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## ***Everyday Life in Ancient India***



**EVERYDAY LIFE IN  
ANCIENT INDIA**

**PADMINI SENGUPTA**



**GEOFFREY CUMBERLEGE**

***Oxford University Press***

*Oxford University Press, Amen House, London E.C.4*  
GLASGOW NEW YORK TORONTO MELBOURNE WELLINGTON  
BOMBAY CALCUTTA MADRAS CAPE TOWN  
*Geoffrey Cumberlege, Publisher to the University*

FIRST PUBLISHED 1950

PRINTED IN INDIA BY V. V. BAMBARDEKAR AT THE INDIA  
PRINTING WORKS, FORT, BOMBAY AND PUBLISHED BY GEOFFREY  
CUMBERLEGE, OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, APOLLO BUNDER, BOMBAY

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The Publishers gratefully acknowledge help in selecting and describing illustrations given by the Curator, Archæological Section, Prince of Wales Museum of Western India, Bombay, the Director-General of Archæology in India, and the Keeper of the Department of Oriental Antiquities, British Museum. Special thanks are due to Dr H. D. Sankalia, of the Deccan College Research Institute, Poona and to Professor Nilakanta Sastri, lately Professor of Indian History in Madras University, who read proofs of the chapters dealing with prehistoric times and South India.

Most of the illustrations have been drawn by D. C. Joglekar. The initial letters are the work of Y. K. Shukla.

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## I. INTRODUCTION



WHEN many of the great nations of today were still undiscovered and unknown, India held the master-key to the mysteries of a profound knowledge and revealed a high standard of civilization. Our forefathers seem to have lived in a golden age. They were a settled people with an organized society, who flourished in a state of full-grown civilization. They left an indelible mark on the whole of India, from the snowy Himalayas to the sun-steeped shores of the South, which will never be effaced.

Even earlier, before the Aryans<sup>1</sup> came to India, our country vied with the first two centres of higher civilization of the ancient East in the third millennium, and confronted Egypt and Babylonia with a thoroughly individual culture of her own. These three countries had to organize a corporate life in order to adjust their conditions to the alluvial plains in which their people lived. The rivers had to be controlled; and it was no easy matter subduing the powerful agents of nature to the will of man. Our ancestors nevertheless succeeded, and thereby created

<sup>1</sup> Sometime in the second millennium B.C. large numbers of people from the steppes of Central Asia moved into northern India. They spoke a language belonging to the Indo-European family, and though in this book they are referred to as Aryans, they should properly be called Aryan-speakers or Indo-Europeans. Racially they were Nordics.

There are Aryan languages but there is no Aryan race. (See Oxford Pamphlets on Indian Affairs: S. K. Chatterji, *Languages and the Linguistic Problem*, and B. S. Guha, *Racial Elements in the Population*.)

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on the banks of the Indus and the Ravi an industrial and commercial civilization which was even vaster than those existing on the Nile and the Euphrates.

India stands out among the nations of the world because her civilization, born thousands of years ago, has never died. Throughout the vicissitudes of her fortunes she has continued to produce outstanding men, an idealist view of life, and a subtle philosophy which are essentially her own. As Jawaharlal Nehru has remarked: 'Nowhere else, apart from India and China, has there been a real continuity of civilization. In spite of all changes and battles and invasions, the thread of the ancient civilization has continued to run on in both these countries. It is true that both of them have fallen greatly from their old estate, and the old culture is covered up with a heap of dust, and sometimes filth, which the long ages have accumulated. But still it endures and is the basis of Indian life even today.'

Al-Biruni, a Muslim scholar of the eleventh century A.D., who entered India in the train of Mahmud of Ghazni and wrote *An Inquiry into India*, remarked (no doubt with a sense of humour) that 'the Hindus do not pay much attention to the historical order of things. They are careless in relating the chronological succession of their kings, and when they are pressed for information and are at a loss, not knowing what to say, they invariably take to tale-telling'. Historical data concerning India have so far scarcely been found. *Vamsavalis*, or lists of kings in lineal succession, were compiled quite early, as were also official records and dynastic chronicles; but their original object, unfortunately, was not the recording of the history of

## Introduction

ancient India. The earliest political event to which an approximate date can be given is the Saisunaga dynasty of Magadha which began about 600 B.C. The birth of the Buddha also stands out clearly against a confused background. But as we are not concerned with the history of ancient India, and only wish to know the everyday life of those past days—of how our ancestors lived and talked and ate and slept, what they worked at, what their village and town administration was like, how they built their streets and houses, what they wore, and whether they were educated—the information which is required is available in abundance in our ancient literature. By a careful study of these heirlooms, a vivid picture can be obtained of life in days of yore and a clear story laid bare before our wondering eyes. Writing was not actually developed before about 800 B.C., but learning passed from generation to generation by ear and constituted what is called *sruti*, i.e. that which is revealed by *hearing*. Nor is literature the only source at hand. There is a great deal of foreign testimony bearing witness, in a highly coloured manner perhaps, to the splendour and romantic glamour of ancient India. Romans, Greeks, Tibetans, Chinese, Persians and Muslims flocked into India and wrote their impressions of the land they visited. The evidence revealed by sculptures, coins, monuments, buildings and works of art, writings on palm leaves, excavations and archæological finds is also unlimited. Ancient history is actually built up on literary, epigraphic, numismatic, artistic and monumental sources.

The history of India from prehistoric times to the present day can roughly be divided into four parts :

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**Hindu India, up to the entrance of Mahmud of Ghazni at the end of the tenth century A.D. ; Muslim India until the coming of the East India Company in the mid-seventeenth century ; British India up to 1947 ; and Independent India. We shall only be concerned with the first era in this book, for with Muslim India our ancient history can roughly be said to end, and medieval history to begin.**

Before the existence of any civilization, palæolithic and neolithic men are known to have lived in India, for tools made of rough stone have been discovered, mostly on the east coast. After prehistoric man came the Dravidians, so long ago that no precise date can be given to their advent. They were the first cultured people to inhabit India. It is still not quite clear who the people were who lived in the Indus valley and on the banks of the Ravi, probably about 2500 B.C. ; but whatever their origin and racial affinity they were certainly a most advanced people. The recent excavations at Mohenjodaro and Harappa have revolutionized theories of ancient Indian life and have proved that man existed in this subcontinent in a highly civilized state long before the coming of the Aryans.

Still later discoveries tend to revolutionize the older theories, for Dr Wheeler's researches in Harappa in 1946 revealed a similarity between the fortified cities of the Indus valley civilization and those mentioned in the *Rig-Veda*.

The activities of the Archæological Department are also likely to throw light on the ancient past of that historical province Orissa, for a city believed to be 2,000 years old called 'Sisupalgarh is being unearthed

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near Bhuvanesar. The city seems to have been well-developed and prosperous and probably occupied by the Kalinga kings. Temples, dwellings and fragments of pottery are being unearthed. The long walls surrounding the city prove that it was a fortress built to resist enemy attacks.

