called themselves sons of heaven.

By the fourth century there is evidence of larger states, including the Gupta Empire. Many of these depended on *samantas*, men who maintained themselves through local resources including control over land. They offered homage and provided military support to rulers. Powerful *samantas* could become kings: conversely, weak rulers might find themselves being reduced to positions of subordination.

Histories of the Gupta rulers have been reconstructed from literature, coins and inscriptions, including *prashastis*, composed in praise of kings in particular, and patrons in general, by poets. While historians often attempt to draw factual information from such compositions, those who composed and read them often treasured them as works of poetry



Fig. 2.4  
A Kushana coin  
Obverse: King Kanishka  
Reverse: A deity

➲ How has the king been portrayed?

rather than as accounts that were literally true. The *Prayaga Prashasti* (also known as the Allahabad Pillar Inscription) composed in Sanskrit by Harishena, the court poet of Samudragupta, arguably the most powerful of the Gupta rulers (c. fourth century CE), is a case in point.

*Source 4*

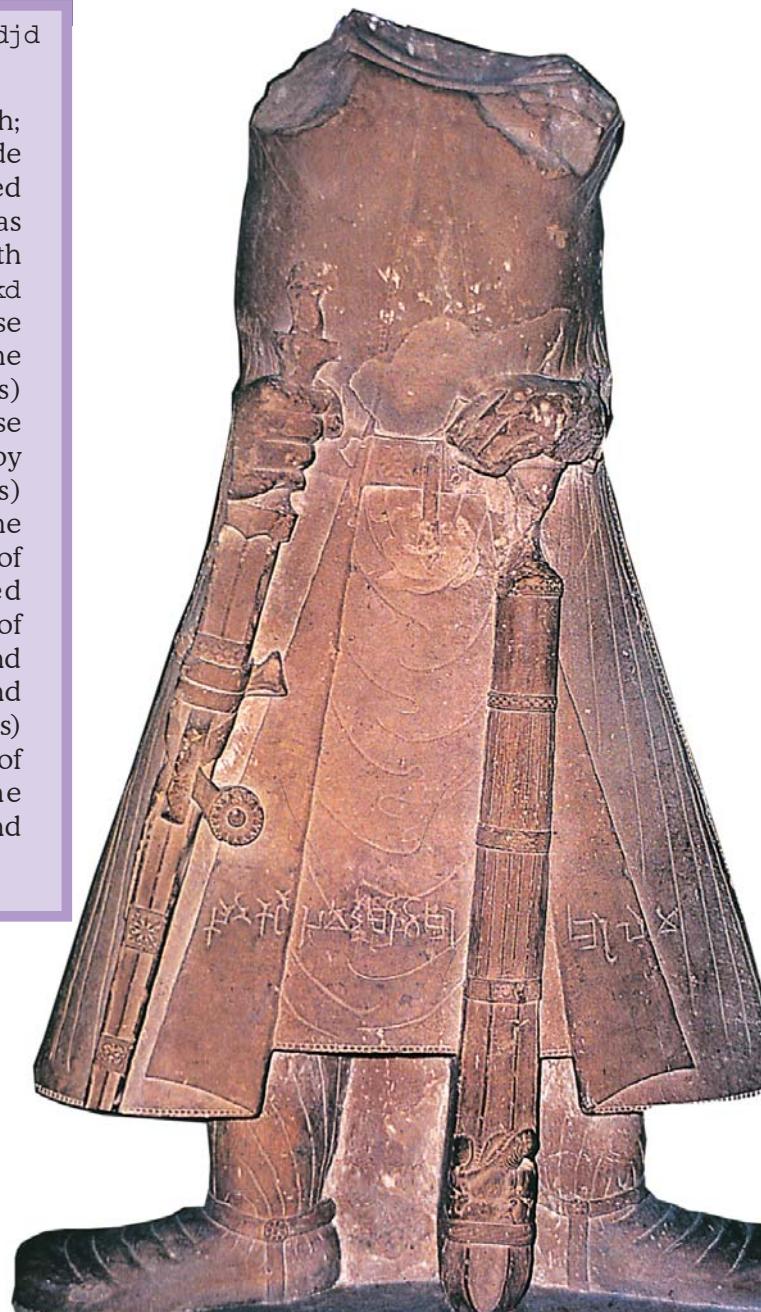
### In praise of Samudragupta

This is an excerpt from the Sudājd  
Sudākṣiṇī-

He was without an antagonist on earth; he, by the overflowing of the multitude of (his) many good qualities adorned by hundreds of good actions, has wiped off the fame of other kings with the soles of (his) feet; (he is) Sxuxvkd (the Supreme Being), being the cause of the prosperity of the good and the destruction of the bad (he is) incomprehensible; (he is) one whose tender heart can be captured only by devotion and humility; (he is) possessed of compassion; (he is) the giver of many hundred-thousands of cows; (his) mind has received ceremonial initiation for the uplift of the miserable, the poor, the forlorn and the suffering; (he is) resplendent and embodied kindness to mankind; (he is) equal to (the gods) Kubera (the god of wealth), Varuna (the god of the ocean), Indra (the god of rains) and Yama (the god of death)...

Fig. 2.5  
Sandstone sculpture of a  
Kushana king

➲ What are the elements in the sculpture that suggest that this is an image of a king?



➲ Discuss...

Why do you think kings claimed divine status?

Source 5

### The Sudarshana (beautiful) lake in Gujarat

Find Girnar on Map 2. The Sudarshana lake was an artificial reservoir. We know about it from a rock inscription (f. second century CE) in Sanskrit, composed to record the achievements of the Shaka ruler Rudradaman.

The inscription mentions that the lake, with embankments and water channels, was built by a local governor during the rule of the Mauryas. However, a terrible storm broke the embankments and water gushed out of the lake. Rudradaman, who was then ruling in the area, claimed to have got the lake repaired using his own resources, without imposing any tax on his subjects.

Another inscription on the same rock (fifth century) mentions how one of the rulers of the Gupta dynasty got the lake repaired once again.

➲ Why did rulers make arrangements for irrigation?

**Transplantation** is used for paddy cultivation in areas where water is plentiful. Here, seeds are first broadcast; when the saplings have grown they are transplanted in waterlogged fields. This ensures a higher ratio of survival of saplings and higher yields.

## 5. A CHANGING COUNTRYSIDE

### 5.1 Popular perceptions of kings

What did subjects think about their rulers? Obviously, inscriptions do not provide all the answers. In fact, ordinary people rarely left accounts of their thoughts and experiences. Nevertheless, historians have tried to solve this problem by examining stories contained in anthologies such as the *Jatakas* and the *Panchatantra*. Many of these stories probably originated as popular oral tales that were later committed to writing. The *Jatakas* were written in Pali around the middle of the first millennium CE.

One story known as the *Gandatindu Jataka* describes the plight of the subjects of a wicked king; these included elderly women and men, cultivators, herders, village boys and even animals. When the king went in disguise to find out what his subjects thought about him, each one of them cursed him for their miseries, complaining that they were attacked by robbers at night and by tax collectors during the day. To escape from this situation, people abandoned their village and went to live in the forest.

As this story indicates, the relationship between a king and his subjects, especially the rural population, could often be strained – kings frequently tried to fill their coffers by demanding high taxes, and peasants particularly found such demands oppressive. Escaping into the forest remained an option, as reflected in the *Jataka* story. Meanwhile, other strategies aimed at increasing production to meet growing demand for taxes also came to be adopted.

### 5.2 Strategies for increasing production

One such strategy was the shift to plough agriculture, which spread in fertile alluvial river valleys such as those of the Ganga and the Kaveri from c. sixth century BCE. The iron-tipped ploughshare was used to turn the alluvial soil in areas which had high rainfall. Moreover, in some parts of the Ganga valley, production of paddy was dramatically increased by the introduction of transplantation, although this meant back-breaking work for the producer.

While the iron ploughshare led to a growth in agricultural productivity, its use was restricted to certain parts of the subcontinent – cultivators in

areas which were semi-arid, such as parts of Punjab and Rajasthan did not adopt it till the twentieth century, and those living in hilly tracts in the north-eastern and central parts of the subcontinent practised hoe agriculture, which was much better suited to the terrain.

Another strategy adopted to increase agricultural production was the use of irrigation, through wells and tanks, and less commonly, canals. Communities as well as individuals organised the construction of irrigation works. The latter, usually powerful men including kings, often recorded such activities in inscriptions.

### 5.3 Differences in rural society

While these technologies often led to an increase in production, the benefits were very uneven. What is evident is that there was a growing differentiation amongst people engaged in agriculture – stories, especially within the Buddhist tradition, refer to landless agricultural labourers, small peasants, as well as large landholders. The term *gahapati* was often used in Pali texts to designate the second and third categories. The large landholders, as well as the village headman (whose position was often hereditary), emerged as powerful figures, and often exercised control over other cultivators. Early Tamil literature (the Sangam texts) also mentions different categories of people living in the villages – large landowners or *vellalar*, ploughmen or *uzhavar* and slaves or *adimai*. It is likely that these differences were based on differential access to land, labour and some of the new technologies. In such a situation, questions of control over land must have become crucial, as these were often discussed in legal texts.

#### Gahapati

A jdkdsdw was the owner, master or head of a household, who exercised control over the women, children, slaves and workers who shared a common residence. He was also the owner of the resources – land, animals and other things – that belonged to the household. Sometimes the term was used as a marker of status for men belonging to the urban elite, including wealthy merchants.

#### Source 6

### The importance of boundaries

The Pdgxvpuwl is one of the best-known legal texts of early India, written in Sanskrit and compiled between 1st century BCE and 1st century CE. This is what the text advises the king to do:

Seeing that in the world controversies constantly arise due to the ignorance of boundaries, he should ... have ... concealed boundary markers buried – stones, bones, cow's hair, chaff, ashes, potsherds, dried cow dung, bricks, coal, pebbles and sand. He should also have other similar substances that would not decay in the soil buried as hidden markers at the intersection of boundaries.

➲ Would these boundary markers have been adequate to resolve disputes?

## Source 7

**Life in a small village**

The *Kāvya-kāvya* is a biography of Harshavardhana, the ruler of Kanauj (see Map 3), composed in Sanskrit by his court poet, Banabhatta (f. seventh century CE). This is an excerpt from the text, an extremely rare representation of life in a settlement on the outskirts of a forest in the Vindhya:

The outskirts being for the most part forest, many parcels of rice-land, threshing ground and arable land were being apportioned by small farmers ... it was mainly spade culture ... owing to the difficulty of ploughing the sparsely scattered fields covered with grass, with their few clear spaces, their black soil stiff as black iron ...

There were people moving along with bundles of bark ... countless sacks of plucked flowers, ... loads of flax and hemp bundles, quantities of honey, peacocks' tail feathers, wreaths of wax, logs, and grass. Village wives hastened en route for neighbouring villages, all intent on thoughts of sale and bearing on their heads baskets filled with various gathered forest fruits.

➲ How would you classify the people described in the text in terms of their occupations?

**5.4 Land grants and new rural elites**

From the early centuries of the Common Era, we find grants of land being made, many of which were recorded in inscriptions. Some of these inscriptions were on stone, but most were on copper plates (Fig. 13) which were probably given as a record of the transaction to those who received the land. The records that have survived are generally about grants to religious institutions or to Brahmanas. Most inscriptions were in Sanskrit. In some cases, and especially from the seventh century onwards, part of the inscription was in Sanskrit, while the rest was in a local language such as Tamil or Telugu. Let us look at one such inscription more closely.

**Prabhavati Gupta** was the daughter of one of the most important rulers in early Indian history, Chandragupta II (c. 375-415 CE). She was married into another important ruling family, that of the Vakatakas, who were powerful in the Deccan (see Map 3). According to Sanskrit legal texts, women were not supposed to have independent access to resources such as land. However, the inscription indicates that Prabhavati had access to land, which she then granted. This may have been because she was a queen (one of the few known from early Indian history), and her situation was therefore exceptional. It is also possible that the provisions of legal texts were not uniformly implemented.

The inscription also gives us an idea about rural populations – these included Brahmanas and peasants, as well as others who were expected to provide a range of produce to the king or his representatives. And according to the inscription, they would have to obey the new lord of the village, and perhaps pay him all these dues.

Land grants such as this one have been found in several parts of the country. There were regional variations in the sizes of land donated – ranging from small plots to vast stretches of uncultivated land – and the rights given to donees (the recipients of the grant). The impact of land grants is a subject of heated debate among historians. Some feel that land grants were part of a strategy adopted by ruling lineages to extend agriculture to new areas. Others suggest that land grants were indicative of weakening political power: as kings were losing control over their *samantras*, they tried to win allies

by making grants of land. They also feel that kings tried to project themselves as supermen (as we saw in the previous section) *because* they were losing control: they wanted to present at least a façade of power.

*Source 8*

### Prabhavati Gupta and the village of Danguna

This is what Prabhavati Gupta states in her inscription:

Prabhavati Gupta ... commands the *judpdnxwxpelqdv* (householders/peasants living in the village), Brahmanas and others living in the village of Danguna

...

"Be it known to you that on the twelfth (lunar day) of the bright (fortnight) of Karttika, we have, in order to increase our religious merit donated this village with the pouring out of water, to the Acharya (teacher) Chanalasvamin ... You should obey all (his) commands

...

We confer on (him) the following exemptions typical of an *djudkdud#y*(this village is) not to be entered by soldiers and policemen; (it is) exempt from (the obligation to provide) grass, (animal) hides as seats, and charcoal (to touring royal officers); exempt from (the royal prerogative of) purchasing fermenting liquors and digging (salt); exempt from (the right to) mines and *nkdglud* trees; exempt from (the obligation to supply) flowers and milk; (it is donated) together with (the right to) hidden treasures and deposits (and) together with major and minor taxes ..."

This charter has been written in the thirteenth (regnal) year. (It has been) engraved by Chakradasa.

➲ What were the things produced in the village?

An *agrahara* was land granted to a Brahmana, who was usually exempted from paying land revenue and other dues to the king, and was often given the right to collect these dues from the local people.

Land grants provide some insight into the relationship between cultivators and the state. However, there were people who were often beyond the reach of officials or *samantas*: pastoralists, fisherfolk and hunter-gatherers, mobile or semi-sedentary artisans and shifting cultivators. Generally, such groups did not keep detailed records of their lives and transactions.

### ➲ Discuss...

Find out whether plough agriculture, irrigation and transplantation are prevalent in your state. If not, are there any alternative systems in use?

### The history of Pataliputra

Each city had a history of its own. Pataliputra, for instance, began as a village known as Pataligrama. Then, in the fifth century BCE, the Magadhan rulers decided to shift their capital from Rajagaha to this settlement and renamed it. By the fourth century BCE, it was the capital of the Mauryan Empire and one of the largest cities in Asia. Subsequently, its importance apparently declined. When the Chinese pilgrim Xuan Zang visited the city in the seventh century CE, he found it in ruins, and with a very small population.

## 6. TOWNS AND TRADE

### 6.1 New cities

Let us retrace our steps back to the urban centres that emerged in several parts of the subcontinent from c. sixth century BCE. As we have seen, many of these were capitals of *mahajanapadas*. Virtually all major towns were located along routes of communication. Some such as Pataliputra were on riverine routes. Others, such as Ujjayini, were along land routes, and yet others, such as Puhar, were near the coast, from where sea routes began. Many cities like Mathura were bustling centres of commercial, cultural and political activity.

### 6.2 Urban populations:

#### Elites and craftspersons

We have seen that kings and ruling elites lived in fortified cities. Although it is difficult to conduct extensive excavations at most sites because people live in these areas even today (unlike the Harappan cities), a wide range of artefacts have been recovered from them. These include fine pottery bowls and dishes, with a glossy finish, known as Northern Black Polished Ware, probably used by rich people, and ornaments, tools, weapons, vessels, figurines, made of a wide range of materials – gold, silver, copper, bronze, ivory, glass, shell and terracotta.



*Fig. 2.6*

*The gift of an image*

This is part of an image from Mathura. On the pedestal is a Prakrit inscription, mentioning that a woman named Nagapiyi, the wife of a goldsmith (*sovanika*) named Dharmaka, installed this image in a shrine.



*Map 3  
Some important kingdoms  
and towns*

By the second century BCE, we find short votive inscriptions in a number of cities. These mention the name of the donor, and sometimes specify his/her occupation as well. They tell us about people who lived in towns: washing folk, weavers, scribes, carpenters, potters, goldsmiths, blacksmiths, officials, religious teachers, merchants and kings.

Sometimes, **guilds** or **shrenis**, organisations of craft producers and merchants, are mentioned as well. These guilds probably procured raw materials, regulated production, and marketed the finished product. It is likely that craftspeople used a range of iron tools to meet the growing demands of urban elites.

➲ Were there any cities in the region where the Harappan civilisation flourished in the third millennium BCE?

Dedicated in fulfillment of a vow

Votive inscriptions record gifts made to religious institutions.

## Source 9

### The Malabar coast (present-day Kerala)

Here is an excerpt from *Shulsoxv ri# wkhd# Hu|wkudhdq# vhd*, composed by an anonymous Greek sailor (1st century CE):

They (i.e. traders from abroad) send large ships to these market-towns on account of the great quantity and bulk of pepper and malabathrum (possibly cinnamon, produced in these regions). There are imported here, in the first place, a great quantity of coin; topaz ... antimony (a mineral used as a colouring substance), coral, crude glass, copper, tin, lead ... There is exported pepper, which is produced in quantity in only one region near these markets ... Besides this there are exported great quantities of fine pearls, ivory, silk cloth, ... transparent stones of all kinds, diamonds and sapphires, and tortoise shell.

Archaeological evidence of a bead-making industry, using precious and semi-precious stones, has been found in Kodumanal (Tamil Nadu). It is likely that local traders brought the stones mentioned in the *Shulsoxv* from sites such as these to the coastal ports.

➲ Why did the author compile this list?

*"Periplus"* is a Greek word meaning sailing around and *"Erythraean"* was the Greek name for the Red Sea.

### 6.3 Trade in the subcontinent and beyond

From the sixth century BCE, land and river routes criss-crossed the subcontinent and extended in various directions – overland into Central Asia and beyond, and overseas, from ports that dotted the coastline – extending across the Arabian Sea to East and North Africa and West Asia, and through the Bay of Bengal to Southeast Asia and China. Rulers often attempted to control these routes, possibly by offering protection for a price.

Those who traversed these routes included peddlers who probably travelled on foot and merchants who travelled with caravans of bullock carts and pack-animals. Also, there were seafarers, whose ventures were risky but highly profitable. Successful merchants, designated as *masattwan* in Tamil and *setthis* and *satthavahas* in Prakrit, could become enormously rich. A wide range of goods were carried from one place to another – salt, grain, cloth, metal ores and finished products, stone, timber, medicinal plants, to name a few. Spices, especially pepper, were in high demand in the Roman Empire, as were textiles and medicinal plants, and these were all transported across the Arabian Sea to the Mediterranean.

### 6.4 Coins and kings

To some extent, exchanges were facilitated by the introduction of coinage. Punch-marked coins made of silver and copper (c. sixth century BCE onwards) were amongst the earliest to be minted and used. These have been recovered from excavations at a number of sites throughout the subcontinent. Numismatists have studied these and other coins to reconstruct possible commercial networks.

Attempts made to identify the symbols on punch-marked coins with specific ruling dynasties, including the Mauryas, suggest that these were issued by kings. It is also likely that merchants, bankers and townspeople issued some of these coins. The first coins to bear the names and images of rulers were issued by the Indo-Greeks, who established control over the north-western part of the subcontinent c. second century BCE.

The first gold coins were issued c. first century CE by the Kushanas. These were virtually identical in weight with those issued by contemporary Roman

emperors and the Parthian rulers of Iran, and have been found from several sites in north India and Central Asia. The widespread use of gold coins indicates the enormous value of the transactions that were taking place. Besides, hoards of Roman coins have been found from archaeological sites in south India. It is obvious that networks of trade were not confined within political boundaries: south India was not part of the Roman Empire, but there were close connections through trade.

Coin were also issued by tribal republics such as that of the Yaudheyas of Punjab and Haryana (c. first century CE). Archaeologists have unearthed several thousand copper coins issued by the Yaudheyas, pointing to the latter's interest and participation in economic exchanges.

Some of the most spectacular gold coins were issued by the Gupta rulers. The earliest issues are remarkable for their purity. These coins facilitated long-distance transactions from which kings also benefited.