Recent archæological research has further led to a linking of culture between North and South India, once believed to be so different in their respective Aryan and Dravidian civilizations. In 1945, Dr Wheeler recognized some specimens of Roman pottery which were imported into India in ancient times. These discoveries, coinciding with others in the Mysore State, have made it possible to assign dates to many chapters of South Indian history. The excavations at Sisupalgarh also reveal the mixed characteristics of North and South India, which may serve to prove a connexion between the two extremes of this vast subcontinent, once believed to be culturally entirely different.

The Aryans brought with them a new outlook and culture and a simple and healthy pastoral civilization; but as they expanded their territories and settled in the Gangetic valley, and further east and south, their rules of living became more and more complex until religious dogma introduced the dreadful caste system which still persists. Meanwhile, the great war described in the *Mahabharata* must have taken place between the Kauravas and the Pandavas (or Panchalas), which probably coincided in time with the Trojan war, in the twelfth or thirteenth century B.C. A rationalistic period followed, leading



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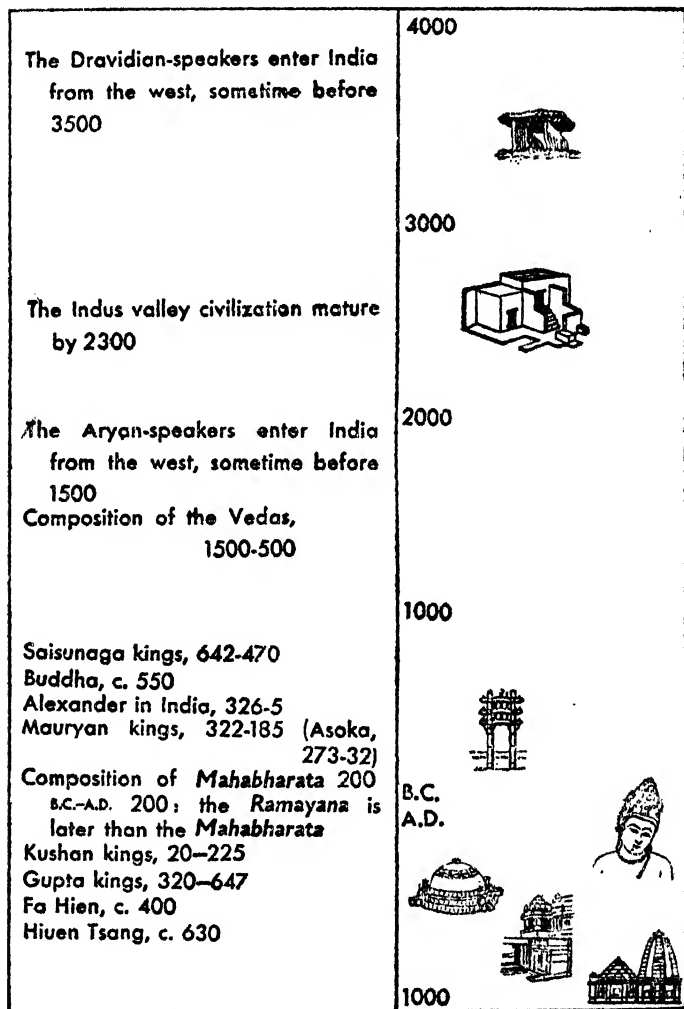
up to the humanitarian religions of Jainism and Buddhism, which broke away from the Brahmanic dogmas that had by this time taken a firm grip of the country. Buddhism reached its purest form during the benign reign of Asoka, of whom H. G. Wells says : ' Amidst the tens and thousands of names of monarchs that crowd the columns of history, their majesties and graciousnesses and serenities and royal highnesses and the like, the name of Asoka shines, and shines almost alone, a star. From the Volga to Japan his name is still honoured. China, Tibet and even India, though it has left his doctrine, preserve the tradition of his greatness. More living men cherish his greatness today than have ever heard the names of Constantine or Charlemagne.'

We have all read in our history books about the great and victorious Mauryan and Gupta emperors, but in between their brilliant reigns Indian history dwindled to humdrum routine. Foreign invasions tended to undermine the strong Aryan civilization, and the Brahmanic revival further obliterated the good effects of Buddhist days, but India once again achieved glory in the fifth century A.D. when King Vikramaditya held court with his 'nine gems' and the country flourished in art, literature and learning. The last two centuries of the Hindu period were static and negative, and the Muslims came into an India from which the light was once again beginning to fade. With the entrance of Mahmud of Ghazni, however, Hinduism strove to raise its head and, despite foreign inroads, re-established its culture. To this day its influence persists, even though it lacks the grandeur of ancient India.

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It has been said by an eminent historian that 'India

### TIME CHART



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suffers today in the estimation of the world more through the world's ignorance of the achievements of the heroes of Indian history than through the absence or insignificance of such achievements'. The same ignorance can be said to exist of Indian ways of living, of our social customs and our everyday tasks and thoughts. Therefore the story of our ancestors is worth relating. Their mighty deeds and high standard of living deserve to be a popular subject of study throughout the world; but a more important reason for striving to lift the veil which obscures India's past is that the everyday life of her ancient civilization is of essential human value. For it is a matter of ceaseless wonder that while, thousands of years ago, our forefathers were a great conquering race, yet despite their power and skill in warfare, and their extensive knowledge, they set an example to all mankind in generous ways of living, in hospitality, kindness and courtesy, in reverence to their elders and respect for women, in love for children and regard for animals, in education and in art, in the chastity and devotion of their women, and in humility and simplicity. In short, India is a treasure-house not only of great deeds but of manners and etiquette, of an ideal mode of living and of a simple pattern of human existence which it is hard to find in these chaotic days of world wars. It is my hope that in writing this book I have to some extent at least displayed the greatness that once was India.

### **SOURCE BOOKS**

V. GORDON CHILDE, *New Light on the Most Ancient East*  
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU, *Glimpses of World History*

## ***Introduction***

**NARENDRA KRISHNA SINHA and ANIL CHANDRA BANERJEE, *History of India***

**VINCENT A. SMITH, *The Early History of India***

**RADHA KUMUD MOOKERJI, *Hindu Civilization***

## II. THE EARLIEST CIVILIZATION



INDIA'S earliest inhabitants lived over a quarter of a million years ago. At that time the physical features of the country were not exactly as they are now. The Himalayas had not reached the great height that they have at present ; Sind, northern Gujarat and presumably the Gangetic plains were not covered by such vast amounts of silt and sand, whereas the country south of the Krishna river did not present a greatly weathered appearance. The valleys of the Indus, the Ganges, the Sabarmati and the Narbada were not so deeply cut as now. These rivers flowed at a much higher level then.

The climate was very different. In the north much of the Kashmir valley, and sometimes even the lower plains of the Pir Panjal range, north-east of Rawalpindi, were covered by huge sheets of ice. In fact, it appears that this part of India witnessed four periods of ice advance and retreat, of greater or less intensity. This whole period is known as the Glacial or Ice Age. Central India (including Gujarat) and south-eastern India at this period received a much heavier rainfall and probably passed through three or four wet and dry phases. In the earliest wet phase the vegetation was much denser. The Central Indian forests teemed with animals which are now no more. This animal life included extinct types of elephant, ox, rhinoceros and horse.

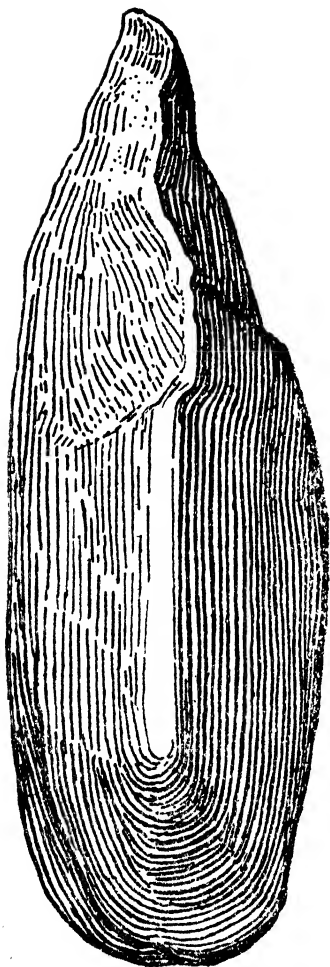
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This was the environment of Early Man. In the Punjab he arrived towards the close of the first Ice Age, and lived on the banks of the Indus and the Sohan; in Central India on the Narbada, in Gujarat on the Sabarmati, the Mahi, the Orsang and the Karjan; in Karnatak on the Tungabhadra and the Malaprabha; on the south-east coast on the laterite-covered beds of the Gundlakamma (Guntur District) and the Cotteliar (Chingleput District).

Man's presence on the banks of these rivers is revealed by his tools. Though his first tools must have included river pebbles, and blocks of wood and bone, only the first have survived, and the rest, being of perishable material, have not. As only stone tools are usually found surviving from this earliest phase of man's life on earth, it is called the Early or Old Stone (Palæolithic) Age. In Europe and Palestine the tools are generally of flint, but in India and Africa they are of quartzite. Man's choice of his material was conditioned by the availability of the raw material in the area in which he lived.

In the very beginning pebbles, broken naturally at one end, seem to have been used. But soon man learnt the art of chipping pebbles with the help of other pebbles to the shape and size he required. The result was the manufacture of tools which were sometimes partly chipped, and sometimes fully, having a regular outline and sharp broad edge or point. Those with a broad cutting edge and U-shaped rounded other end are comparable to our iron axes. These stone axes had no handles. The end opposite the working end was usually the rounded pebble surface, and if not so already (or naturally) was made into a

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### PRIMITIVE TOOLS— ACTUAL SIZE

On the left is a primitive handaxe found in Gujarat with the striking end chipped to a broad point. This is of the Old Stone age.

The microlith (above) is a comparatively delicate tool, also made by chipping, and it was probably mounted in a handle of wood or bone as indicated. This too was found in Gujarat. (From photographs provided by Dr H. D. Sankalia)

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convenient hand-hold. Hence the term 'handaxe' commonly used for these tools. With this equipment man dug out roots, felled trees and cut up animals captured by other contrivances. Thus he was only a food-gatherer.

Man remained in this primitive economic state for several thousands of years. The only advance he seems to have made is in the preparation of his tools. These had a more defined shape, much neater outline, and a finer edge.

How this man looked we have no means of knowing at present. Nor do we know how and when this Early Stone Age culture ceased to flourish in India.

Another stone-using culture replaced the early one almost all over India, comparatively within recent times. Geologically India had assumed its modern form, and the climate, vegetation and animals did not differ much from those of the present day. The culture was, however, different from the Old Stone Age in that the tools and weapons, though of stone, were much smaller, of greater variety, and made out of several varieties of stone. The tools are so small that they were evidently hafted in a bone or wood handle. This feature was a great technical advance in man's progress towards higher material culture. In it we notice the beginnings (or prototypes) of our modern metal tools such as knives, chisels and arrow-heads. Because of the small tools, this stone age culture is often called the Microlithic (small stone) culture.

Nearly all our knowledge of microlithic man in India is based on finds in northern Gujarat. When microlithic man lived there, the area was almost



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flat, made up of huge deposits of silty sand. This monotony was relieved by occasional sand-dunes heaped up by winds, with a few small ponds. Only the babul and such thorny shrubs could grow in this climate. Large oxen, pig, buffalo, deer, goat and one-horned rhinoceros roamed in this thin forest, and fish thrived in the ponds. There were dogs also and they were probably domesticated.

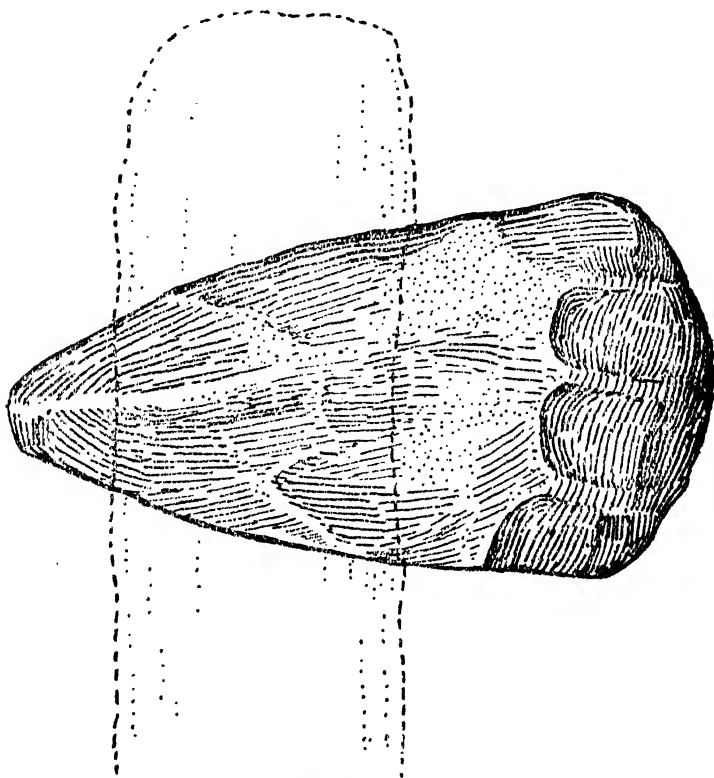
A tall man, with a long head, slightly protruding mouth, a low forehead and a broad nose lived on these sandy dunes. He was still a food-collector, and not a producer. Besides collecting wild berries, fruits and roots, fishing and hunting were his chief occupations. He used a varied assortment of tools of hard but fine-grained coloured stones, such as agate, cornelian, jasper and quartz. These were not all locally available in the sandy, stoneless plains of Gujarat, but had to be brought from distant river-beds. Perhaps man knew the use of fire at this time, but he was still ignorant of the potter's art.

This primitive man had however some fixed notions about burying the dead. A small place was cleared on the dune where he lived, and the dead person was usually laid on his side in a flexed posture (that is, with the legs bent back at the knee), surrounded by the bodies of animals slaughtered by him. Sometimes a dog also was buried by the side of the dead person.