From c. sixth century CE onwards, finds of gold coins taper off. Does this indicate that there was some kind of an economic crisis? Historians are divided on this issue. Some suggest that with the collapse of the Western Roman Empire long-distance trade declined, and this affected the prosperity of the states, communities and regions that had benefited from it. Others argue that new towns and networks of trade started emerging around this time. They also point out that though finds of coins of that time are fewer, coins continue to be mentioned in inscriptions and texts. Could it be that there are fewer finds because coins were in circulation rather than being hoarded?

**Numismatics** is the study of coins, including visual elements such as scripts and images, metallurgical analysis and the contexts in which they have been found.



Fig. 2.7  
A punch-marked coin, so named because symbols were punched or stamped onto the metal surface



Fig. 2.8  
A Yaudheya coin



Fig. 2.9  
A Gupta coin

### Discuss...

What are the transactions involved in trade? Which of these transactions are apparent from the sources mentioned? Are there any that are not evident from the sources?

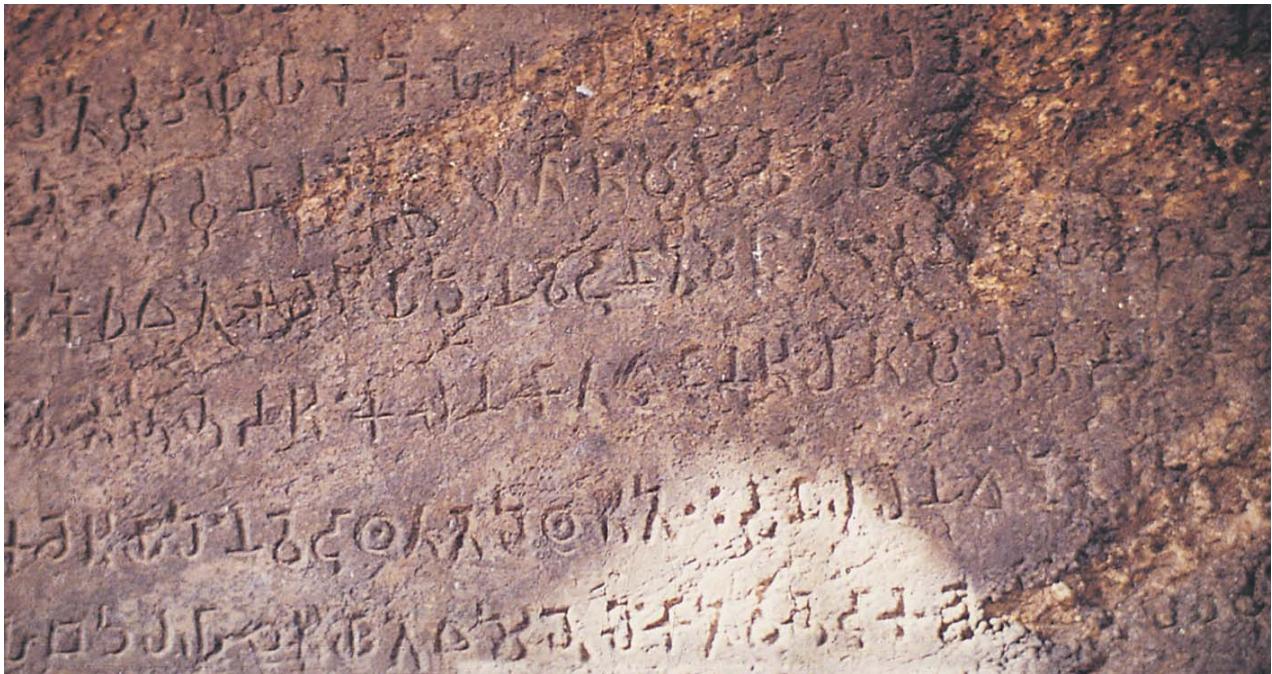


Fig. 2.10  
An Asokan inscription

+	क
॰	च
ॳ	ट
ॳ	द
ॳ	म
।	र

Fig. 2.11  
Asokan Brahmi with Devanagari equivalents

➲ Do some Devanagari letters appear similar to Brahmi? Are there any that seem different?

## 7. BACK TO BASICS

### HOW ARE INSCRIPTIONS DECIPHERED?

So far, we have been studying excerpts from inscriptions amongst other things. But how do historians find out what is written on them?

#### 7.1 Deciphering Brahmi

Most scripts used to write modern Indian languages are derived from **Brahmi**, the script used in most **Asokan inscriptions**. From the late eighteenth century, European scholars aided by Indian pandits worked backwards from contemporary Bengali and Devanagari (the script used to write Hindi) manuscripts, comparing their letters with older specimens.

Scholars who studied early inscriptions sometimes assumed these were in Sanskrit, although the earliest inscriptions were, in fact, in Prakrit. It was only after decades of painstaking investigations by several epigraphists that **James Prinsep** was able to decipher Asokan Brahmi in 1838.

#### 7.2 How Kharosthi was read

The story of the decipherment of **Kharosthi**, the script used in inscriptions in the **northwest**, is different. Here, finds of coins of Indo-Greek kings who ruled over the area (c. second-first centuries BCE) have

facilitated matters. These coins contain the names of kings written in Greek and Kharosthi scripts. European scholars who could read the former compared the letters. For instance, the symbol for “a” could be found in both scripts for writing names such as Apollodotus. With Prinsep identifying the language of the Kharosthi inscriptions as Prakrit, it became possible to read longer inscriptions as well.

### 7.3 Historical evidence from inscriptions

To find out how epigraphists and historians work, let us look at two Asokan inscriptions more closely.

Note that the name of the ruler, Asoka, is not mentioned in the inscription (Source 10). What is used instead are titles adopted by the ruler – *devanampiya*, often translated as “beloved of the gods” and *piyadassi*, or “pleasant to behold”. The name Asoka is mentioned in some other inscriptions, which also contain these titles. After examining all these inscriptions, and finding that they match in terms of content, style, language and *palaeography*, epigraphists have concluded that they were issued by the same ruler.

You may also have noticed that Asoka claims that earlier rulers had no arrangements to receive reports. If you consider the political history of the subcontinent prior to Asoka, do you think this statement is true? Historians have to constantly assess statements made in inscriptions to judge whether they are true, plausible or exaggerations.

Did you notice that there are words within brackets? Epigraphists sometimes add these to make the meaning of sentences clear. This has to be done carefully, to ensure that the intended meaning of the author is not changed.

Source 10

#### The orders of the king

Thus speaks king Devanampiya Piyadassi:

In the past, there were no arrangements for disposing affairs, nor for receiving regular reports. But I have made the following (arrangement). *Sdwlyhgndv* should report to me about the affairs of the people at all times, anywhere, whether I am eating, in the inner apartment, in the bedroom, in the cow pen, being carried (possibly in a palanquin) in the garden. And I will dispose of the affairs of the people everywhere.

➲ Epigraphists have translated the term *pativedaka* as reporter. In what ways would the functions of the *pativedaka* have been different from those we generally associate with reporters today?



*Fig. 2.12*  
A coin of the Indo-Greek king Menander

Source 11

### The anguish of the king

When the king Devanampiya Piyadassi had been ruling for eight years, the (country of the) Kalingas (present-day coastal Orissa) was conquered by (him).

One hundred and fifty thousand men were deported, a hundred thousand were killed, and many more died.

After that, now that (the country of) the Kalingas has been taken, Devanampiya (is devoted) to an intense study of Dhamma, to the love of Dhamma, and to instructing (the people) in Dhamma.

This is the repentance of Devanampiya on account of his conquest of the (country of the) Kalingas.

For this is considered very painful and deplorable by Devanampiya that, while one is conquering an unconquered (country) slaughter, death and deportation of people (take place) there ...

Historians have to make other assessments as well. If a king's orders were inscribed on natural rocks near cities or important routes of communication, would passers-by have stopped to read these? Most people were probably not literate. Did everybody throughout the subcontinent understand the Prakrit used in Pataliputra? Would the orders of the king have been followed? Answers to such questions are not always easy to find.

Some of these problems are evident if we look at an Asokan inscription (Source 11), which has often been interpreted as reflecting the anguish of the ruler, as well as marking a change in his attitude towards warfare. As we shall see, the situation becomes more complex once we move beyond reading the inscription at face value.

While Asokan inscriptions have been found in present-day Orissa, the one depicting his anguish is missing. In other words, the inscription has not been found in the region that was conquered. What are we to make of that? Is it that the anguish of the recent conquest was too painful in the region, and therefore the ruler was unable to address the issue?

## 8. THE LIMITATIONS OF INSCRIPTIONAL EVIDENCE

By now it is probably evident that there are limits to what epigraphy can reveal. Sometimes, there are technical limitations: letters are very faintly engraved, and thus reconstructions are uncertain. Also, inscriptions may be damaged or letters missing. Besides, it is not always easy to be sure about the exact meaning of the words used in inscriptions, some of which may be specific to a particular place or time. If you go through an epigraphical journal (some are listed in Timeline 2), you will realise that scholars are constantly debating and discussing alternative ways of reading inscriptions.

Although several thousand inscriptions have been discovered, not all have been deciphered, published and translated. Besides, many more inscriptions must have existed, which have not survived the ravages of time. So what is available at present is probably only a fraction of what was inscribed.

There is another, perhaps more fundamental, problem: not everything that we may consider

### Discuss...

Look at Map 2 and discuss the location of Asokan inscriptions. Do you notice any patterns?

politically or economically significant was necessarily recorded in inscriptions. For instance, routine agricultural practices and the joys and sorrows of daily existence find no mention in inscriptions, which focus, more often than not, on grand, unique events. Besides, the content of inscriptions almost invariably projects the perspective of the person(s) who commissioned them. As such, they need to be juxtaposed with other perspectives so as to arrive at a better understanding of the past.

Thus epigraphy alone does not provide a full understanding of political and economic history. Also, historians often question both old and new evidence. Scholars in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were primarily interested in the histories of kings. From the mid-twentieth century onwards, issues such as economic change, and the ways in which different social groups emerged have assumed far more importance. Recent decades have seen a much greater preoccupation with histories of marginalised groups. This will probably lead to fresh investigations of old sources, and the development of new strategies of analysis.

*Fig. 2.13  
A copperplate inscription from Karnataka, c. sixth century CE*



## TIMELINE 1

### MAJOR POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS

c.600-500 BCE	Paddy transplantation; urbanisation in the Ganga valley; <i>mahajanapadas</i> ; punch-marked coins
c. 500-400 BCE	Rulers of Magadha consolidate power
c. 327-325 BCE	Invasion of Alexander of Macedon
c. 321 BCE	Accession of Chandragupta Maurya
c. 272/268-231 BCE	Reign of Asoka
c. 185 BCE	End of the Mauryan empire
c. 200-100 BCE	Indo-Greek rule in the northwest; Cholas, Cheras and Pandiyas in south India; Satavahanas in the Deccan
c. 100 BCE-200 CE	Shaka (peoples from Central Asia) rulers in the northwest; Roman trade; gold coinage
c. 78 CE?	Accession of Kanishka
c.100-200 CE	Earliest inscriptional evidence of land grants by Satavahana and Shaka rulers
c. 320 CE	Beginning of Gupta rule
c. 335-375 CE	Samudragupta
c. 375-415 CE	Chandragupta II; Vakatakas in the Deccan
c. 500-600 CE	Rise of the Chalukyas in Karnataka and of the Pallavas in Tamil Nadu
c. 606-647 CE	Harshavardhana king of Kanauj; Chinese pilgrim Xuan Zang comes in search of Buddhist texts
c. 712	Arabs conquer Sind

(Note: It is difficult to date economic developments precisely. Also, there are enormous subcontinental variations which have not been indicated in the timeline.

Only the earliest dates for specific developments have been given. The date of Kanishka's accession is not certain and this has been marked with a '?')

## TIMELINE 2

### MAJOR ADVANCES IN EPIGRAPHY

#### **Eighteenth century**

1784	Founding of the Asiatic Society (Bengal)
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#### **Nineteenth century**

1810s	Colin Mackenzie collects over 8,000 inscriptions in Sanskrit and Dravidian languages
1838	Decipherment of Asokan Brahmi by James Prinsep
1877	Alexander Cunningham publishes a set of Asokan inscriptions
1886	First issue of <i>Epigraphia Carnatica</i> , a journal of south Indian inscriptions
1888	First issue of <i>Epigraphia Indica</i>

#### **Twentieth century**

1965-66	D.C. Sircar publishes <i>Indian Epigraphy</i> and <i>Indian Epigraphical Glossary</i>
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#### **ANSWER IN 100-150 WORDS**

1. Discuss the evidence of craft production in Early Historic cities. In what ways is this different from the evidence from Harappan cities?
2. Describe the salient features of *mahajanapadas*.
3. How do historians reconstruct the lives of ordinary people?
4. Compare and contrast the list of things given to the Pandyan chief (Source 3) with those produced in the village of Danguna (Source 8). Do you notice any similarities or differences?
5. List some of the problems faced by epigraphists.



### WRITE A SHORT ESSAY (ABOUT 500 WORDS) ON THE FOLLOWING:

6. Discuss the main features of Mauryan administration. Which of these elements are evident in the Asokan inscriptions that you have studied?
7. This is a statement made by one of the best-known epigraphists of the twentieth century, D.C. Sircar: "There is no aspect of life, culture and activities of the Indians that is not reflected in inscriptions." Discuss.
8. Discuss the notions of kingship that developed in the post-Mauryan period.
9. To what extent were agricultural practices transformed in the period under consideration?



### MAP WORK

10. Compare Maps 1 and 2, and list the *mahajanapadas* that might have been included in the Mauryan Empire. Are any Asokan inscriptions found in these areas?



### PROJECT (ANY ONE)

11. Collect newspapers for one month. Cut and paste all the statements made by government officials about public works. Note what the reports say about the resources required for such projects, how the resources are mobilised and the objective of the project. Who issues these statements, and how and why are they communicated? Compare and contrast these with the evidence from inscriptions discussed in this chapter. What are the similarities and differences that you notice?
12. Collect five different kinds of currency notes and coins in circulation today. For each one of these, describe what you see on the obverse and the reverse (the front and the back). Prepare a report on the common features as well as the differences in terms of pictures, scripts and languages, size, shape and any other element that you find significant. Compare these with the coins shown in this chapter, discussing the materials used, the techniques of minting, the visual symbols and their significance and the possible functions that coins may have had.



**For more information,  
you could visit:**  
<http://projectsouthasia.sdsstate.edu/Docs/index.html>

## THEME THREE

# KINSHIP, CASTE AND CLASS EARLY SOCIETIES (c. 600 BCE-600 CE)

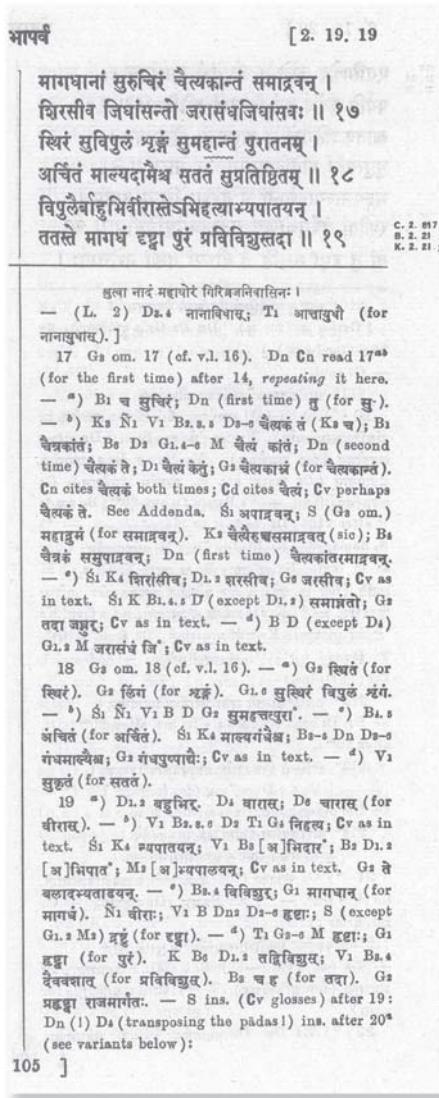
In the previous chapter we saw that there were several changes in economic and political life between c. 600 BCE and 600 CE. Some of these changes influenced societies as well. For instance, the extension of agriculture into forested areas transformed the lives of forest dwellers; craft specialists often emerged as distinct social groups; the unequal distribution of wealth sharpened social differences.

Historians often use textual traditions to understand these processes. Some texts lay down norms of social behaviour; others describe and occasionally comment on a wide range of social situations and practices. We can also catch a glimpse of some social actors from inscriptions. As we will see, each text (and inscription) was written from the perspective of specific social categories. So we need to keep in mind *who* composed *what* and for *whom*. We also need to consider the language used, and the ways in which the text circulated. Used carefully, texts allow us to piece together attitudes and practices that shaped social histories.

In focusing on the *Mahabharata*, a colossal epic running in its present form into over 100,000 verses with depictions of a wide range of social categories and situations, we draw on one of the richest texts of the subcontinent. It was composed over a period of about 1,000 years (c. 500 BCE onwards), and some of the stories it contains may have been in circulation even earlier. The central story is about two sets of warring cousins. The text also contains sections laying down norms of behaviour for various social groups. Occasionally (though not always), the principal characters seem to follow these norms. What does conformity with norms and deviations from them signify?



*Fig. 3.1*  
A terracotta sculpture  
depicting a scene from  
the *Mahabharata*  
(West Bengal),  
c. seventeenth century



105 ]

*Fig. 3.2*  
A section of a page from the Critical Edition

The section printed in large bold letters is part of the main text. The smaller print lists variations in different manuscripts, which were carefully catalogued.

## 1. THE CRITICAL EDITION OF THE MAHABHARATA

One of the most ambitious projects of scholarship began in 1919, under the leadership of a noted Indian Sanskritist, V.S. Sukthankar. A team comprising dozens of scholars initiated the task of preparing a critical edition of the *Mahabharata*. What exactly did this involve? Initially, it meant collecting Sanskrit manuscripts of the text, written in a variety of scripts, from different parts of the country.

The team worked out a method of comparing verses from each manuscript. Ultimately, they selected the verses that appeared common to most versions and published these in several volumes, running into over 13,000 pages. The project took 47 years to complete. Two things became apparent: there were several common elements in the Sanskrit versions of the story, evident in manuscripts found all over the subcontinent, from Kashmir and Nepal in the north to Kerala and Tamil Nadu in the south. Also evident were enormous regional variations in the ways in which the text had been transmitted over the centuries. These variations were documented in footnotes and appendices to the main text. Taken together, more than half the 13,000 pages are devoted to these variations.

In a sense, these variations are reflective of the complex processes that shaped early (and later) social histories – through dialogues between dominant traditions and resilient local ideas and practices. These dialogues are characterised by moments of conflict as well as consensus.

Our understanding of these processes is derived primarily from texts written in Sanskrit by and for Brahmanas. When issues of social history were explored for the first time by historians in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, they tended to take these texts at face value – believing that everything that was laid down in these texts was actually practised. Subsequently, scholars began studying other traditions, from works in Pali, Prakrit and Tamil. These studies indicated that the ideas contained in normative Sanskrit texts were on the whole recognised as authoritative: they were also questioned and occasionally even rejected. It is important to keep this in mind as we examine how historians reconstruct social histories.

## 2. KINSHIP AND MARRIAGE

### MANY RULES AND VARIED PRACTICES

#### 2.1 Finding out about families

We often take family life for granted. However, you may have noticed that not all families are identical: they vary in terms of numbers of members, their relationship with one another as well as the kinds of activities they share. Often people belonging to the same family share food and other resources, and live, work and perform rituals together. Families are usually parts of larger networks of people defined as relatives, or to use a more technical term, *kinfolk*. While familial ties are often regarded as “natural” and based on blood, they are defined in many different ways. For instance, some societies regard cousins as being blood relations, whereas others do not.

For early societies, historians can retrieve information about elite families fairly easily; it is, however, far more difficult to reconstruct the familial relationships of ordinary people. Historians also investigate and analyse *attitudes* towards family and kinship. These are important, because they provide an insight into people’s thinking; it is likely that some of these ideas would have shaped their actions, just as actions may have led to changes in attitudes.

#### 2.2 The ideal of patriliney

Can we identify points when kinship relations changed? At one level, the *Mahabharata* is a story about this. It describes a feud over land and power between two groups of cousins, the Kauravas and the Pandavas, who belonged to a single ruling family, that of the Kurus, a lineage dominating one of the *janapadas* (Chapter 2, Map 1). Ultimately, the conflict ended in a battle, in which the Pandavas emerged victorious. After that, patrilineal succession was proclaimed. While patriliney had existed prior to the composition of the epic, the central story of the *Mahabharata* reinforced the idea that it was valuable. Under patriliney, sons could claim the resources (including the throne in the case of kings) of their fathers when the latter died.