Towards the end of this phase man began to make earthen pots. In many parts of eastern and southern India he made still further progress. Living under overhanging rocks, on bare granite hills, he found fine, black, trap stone at hand. Out of this he manu-

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factured larger tools, which he made smooth by grinding and polishing. Among these we may notice celts, chisels, and even hoes. The present Bellary

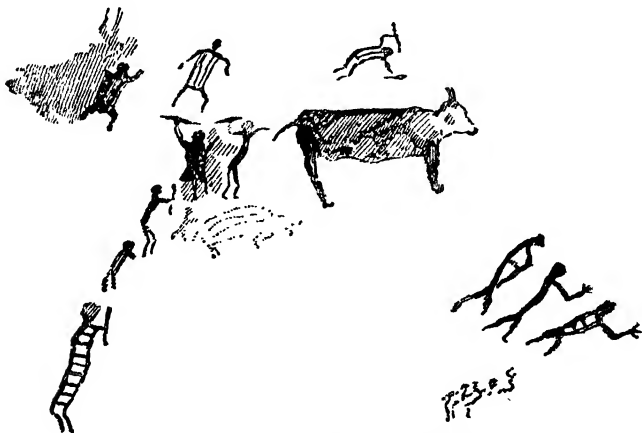


**NEW STONE AGE AXE—ACTUAL SIZE**

This chipped and polished tool, made from hard local rock, was found in a trench cut in a hill-top near Bellary in 1947. Probably it was used as an axe-head, fixed between a pierced branch as indicated here. (From a photograph kindly provided by Mr T. V. Krishnarao, Bellary)

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District was one of the great centres of this culture. Though the use of metal, copper or iron was still unknown, this New Stone Age or Neolithic period was a great step forward in man's advance towards



**HUNTING IN THE STONE AGE**

This rough painting, showing a bison attacked by men with clubs and spears, is to be found on the wall of a cave at Singanpur, about three miles from Naharpati, a station on the Bengal-Nagpur line, eleven miles west of Raigarh. It has been copied from Manoranjan Ghosh's *Rock-paintings of Pre-historic and Later Times*.

a civilized life. For he had learnt the two great arts, agriculture and pottery, and lived in settled habitations. The end of this period came about 300 B.C. in South India, when other people started to use iron weapons and tools. These other people also introduced the idea of making an underground grave of huge stones (called megaliths), covered by heaps of stones or surrounded by stone circles.

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In the North man went through a different course. On the banks of the Indus and the Ravi a regular city civilization grew up, around 2500 B.C., with a varied economy. The inhabitants knew how to lay out a city with straight broad roads, align them with closed drainage, live in buildings of burnt bricks, provided with bathrooms, use a fine pottery, often painted in two or three colours with geometric and natural designs, wear ornaments of gold and semi-precious stones, dress in cotton clothes, eat wheat, barley and other grains and fish and meat. They also knew how to read and write, having developed what is known as a pictographic script. But in spite of this advanced state they still used tools and weapons of stone such as arrow-heads, blades and scrapers, like those used by the preceding Stone Age man, along with a few copper and bronze tools. For this reason the culture unearthed at Mohenjodaro in Sind and Harappa in the Punjab is called the Chalcolithic (copper-stone), and not simply the Copper or Stone age culture.

How this civilization perished is not definitely known. Gradual drying up of the Indus valley, which then received much more rain and was very fertile compared with its present state, may have been one of the reasons. Another reason seems to be the arrival of the Aryans. These people with their fast-moving chariots drawn by horses, their cavalry and superior weapons of offence like the sword, may have overwhelmed the Indus and Ravi cities even though they were well protected by huge mud-brick ramparts.

The Aryans were a tall, fair, people with straight, pointed noses. Some of the people whom they met

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in India were short and dark-skinned, with flat noses. These they called Dasas or Dasyas. But there were other people who did not look like these aboriginals, and who were perhaps the authors of the Indus civilization; these they called Asuras. According to most historians, the Dasas were the original Dravidians who finally settled in South India. There are two theories as to the origin of the Dravidians. The first is that they were the direct descendants of the primitive inhabitants and that their culture was only slightly in advance of that of their forefathers. The second theory, based on ethnic similarities between the Sumerians and Dravidians, is that the Dravidians came from western Asia through Baluchistan. √

The early culture of the Indus valley can best be called pre-Vedic Hinduism and may well have owed its origin to the Dravidians who were in India when the Aryans came. Dravidian culture and that of the Indus valley also tallied in the following points: neither followed Vedic ritual, the Aryan gods or mode of worship, but each had its own system (*anyavrata*) of religious observances. The religious observances of the Dasas are clearly described in the *Rig-Veda*. Both were phallus-worshippers. The *Rig-Veda* refers to towns and forts built by the Dasas and to a hundred pillars built of stone, and the architecture of the Indus valley corresponds closely to this type. Then again there are references to forts constructed to resist inundations and to one hundred cities in a non-Aryan kingdom, while mention is made of the Panis, a mercantile people who may well have been the people who dwelt at Mohenjodaro and Harappa. The Dasas were snub-nosed and a 'dusky brood' according to

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the Aryans, and the description might fit some Proto-Australoid skulls found at Mohenjodaro.

The animals of the Dravidians and the Indus valley people were also alike : sheep, goats, dogs and bulls were familiar to both. Both peoples ornamented themselves in the same manner with gold earrings, necklaces, bracelets, anklets and garlands ; both used stone and copper. Men and women combed and oiled their hair in a similar way, the women wearing it in plaits and a certain class of the men in coils. If the Aryans really came to India earlier than 2000 B.C., as some scholars suppose, then they may well have found the Indus civilization still in existence, and the people whom they called Dasas or Dasyas, and who are considered to be the original Dravidians, may have been the race responsible for the high standard of civilization they found there. If so they were a highly cultured people with habits vigorous enough to have influenced Vedic civilization. The *Rig-Veda*, although despising the Dasas, speaks of their wealth, the strength of their cities and castles, and of their women bathing in milk.

Whoever they were, the Dravidians certainly knew the use of metals and their pottery was highly evolved and very beautiful. They were great builders, and ways of living in South India have been refined and cultured from early times. The Dravidians cultivated their lands, navigated their rivers and controlled them with dams ; they sailed the seas. Theirs was a matriarchal society, unlike that of the Aryans which was patriarchal. When the Aryans came in their thousands, the Dravidians could not withstand them and their settlements were swiftly conquered. The

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original race, however, could not be eliminated, and gradually the two mingled, though the Aryans remained the masters. The conquest of the South, which was and still is the Dravidian stronghold, was checked for a long time by the natural barrier of the Vindhya mountains, but even this was finally overcome and the Aryans at last penetrated the fastnesses of southern India.

Discoveries at Mohenjodaro in Sind and Harappa in the Punjab during the last twenty-five years have revealed a very ancient civilization which existed in India about 2500 B.C. or even earlier. The finds excavated in the upper levels of Mohenjodaro correspond roughly with those characteristic of the early dynastic period of Babylonia. The skulls found in both places agree. It is thus quite likely that the peoples of the Indus valley, of Mesopotamia, and even the Dravidians of southern India, are of the same origin.

The site of Mohenjodaro was found by R. D. Banerji in 1922 when he was excavating a Buddhist stupa ; but there is evidence of an even earlier civilization at Amri, named after the mounds discovered at that place in Sind. Little is known of this civilization except that the pottery differs from that of the Indus valley and was clearly the work of a different people.

The Indus people carried on a thriving trade with their neighbours, and pottery of the Mohenjodaro type has been found in Baluchistan. Communications extending south and east of Harappa must have embraced an area larger than Egypt or Sumer. As research on these various finds progresses, more and more light is being thrown on the astounding refinement and culture of this ancient race who dwelt in

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the Indus valley. About the same time that Mr Banerji discovered Mohenjodaro, Rai Bahadur Sahni found Harappa, and extensive excavations have since been carried out.

It is significant that the name India is derived from the river Indus and originally only embraced Sind and a portion of the Punjab. It was here that the earliest civilization was found; and the Greeks actually gave the name 'Indos' to India after the river Indus. Hindustan means the 'country of the river' according to inscriptions of King Darius in the sixth century B.C., the Persian *hindu* (river) corresponding to the Sanskrit *sindhu*, by which name India was originally known to foreigners.

Mohenjodaro and Harappa are 400 miles apart, but the similarity of the finds at these two places indicates intimate commerce between them. Both settlements were urban, and show every evidence that a co-operative, organized effort was made by their inhabitants to control the waters of the rivers on whose banks they lived. The periodic flooding of the river Indus did not wipe out the people, because they built their houses high above the reach of the waters. Floods, however, virtually marooned humanity for miles around the settlements, putting a stop to commerce, and this must have been a serious hindrance to an essentially commercial people.

The area of Mohenjodaro so far unearthed is about one square mile and it must have been one of the largest cities of the ancient world. Both Harappa and Mohenjodaro are built of burnt brick, which unfortunately gradually crumbles away when exposed to the atmosphere, on account of the heavy impregnation of



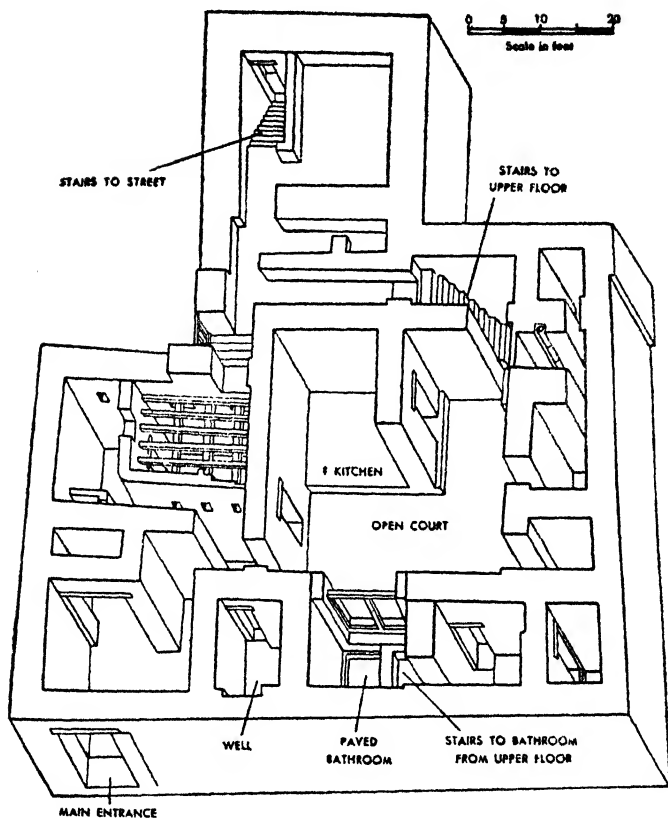
## ***Everyday Life in Ancient India***

salt. The houses were well built, nevertheless, and it is clear that the inhabitants lived peaceful lives. The buildings stood undamaged by war for many centuries, and the cities were not surrounded by walls or ditches, though parts of both Mohenjodaro and Harappa were massively fortified. The civilization of Mohenjodaro however seems to have come to a sudden violent end. Skeletons have been found in contorted attitudes and it looks as if, about 1500 B.C., invaders (who may well have been the Aryans) swept through the city, plundering and burning it.

Though ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt had many public buildings, there are comparatively few in the Indus valley. At Mohenjodaro, however, we find a market-place with cattle-stalls in long rows, while the ruins at Harappa contain a huge storehouse. The form of government of the people is not known; but at Mohenjodaro there is a single large building which may have been a palace or a Governor's residence. This building is surrounded by servants' quarters and store-rooms. No temples or tombs have been discovered; but the mound on which the Buddhist stupa now stands probably has a large temple buried within it, for nearby is an extensive bath with eight small bathrooms and cells on top which have been used by priests. Another obviously public building is the swimming pool with an area of 11,440 square feet.

Both cities were laid out on a definite plan, the streets being straight and crossed by others at right angles. There were of course a few deviations from this symmetrical pattern; but Mohenjodaro is the earliest known example of a well-planned city and is obviously the work of highly skilled engineers. It

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**GROUND PLAN OF AN UPPER-CLASS HOUSE  
AT MOHENJODARO**

The living and sleeping rooms of the family were on the upper floor, and there was probably a flat roof forming a terrace.

Redrawn from Plates IV and V of Sir John Marshall's *Mohenjo-Daro*, Vol. I (Copyright, Government of India, by permission of Arthur Probsthain)

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may even be said that the houses were better constructed than the majority existing in India today. The cities of the Indus valley were built on different strata due to the older ones being destroyed by floods, and many of those on the lowest levels have not as yet been excavated. Where they have been, the lowest levels appear to have been better built than the higher. In the former, houses were not allowed to encroach on the streets. This is not so in the higher levels and suggests a decline in the state of the municipal law. All streets ran from east to west and north to south, because the winds came from the two latter directions. Some streets were wide and some narrow. They were not paved, and the people must have walked knee-deep in either dust or mud according to weather conditions. An attempt at paving one street with broken bricks and potsherds was obviously abandoned; no other such attempts seem to have been made. It is interesting to note that some walls have rounded corners so that loads should not be dislodged from the backs of animals, a convenience also found in Ur. The long-suffering donkey must have been the usual beast of burden as he is today.

Buildings were plain and quite without decoration. No stones, only bricks, were used. Strange to say there were no exterior windows, and often the entrance was placed in a by-way rather than on the main street. The ground floor of a small house measured about 27 by 30 ft. while a larger house was twice that size. Houses were two or more stories high and the lower portions of some staircases still survive. Roofs were flat and surrounded by a parapet drained by projecting gutters made of pottery. Light

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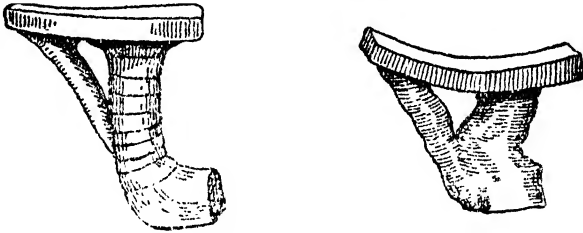
and air gained admittance only through doorways, grills having rarely been found; nor were there separate harems or women's apartments, from which we may infer that women enjoyed a good social status.