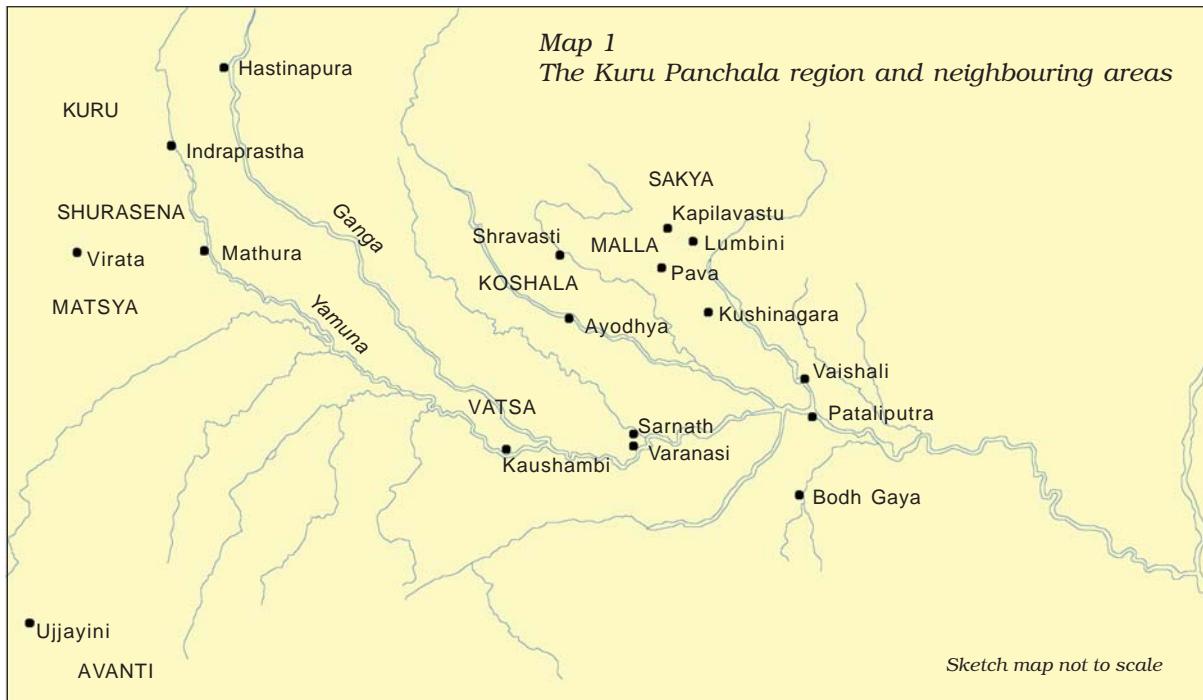
Most ruling dynasties (c. sixth century BCE onwards) claimed to follow this system, although there were variations in practice: sometimes there were no sons,

#### Terms for family and kin

Sanskrit texts use the term ऋत्रि to designate families and ऋत्रि for the larger network of kinfolk. The term यद्पवक्त्रि is used for lineage.

*Patriliney* means tracing descent from father to son, grandson and so on.

*Matriliney* is the term used when descent is traced through the mother.



in some situations brothers succeeded one another, sometimes other kinsmen claimed the throne, and, in very exceptional circumstances, women such as Prabhavati Gupta (Chapter 2) exercised power.

The concern with patriliney was not unique to ruling families. It is evident in mantras in ritual texts such as the *Rigveda*. It is possible that these attitudes were shared by wealthy men and those who claimed high status, including Brahmanas.

#### Source 1

#### Producing “fine sons”

Here is an excerpt of a mantra from the *Ujjhaga* which was probably inserted in the text c. 1000 BCE, to be chanted by the priest while conducting the marriage ritual. It is used in many Hindu weddings even today:

I free her from here, but not from there. I have bound her firmly there, so that through the grace of Indra she will have fine sons and be fortunate in her husband's love.

Indra was one of the principal deities, a god of valour, warfare and rain. “Here” and “there” refer to the father's and husband's house respectively.

➲ In the context of the mantra, discuss the implications of marriage from the point of view of the bride and groom. Are the implications identical, or are there differences?

## Source 2

### Why kinfolk quarrelled

This is an excerpt from the *Dg1#Sduydg#* (literally, the first section) of the Sanskrit *Pdkdekdudwd*, describing why conflicts arose amongst the Kauravas and Pandavas:

The Kauravas were the ... sons of Dhritarashtra, and the Pandavas ... were their cousins. Since Dhritarashtra was blind, his younger brother Pandu ascended the throne of Hastinapura (see Map 1) ... However, after the premature death of Pandu, Dhritarashtra became king, as the royal princes were still very young. As the princes grew up together, the citizens of Hastinapura began to express their preference for the Pandavas, for they were more capable and virtuous than the Kauravas. This made Duryodhana, the eldest of the Kauravas, jealous. He approached his father and said, "You yourself did not receive the throne, although it fell to you, because of your defect. If the Pandava receives the patrimony from Pandu, his son will surely inherit it in turn, and so will his son, and his. We ourselves with our sons shall be excluded from the royal succession and become of slight regard in the eyes of the world, lord of the earth!"

Passages such as these may not have been literally true, but they give us an idea about what those who wrote the text thought. Sometimes, as in this case, they contain conflicting ideas.

➲ Read the passage and list the different criteria suggested for becoming king. Of these, how important was birth in a particular family? Which of these criteria seem justified? Are there any that strike you as unjust?

### 2.3 Rules of marriage

While sons were important for the continuity of the patrilineage, daughters were viewed rather differently within this framework. They had no claims to the resources of the household. At the same time, marrying them into families outside the kin was considered desirable. This system, called **exogamy** (literally, marrying outside), meant that the lives of young girls and women belonging to families that claimed high status were often carefully regulated to ensure that they were married at the "right" time and to the "right" person. This gave rise to the belief that **kanyadana** or the gift of a daughter in marriage was an important religious duty of the father.

With the emergence of new towns (Chapter 2), social life became more complex. People from near

### Types of marriages

**Hqgrjdp|** refers to marriage within a unit – this could be a kin group, caste, or a group living in the same locality.

**H{rjdp|#** refers to marriage outside the unit.

**Sro|j|q|** is the practice of a man having several wives.

**Sro|dqgu|#** is the practice of a woman having several husbands.

Source 3

### Eight forms of marriage

Here are the first, fourth, fifth and sixth forms of marriage from the *Pdgxvpulwl=*

First: The gift of a daughter, after dressing her in costly clothes and honouring her with presents of jewels, to a man learned in the Veda whom the father himself invites.

Fourth: The gift of a daughter by the father after he has addressed the couple with the text, "May both of you perform your duties together", and has shown honour to the bridegroom.

Fifth: When the bridegroom receives a maiden, after having given as much wealth as he can afford to the kinsmen and to the bride herself, according to his own will.

Sixth: The voluntary union of a maiden and her lover ... which springs from desire ...

- ➲ For each of the forms, discuss whether the decision about the marriage was taken by
  - (a) the bride,
  - (b) the bridegroom,
  - (c) the father of the bride,
  - (d) the father of the bridegroom,
  - (e) any other person.

and far met to buy and sell their products and share ideas in the urban milieu. This may have led to a questioning of earlier beliefs and practices (see also Chapter 4). Faced with this challenge, the Brahmanas responded by laying down codes of social behaviour in great detail. These were meant to be followed by Brahmanas in particular and the rest of society in general. From c. 500 BCE, these norms were compiled in Sanskrit texts known as the Dharmasutras and Dharmashastras. The most important of such works, the *Manusmriti*, was compiled between c. 200 BCE and 200 CE.

While the Brahmana authors of these texts claimed that their point of view had universal validity and that what they prescribed had to be obeyed by everybody, it is likely that real social relations were more complicated. Besides, given the regional diversity within the subcontinent and the difficulties of communication, the influence of Brahmanas was by no means all-pervasive.

What is interesting is that the Dharmasutras and Dharmashastras recognised as many as eight forms of marriage. Of these, the first four were considered as "good" while the remaining were condemned. It is possible that these were practised by those who did not accept Brahmanical norms.

#### 2.4 The gotra of women

One Brahmanical practice, evident from c. 1000 BCE onwards, was to classify people (especially Brahmanas) in terms of *gotras*. Each *gotra* was named after a Vedic seer, and all those who belonged to the same *gotra* were regarded as his descendants. Two rules about *gotra* were particularly important: women were expected to give up their father's *gotra* and adopt that of their husband on marriage and members of the same *gotra* could not marry.

One way to find out whether this was commonly followed is to consider the names of men and women, which were sometimes derived from *gotra* names. These names are available for powerful ruling lineages such as the Satavahanas who ruled over parts of western India and the Deccan (c. second century BCE-second century CE). Several of their inscriptions have been recovered, which allow historians to trace family ties, including marriages.

Source 4

### Names of Satavahana kings from inscriptions

These are the names of several generations of Satavahana rulers, recovered from inscriptions. Note the uniform title राजा. Also note the following word, which ends with the term पुता, a Prakrit word meaning "son". The term Gotami-puta means "son of Gotami". Names like Gotami and Vasithi are feminine forms of Gotama and Vasistha, Vedic seers after whom ज्योति were named<sup>1</sup>

- raja Gotami-puta Siri-Satakani**
- raja Vasithi-puta (sami-) Siri-Pulumayi**
- raja Gotami-puta sami-Siri-Yana-Satakani**
- raja Madhari-puta svami-Sakasena**
- raja Vasathi-puta Chatrapana-Satakani**
- raja Hariti-puta Vinhukada  
Chutukulanamda-Satakamni**
- raja Gotami-puta Siri-Vijaya- Satakani**

➲ How many Gotami-putas and how many Vasithi (alternative spelling Vasathi)-putas are there?



Fig. 3.3

A Satavahana ruler and his wife  
This is one of the rare sculptural depictions of a ruler from the wall of a cave donated to Buddhist monks. This sculpture dates to c. second century BCE.

### Metronymics in the Upanishads

The एवं लक्ष्मणः इति उपनिषद् (one of the earliest Upanishads (see also Chapter 4), contains a list of successive generations of teachers and students, many of whom were designated by metronymics.)

Source 5

### A mother's advice

The Pdkdekdudwd#describes how, when war between the Kauravas and the Pandavas became almost inevitable, Gandhari made one last appeal to her eldest son Duryodhana:

By making peace you honour your father and me, as well as your well-wishers ... it is the wise man in control of his senses who guards his kingdom. Greed and anger drag a man away from his profits; by defeating these two enemies a king conquers the earth ... You will happily enjoy the earth, my son, along with the wise and heroic Pandavas ... There is no good in a war, no law (gkdupd) and profit (dwdk), let alone happiness; nor is there (necessarily) victory in the end – don't set your mind on war ...

Duryodhana did not listen to this advice and fought and lost the war.

➲ Does this passage give you an idea about the way in which mothers were viewed in early Indian societies?

### ➲ Discuss...

How are children named today? Are these ways of naming similar to or different from those described in this section?

Some of the Satavahana rulers were polygynous (that is, had more than one wife). An examination of the names of women who married Satavahana rulers indicates that many of them had names derived from *gotras* such as Gotama and Vasistha, their father's *gotras*. They evidently retained these names instead of adopting names derived from their husband's *gotra* name as they were required to do according to the Brahmanical rules. What is also apparent is that some of these women belonged to the same *gotra*. As is obvious, this ran counter to the ideal of exogamy recommended in the Brahmanical texts. In fact, it exemplified an alternative practice, that of endogamy or marriage within the kin group, which was (and is) prevalent amongst several communities in south India. Such marriages amongst kinfolk (such as cousins) ensured a close-knit community.

It is likely that there were variations in other parts of the subcontinent as well, but as yet it has not been possible to reconstruct specific details.

### 2.5 Were mothers important?

We have seen that Satavahana rulers were identified through metronymics (names derived from that of the mother). Although this may suggest that mothers were important, we need to be cautious before we arrive at any conclusion. In the case of the Satavahanas we know that succession to the throne was generally patrilineal.



*Fig. 3.4*  
A battle scene  
This is amongst the earliest sculptural depictions of a scene from the *Mahabharata*, a terracotta sculpture from the walls of a temple in Ahichchhatra (Uttar Pradesh), c. fifth century CE.

### 3. SOCIAL DIFFERENCES: WITHIN AND BEYOND THE FRAMEWORK OF CASTE

You are probably familiar with the term caste, which refers to a set of hierarchically ordered social categories. The ideal order was laid down in the Dharmasutras and Dharmashastras. Brahmanas claimed that this order, in which they were ranked first, was divinely ordained, while placing groups classified as Shudras and “untouchables” at the very bottom of the social order. Positions within the order were supposedly determined by birth.

#### 3.1 The “right” occupation

The Dharmasutras and Dharmashastras also contained rules about the ideal “occupations” of the four categories or *varnas*. Brahmanas were supposed to study and teach the Vedas, perform sacrifices and get sacrifices performed, and give and receive gifts. Kshatriyas were to engage in warfare, protect people and administer justice, study the Vedas, get sacrifices performed, and make gifts. The last three “occupations” were also assigned to the Vaishyas, who were in addition expected to engage in agriculture, pastoralism and trade. Shudras were assigned only one occupation – that of serving the three “higher” *varnas*.

The Brahmanas evolved two or three strategies for enforcing these norms. One, as we have just seen, was to assert that the *varna* order was of divine origin. Second, they advised kings to ensure that these norms were followed within their kingdoms. And third, they attempted to persuade people that their status was determined by birth. However, this was not always easy. So prescriptions were often reinforced by stories told in the *Mahabharata* and other texts.

Source 6

#### A divine order?

To justify their claims, Brahmanas often cited a verse from a hymn in the Uljyogd known as the Sxuxvkd#vxnw, describing the sacrifice of Sxuxvkd/#the primeval man. All the elements of the universe, including the four social categories, were supposed to have emanated from his body:

The Brahmana was his mouth, of his arms was made the Kshatriya1

His thighs became the Vaishya# of his feet the Shudra#was born1

➲ Why do you think the Brahmanas quoted this verse frequently?

## Source 7

**“Proper” social roles**

Here is a story from the Dg1#Sduydq# of the Pdkdekdudwd=

Once Drona, a Brahmana who taught archery to the Kuru princes, was approached by Ekalavya, a forest-dwelling q1vkdg (a hunting community). When Drona, who knew the gkdupd, refused to have him as his pupil, Ekalavya returned to the forest, prepared an image of Drona out of clay, and treating it as his teacher, began to practise on his own. In due course, he acquired great skill in archery. One day, the Kuru princes went hunting and their dog, wandering in the woods, came upon Ekalavya. When the dog smelt the dark q1vkdg wrapped in black deer skin, his body caked with dirt, it began to bark. Annoyed, Ekalavya shot seven arrows into its mouth. When the dog returned to the Pandavas, they were amazed at this superb display of archery. They tracked down Ekalavya, who introduced himself as a pupil of Drona.

- ➲ What message do you think this story was meant to convey to the *nishadas*?  
What message would it convey to Kshatriyas?  
Do you think that Drona, as a Brahmana, was acting according to the Dharmasutras when he was teaching archery?

Drona had once told his favourite student Arjuna, that he would be unrivalled amongst his pupils. Arjuna now reminded Drona about this. Drona approached Ekalavya, who immediately acknowledged and honoured him as his teacher. When Drona demanded his right thumb as his fee, Ekalavya unhesitatingly cut it off and offered it. But thereafter, when he shot with his remaining fingers, he was no longer as fast as he had been before. Thus, Drona kept his word: no one was better than Arjuna.

### 3.2 Non-Kshatriya kings

According to the Shastras, only Kshatriyas could be kings. However, several important ruling lineages probably had different origins. The social background of the Mauryas, who ruled over a large empire, has been hotly debated. While later Buddhist texts suggested they were Kshatriyas, Brahmanical texts described them as being of “low” origin. The Shungas and Kanvas, the immediate successors of the Mauryas, were Brahmanas. In fact, political power was effectively open to anyone who could muster support and resources, and rarely depended on birth as a Kshatriya.

Other rulers, such as the Shuras who came from Central Asia, were regarded as *mlechchhas*,

barbarians or outsiders by the Brahmanas. However, one of the earliest inscriptions in Sanskrit describes how Rudradaman, the best-known Shaka ruler (c. second century CE), rebuilt Sudarshana lake (Chapter 2). This suggests that powerful *mlechchhas* were familiar with Sanskritic traditions.

It is also interesting that the best-known ruler of the Satavahana dynasty, Gotami-puta Siri-Satakani, claimed to be both a unique Brahmana (*eka brahamana*) and a destroyer of the pride of Kshatriyas. He also claimed to have ensured that there was no intermarriage amongst members of the four *varnas*. At the same time, he entered into a marriage alliance with the kin of Rudradaman.

As you can see from this example, integration within the framework of caste was often a complicated process. The Satavahanas claimed to be Brahmanas, whereas according to the Brahmanas, kings ought to have been Kshatriyas. They claimed to uphold the fourfold *varna* order, but entered into marriage alliances with people who were supposed to be excluded from the system. And, as we have seen, they practised endogamy instead of the exogamous system recommended in the Brahmanical texts.

### 3.3 Jatis and social mobility

These complexities are reflected in another term used in texts to refer to social categories – *jati*. In Brahmanical theory, *jati*, like *varna*, was based on birth. However, while the number of *varnas* was fixed at four, there was no restriction on the number of *jatis*. In fact, whenever Brahmanical authorities encountered new groups – for instance, people living in forests such as the *nishadas* – or wanted to assign a name to occupational categories such as the goldsmith or *swarnakara*, which did not easily fit into the fourfold *varna* system, they classified them as a *jati*. *Jatis* which shared a common occupation or profession were sometimes organised into *shrenis* or guilds.

We seldom come across documents that record the histories of these groups. But there are exceptions. One interesting stone inscription (c. fifth century CE), found in Mandasor (Madhya Pradesh), records the history of a guild of silk weavers who originally lived in Lata (Gujarat), from where they



*Fig. 3.5*  
Silver coin depicting a Shaka ruler,  
c. fourth century CE

### The case of the merchants

Sanskrit texts and inscriptions used the term *ydgln* to designate merchants. While trade was defined as an occupation for Vaishyas in the Shastras, a more complex situation is evident in plays such as the *Pulfkfkndwlnd* written by Shudraka (1st century CE). Here, the hero Charudatta was described as both a Brahmana and a *vduwkdydkd* or merchant. And a fifth-century inscription describes two brothers who made a donation for the construction of a temple as *nvkdwl|doydglnv1*.

➲ Do you think the silk weavers were following the occupation laid down for them in the Shastras?

migrated to Mandasor, then known as Dashapura. It states that they undertook the difficult journey along with their children and kinfolk, as they had heard about the greatness of the local king, and wanted to settle in his kingdom.

The inscription provides a fascinating glimpse of complex social processes and provides insights into the nature of guilds or *shrenis*. Although membership was based on a shared craft specialisation, some members adopted other occupations. It also indicates that the members shared more than a common profession – they collectively decided to invest their wealth, earned through their craft, to construct a splendid temple in honour of the sun god.

Source 8

### What the silk weavers did

Here is an excerpt from the inscription, which is in Sanskrit:

Some are intensely attached to music (so) pleasing to the ear; others, being proud of (the authorship of) a hundred excellent biographies, are conversant with wonderful tales; (others), filled with humility, are absorbed in excellent religious discourses; ... some excel in their own religious rites; likewise by others, who were self-possessed, the science of (Vedic) astronomy was mastered; and others, valorous in battle, even today forcibly cause harm to the enemies.

### 3.4 Beyond the four varnas: Integration

Given the diversity of the subcontinent, there were, and always have been, populations whose social practices were not influenced by Brahmanical ideas. When they figure in Sanskrit texts, they are often described as odd, uncivilised, or even animal-like. In some instances, these included forest-dwellers – for whom hunting and gathering remained an important means of subsistence. Categories such as the *nishada*, to which *Ekalavya* is supposed to have belonged, are examples of this.

Others who were viewed with suspicion included populations such as nomadic pastoralists, who could not be easily accommodated within the framework of settled agriculturists. Sometimes those who spoke non-Sanskritic languages were labelled as

*mlechchhas* and looked down upon. There was nonetheless also a sharing of ideas and beliefs between these people. The nature of relations is evident in some stories in the *Mahabharata*.