Matting may have covered the floors though the common flooring in poorer houses was beaten earth smoothed over with cow-dung. Large pottery jars often served as cupboards, but the deep recesses in the walls may have been fitted with wooden shelves. There were stands in the walls for water-jars, and possibly the forerunners of the water-stalls or *piaus* of modern times. Chests were also used for storage purposes. Beds and chairs seem to have been the only furniture. Some of the chairs had legs carved like bulls' feet, similar to those in Egypt. Clay models of couches have also been found.

Cooking was done mostly in the courtyard through which people generally had to enter a house. There were small kitchens as well, and raised brick platforms where fuel could be placed. In some kitchens pots were sunk into the ground for waste water which gradually seeped into the ground through a small hole at the bottom. A bread-oven has been discovered in one courtyard and also saddle-querns and curry-stones. The courtyard was not only the scene of cooking but also of housework, sewing and most domestic tasks; animals may also have been kept there, for feeding-bins have been found. Sometimes the larger houses were divided into a number of flats. Workmen's houses were well constructed: those at Harappa bear a strong resemblance to the potters' quarters of Athens in the sixth century B.C.

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The drainage system was really something to be proud of. All houses had bathrooms and latrines. A brick-lined channel ran down every street, and tributary drains from houses on either side led into it.



These clay models of chairs were found at Mohenjodaro. They are roughly made toys, about two inches high, and were perhaps used in a doll's house. The clumsy appearance suggests that the full-size chairs were cut from one piece of wood. (Drawn from exhibits in the Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay, by courtesy of the Curator)

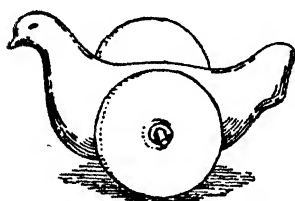
Sewage had first to pass a dump or cess-pit into which solid matter was deposited, thus preventing blockage of the main drains. Pipes led from the bathrooms and closets to the drains. Rubbish was also deposited by means of shoots from the houses into dust-bins. There was a good water-supply from brick-lined wells.

Occupations were mostly trading and farming, though arts and crafts were numerous and of a high standard. Farmers cultivated barley, wheat, cotton, melons, dates and other fruit, but their implements were few. They also raised stock for beef, mutton, and pork, as well as poultry. The original inhabitants

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of India were clearly meat-eaters, and fish also figured in their diet. No sign of horses has been recorded ; but among their domesticated animals were goats, poultry, cattle, buffaloes, sheep and elephants : their two-wheeled carts were drawn by oxen. Of the wild animals, they must have been familiar with tigers, bears, deer, hares—and, of course, elephants.

Women were not idle but spun wool and cotton. As toys for their children, they made pottery carts (identical with the farm carts seen at Mohenjodaro today), marbles, bulls with nodding heads, and little birds. The children amused themselves by modelling with clay.



CLAY TOY FROM  
MOHENJODARO

From an exhibit in the  
Prince of Wales Museum,  
Bombay

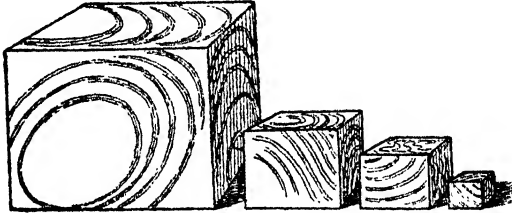
In general, the standard of culture seems to have been similar to that of western Asia because corbelled arches, niches

in walls, the worship of the Mother Goddess and seals containing pictures of animals were common to both places.

Boats are known to have existed, for an amulet depicts a boat with the helmsman seated at the stern. Metals in use were tin, copper, lead and bronze ; the oblong copper bars which have been discovered may have been a form of coinage, in which case they are the oldest coins yet discovered in the world. Domestic vessels were made of copper and so were instruments

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of warfare. Warriors went into battle with bows, spears, axes and daggers.



STONE WEIGHTS—ONE-QUARTER  
ACTUAL SIZE

A number of stone cubes like this, of graduated weight, have been found at Mohenjodaro. They were clearly used as weights, and show that commerce was well-developed. (Drawn from specimens in the Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay, by courtesy of the Curator)

Gambling was obviously a favourite amusement, and various kinds of dice have been found as well as counters somewhat resembling halma pieces or chessmen. The boards on which these games were played were probably made of wood and have therefore perished. A brick game-board, however, has defied time. Indications of dancing accompanied by music exist in the form of drums, tambourines and castanets. Hunting was another pastime, and there seems to have been game-cock fighting.

The race that dwelt in the Indus valley, therefore, was a highly civilized and cultured people. Whatever their origin, wherever they finally disappeared to, and whether they will eventually be identified with the Dravidians and the race which was found in India

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when the Aryans came, for the time they inhabited the Indus valley they made healthy, happy homes for themselves, and organized a settled society with a sound administration.

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### III. THE LIFE OF THE ARYANS



THE Aryan-speakers who poured into India about 1500 B.C., and who are distinguished from the races of present-day Europe by being called Indo-Europeans, were a fair-skinned stalwart people who in all probability lived originally in western Asia and were akin to the ancient Iranians. They entered India through the north-west and settled during the first few centuries in the Sapta-Sindhu region, which included the Punjab, with the valley of Kashmir on the north, Gandhara (Peshawar, Rawalpindi and Kabul) on the west, Rajputana on the south and the Gangetic trough on the east.

‘Can you not see them trekking down the mountain passes into the unknown land below?’ asks Jawaharlal Nehru. ‘Brave and full of the spirit of adventure, they dared to go ahead without fear of the consequences. If death came, they did not mind. They met it laughing. But they loved life and knew that the only way to enjoy life was to be fearless, and not worry about defeat and disaster. For defeat and disaster have a way of keeping away from those who are not afraid. Think of them, these distant ancestors of ours, marching on and on, and suddenly reaching the banks of the noble Ganga, flowing majestically down to the sea. How the sight must have filled them with joy! And is it any wonder that they bowed down to her and praised her in their melodious language?’

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The *Rig-Veda*,<sup>1</sup> which is the earliest Aryan literature, mentions rivers which more or less fix the geographical positions of the first settlements before the Aryans reached the Gangetic valley. These rivers are the Indus, Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Sutlej and Sarasvati ; but rivers further south and east, such as the Narbada, are not heard of. The beauty and majesty of these mighty sheets of flowing water seem to have impressed the Vedic people almost to the point of worship, and we hear them sing their praises :

The irresistible Indus proceeds straight, white and dazzling in splendour ! She is great, and her waters fill all sides with mighty force. She is wild like a mare, beautiful like a well-developed woman.<sup>2</sup>

The Indus has fastened horses to her easy chariot, and has brought food therein to us. The greatness of the chariot is extolled as mighty ; it is irresistible and great and rich in its fame.<sup>3</sup>

The Himalayas also are mentioned ; but the Vindhya are not. Later the Aryans moved eastward, for they were a strong conquering race, and the Punjab lost a great deal of its importance. The Dravidians accepted the fair-skinned conquerors and were in certain cases even enslaved by them, but a

<sup>1</sup> *Veda* means 'knowledge' and the Vedas are the source of all knowledge to Hindus. They are considered as inspired revelations (*sruti*) which are to be distinguished from later traditional books called *smriti*. It is even said that 'Vedic verses are not made, they are eternal'. There are four Vedas, the *Rig*, *Sama*, *Yajur* and *Atharva*. They comprise a collection of hymns, prayers and spells called *Samhitas*. The *Upnishads* and *Brahmanas* are supplementary writings to the Vedas, also regarded as revealed or *sruti* and as ritual treatises. The *Rig-Veda Samhita* is the oldest and most important of the Vedas.

<sup>2</sup> *Rig-Veda*, X. 75. 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Rig-Veda*, X. 75. 9.

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great deal of mingling of the races also took place between the conquerors and the conquered, for it was impossible to eliminate the original inhabitants of India.

Rig-Vedic civilization was anything but primitive. It was an advanced military aristocracy ruling a subject people. The mission of the invaders was threefold : to conquer, to colonize and to civilize. The Aryans were divided into tribes and each tribe had a king or chief. Most often the title was hereditary, but sometimes the king was elected. The tribe was modelled on the family, and the people gradually lost their nomadic habits and settled down in villages. These kings or chiefs of tribes of whom we hear in the early settlements became later on the magnificent rulers of the epics and other literature.

The king had to look after his subjects and to ensure for them a free, happy and prosperous existence. His duties, apart from that of protecting his subjects, were not very well defined ; but he had also to maintain professional priests (called *purohitas*) to sing hymns and perform sacrifices, and officials of lesser standing were the *senani* or leader of the army and the *gramani* or village chief. The *purohita* often went to battle with the king. The king received tribute from the people he conquered and also from his Aryan subjects. Whether these contributions were fixed or voluntary is not definitely known.

Only a single reference is made to caste in the *Rig-Veda*, in a hymn<sup>1</sup> where it is said that out of the

<sup>1</sup> *Rig-Veda*, X.90.12, the *Purusha-Sukta*, or Hymn of Man, which divides mankind into Brahmin, Rajanya, Vaisya and Sudra.

## *The Life of the Aryans*

mouth, arms, thighs and feet of the creator came the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, the Vaisyas and the Sudras. Caste was definitely not practised in the first few centuries after the Aryans entered India. There were no definite royal or priestly castes, though, both these callings being hereditary, a vague class of noblemen and priests may have existed, which finally led to strict distinctions. The people of the *Rig-Veda* were free and unhampered, a virile, joyous race, devoid of the mystic complexities which have marked Hindus of later periods.

There were rishis and holy men but they did not retire into forest fastnesses in order to spend a life of meditation, prayer and teaching. The father was the head of the family and very often he was regarded as a rishi because he led the family in worship. This did not mean that he denied himself the pleasures of life ; on the contrary he often prayed for wealth, prosperity and sons. One rishi sang :

Behold, I am a composer of hymns, my father is a physician, my mother grinds corn on stone. We are all engaged in different occupations. As cows wander [in various directions] in the pasture-field [for food], so we [in various occupations] worship thee, O Soma !, for wealth. Flow thou for Indra.<sup>1</sup>

The earliest Aryans were a rural people, and had no large towns such as were to be found a few centuries later. Cattle-rearing and agriculture were the chief sources of income. The cattle grazed in pastures under a herdsman who was called a *gopala* and who was usually armed with a goad. The ears of cattle were marked to show ownership. The plough-

<sup>1</sup> *Rig-Veda*, IX. 112. 3.

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land was called *urvara* or *kshetra*. The plough was drawn by oxen in teams of six, eight or even twelve.<sup>1</sup> Ripe grain was cut with the sickle, and the harvest was collected in bundles and thrashed on the floor of the granary. The grain was separated from the chaff by a sieve or winnowing fan and then measured. Thus the process of ploughing, sowing, reaping and thrashing<sup>2</sup> took place in ancient India just as it does today. There are many references to agriculture and a pastoral life in the *Rig-Veda* which throw light on the life of the period :

Let the oxen work merrily, let the men work merrily, let the plough move on merrily. Fasten the traces merrily ; ply the goad merrily.<sup>3</sup>

Note the joy associated with country life. One can almost imagine the peasants singing aloud as they ploughed their fields. Or again :

May the plants be sweet unto us ; may the skies and the firmament be full of sweetness ; may the Lord of the field be gracious to us. We will follow him uninjured by enemies.<sup>4</sup>

Fasten the ploughs, spread out the yokes and sow the seed on the field which has been prepared. Let the corn grow with our hymns ; let the scythes fall on the neighbouring fields where the corn is ripe.<sup>5</sup>

The cow played an important part in their lives, and though the Aryans ate beef, reverence for the cow seems to have been prevalent from the earliest days. Allusions to the cow are innumerable : ' The cowherd seeks for the cows and brings them back to the house ;

<sup>1</sup> *Rig-Veda*, VIII. 6. 48 and X. 101. 4.

<sup>2</sup> *Satapatha Brahmana*, I. 6. 1-3.

<sup>5</sup> *Rig-Veda*, X. 101. 3.

<sup>3</sup> *Rig-Veda*, IV. 57. 4.

<sup>4</sup> *Rig-Veda*, IV. 57. 3.

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he pastures them on all sides. May he come home safe.'<sup>1</sup>

Cattle were the standby of the Aryans. The cow supplied them with butter and milk and clarified butter (originally *ghrita* and now *ghee*), which latter was used profusely for cooking and also as a libation in sacrifices, when it was poured into the fire (*agni*). Cow-dung cakes were used as fuel, and cow-dung was also used as manure for fertilizing the soil. In fact the cow was so useful and gentle an animal that she was soon deified and a cow-goddess was introduced called *Gavi-Devata*. The bull drew chariots and carts as well as the plough. He was the symbol of generation ; but bulls were killed at sacrifices and frequently offered to Indra. The flesh of bulls and barren cows was eaten, but beef seems to have been thought difficult to digest, and it was gradually given up. The sacrificing of bulls and barren cows was also gradually abandoned as the climate changed from cold to hot. Cow-hide was tanned and made into everyday articles ; in those days there was no prejudice against its use. Hide receptacles were used for storing wine, water, honey, oil, *ghee* and even articles of worship like *soma* juice. It is known that there were regular slaughter-houses.

The horse was a useful domestic animal and used for riding and drawing cars and chariots. Texts such as the following from the *Rig-Veda* : ' O Asvins, come quickly to the place where we are offering hymns, on your fleet horses,'<sup>2</sup> have now quite refuted the theory that the early Aryans were not riders. Dadhikra, the deified war-horse, was a familiar and

<sup>1</sup> *Rig-Veda*, X. 19. 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Rig-Veda*, X. 5. 7.