Source 9

### A tiger-like husband

This is a summary of a story from the Dgl#Sduydg# of the Pdkdekdudwd=

The Pandavas had fled into the forest. They were tired and fell asleep; only Bhima, the second Pandava, renowned for his prowess, was keeping watch. A man-eating udnvkdvd caught the scent of the Pandavas and sent his sister Hidimba to capture them. She fell in love with Bhima, transformed herself into a lovely maiden and proposed to him. He refused. Meanwhile, the udnvkdvd arrived and challenged Bhima to a wrestling match. Bhima accepted the challenge and killed him. The others woke up hearing the noise. Hidimba introduced herself, and declared her love for Bhima. She told Kunti: "I have forsaken my friends, my gkdupd and my kin; and good lady, chosen your tiger-like son for my man ... whether you think me a fool, or your devoted servant, let me join you, great lady, with your son as my husband."

Ultimately, Yudhisthira agreed to the marriage on condition that they would spend the day together but that Bhima would return every night. The couple roamed all over the world during the day. In due course Hidimba gave birth to a udnvkdvd boy named Ghatotkacha. Then the mother and son left the Pandavas. Ghatotkacha promised to return to the Pandavas whenever they needed him.

Some historians suggest that the term udnvkdvd# is used to describe people whose practices differed from those laid down in Brahmanical texts.

➲ Identify the practices described in this passage which seem non-Brahmanical.

### 3.5 Beyond the four varnas Subordination and conflict

While the Brahmanas considered some people as being outside the system, they also developed a sharper social divide by classifying certain social categories as "untouchable". This rested on a notion that certain activities, especially those connected with the performance of rituals, were sacred and by

extension “pure”. Those who considered themselves pure avoided taking food from those they designated as “untouchable”. In sharp contrast to the purity aspect, some activities were regarded as particularly “polluting”. These included handling corpses and dead animals. Those who performed such tasks, designated as *chandalas*, were placed at the very bottom of the hierarchy. Their touch and, in some cases, even seeing them was regarded as “polluting” by those who claimed to be at the top of the social order.

The *Manusmriti* laid down the “duties” of the *chandalas*. They had to live outside the village, use discarded utensils, and wear clothes of the dead and ornaments of iron. They could not walk about in villages and cities at night. They had to dispose of the bodies of those who had no relatives and serve as executioners. Much later, the Chinese Buddhist monk Fa Xian (c. fifth century CE) wrote that “untouchables” had to sound a clapper in the streets so that people could avoid seeing them. Another Chinese pilgrim, Xuan Zang (c. seventh century), observed that executioners and scavengers were forced to live outside the city.

By examining non-Brahmanical texts which depict the lives of *chandalas*, historians have tried to find out whether *chandalas* accepted the life of degradation prescribed in the *Shastras*. Sometimes, these depictions correspond with those in the Brahmanical texts. But occasionally, there are hints of different social realities.

*Fig. 3.6*  
Depiction of a mendicant seeking alms, stone sculpture (Gandhara)  
c. third century, CE



Source 10

### The Bodhisatta as a *chandala*

Did फक्तदग्धदूषक resist the attempts to push them to the bottom of the social order? Read this story, which is part of the पद्मदण्डनामृतानंद, a Pali text, where the Bodhisatta (the Buddha in a previous birth) is identified as a फक्तदग्धदूषक.

Once, the Bodhisatta was born outside the city of Banaras as a फक्तदग्धदूषक son and named Matanga. One day, when he had gone to the city on some work, he encountered Dittha Mangalika, the daughter of a merchant. When she saw him, she exclaimed "I have seen something inauspicious" and washed her eyes. The angry hangers-on then beat him up. In protest, he went and lay down at the door of her father's house. On the seventh day they brought out the girl and gave her to him. She carried the starving Matanga back to the फक्तदग्धदूषक settlement. Once he returned home, he decided to renounce the world. After attaining spiritual powers, he returned to Banaras and married her. A son named Mandavya Kumara was born to them. He learnt the three Vedas as he grew up and began to provide food to 16,000 Brahmanas every day.

One day, Matanga, dressed in rags, with a clay alms bowl in his hand, arrived at his son's doorstep and begged for food. Mandavya replied that he looked like an outcaste and was unworthy of alms; the food was meant for the Brahmanas. Matanga said: "Those who are proud of their birth and are ignorant do not deserve gifts. On the contrary, those who are free from vices are worthy of offerings." Mandavya lost his temper and asked his servants to throw the man out. Matanga rose in the air and disappeared. When Dittha Mangalika learnt about the incident, she followed Matanga and begged his forgiveness. He asked her to take a bit of the leftover from his bowl and give it to Mandavya and the Brahmanas ...

➲ Identify elements in the story that suggest that it was written from the perspective of Matanga.

#### ➲ Discuss...

Which of the sources mentioned in this section suggest that people followed the occupations laid down by Brahmanas? Which sources suggest other possibilities?

## 4. BEYOND BIRTH

### RESOURCES AND STATUS

If you recall the economic relations discussed in Chapter 2, you will realise that slaves, landless agricultural labourers, hunters, fisherfolk, pastoralists, peasants, village headmen, craftspersons, merchants and kings emerged as social actors in different parts of the subcontinent. Their social positions were often shaped by their access to economic resources. Here we will examine the social implications of access to resources in certain specific situations.

#### 4.1 Gendered access to property

Consider first a critical episode in the *Mahabharata*. During the course of the long-drawn rivalry between the Kauravas and the Pandavas, Duryodhana invited Yudhishthira to a game of dice. The latter, who was deceived by his rival, staked his gold, elephants, chariots, slaves, army, treasury, kingdom, the property of his subjects, his brothers and finally himself and lost all. Then he staked their common wife Draupadi and lost her too.

Issues of ownership, foregrounded in stories such as this one (Source 11), also figure in the Dharmasutras and Dharmashastras. According to the *Manusmriti*, the paternal estate was to be divided equally amongst sons after the death of the parents, with a special share for the eldest. Women could not claim a share of these resources.

However, women were allowed to retain the gifts they received on the occasion of their marriage as *stridhana* (literally, a woman's wealth). This could be inherited by their children, without the husband having any claim on it. At the same time, the *Manusmriti* warned women against hoarding family property, or even their own valuables, without the husband's permission.

You have read about wealthy women such as the Vakataka queen Prabhavati Gupta (Chapter 2). However, cumulative evidence – both epigraphic and textual – suggests that while upper-class women may have had access to resources, land, cattle and money were generally controlled by men. In other words, social differences between men and women were sharpened because of the differences in access to resources.

Source 11

#### Draupadi's question

Draupadi is supposed to have asked Yudhishthira whether he had lost himself before staking her. Two contrary opinions were expressed in response to this question.

One, that even if Yudhishthira had lost himself earlier, his wife remained under his control, so he could stake her.

Two, that an unfree man (as Yudhishthira was when he had lost himself) could not stake another person.

The matter remained unresolved; ultimately, Dhritarashtra restored to the Pandavas and Draupadi their personal freedom.

➲ Do you think that this episode suggests that wives could be treated as the property of their husbands?

Source 12

### How could men and women acquire wealth?

For men, the Pdgxvpulwl #declares, there are seven means of acquiring wealth: inheritance, finding, purchase, conquest, investment, work, and acceptance of gifts from good people.

For women, there are six means of acquiring wealth: what was given in front of the fire (marriage) or the bridal procession, or as a token of affection, and what she got from her brother, mother or father. She could also acquire wealth through any subsequent gift and whatever her “affectionate” husband might give her.

☛ Compare and contrast the ways in which men and women could acquire wealth.

#### 4.2 Varna and access to property

According to the Brahmanical texts, another criterion (apart from gender) for regulating access to wealth was *varna*. As we saw earlier, the only “occupation” prescribed for Shudras was servitude, while a variety of occupations were listed for men of the first three *varnas*. If these provisions were actually implemented, the wealthiest men would have been the Brahmanas and the Kshatriyas. That this corresponded to some extent with social realities is evident from descriptions of priests and kings in other textual traditions. Kings are almost invariably depicted as wealthy; priests are also generally shown to be rich, though there are occasional depictions of the poor Brahmana.

At another level, even as the Brahmanical view of society was codified in the Dharmasutras and Dharmashastras, other traditions developed critiques of the *varna* order. Some of the best-known of these were developed within early Buddhism (c. sixth century BCE onwards; see also Chapter 4). The Buddhists recognised that there were differences in society, but did not regard these as natural or inflexible. They also rejected the idea of claims to status on the basis of birth.

## Source 13

### The wealthy Shudra

This story, based on a Buddhist text in Pali known as the *Pāṇmuklapd#Q1nd|d/#* is part of a dialogue between a king named Avantiputta and a disciple of the Buddha named Kachchana. While it may not be literally true, it reveals Buddhist attitudes towards *yduqd1*

Avantiputta asked Kachchana what he thought about Brahmanas who held that they were the best caste and that all other castes were low; that Brahmanas were a fair caste while all other castes were dark; that only Brahmanas were pure, not non-Brahmanas; that Brahmanas were sons of Brahma, born of his mouth, born of Brahma, formed by Brahma, heirs to Brahma.

Kachchana replied: "What if a Shudra were wealthy ... would another Shudra#...or a Kshatriya or a Brahmana or a Vaishya ... speak politely to him?"

Avantiputta replied that if a Shudra had wealth or corn or gold or silver, he could have as his obedient servant another Shudra to get up earlier than he, to go to rest later, to carry out his orders, to speak politely; or he could even have a Kshatriya or a Brahmana or a Vaishya as his obedient servant.

Kachchana asked: "This being so, are not these four *yduqd1#* exactly the same?"

Avantiputta conceded that there was no difference amongst the *yduqd1#* on this count.

➲ Read Avantiputta's first statement again. What are the ideas in it that are derived from Brahmanical texts/traditions? Can you identify the source of any of these? What, according to this text, explains social difference?

#### 4.3 An alternative social scenario: Sharing wealth

So far we have been examining situations where people either claimed or were assigned status on the basis of their wealth. However, there were other possibilities as well; situations where men who were generous were respected, while those who were miserly or simply accumulated wealth for themselves were despised. One area where these values were cherished was ancient Tamilakam, where, as we saw earlier (Chapter 2), there were several chiefdoms around 2,000 years ago. Amongst other things, the chiefs were patrons of bards and poets who sang their praise. Poems included in the Tamil Sangam anthologies often illuminate social and economic

relationships, suggesting that while there were differences between rich and poor, those who controlled resources were also expected to share them.

*Source 14*

### The poor generous chief

In this composition from the *Sxudqduxux*, one of the anthologies of poems of the Tamil Sangam literature (1st century CE), a bard describes his patron to other poets thus :

He (i.e. the patron) doesn't have the wealth to lavish on others everyday

Nor does he have the pettiness to say that he has nothing and so refuse!

...

he lives in Irantai (a place) and is generous. He is an enemy to the hunger of bards!

If you wish to cure your poverty, come along with me, bards whose lips are so skilled!

If we request him, showing him our ribs thin with hunger, he will go to the blacksmith of his village

And will say to that man of powerful hands:

"Shape me a long spear for war, one that has a straight blade!"

➲ What are the strategies which the bard uses to try and persuade the chief to be generous?

What is the chief expected to do to acquire wealth in order to give some to the bards?

### ➲ Discuss...

How do social relationships operate in present-day societies? Are there any similarities or differences with patterns of the past?

*Fig. 3.7*

A chief and his follower, stone sculpture, Amaravati (Andhra Pradesh), c. second century CE

➲ How has the sculptor shown the difference between the chief and his follower?



## 5. EXPLAINING SOCIAL DIFFERENCES: A SOCIAL CONTRACT

The Buddhists also developed an alternative understanding of social inequalities, and of the institutions required to regulate social conflict. In a myth found in a text known as the *Sutta Pitaka* they suggested that originally human beings did not have fully evolved bodily forms, nor was the world of plants fully developed. All beings lived in an idyllic state of peace, taking from nature only what they needed for each meal.

However, there was a gradual deterioration of this state as human beings became increasingly greedy, vindictive and deceitful. This led them to wonder: "What if we were to select a certain being who should be wrathful when indignation is right, who should censure that which should rightly be censured and should banish him who deserves to be banished? We will give him in return a proportion of the rice ... chosen by the whole people, he will be known as *mahasammata*, the great elect."

This suggests that the institution of kingship was based on human choice, with taxes as a form of payment for services rendered by the king. At the same time, it reveals recognition of human agency in creating and institutionalising economic and social relations. There are other implications as well. For instance, if human beings were responsible for the creation of the system, they could also change it in future.

## 6. HANDLING TEXTS

### HISTORIANS AND THE MAHABHARATA

If you look through the sources cited in this chapter once more you will notice that historians consider several elements when they analyse texts. They examine whether texts were written in Prakrit, Pali or Tamil, *languages* that were probably used by ordinary people, or in Sanskrit, a language meant almost exclusively for priests and elites. They also consider the *kinds* of text. Were these mantras, learnt and chanted by ritual specialists, or stories that people could have read, or heard, and then retold if they found them interesting? Besides, they try to find out about the *author(s)* whose perspectives and ideas shaped the text, as well as the intended

audience, as, very often, authors keep the interests of their audience in mind while composing their work. And they try and ascertain the possible *date* of the composition or compilation of the texts as well as the *place* where they may have been composed. It is only after making these assessments that they draw on the *content* of texts to arrive at an understanding of their historical significance. As you can imagine, this is a particularly difficult task for a text as complex as the *Mahabharata*.

### 6.1 Language and content

Let us look at the language of the text. The version of the *Mahabharata* we have been considering is in Sanskrit (although there are versions in other languages as well). However, the Sanskrit used in the *Mahabharata* is far simpler than that of the Vedas, or of the *prashastis* discussed in Chapter 2. As such, it was probably widely understood.

Historians usually classify the contents of the present text under two broad heads – sections that contain stories, designated as the *narrative*, and sections that contain prescriptions about social norms, designated as *didactic*. This division is by no means watertight – the didactic sections include stories, and the narrative often contains a social message. However, generally historians agree that the *Mahabharata* was meant to be a dramatic, moving story, and that the didactic portions were probably added later.

*Didactic* refers to something that is meant for purposes of instruction.



Fig. 3.8  
Krishna advises Arjuna on the battlefield

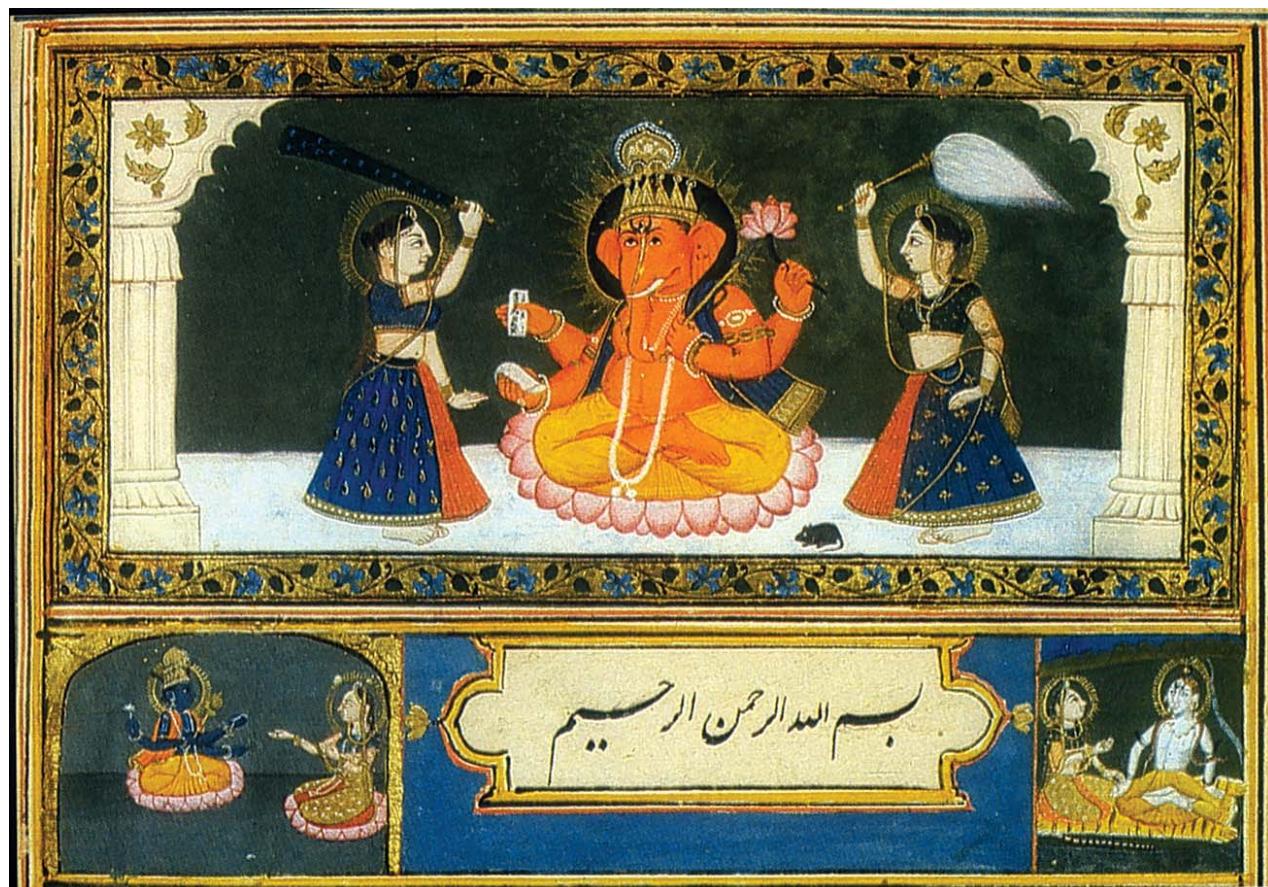
This painting dates to the eighteenth century. Perhaps the most important didactic section of the *Mahabharata* is the *Bhagavad Gita*, which contains the advice offered by Lord Krishna to Arjuna. This scene is frequently depicted in painting and sculpture.

Interestingly, the text is described as an *itihasa* within early Sanskrit tradition. The literal meaning of the term is “thus it was”, which is why it is generally translated as “history”. Was there a real war that was remembered in the epic? We are not sure. Some historians think that the memory of an actual conflict amongst kinfolk was preserved in the narrative; others point out that there is no other corroborative evidence of the battle.

### 6.2 Author(s) and dates

Who wrote the text? This is a question to which there are several answers. The original story was probably composed by charioteer-bards known as *sutas* who generally accompanied Kshatriya warriors to the battlefield and composed poems celebrating their victories and other achievements. These compositions circulated orally. Then, from the fifth century BCE, Brahmanas took over the story and began to commit it to writing. This was the time when chiefdoms such as those of the Kurus and

*Fig. 3.9*  
*Lord Ganesha the scribe*  
According to tradition, Vyasa dictated the text to the deity.  
This illustration is from a Persian translation of the *Mahabharata*,  
c. 1740-50.



Panchalas, around whom the story of the epic revolves, were gradually becoming kingdoms. Did the new kings want their *itihasa* to be recorded and preserved more systematically? It is also possible that the upheavals that often accompanied the establishment of these states, where old social values were often replaced by new norms, are reflected in some parts of the story.

We notice another phase in the composition of the text between c. 200 BCE and 200 CE. This was the period when the worship of Vishnu was growing in importance, and Krishna, one of the important figures of the epic, was coming to be identified with Vishnu. Subsequently, between c. 200 and 400 CE, large didactic sections resembling the *Manusmriti* were added. With these additions, a text which initially perhaps had less than 10,000 verses grew to comprise about 100,000 verses. This enormous composition is traditionally attributed to a sage named Vyasa.

### 6.3 The search for convergence

The *Mahabharata*, like any major epic, contains vivid descriptions of battles, forests, palaces and settlements. In 1951-52, the archaeologist B.B. Lal excavated at a village named Hastinapura in Meerut (Uttar Pradesh). Was this the Hastinapura of the epic? While the similarity in names could be coincidental, the location of the site in the Upper Ganga doab, where the Kuru kingdom was situated, suggests that it may have been the capital of the Kurus mentioned in the text.

Lal found evidence of five occupational levels, of which the second and third are of interest to us. This is what Lal noted about the houses in the second phase (c. twelfth-seventh centuries BCE): "Within the limited area excavated, no definite plans of houses were obtained, but walls of mud and mud-bricks were duly encountered. The discovery of mud-plaster with prominent reed-marks suggested that some of the houses had reed walls plastered over with mud." For the third phase (c. sixth-third centuries BCE), he noted: "Houses of this period were built of mud-brick as well as burnt bricks. Soakage jars and brick drains were used for draining out refuse water, while terracotta ring-wells may have been used both as wells and drainage pits."

## Source 15

**Hastinapura**

This is how the city is described in the Dgl# Sduydq# of the Pdkdekduwd=

The city, bursting like the ocean, packed with hundreds of mansions, displayed with its gateways, arches and turrets like massing clouds the splendour of Great Indra's city.

➲ Do you think Lal's finds match the description of Hastinapura in the epic?

Was the description of the city in the epic added after the main narrative had been composed, when (after the sixth century BCE) urban centres flourished in the region? Or was it a flight of poetic fancy, which cannot always be verified by comparisons with other kinds of evidence?

Consider another instance. One of the most challenging episodes in the *Mahabharata* is Draupadi's marriage with the Pandavas, an instance of polyandry that is central to the narrative. If we examine the section of the epic that describes this event, it is evident that the author(s) attempted to explain it in a variety of ways.

## Source 16

**Draupadi's marriage**

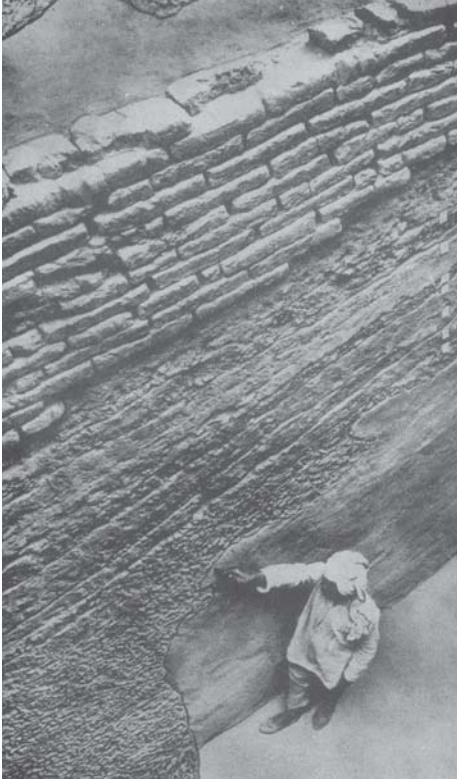
Drupada, the king of Panchala, organised a competition where the challenge was to string a bow and hit a target; the winner would be chosen to marry his daughter Draupadi. Arjuna was victorious and was garlanded by Draupadi. The Pandavas returned with her to their mother Kunti, who, even before she saw them, asked them to share whatever they had got. She realised her mistake when she saw Draupadi, but her command could not be violated. After much deliberation, Yudhishthira decided that Draupadi would be their common wife.

When Drupada was told about this, he protested. However, the seer Vyasa arrived and told him that the Pandavas were in reality incarnations of Indra, whose wife had been reborn as Draupadi, and they were thus destined for each other.

Vyasa added that in another instance a young woman had prayed to Shiva for a husband, and in her enthusiasm, had prayed five times instead of once. This woman was now reborn as Draupadi, and Shiva had fulfilled her prayers. Convinced by these stories, Drupada consented to the marriage.

➲ Why do you think the author(s) offered three explanations for a single episode?

*Fig. 3.10  
A wall excavated at Hastinapura*



Present-day historians suggest that the fact that the author(s) describe a polyandrous union indicates that polyandry may have been prevalent amongst ruling elites at some point of time. At the same time, the fact that so many different explanations are offered for the episode (Source 16) suggests that polyandry gradually fell into disfavour amongst the Brahmanas, who reworked and developed the text through the centuries.

Some historians note that while the practice of polyandry may have seemed unusual or even undesirable from the Brahmanical point of view, it was (and is) prevalent in the Himalayan region. Others suggest that there may have been a shortage of women during times of warfare, and this led to polyandry. In other words, it was attributed to a situation of crisis.

Some early sources suggest that polyandry was not the only or even the most prevalent form of marriage. Why then did the author(s) choose to associate this practice with the central characters of the *Mahabharata*? We need to remember that creative literature often has its own narrative requirements and does not always literally reflect social realities.

## 7. A DYNAMIC TEXT

The growth of the *Mahabharata* did not stop with the Sanskrit version. Over the centuries, versions of the epic were written in a variety of languages through an ongoing process of dialogue between peoples, communities, and those who wrote the texts. Several stories that originated in specific regions or circulated amongst certain people found their way into the epic. At the same time, the central story of the epic was often retold in different ways. And episodes were depicted in sculpture and painting. They also provided themes for a wide range of performing arts – plays, dance and other kinds of narrations.

### ➲ Discuss...

Read the excerpts from the *Mahabharata* included in this chapter once more. For each of these, discuss whether they could have been literally true. What do these excerpts tell us about those who composed the text? What do they tell us about those who must have read or heard the epic?

Most retellings or re-enactments of the epic draw on the main narrative in creative ways. Let us look at one example, an episode from the *Mahabharata* that has been transformed by Mahashweta Devi, a contemporary Bengali writer known for raising her voice against all forms of exploitation and oppression. In this particular instance, she works out alternative possibilities from the main story of the *Mahabharata* and draws attention to questions on which the Sanskrit text is silent.

The Sanskrit text describes how Duryodhana plotted to kill the Pandavas by inviting them to stay in a specially prepared house of lac, which he planned to set on fire. Forewarned, the Pandavas dug a tunnel to ensure their escape. Then Kunti arranged for a feast. While most of the invitees were Brahmanas, a *nishada* woman came with her five sons. When they were satiated with drink and fell off to sleep, the Pandavas escaped, setting fire to the house. When the bodies of the woman and her sons were discovered, people thought that the Pandavas were dead.

In her short story titled “Kunti O Nishadi”, Mahashweta Devi takes up the narrative from where the *Mahabharata* ends it. She sets the story in a forest, where Kunti retires after the war. Kunti now has time to reflect on her past, and often confesses to what she regards as her failings, talking with the earth, the symbol of nature. Every day she sees the *nishadas* who come to collect wood, honey, tubers and roots. One *nishadi* (a *nishada* woman) often listens to Kunti when she talks with the earth.

One day, there was something in the air; the animals were fleeing the forest. Kunti noticed that the *nishadi* was watching her, and was startled when she spoke to her and asked if she remembered the house of lac. Yes, Kunti said, she did. Did she remember a certain elderly *nishadi* and her five young sons? And that she had served them wine till they were senseless, while she escaped with her own sons? That *nishadi* ... “Not you!” Kunti exclaimed. The *nishadi* replied that the woman who was killed had been her mother-in-law. She added that while Kunti had been reflecting on her past, not once did she remember the six innocent lives that were lost because she had wanted to save herself and her sons. As they spoke, the flames drew nearer. The *nishadi* escaped to safety, but Kunti remained where she was.

## TIMELINE 1 MAJOR TEXTUAL TRADITIONS

c. 500 BCE	<i>Ashtadhyayi</i> of Panini, a work on Sanskrit grammar
c. 500-200 BCE	Major Dharmasutras (in Sanskrit)
c. 500-100 BCE	Early Buddhist texts including the <i>Tripitaka</i> (in Pali)
c. 500 BCE-400 CE	<i>Ramayana</i> and <i>Mahabharata</i> (in Sanskrit)
c. 200 BCE-200 CE	<i>Manusmriti</i> (in Sanskrit); composition and compilation of Tamil Sangam literature
c. 100 CE	<i>Charaka</i> and <i>Sushruta Samhitas</i> , works on medicine (in Sanskrit)
c. 200 CE onwards	Compilation of the <i>Puranas</i> (in Sanskrit)
c. 300 CE	<i>Natyashastra</i> of Bharata, a work on dramaturgy (in Sanskrit)
c. 300-600 CE	Other Dharmashastras (in Sanskrit)
c. 400-500 CE	Sanskrit plays including the works of Kalidasa; works on astronomy and mathematics by Aryabhata and Varahamihira (in Sanskrit); compilation of Jaina works (in Prakrit)

## TIMELINE 2 MAJOR LANDMARKS IN THE STUDY OF THE MAHABHARATA

### Twentieth century

1919-66	Preparation and publication of the Critical Edition of the <i>Mahabharata</i>
1973	J.A.B. van Buitenen begins English translation of the Critical Edition; remains incomplete after his death in 1978



### ANSWER IN 100-150 WORDS

1. Explain why patriliney may have been particularly important among elite families.
2. Discuss whether kings in early states were invariably Kshatriyas.
3. Compare and contrast the *dharma* or norms mentioned in the stories of Drona, Hidimba and Matanga.
4. In what ways was the Buddhist theory of a social contract different from the Brahmanical view of society derived from the *Purusha sukta*?
5. The following is an excerpt from the *Mahabharata*, in which Yudhishthira, the eldest Pandava, speaks to Sanjaya, a messenger:

Sanjaya, convey my respectful greetings to all the Brahmanas and the chief priest of the house of Dhritarashtra. I bow respectfully to teacher Drona ... I hold the feet of our preceptor Kripa ... (and) the chief of the Kurus, the great Bhishma. I bow respectfully to the old king (Dhritarashtra). I greet and ask after the health of his son Duryodhana and his younger brother ... Also greet all the young Kuru warriors who are our brothers, sons and grandsons ... Greet above all him, who is to us like father and mother, the wise Vidura (born of a slave woman) ... I bow to the elderly ladies who are known as our mothers. To those who are our wives you say this, "I hope they are well-protected"... Our daughters-in-law born of good families and mothers of children greet on my behalf. Embrace for me those who are our daughters ... The beautiful, fragrant, well-dressed courtesans of ours you should also greet. Greet the slave women and their children, greet the aged, the maimed (and) the helpless ...

Try and identify the criteria used to make this list – in terms of age, gender, kinship ties. Are there any other criteria? For each category, explain why they are placed in a particular position in the list.



### WRITE A SHORT ESSAY (ABOUT 500 WORDS) ON THE FOLLOWING:

6. This is what a famous historian of Indian literature, Maurice Winternitz, wrote about the *Mahabharata*: “just because the Mahabharata represents more of an entire literature ... and contains so much and so many kinds of things, ... (it) gives(s) us an insight into the most profound depths of the soul of the Indian folk.” Discuss.
7. Discuss whether the *Mahabharata* could have been the work of a single author.
8. How important were gender differences in early societies? Give reasons for your answer.
9. Discuss the evidence that suggests that Brahmanical prescriptions about kinship and marriage were not universally followed.



### MAP WORK

10. Compare the map in this chapter with Map 1 in Chapter 2. List the *mahanapadas* and cities located near the Kuru-Panchala lands.



### PROJECT (ANY ONE)

11. Find out about retellings of the *Mahabharata* in other languages. Discuss how they handle any two of the episodes of the text described in this chapter, explaining any similarities or differences that you notice.
12. Imagine that you are an author and rewrite the story of Ekalavya from a perspective of your choice.



#### If you would like to know more, read:

Uma Chakravarti. 2006.  
Hyhu|gd| #Olyhv/#Hyhu|gd|  
Klwulhv#Tulika, New Delhi.

Irawati Karve. 1968.  
Nlqvkl#Rujdq1vdwlrq#lq#Logld1  
Asia Publishing House, Bombay.

R.S. Sharma. 1983.  
Shvshfwlyhv#lq#Vrfldo#dog  
Hfrqplf#Klwru|#ri#Hduo|#Logld1  
Munshiram Manoharlal,  
New Delhi.

V.S. Sukthankar. 1957.  
Rq#wk#Phdq1oj#ri#wk#  
Pdkdekduwd1#Asiatic Society of  
Bombay, Bombay.

Romila Thapar. 2000.  
Exowudot#Sdtw=##Hvd|v#flq#Hduo|  
Logld#Klwru| #Oxford University  
Press, New Delhi.



#### For more information, you could visit:

[http://bombay.indology.info/  
mahabharata/statement.html](http://bombay.indology.info/mahabharata/statement.html)

## THEME FOUR

# THINKERS, BELIEFS AND BUILDINGS

## CULTURAL DEVELOPMENTS

### (c. 600 BCE - 600 CE)



Fig. 4.1  
A sculpture from Sanchi

In this chapter we shall go on a long journey across a thousand years to read about philosophers and their attempts to understand the world they inhabited. We will also see how their ideas were compiled as oral and written texts as well as expressed in architecture and sculpture. These are indicative of the enduring influence these thinkers had on people. While we will be focusing on Buddhism, it is important to remember that this tradition did not develop in isolation – there were several other traditions, each engaged in debates and dialogues with the others.

The sources that historians use to reconstruct this exciting world of ideas and beliefs include Buddhist, Jaina and Brahmanical texts, as well as a large and impressive body of material remains including monuments and inscriptions. Among the best preserved monuments of the time is the stupa at Sanchi which is a major focus in this chapter.

Fig. 4.2  
Shahjehan Begum



## 1. A GLIMPSE OF SANCHI

### Sanchi in the nineteenth century

The most wonderful ancient buildings in the state of Bhopal are at Sanchi Kanakhera, a small village under the brow of a hill some 20 miles north-east of Bhopal which we visited yesterday. We inspected the stone sculptures and statues of the Buddha and an ancient gateway ... The ruins appear to be the object of great interest to European gentlemen. Major Alexander Cunningham ... stayed several weeks in this neighbourhood and examined these ruins most carefully. He took drawings of the place, deciphered the inscription, and bored shafts down these domes. The results of his investigations were described by him in an English work ...

FROM SHAHJEHAN BEGUM, NAWAB OF BHOPAL (ruled 1868-1901),  
Wdr#k#Lted#WduInk Ekrdo +D#Klvru |#ri#Ekrdo, , translated by H.D. Barstow, 1876.

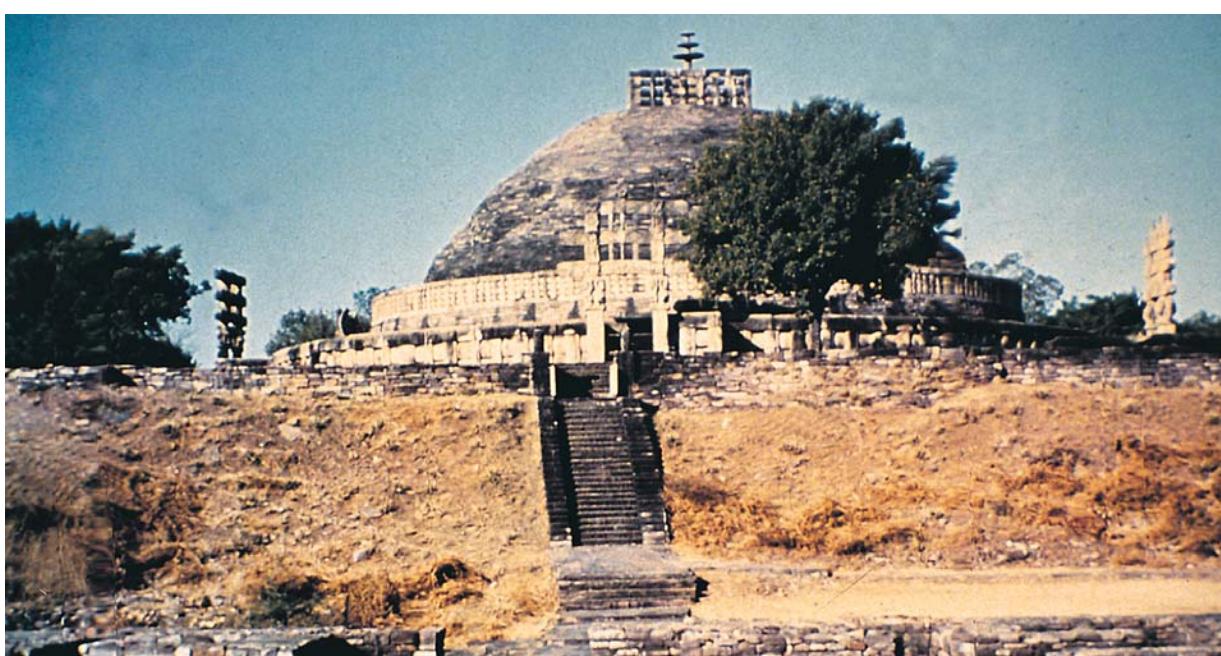
Nineteenth-century Europeans were very interested in the stupa at Sanchi. In fact, the French sought Shahjehan Begum's permission to take away the eastern gateway, which was the best preserved, to be displayed in a museum in France. For a while some Englishmen also wanted to do the same, but fortunately both the French and the English were satisfied with carefully prepared plaster-cast copies and the original remained at the site, part of the Bhopal state.

The rulers of Bhopal, Shahjehan Begum and her successor Sultan Jehan Begum, provided money for the preservation of the ancient site. No wonder then that John Marshall dedicated his important volumes on Sanchi to Sultan Jehan. She funded the museum that was built there as well as the guesthouse where he lived and wrote the volumes. She also funded the publication of the volumes. So if the stupa complex has survived, it is in no small measure due to wise decisions, and to good luck in escaping the eyes of railway contractors, builders, and those looking for finds to carry away to the museums of Europe. One of the most important Buddhist centres, the discovery of Sanchi has vastly transformed our understanding of early Buddhism. Today it stands testimony to the successful restoration and preservation of a key archaeological site by the Archaeological Survey of India.

*Fig. 4.3*

*The Great Stupa at Sanchi*

If you travel from Delhi to Bhopal by train, you will see the majestic stupa complex on top of a hill, crowning it as it were. If you request the guard he will stop the train at the little station of Sanchi for two minutes – enough time for you to get down. As you climb up the hill you can see the complex of structures: a large mound and other monuments including a temple built in the fifth century.



### Discuss...

Compare what Shahjehan Begum described with what you see in Fig. 3. What similarities and differences do you notice?

But what is the significance of this monument? Why was the mound built and what did it contain? Why is there a stone railing around it? Who built the complex or paid for its construction? When was it "discovered"? There is a fascinating story that we can uncover at Sanchi for which we must combine information from texts, sculpture, architecture and inscriptions. Let us begin by exploring the background of the early Buddhist tradition.

## 2. THE BACKGROUND: SACRIFICES AND DEBATES

Source 1

### A prayer to Agni

Here are two verses from the *Uṇḍīyāgī* invoking Agni, the god of fire, often identified with the sacrificial fire, into which offerings were made so as to reach the other deities:

Bring, O strong one, this sacrifice of ours to the gods, O wise one, as a liberal giver. Bestow on us, O priest, abundant food. Agni, obtain, by sacrificing, mighty wealth for us.

Procure, O Agni, for ever to him who prays to you (the gift of) nourishment, the wonderful cow. May a son be ours, offspring that continues our line ...

Verses such as these were composed in a special kind of Sanskrit, known as Vedic Sanskrit. They were taught orally to men belonging to priestly families.

List the objectives of the sacrifice.

The mid-first millennium BCE is often regarded as a turning point in world history: it saw the emergence of thinkers such as Zarathustra in Iran, Kong Zi in China, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle in Greece, and Mahavira and Gautama Buddha, among many others, in India. They tried to understand the mysteries of existence and the relationship between human beings and the cosmic order. This was also the time when new kingdoms and cities were developing and social and economic life was changing in a variety of ways in the Ganga valley (Chapters 2 and 3). These thinkers attempted to understand these developments as well.

#### 2.1 The sacrificial tradition

There were several pre-existing traditions of thought, religious belief and practice, including the early Vedic tradition, known from the *Rigveda*, compiled between c. 1500 and 1000 BCE. The *Rigveda* consists of hymns in praise of a variety of deities, especially Agni, Indra and Soma. Many of these hymns were chanted when sacrifices were performed, where people prayed for cattle, sons, good health, long life, etc.

At first, sacrifices were performed collectively. Later (c. 1000 BCE–500 BCE onwards) some were performed by the heads of households for the well-being of the domestic unit. More elaborate sacrifices, such as the *rajasuya* and *ashvamedha*, were performed by chiefs and kings who depended on Brahmana priests to conduct the ritual.

#### 2.2 New questions

Many ideas found in the *Upanishads* (c. sixth century BCE onwards) show that people were curious about the meaning of life, the possibility of life after death,

and rebirth. Was rebirth due to past actions? Such issues were hotly debated. Thinkers were concerned with understanding and expressing the nature of the ultimate reality. And others, outside the Vedic tradition, asked whether or not there even was a single ultimate reality. People also began speculating on the significance of the sacrificial tradition.

### 2.3 Debates and discussions

We get a glimpse of lively discussions and debates from Buddhist texts, which mention as many as 64 sects or schools of thought. Teachers travelled from place to place, trying to convince one another as well as laypersons, about the validity of their philosophy or the way they understood the world. Debates took place in the *kutagarashala* – literally, a hut with a pointed roof – or in groves where travelling mendicants halted. If a philosopher succeeded in convincing one of his rivals, the followers of the latter also became his disciples. So support for any particular sect could grow and shrink over time.

Many of these teachers, including Mahavira and the Buddha, questioned the authority of the Vedas. They also emphasised individual agency – suggesting that men and women could strive to attain liberation from the trials and tribulations of worldly existence. This was in marked contrast to the Brahmanical position, wherein, as we have seen, an individual's existence was thought to be determined by his or her birth in a specific caste or gender.

*Source 2*

#### Verses from the Upanishads

Here are two verses from the Fkkdqgrj | d#Xsdqlvkdg/#a text composed in Sanskrit in sixth century BCE:

##### The nature of the self

This self of mine within the heart, is smaller than paddy or barley or mustard or millet or the kernel of a seed of millet. This self of mine within the heart is greater than the earth, greater than the intermediate space, greater than heaven, greater than these worlds.

##### The true sacrifice

This one (the wind) that blows, this is surely a sacrifice ... While moving, it sanctifies all this; therefore it is indeed a sacrifice.

## How Buddhist texts were prepared and preserved

The Buddha (and other teachers) taught orally – through discussion and debate. Men and women (perhaps children as well) attended these discourses and discussed what they heard. None of the Buddha's speeches were written down during his lifetime. After his death (fl. fifth-fourth century BCE) his teachings were compiled by his disciples at a council of "elders" or senior monks at Vesali (Pali for Vaishali in present-day Bihar). These compilations were known as *trikāṇḍa* – literally, three baskets to hold different types of texts. They were first transmitted orally and then written and classified according to length as well as subject matter.

The *yāqidaśīwādha* included rules and regulations for those who joined the *vdgjkd* or monastic order; the Buddha's teachings were included in the *Vāyavādī* *Sīwādha*; and the *#Deklgkdppd#Sīwādha* dealt with philosophical matters. Each *sīwādha* comprised a number of individual texts. Later, commentaries were written on these texts by Buddhist scholars.

As Buddhism travelled to new regions such as Sri Lanka, other texts such as the *Gāsdydpvd* (literally, the chronicle of the island) and *Pdkdydpvd* (the great chronicle) were written, containing regional histories of Buddhism. Many of these works contained biographies of the Buddha. Some of the oldest texts are in Pali, while later compositions are in Sanskrit.

When Buddhism spread to East Asia, pilgrims such as Fa Xian and Xuan Zang travelled all the way from China to India in search of texts. These they took back to their own country, where they were translated by scholars. Indian Buddhist teachers also travelled to faraway places, carrying texts to disseminate the teachings of the Buddha.

Buddhist texts were preserved in manuscripts for several centuries in monasteries in different parts of Asia. Modern translations have been prepared from Pali, Sanskrit, Chinese and Tibetan texts.



*Fig. 4.4  
A Buddhist manuscript in Sanskrit, c. twelfth century*

Source 3

### Fatalists and materialists?

Here is an excerpt from the *Vāyūdhaśilavāda*, describing a conversation between king Ajatasattu, the ruler of Magadha, and the Buddha:

On one occasion King Ajatasattu visited the Buddha and described what another teacher, named Makkhali Gosala, had told him:

“Though the wise should hope, by this virtue ... by this penance I will gain karma ... and the fool should by the same means hope to gradually rid himself of his karma, neither of them can do it. Pleasure and pain, measured out as it were, cannot be altered in the course of *vāpyavāda* (transmigration). It can neither be lessened or increased ... just as a ball of string will when thrown unwind to its full length, so fool and wise alike will take their course and make an end of sorrow.”

And this is what a philosopher named Ajita Kesakambalin taught:

“There is no such thing, O king, as alms or sacrifice, or offerings ... there is no such thing as this world or the next ...”

A human being is made up of the four elements. When he dies the earthy in him returns to the earth, the fluid to water, the heat to fire, the windy to air, and his senses pass into space ...”

The talk of gifts is a doctrine of fools, an empty lie ... fools and wise alike are cut off and perish. They do not survive after death.”

The first teacher belonged to the tradition of the Ajivikas. They have often been described as fatalists: those who believe that everything is predetermined. The second teacher belonged to the tradition of the Lokayatas, usually described as materialists. Texts from these traditions have not survived, so we know about them only from the works of other traditions.

➲ Do you think it is appropriate to describe these men as fatalists or materialists?

### ➲ Discuss...

What are the problems in reconstructing histories of ideas and beliefs when texts are not available or have not survived?



Fig. 4.5

An image of a tirthankara from Mathura, c. third century CE

Source 4

### The world beyond the palace

Just as the Buddha's teachings were compiled by his followers, the teachings of Mahavira were also recorded by his disciples. These were often in the form of stories, which could appeal to ordinary people. Here is one example, from a Prakrit text known as the *Xwddudgk|d|dqd#Vxwd/* describing how a queen named Kamalavati tried to persuade her husband to renounce the world:

If the whole world and all its treasures were yours, you would not be satisfied, nor would all this be able to save you. When you die, O king and leave all things behind, gkdppd alone, and nothing else, will save you. As a bird dislikes the cage, so do I dislike (the world). I shall live as a nun without offspring, without desire, without the love of gain, and without hatred ...

Those who have enjoyed pleasures and renounced them, move about like the wind, and go wherever they please, unchecked like birds in their flight ...

Leave your large kingdom ... abandon what pleases the senses, be without attachment and property, then practise severe penance, being firm of energy ...

➲ Which of the arguments advanced by the queen do you find most convincing?

### 3.1 The spread of Jainism

Gradually, Jainism spread to many parts of India. Like the Buddhists, Jaina scholars produced a wealth of literature in a variety of languages – Prakrit, Sanskrit and Tamil. For centuries, manuscripts of these texts were carefully preserved in libraries attached to temples.

Some of the earliest stone sculptures associated with religious traditions were produced by devotees of the Jaina *tirthankaras*, and have been recovered from several sites throughout the subcontinent.

#### Discuss...

Is ahimsa relevant in the twenty-first century?



Fig. 4.6  
A page from a fourteenth-century  
Jaina manuscript

Can you identify the script?

## 4. THE BUDDHA AND THE QUEST FOR ENLIGHTENMENT

One of the most influential teachers of the time was the Buddha. Over the centuries, his message spread across the subcontinent and beyond – through Central Asia to China, Korea and Japan, and through Sri Lanka, across the seas to Myanmar, Thailand and Indonesia.

How do we know about the Buddha's teachings? These have been reconstructed by carefully editing, translating and analysing the Buddhist texts mentioned earlier. Historians have also tried to reconstruct details of his life from hagiographies. Many of these were written down at least a century after the time of the Buddha, in an attempt to preserve memories of the great teacher.

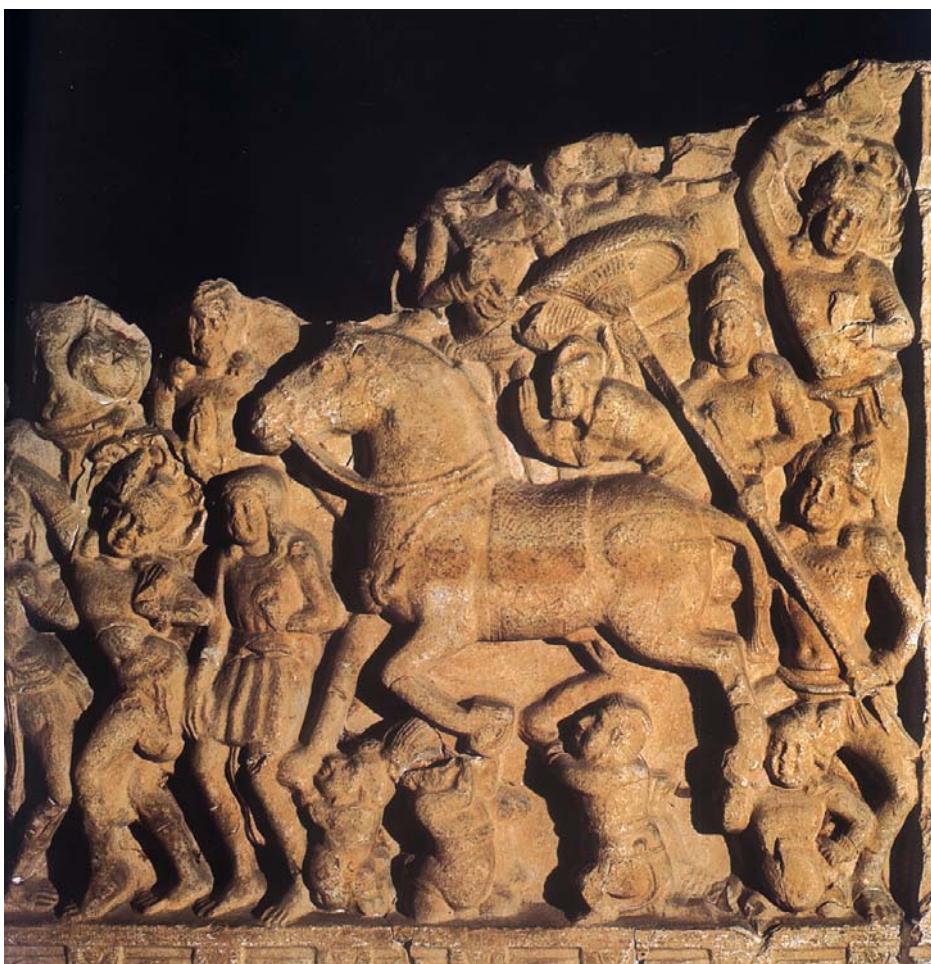
According to these traditions, Siddhartha, as the Buddha was named at birth, was the son of a chief

**Hagiography** is a biography of a saint or religious leader. Hagiographies often praise the saint's achievements, and may not always be literally accurate. They are important because they tell us about the beliefs of the followers of that particular tradition.

of the **Sakya clan**. He had a sheltered upbringing within the palace, insulated from the harsh realities of life. One day he persuaded his charioteer to take him into the city. His first journey into the world outside was traumatic. He was deeply anguished when he saw an **old man, a sick man and a corpse**. He realised in that moment that the decay and destruction of the human body was inevitable. He also saw a homeless mendicant, who, it seemed to him, had come to terms with old age, disease and death, and found peace. Siddhartha decided that he too would adopt the same path. Soon after, he left the palace and set out in search of his own truth.

Siddhartha explored several paths including bodily mortification which led him to a situation of near death. Abandoning these extreme methods, he meditated for several days and finally attained enlightenment. After this he came to be known as the Buddha or the Enlightened One. For the rest of his life, he taught *dhamma* or the path of righteous living.

*Fig. 4.7  
A sculpture (c. 200 ce) from Amaravati (Andhra Pradesh), depicting the departure of the Buddha from his palace*



### Discuss...

If you did not know about the life of the Buddha, would you be able to tell what the sculpture depicts?

## 5. THE TEACHINGS OF THE BUDDHA

The Buddha's teachings have been reconstructed from stories, found mainly in the *Sutta Pitaka*. Although some stories describe his miraculous powers, others suggest that the Buddha tried to convince people through reason and persuasion rather than through displays of supernatural power. For instance, when a grief-stricken woman whose child had died came to the Buddha, he gently convinced her about the inevitability of death rather than bring her son back to life. These stories were narrated in the language spoken by ordinary people so that these could be easily understood.

According to Buddhist philosophy, the world is transient (*anicca*) and constantly changing; it is also soulless (*anatta*) as there is nothing permanent or eternal in it. Within this transient world, sorrow (*dukkha*) is intrinsic to human existence. It is by following the path of moderation between severe penance and self-indulgence that human beings can rise above these worldly troubles. In the earliest forms of Buddhism, whether or not god existed was irrelevant.

*Source 5*

### Buddhism in practice

This is an excerpt from the *Vāvudhī Sutta*, and contains the advice given by the Buddha to a wealthy householder named Sigala:

In five ways should a master look after his servants and employees ... by assigning them work according to their strength, by supplying them with food and wages, by tending them in sickness; by sharing delicacies with them and by granting leave at times ...

In five ways should the clansmen look after the needs of *vdpdqdv* (those who have renounced the world) and Brahmanas: by affection in act and speech and mind, by keeping open house to them and supplying their worldly needs.

There are similar instructions to Sigala about how to behave with his parents, teacher and wife.

➲ Suggest what the instructions regarding parents, teacher and wife may have been.

### Discuss...

Compare the Buddha's advice to Sigala with Asoka's advice to his subjects (Chapter 2). Do you notice any similarities and differences?

The Buddha regarded the social world as the creation of humans rather than of divine origin. Therefore, he advised kings and *gahapatis* (see also Chapter 2) to be humane and ethical. Individual effort was expected to transform social relations.

The Buddha emphasised individual agency and righteous action as the means to escape from the cycle of rebirth and attain self-realisation and *nibbana*, literally the extinguishing of the ego and desire – and thus end the cycle of suffering for those who renounced the world. According to Buddhist tradition, his last words to his followers were: “Be lamps unto yourselves as all of you must work out your own liberation.”

## 6. FOLLOWERS OF THE BUDDHA

Soon there grew a body of disciples of the Buddha and he founded a *sangha*, an organisation of monks who too became teachers of *dhamma*. These monks lived simply, possessing only the essential requisites for survival, such as a bowl to receive food once a day from the laity. As they lived on alms, they were known as *bhikkhus*.

Initially, only men were allowed into the *sangha*, but later women also came to be admitted. According to Buddhist texts, this was made possible through the mediation of Ananda, one of the Buddha's dearest disciples, who persuaded him to allow women into the *sangha*. The Buddha's foster mother, Mahapajapati Gotami was the first woman to be ordained as a *bhikkhuni*. Many women who entered the *sangha* became teachers of *dhamma* and went on to become *theris*, or respected women who had attained liberation.

The Buddha's followers came from many social groups. They included kings, wealthy men and *gahapatis*, and also humbler folk: workers, slaves and craftspeople. Once within the *sangha*, all were regarded as equal, having shed their earlier social identities on becoming *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunis*. The internal functioning of the *sangha* was based on the traditions of *ganas* and *sanghas*, where consensus was arrived at through discussions. If that failed, decisions were taken by a vote on the subject.

Source 6

### The Therigatha

This unique Buddhist text, part of the *Vāvudhī-Slāvahī*, is a collection of verses composed by ekāmnakṣayī. It provides an insight into women's social and spiritual experiences. Punna, a gāvī or slave woman, went to the river each morning to fetch water for her master's household. There she would daily see a Brahmana performing bathing rituals. One morning she spoke to him. The following are verses composed by Punna, recording her conversation with the Brahmana:

I am a water carrier:  
 Even in the cold  
 I have always gone down to the water  
 frightened of punishment  
 Or the angry words of high class women.  
 So what are you afraid of Brahmana/  
 That makes you go down to the water  
 (Though) your limbs shake with the bitter cold?

The Brahmana replied:  
 I am doing good to prevent evil;  
 anyone young or old  
 who has done something bad  
 is freed by washing in water.

Punna said:  
 Whoever told you  
 You are freed from evil by washing in the water?...  
 In that case all the frogs and turtles  
 Would go to heaven, and so would the water snakes  
 and crocodiles!  
 (Instead) Don't do that thing,  
 the fear of which  
 leads you to the water.  
 Stop now Brahmana!  
 Save your skin from the cold ...

➲ Which of the teachings of the Buddha are evident in this composition?

Fig. 4.8

A woman water-carrier, Mathura, c. third century CE



## Source 7

**Rules for monks and nuns**

These are some of the rules laid down in the *Ylqd|d Slwdnd=*

When a new felt (blanket/rug) has been made by a *eklnmkx*, it is to be kept for (at least) six years. If after less than six years he should have another new felt (blanket/rug) made, regardless of whether or not he has disposed of the first, then – unless he has been authorised by the *eklnnkxv* – it is to be forfeited and confessed.

In case a *eklnnkx* arriving at a family residence is presented with cakes or cooked grain-meal, he may accept two or three bowlfuls if he so desires. If he should accept more than that, it is to be confessed. Having accepted the two or three bowlfuls and having taken them from there, he is to share them among the *eklnnkxv*. This is the proper course here.

Should any *eklnnkx*, having set out bedding in a lodging belonging to the *vdqjk#* – or having had it set out – and then on departing neither put it away nor have it put away, or should he go without taking leave, it is to be confessed.

➲ Can you explain why these rules were framed?

Buddhism grew rapidly both during the lifetime of the Buddha and after his death, as it appealed to many people dissatisfied with existing religious practices and confused by the rapid social changes taking place around them. The importance attached to conduct and values rather than claims of superiority based on birth, the emphasis placed on *metta* (fellow feeling) and *karuna* (compassion), especially for those who were younger and weaker than oneself, were ideas that drew men and women to Buddhist teachings.

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➲ Discuss...

Why do you think a *dasi* like Punna wanted to join the *sangha*?

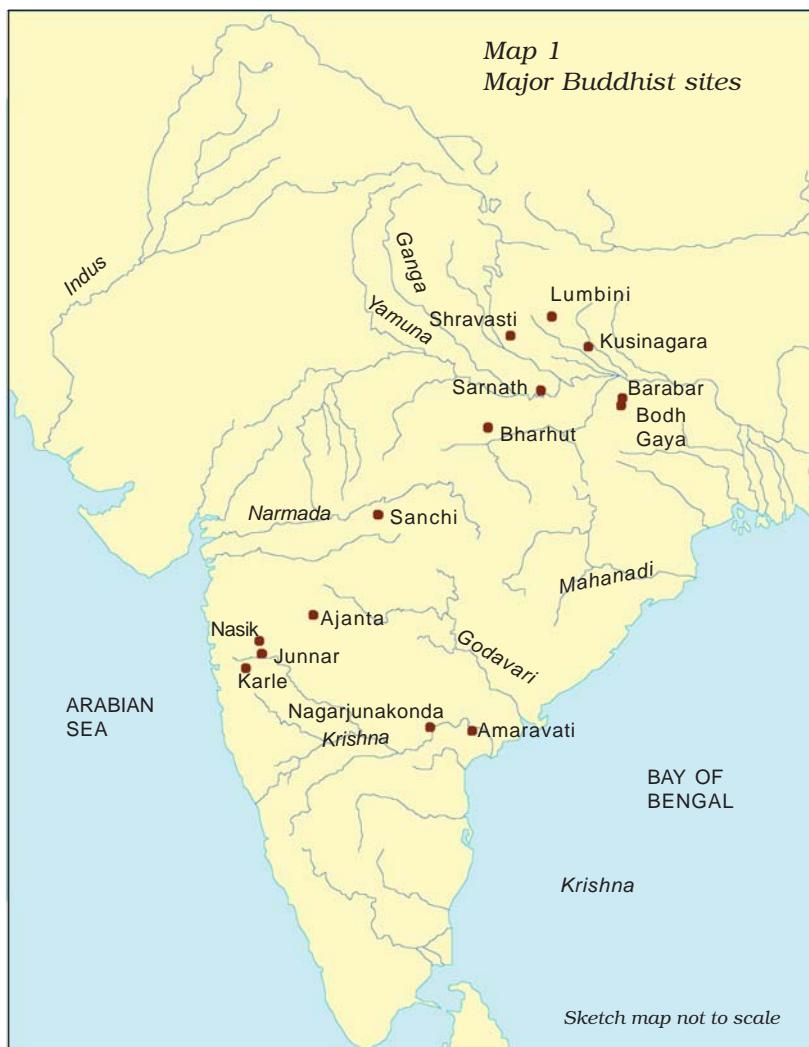
## 7. STUPAS

We have seen that Buddhist ideas and practices emerged out of a process of dialogue with other traditions – including those of the Brahmanas, Jainas and several others, not all of whose ideas and practices were preserved in texts. Some of these interactions can be seen in the ways in which sacred places came to be identified.

From earliest times, people tended to regard certain places as sacred. These included sites with special trees or unique rocks, or sites of awe-inspiring natural beauty. These sites, with small shrines attached to them, were sometimes described as *chaityas*.

Buddhist literature mentions several *chaityas*. It also describes places associated with the

*Chaitya* may also have been derived from the word *chita*, meaning a funeral pyre, and by extension a funerary mound.



Buddha's life – where he was born (Lumbini), where he attained enlightenment (Bodh Gaya), where he gave his first sermon (Sarnath) and where he attained *nibbana* (Kusinagara). Gradually, each of these places came to be regarded as sacred. We know that about 200 years after the time of the Buddha, Asoka erected a pillar at Lumbini to mark the fact that he had visited the place.

#### Source 8

### Why were stupas built

This is an excerpt from the Pdkdsdulqleedqd Vxwd, part of the Vxwd#Slwdhd=

As the Buddha lay dying, Ananda asked him:

"What are we to do Lord, with the remains of the Tathagata (another name for the Buddha)?"

The Buddha replied: "Hinder not yourselves Ananda by honouring the remains of the Tathagata. Be zealous, be intent on your own good."

But when pressed further, the Buddha said:

"At the four crossroads they should erect a wkxsd (Pali for stupa) to the Tathagata. And whosoever shall there place garlands or perfume ... or make a salutation there, or become in its presence calm of heart, that shall long be to them for a profit and joy."

➲ Look at Fig. 4.15 and see whether you can identify some of these practices.

### 7.1 Why were stupas built

There were other places too that were regarded as sacred. This was because relics of the Buddha such as his bodily remains or objects used by him were buried there. These were mounds known as stupas.

The tradition of erecting stupas may have been pre-Buddhist, but they came to be associated with Buddhism. Since they contained relics regarded as sacred, the entire stupa came to be venerated as an emblem of both the Buddha and Buddhism. According to a Buddhist text known as the *Ashokavadana*, Asoka distributed portions of the Buddha's relics to every important town and ordered the construction of stupas over them. By the second century BCE a number of stupas, including those at Bharhut, Sanchi and Sarnath (Map 1), had been built.

### 7.2 How were stupas built

Inscriptions found on the railings and pillars of stupas record donations made for building and decorating them. Some donations were made by kings such as the Satavahanas; others were made by guilds, such as that of the ivory workers who financed part of one of the gateways at Sanchi. Hundreds of donations were made by women and men who mention their names, sometimes adding the name of the place from where they came, as well as their occupations and names of their relatives. *Bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunis* also contributed towards building these monuments.

### 7.3 The structure of the stupa

The stupa (a Sanskrit word meaning a heap) originated as a simple semi-circular mound of earth, later called *anda*. Gradually, it evolved into a more complex structure, balancing round and square shapes. Above the *anda* was the *harmika*, a balcony-like structure that represented the abode of the gods.

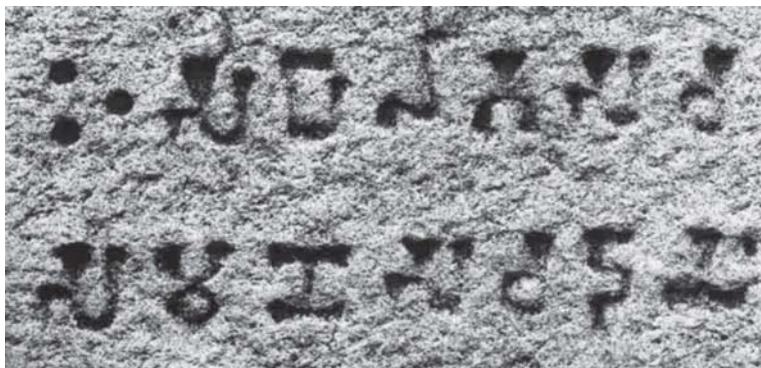


Fig. 4.9

A votive inscription from Sanchi. Hundreds of similar inscriptions have also been found at Bharhut and Amaravati.

Arising from the *harmika* was a mast called the *yashti*, often surmounted by a *chhatri* or umbrella. Around the mound was a railing, separating the sacred space from the secular world.

The early stupas at Sanchi and Bharhut were plain except for the stone railings, which resembled a bamboo or wooden fence, and the gateways, which were richly carved and installed at the four cardinal points. Worshippers entered through the eastern gateway and walked around the mound in a clockwise direction keeping the mound on the right, imitating the sun's course through the sky. Later, the mound of the stupas came to be elaborately carved with niches and sculptures as at Amaravati, and Shahji-ki-Dheri in Peshawar (Pakistan).

### Discuss...

What are the similarities and differences between the plan of the Great Stupa, Sanchi (Fig. 4.10a) and the photograph (Fig. 4.3)?

What are the features of the building that are clearest in the plan? What are the features that are best seen in the elevation?

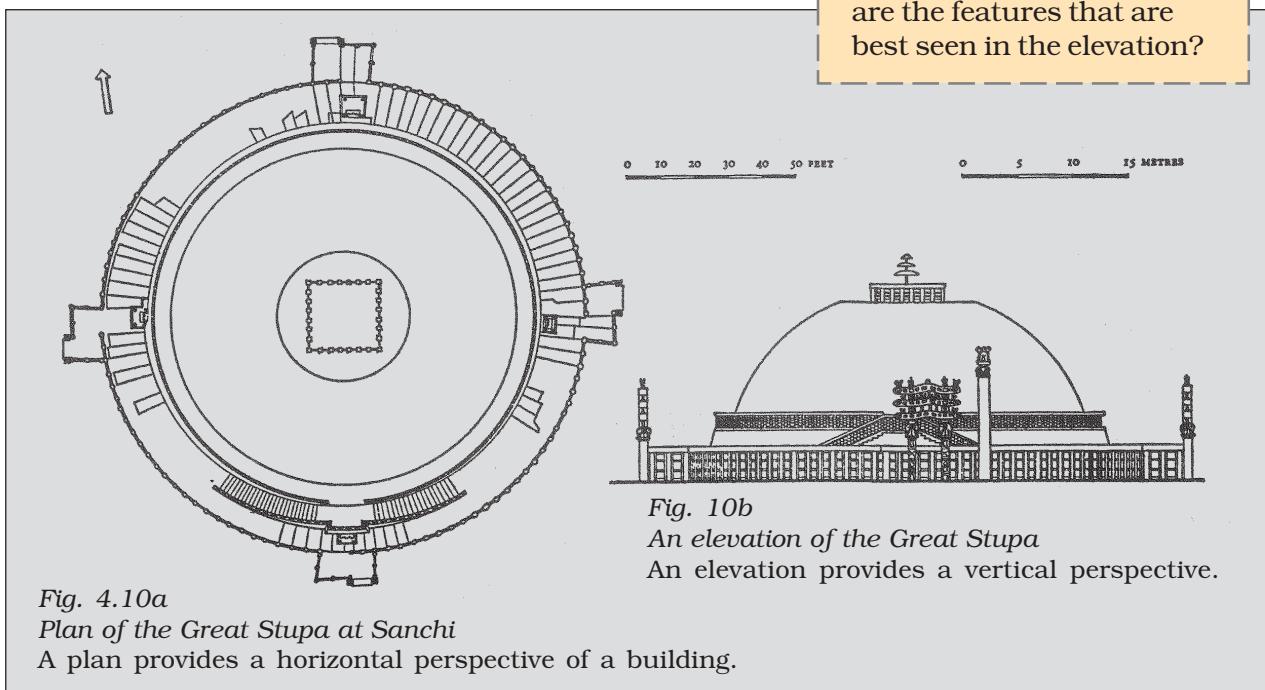


Fig. 4.10a

Plan of the Great Stupa at Sanchi

A plan provides a horizontal perspective of a building.

Fig. 10b

An elevation of the Great Stupa

An elevation provides a vertical perspective.

## 8. “DISCOVERING” STUPAS

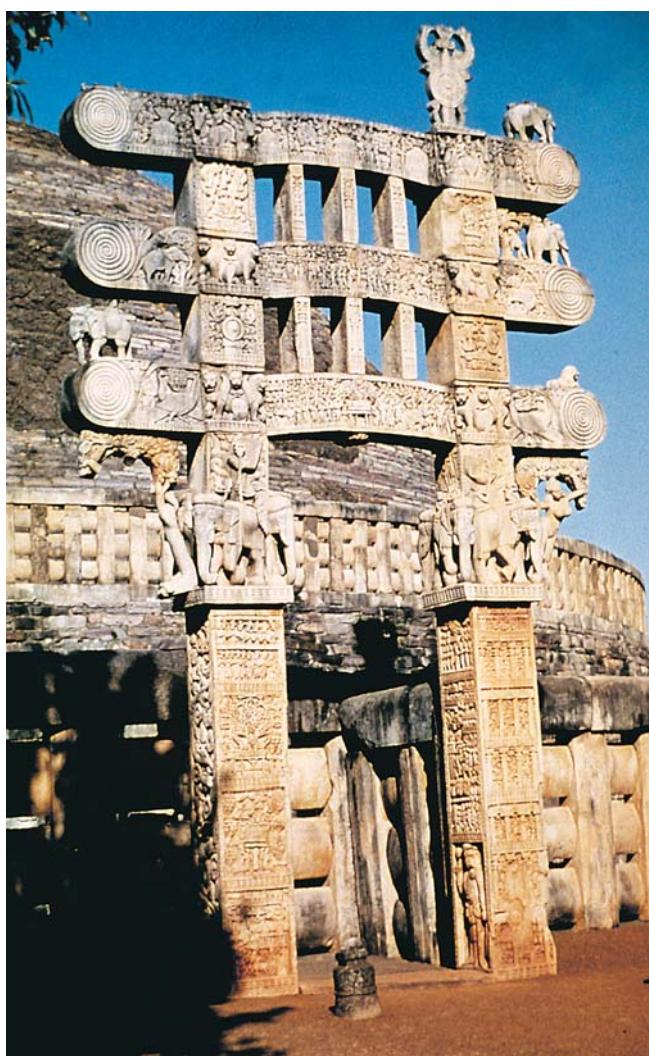
### THE FATE OF AMARAVATI AND SANCHI

Each stupa has a history of its own – as we have just seen, some of these are histories of how they were built. But there are histories of discoveries as well, and let us now turn to some of these. In 1796, a local raja who wanted to build a temple stumbled upon the ruins of the stupa at Amaravati. He decided to use the stone, and thought there might be some treasure buried in what seemed to be a hill. Some years later, a British official named Colin Mackenzie (see also Chapter 7) visited the site. Although he found several pieces of sculpture and made detailed drawings of them, these reports were never published.

In 1854, Walter Elliot, the commissioner of Guntur (Andhra Pradesh), visited Amaravati and collected several sculpture panels and took them away to Madras. (These came to be called the Elliot marbles after him.) He also discovered the remains of the western gateway and came to the conclusion that the structure at Amaravati was one of the largest and most magnificent Buddhist stupas ever built. By the 1850s, some of the slabs from Amaravati had begun to be taken to different places: to the Asiatic Society of Bengal at Calcutta, to the India Office in Madras and some even to London. It was not unusual to find these sculptures adorning the gardens of British administrators. In fact, any new official in the area continued to remove sculptures from the site on the grounds that earlier officials had done the same.

One of the few men who had a different point of view was an archaeologist named H.H. Cole. He wrote: “It seems to me a suicidal and indefensible policy to allow the country to be looted of original works of ancient art.” He believed that museums should have plaster-cast facsimiles of sculpture, whereas the originals should remain

*Fig. 4.11  
The eastern gateway, Sanchi  
Notice the vibrant sculpture.*



where they had been found. Unfortunately, Cole did not succeed in convincing the authorities about Amaravati, although his plea for *in situ* preservation was adopted in the case of Sanchi.

**Why did Sanchi survive while Amaravati did not?** Perhaps Amaravati was discovered before scholars understood the value of the finds and realised how critical it was to preserve things where they had been found instead of removing them from the site. When Sanchi was “discovered” in 1818, three of its four gateways were still standing, the fourth was lying on the spot where it had fallen and the mound was in good condition. Even so, it was suggested that the gateway be taken to either Paris or London; finally a number of factors helped to keep Sanchi as it was, and so it stands, whereas the *mahachaitya* at Amaravati is now just an insignificant little mound, totally denuded of its former glory.

## 9. SCULPTURE

We have just seen how sculptures were removed from stupas and transported all the way to Europe. This happened partly because those who saw them considered them to be beautiful and valuable, and wanted to keep them for themselves. Let us look at some of these more closely.

### 9.1 Stories in stone

You may have seen wandering storytellers carrying scrolls (*charanachitras*) of cloth or paper with pictures on them and pointing to the pictures as they tell the story.

Look at Figure 4.13. At first sight the sculpture seems to depict a rural scene, with thatched huts and trees. However, art historians who have carefully studied the sculpture at Sanchi identify it as a scene from the *Vessantara Jataka*. This is a story about a generous prince who gave away everything to a Brahmana, and went to live in the forest with his wife and children. As you can see in this

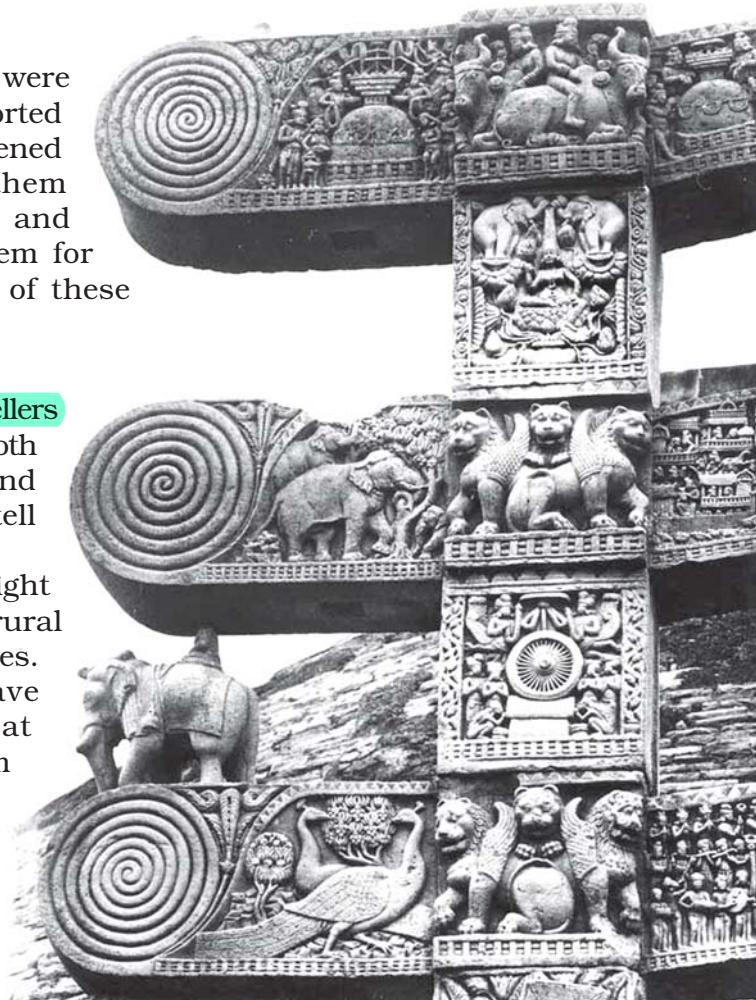
### Discuss...

Read Section 1 again.  
Give your reasons why  
Sanchi survived.

*In situ* means on the spot.

Fig. 4.12

A section of the gateway  
Do you think the sculptors at  
Sanchi wanted to depict a scroll  
being unfurled?





*Fig. 4.13  
A part of the northern gateway*

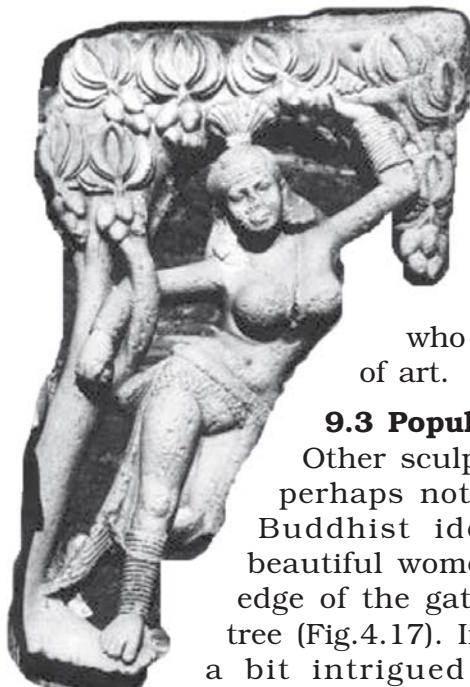
*Fig. 4.14 (far right)  
Worshipping the Bodhi tree  
Notice the tree, the seat, and the people around it.  
Fig. 4.15 (middle right)  
Worshipping the stupa  
Fig. 4.16 (below)  
Setting in motion the wheel of dharma*

case, historians often try to understand the meaning of sculpture by comparing it with textual evidence.

### 9.2 Symbols of worship

Art historians had to acquire familiarity with hagiographies of the Buddha in order to understand Buddhist sculpture. According to hagiographies, the Buddha attained enlightenment while meditating under a tree. Many early sculptors did not show the Buddha in human form – instead, they showed his presence through symbols. The empty seat (Fig. 4.14) was meant to indicate the meditation of the Buddha, and the stupa (Fig. 4.15) was meant to represent the *mahaparinibbana*. Another frequently used symbol was the wheel (Fig. 4.16). This stood for the first sermon of the Buddha, delivered at Sarnath. As is obvious, such sculptures cannot be understood literally – for instance, the tree does not stand





simply for a tree, but symbolises an event in the life of the Buddha. In order to understand such symbols, historians have to familiarise themselves with the traditions of those who produced these works of art.

### 9.3 Popular traditions

Other sculptures at Sanchi were perhaps not directly inspired by Buddhist ideas. These include beautiful women swinging from the edge of the gateway, holding onto a tree (Fig. 4.17). Initially, scholars were a bit intrigued about this image, which seemed to have little to do with renunciation. However, after examining other literary traditions, they realised that it could be a representation of what is described in Sanskrit as a *shalabhanjika*. According to popular belief, this was a woman whose touch caused trees to flower and bear fruit. It is likely that this was regarded as an auspicious symbol and integrated into the decoration of the stupa. The *shalabhanjika* motif suggests that many people who turned to Buddhism enriched it with their own pre-Buddhist and even non-Buddhist beliefs, practices and ideas.

Some of the recurrent motifs in the sculpture at Sanchi were evidently derived from these traditions.

There are other images as well. For instance, some of the finest depictions of animals are found there. These animals include elephants, horses, monkeys and cattle. While the *Jatakas* contain several animal stories that are depicted at Sanchi, it is likely that many of these animals were carved to create lively scenes to draw viewers. Also, animals were often used as symbols of human attributes. Elephants, for example, were depicted to signify strength and wisdom.

Fig. 4.17  
The woman at the gate

Fig. 4.18  
An elephant at Sanchi

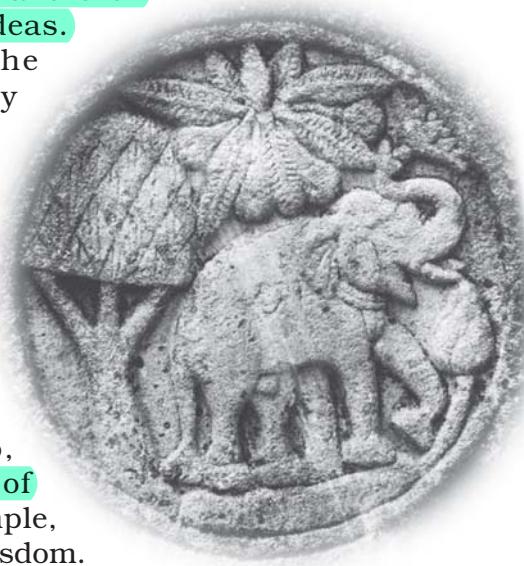




Fig. 4.19  
Gajalakshmi

Fig. 4.20  
A painting from Ajanta  
Note the seated figure and those  
serving him.

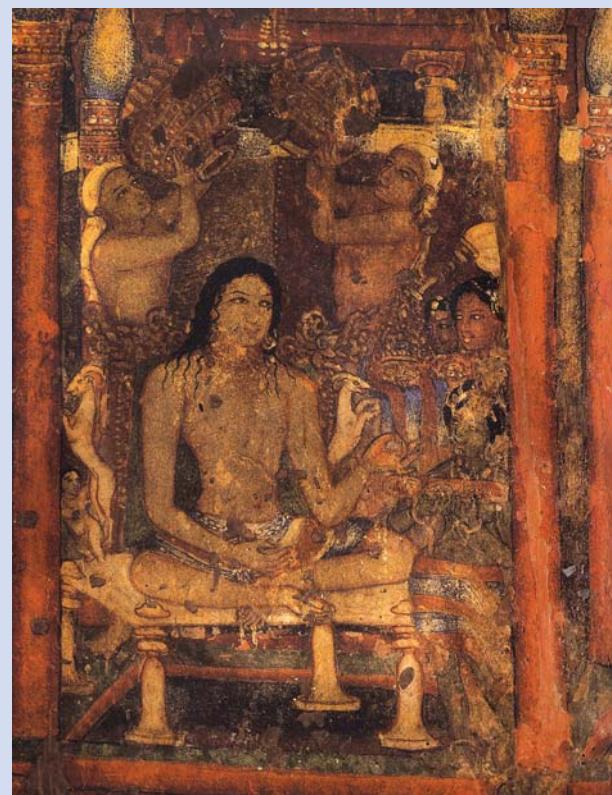
Fig. 4.21  
A serpent at Sanchi



### Paintings from the past

While stone sculpture survives the ravages of time and is therefore most easily available to the historian, other visual means of communication, including paintings, were also used in the past. Those that have survived best are on walls of caves, of which those from Ajanta (Maharashtra) are the most famous.

The paintings at Ajanta depict stories from the *Mādhyāvaka*. These include depictions of courtly life, processions, men and women at work, and festivals. The artists used the technique of shading to give a three-dimensional quality. Some of the paintings are extremely naturalistic.



Another motif is that of a woman surrounded by lotuses and elephants (Fig. 4.19), which seem to be sprinkling water on her as if performing an *abhisheka* or consecration. While some historians identify the figure as **Maya, the mother of the Buddha**, others identify her with a popular **goddess, Gajalakshmi** – literally, the goddess of good fortune – who is associated with elephants. It is also possible that

devotees who saw these sculptures identified the figure with both Maya and Gajalakshmi.

Consider, too, the serpent, which is found on several pillars (Fig. 4.21). This motif seems to be derived from popular traditions, which were not always recorded in texts. Interestingly, one of the earliest modern art historians, James Fergusson, considered Sanchi to be a centre of tree and serpent worship. He was not familiar with Buddhist literature – most of which had not yet been translated – and arrived at this conclusion by studying only the images on their own.

## 10. NEW RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

### 10.1 The development of Mahayana Buddhism

By the first century CE, there is evidence of changes in Buddhist ideas and practices. Early Buddhist teachings had given great importance to self-effort in achieving *nibbana*. Besides, the Buddha was regarded as a human being who attained enlightenment and *nibbana* through his own efforts. However, gradually the idea of a saviour emerged. It was believed that he was the one who could ensure salvation. Simultaneously, the concept of the Bodhisatta also developed. Bodhisattas were perceived as deeply compassionate beings who accumulated merit through their efforts but used this not to attain *nibbana* and thereby abandon the world, but to help others. The worship of images of the Buddha and Bodhisattas became an important part of this tradition.

This new way of thinking was called Mahayana – literally, the “great vehicle”. Those who adopted these beliefs described the older tradition as Hinayana or the “lesser vehicle”.

#### Hinayana or Theravada?

Supporters of Mahayana regarded other Buddhists as followers of Hinayana. However, followers of the older tradition described themselves as *whudydglyv*, that is, those who followed the path of old, respected teachers, the *whudv*.

#### Discuss...

Bone, terracotta and metal can also be used for sculpture. Find out more about these.

Fig. 4.22

An image of the Buddha from Mathura, c. first century CE



*Fig. 4.23  
The Varaha or boar avatar of Vishnu rescuing the earth goddess, Aihole (Karnataka) c. sixth century ce*

➲ What does the proportion of the figures suggest?



## 10.2 The growth of Puranic Hinduism

The notion of a saviour was not unique to Buddhism. We find similar ideas being developed in different ways within traditions that we now consider part of Hinduism. These included Vaishnavism (a form of Hinduism within which Vishnu was worshipped as the principal deity) and Shaivism (a tradition within which Shiva was regarded as the chief god), in which there was growing emphasis on the worship of a chosen deity. In such worship the bond between the devotee and the god was visualised as one of love and devotion, or bhakti.

In the case of Vaishnavism, cults developed around the various avatars or incarnations of the deity. Ten avatars were recognised within the tradition. These were forms that the deity was believed to have assumed in order to save the world whenever it was threatened by disorder and destruction because of the dominance of evil forces. It is likely that different avatars were popular in different parts of the country. Recognising each of these local deities as a form of Vishnu was one way of creating a more unified religious tradition.

Some of these forms were represented in sculptures, as were other deities. Shiva, for instance, was symbolised by the *linga*, although he was occasionally represented in human form too. All such representations depicted a complex set of ideas about the deities and their attributes through symbols such as head-dresses, ornaments and *ayudhas* – weapons or auspicious objects the deities hold in their hands – how they are seated, etc.

To understand the meanings of these sculptures historians



have to be familiar with the stories behind them – many of which are contained in the Puranas, compiled by Brahmanas (by about the middle of the first millennium CE). They contained much that had been composed and been in circulation for centuries, including stories about gods and goddesses. Generally, they were written in simple Sanskrit verse, and were meant to be read aloud to everybody, including women and Shudras, who did not have access to Vedic learning.

Much of what is contained in the Puranas evolved through interaction amongst people – priests, merchants, and ordinary men and women who travelled from place to place sharing ideas and beliefs. We know for instance that Vasudeva-Krishna was an important deity in the Mathura region. Over centuries, his worship spread to other parts of the country as well.

### 10.3 Building temples

Around the time that the stupas at sites such as Sanchi were acquiring their present form, the first temples to house images of gods and goddesses were also being built. The early temple was a small square room, called the *garbhagriha*, with a single doorway for the worshipper to enter and offer worship to the image. Gradually, a tall structure, known as the

*Fig. 4.24*  
An image of Durga, Mahabalipuram (Tamil Nadu), c. sixth century CE

→ Identify the ways in which the artists have depicted movement. Find out more about the story depicted in this sculpture.



*Fig. 4.25  
A temple in Deogarh  
(Uttar Pradesh), c. fifth century CE*

➲ Identify the remains of the shikhara and the entrance to the garbhagriha.

**shikhara**, was built over the central shrine. Temple walls were often decorated with sculpture. Later temples became far more elaborate – with assembly halls, huge walls and gateways, and arrangements for supplying water (see also Chapter 7).

One of the unique features of early temples was that some of these were hollowed out of huge rocks, as artificial caves. The tradition of building artificial caves was an old one. Some of the earliest (Fig. 4.27)



*Fig. 4.26  
Vishnu reclining on the serpent  
Shesha, sculpture from Deogarh  
(Uttar Pradesh), c. fifth century CE*

of these were constructed in the third century BCE on the orders of Asoka for renouncers who belonged to the Ajivika sect.

This tradition evolved through various stages and culminated much later – in the eighth century – in the carving out of an entire temple, that of Kailashnatha (a name of Shiva).

A copperplate inscription records the amazement of the chief sculptor after he completed the temple at Ellora: “Oh how did I make it!”



*Fig. 4.27  
Entrance to a cave at Barabar  
(Bihar), c. third century BCE*

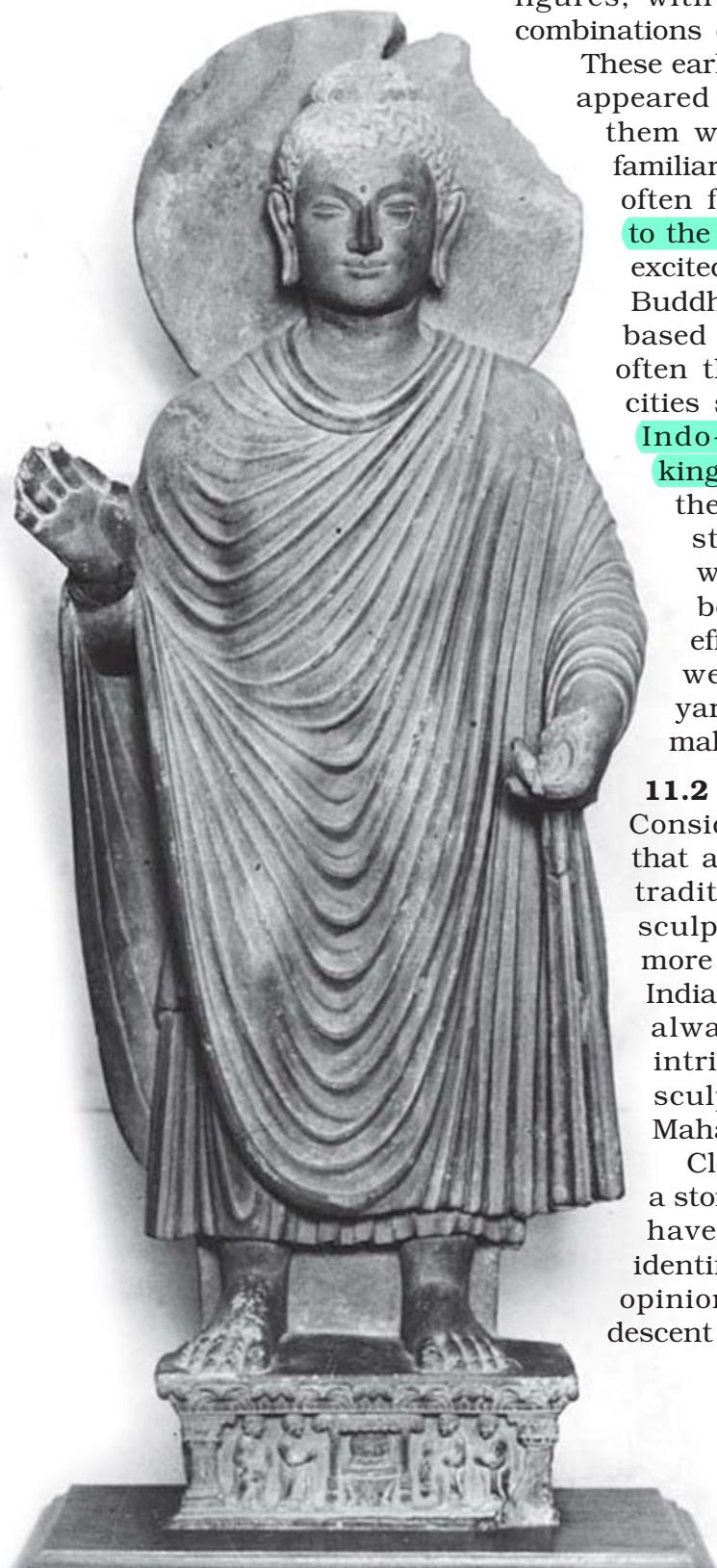
*Fig. 4.28  
Kailashnatha Temple, Ellora  
(Maharashtra). This entire structure  
is carved out of a single piece of  
rock.*

## 11. CAN WE “SEE” EVERYTHING?

By now you have had a glimpse of the rich visual traditions that existed in the past – expressed in brick and stone architecture, sculpture and painting. We have seen that much has been destroyed and lost over the centuries. Nevertheless, what remains and has been preserved conveys a sense of the vision of the artists, sculptors, masons and architects who created these spectacular works. Yet, do we always automatically understand what they wanted to convey? Can we ever know what these images meant to people who saw them and venerated them about 2,000 years ago?

### 11.1 Grappling with the unfamiliar

It will be useful to recall that when nineteenth-century European scholars first saw some of the sculptures of gods and goddesses, they could not understand what these were about. Sometimes, they were horrified by what seemed to them grotesque



figures, with multiple arms and heads or with combinations of human and animal forms.

These early scholars tried to make sense of what appeared to be strange images by comparing them with sculpture with which they were familiar, that from ancient Greece. While they often found early Indian sculpture inferior to the works of Greek artists, they were very excited when they discovered images of the Buddha and Bodhisattas that were evidently based on Greek models. These were, more often than not, found in the northwest, in cities such as Taxila and Peshawar, where Indo-Greek rulers had established kingdoms in the second century BCE. As these images were closest to the Greek statues these scholars were familiar with, they were considered to be the best examples of early Indian art. In effect, these scholars adopted a strategy we all frequently use – devising yardsticks derived from the familiar to make sense of the unfamiliar.

### 11.2 If text and image do not match ...

Consider another problem. We have seen that art historians often draw upon textual traditions to understand the meaning of sculptures. While this is certainly a far more efficacious strategy than comparing Indian images with Greek statues, it is not always easy to use. One of the most intriguing examples of this is a famous sculpture along a huge rock surface in Mahabalipuram (Tamil Nadu).

Clearly, Fig. 4.30 is a vivid depiction of a story. But which story is it? Art historians have searched through the Puranas to identify it and are sharply divided in their opinions. Some feel that this depicts the descent of the river Ganga from heaven – the

*Fig. 4.29  
A Bodhisatta from Gandhara  
Note the clothes and the hairstyle.*

natural cleft through the centre of the rock surface might represent the river. The story itself is narrated in the Puranas and the epics. Others feel that it represents a story from the *Mahabharata* – Arjuna doing penance on the river bank in order to acquire arms – pointing to the central figure of an ascetic.

Finally, remember that many rituals, religious beliefs and practices were not recorded in a permanent, visible form – as monuments, or sculpture, or even paintings. These included daily practices, as well as those associated with special occasions. Many communities and peoples may not have felt the need for keeping lasting records, even as they may have had vibrant traditions of religious activities and philosophical ideas. In fact, the spectacular instances we have focused on in this chapter are just the tip of the iceberg.

### Discuss...

Describe any religious activity you have seen.  
Is it permanently recorded in any form?

*Fig. 4.30  
A sculpture in Mahabalipuram*



### TIMELINE 1

#### MAJOR RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENTS

c. 1500-1000 BCE	Early Vedic traditions
c. 1000-500 BCE	Later Vedic traditions
c. sixth century BCE	Early Upanishads; Jainism, Buddhism
c. third century BCE	First stupas
c. second century BCE onwards	Development of Mahayana Buddhism, Vaishnavism, Shaivism and goddess cults
c. third century CE	Earliest temples

### TIMELINE 2

#### LANDMARKS IN THE DISCOVERY AND PRESERVATION OF EARLY MONUMENTS AND SCULPTURE

##### Nineteenth century

1814	Founding of the Indian Museum, Calcutta
1834	Publication of <i>Essay on the Architecture of the Hindus</i> , by Ram Raja; Cunningham explores the stupa at Sarnath
1835-1842	James Fergusson surveys major archaeological sites
1851	Establishment of the Government Museum, Madras
1854	Alexander Cunningham publishes <i>Bhilsa Topes</i> , one of the earliest works on Sanchi
1878	Rajendra Lala Mitra publishes <i>Buddha Gaya: The Heritage of Sakya Muni</i>
1880	H.H. Cole appointed Curator of Ancient Monuments
1888	Passing of the <b>Treasure Trove Act</b> , giving the government the right to acquire all objects of archaeological interest

##### Twentieth century

1914	John Marshall and Alfred Foucher publish <i>The Monuments of Sanchi</i>
1923	John Marshall publishes the <i>Conservation Manual</i>
1955	Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru lays the foundation stone of the <b>National Museum</b> , New Delhi
1989	Sanchi declared a World Heritage Site



### ANSWER IN 100-150 WORDS

1. Were the ideas of the Upanishadic thinkers different from those of the fatalists and materialists? Give reasons for your answer.
2. Summarise the central teachings of Jainism.
3. Discuss the role of the begums of Bhopal in preserving the stupa at Sanchi.
4. Read this short inscription and answer:

In the year 33 of the *maharaja* Huvishka (a Kushana ruler), in the first month of the hot season on the eighth day, a Bodhisatta was set up at Madhuvanaka by the *bhikkhuni* Dhanavati, the sister's daughter of the *bhikkhuni* Buddhamita, who knows the *Tipitaka*, the female pupil of the *bhikkhu* Bala, who knows the *Tipitaka*, together with her father and mother.

- (a) How did Dhanavati date her inscription?
  - (b) Why do you think she installed an image of the Bodhisatta?
  - (c) Who were the relatives she mentioned?
  - (d) What Buddhist text did she know?
  - (e) From whom did she learn this text?
5. Why do you think women and men joined the *sangha*?

*Fig. 4.31*  
A sculpture in Sanchi

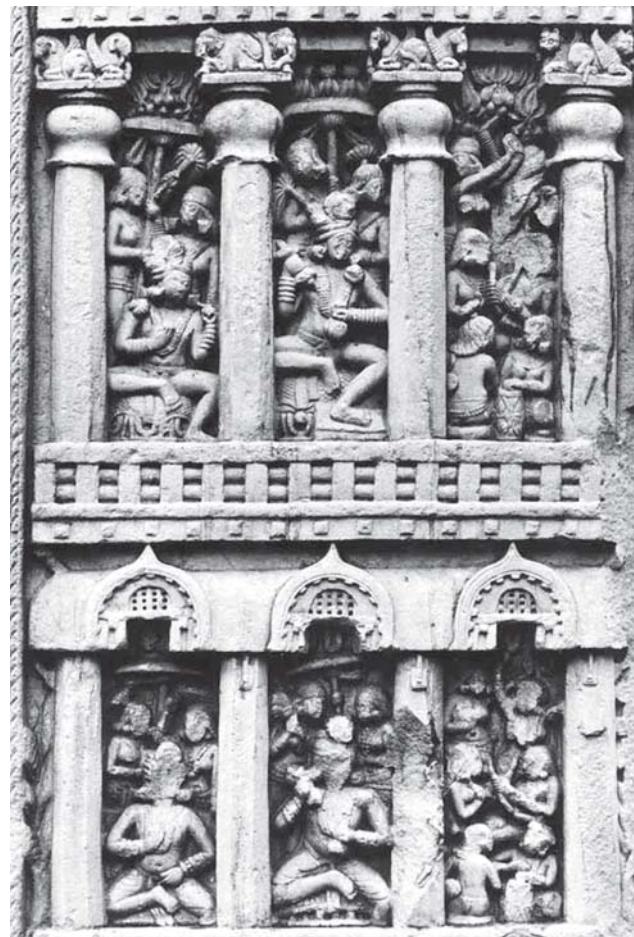




**WRITE A SHORT ESSAY (ABOUT 500 WORDS) ON THE FOLLOWING:**

6. To what extent does knowledge of Buddhist literature help in understanding the sculpture at Sanchi?
7. Figs. 4.32 and 4.33 are two scenes from Sanchi. Describe what you see in each of them, focusing on the architecture, plants and animals, and the activities. Identify which one shows a rural scene and which an urban scene, giving reasons for your answer.
8. Discuss the development in sculpture and architecture associated with the rise of Vaishnavism and Shaivism.
9. Discuss how and why stupas were built.

*Fig. 4.33*



*Fig. 4.32*





### MAP WORK

10. On an outline world map, mark the areas to which Buddhism spread. Trace the land and sea routes from the subcontinent to these areas.



### PROJECT (ANY ONE)

11. Of the religious traditions discussed in this chapter, is there any that is practised in your neighbourhood? What are the religious texts used today, and how are they preserved and transmitted? Are images used in worship? If so, are these similar to or different from those described in this chapter? Describe the buildings used for religious activities today, comparing them with early stupas and temples.
12. Collect at least five pictures of sculpture or painting, belonging to different periods and regions, on the religious traditions described in this chapter. Remove their captions, and show each one to two people, and ask them to describe what they see. Compare their descriptions and prepare a report on your findings.



#### If you would like to know more, read:

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Wkh# Zrogħu#wkdw#zdv#Lgħid.  
Rupa, Calcutta.

N.N. Bhattacharyya. 1996.  
Lgħdgħiż-żebbuġi kliemha | 1  
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### **Theme 1**

*Fig. 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 1.8, 1.11, 1.12, 1.13, 1.14, 1.15, 1.16, 1.20, 1.22, 1.23, 1.26, 1.28, 1.29, Fig 1.30 of exercises:*

*Archaeological Survey of India and National Museum,  
New Delhi*

*Fig. 1.7, 1.9, 1.10, 1.17, 1.18, 1.19, 1.21, 1.24:*

*Prof. Gregory L. Possehl*

*Fig. 1.27:*

*Centre for Cultural Resources and Training, New Delhi*

### **Theme 2**

*Fig. 2.1: American Institute of Indian Studies, Gurgaon*

*Fig. 2.2, 2.6: Archaeological Survey of India*

*Fig. 2.3, 2.5, 2.10:*

*Centre for Cultural Resources and Training, New Delhi*

*Fig. 2.4, 2.7, 2.9, 2.12, 2.13: National Museum, New Delhi*

*Fig. 2.8: Wikipedia*

### **Theme 3**

*Fig. 3.1, 3.10: Archaeological Survey of India*

*Fig. 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6, 3.7, 3.8, 3.9: National Museum,  
New Delhi*

### **Theme 4**

*Fig. 4.1, 4.5, 4.8, 4.9, 4.12, 4.13, 4.14, 4.15, 4.16, 4.17, 4.18, 4.19, 4.21, 4.22, 4.23, 4.24, 4.25, 4.26, 4.27, 4.29, 4.31, fig 4.32 and 33 in exercise:*

*American Institute of Indian Studies, Gurgaon*

*Fig. 4.2: Wikipedia*

*Fig. 4.3, 4.11, 4.28, 4.30:*

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*Fig. 4.4, 4.6, 4.7, 4.20: National Museum, New Delhi*