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even frightening figure. He was classed with Fire, the Sun and Power. The horse also drew the plough and, decked in gold and silver ornaments, it often stepped proudly in processions, as it still does on festive occasions. An illuminating passage from the *Rig-Veda* gives us the following information concerning water-stalls for animals :

Refresh the horses, take up the corn stacked in the field ; and make a cart which will convey it easily. This well full of water for the drinking of animals is one *drona* in extent, and there is a stone wheel to it. And the reservoir for the drinking of men is one *skanda*. Fill it with water.<sup>1</sup>

In fact, wells seem to have been the chief means of irrigation, for we read : 'Prepare troughs for the drinking of the animals. Fasten the leather string, and let us take out water from this deep and goodly well which never dries up.'<sup>2</sup>

The ass was used to draw carts and carry burdens. It was probably caught in the wild state and tamed. The mule is mentioned in the *Aitareya Brahmana*<sup>3</sup> and it is possible that cross-breeding was known from the earliest days. It was definitely a beast of burden. Buffalo's milk was used and buffalo flesh eaten ; buffaloes were also draught animals and herds of them grazed in the woods. Goats' milk was also drunk, the coat made into clothing and the flesh prescribed as suitable for invalids. Goats were sometimes harnessed to light carts. Sheep were sheared for their wool. The camel was familiar<sup>4</sup> as the 'ship of the desert' and dogs of enormous size were kept as pets.

<sup>1</sup> *Rig-Veda*, X. 101. 7.

<sup>3</sup> VI. 7. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Rig-Veda*, X. 101. 5.

<sup>4</sup> *Rig-Veda*, VIII. 46. 28.

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Elephants are mentioned but were still regarded as strange animals. They were used for royalty, for we read : 'O Agni, thou goest with fearless power, just as the king goes with his minister on the elephant.'<sup>1</sup>

Among wild beasts there were spotted deer, wild boar, bison, lions, wolves, bears, hares and monkeys. The abundant woods and thickets and forests must have been thickly inhabited by these animals, and in the bogs and marshes there were frogs and snakes. The song of the frog was evidently as loud all night during the rainy weather as it is now, for it seems to have provoked a humorous comparison. A poet compares the croaking of frogs to the droning voices of disciples, pupils and rishis reciting Vedic hymns in the abodes of learning.<sup>2</sup>

Fish are mentioned quite frequently, and among birds we hear of peacocks, geese, swans, quails, partridge, owls, parrots and vultures ; and most probably many of the other beautiful varieties we see today in the Indian forests abounded. There were bird-catchers who netted birds and sold them for food. The trees were probably more magnificent in olden days than they are today and flowers as profuse. Edible fruits and medicinal herbs were plentiful. In fact, medicine became a highly developed science and many of the well-known remedies of today had their origin in Vedic times. The white lotus was a favourite flower, and of course the *kusa* grass was sacred and used for sacrifices.

The hunting of lions, boars, buffaloes, deer and birds was a favourite form of amusement. The bow and arrow was the chief weapon, but antelopes were

<sup>1</sup> *Rig-Veda*, IV. 4. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Rig-Veda*, VIII. 103. 5.



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caught in pits, boars were chased by dogs and buffaloes caught by the lasso. Lions were trapped in pit-falls, lured into pits or ambushades, or followed up and surrounded by hunters. Wild elephants were captured by tame ones.

Chariot-racing, dancing, music and gambling were other forms of recreation. Musical instruments were of three types, percussion, string and wind. Gambling was a favourite pastime, and there is a poem in the Vedas in which the gambler bemoans his fate :

My wife rejects me and my mother hates me ;  
The gamester finds no pity for his troubles.  
No better use can I see for a gambler  
Than for a costly horse worn out and aged.<sup>1</sup>

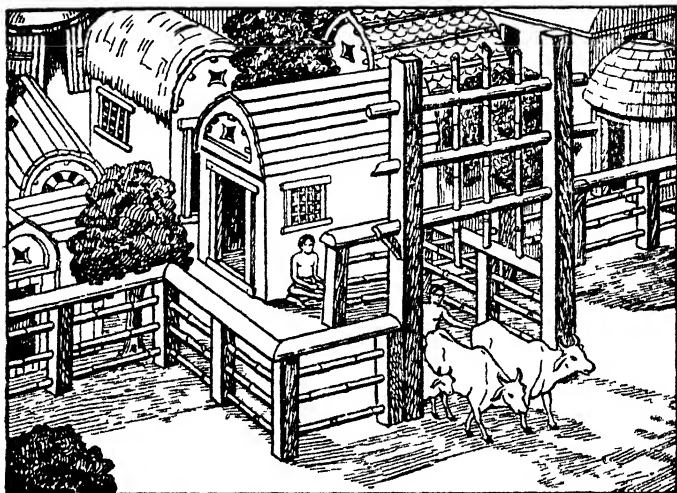
The villages did not grow up haphazard but to a well-planned geometric pattern, as each village had to be a fortified camp in order to be protected against enemies and marauders. The village was usually rectangular in shape and surrounded by a wall pierced by four big gates and four small ones. There were streets inside and the houses were built in a special order. At the centre stood the Panchayat Ghar where the elders met, for a council of elders settled village problems. In small villages the council met under a large tree, where the freemen elected their Panchayat.

There were individual houses in Vedic times and a conglomerate of these houses formed a village. Villages were often built on a higher tract of land in order to prevent inundation by rivers. A house was constructed as follows : 'Columns were set up on

<sup>1</sup> *Rig-Veda*, X. 34. 4.

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firm ground, with supporting beams leaning obliquely against them, and connected by rafters on which long bamboo rods were laid, forming the high roof. Between the corner posts other beams were set up,



A VEDIC VILLAGE

This reconstruction is copied from Plate I in Percy Brown's *Indian Architecture* (D. B. Taraporevala), Vol. I, by kind permission of the author

according to the size of the house. The crevices in the walls were filled in with straw or reeds, tied in bundles, and the whole was to some extent covered with the same material. The various parts were fastened together with bars, ropes, pegs and thongs.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Kaegi, *The Rig-Veda* (trs. Arrowsmith), pp. 12-13.

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There were doors fastened with a strap as in Homeric houses.

Life was still very simple, and there was not much furniture ; but there were beds of interwoven rope. A spittoon and footstool were always to be found, and the latter was often used to ascend the bed, which stood rather high, and also as a stand for the betel-box, the water-carafe, or flagons of wine and drinking-cups. The throne, called Simhasana, was always necessary in royal households, and various forms of ottomans are described in ancient homes. There were certainly chairs, as a verse in the *Rig-Veda* gives the following description : 'Of golden form, of golden aspect, of golden hue, and shining, seated on a seat of gold.'<sup>1</sup>

There were countless utensils such as pots, pans, water-jars and water-carafes, nectar-bottles, *lotas*, goblets, cups, kettles and bowls. The *Rig-Veda* states that fresh clay pots were used for each cooking, which goes to prove that the early Aryans were scrupulously clean. There were cups of gold and copper, as well as leather bottles and caskets.

Barley and wheat seem to have been the staple food of Vedic India, though flour and butter, preparations of milk, bread, vegetables, roots, fruit and honey were also commonly eaten. Cakes were made of wheat and barley, and meat was eaten though not every day. The women did most of the cooking, and when the man of the house came back from his work he was usually welcomed with preparations of curds, milk or barley. We are told that 'meat cooked on the spit or in pits was little used and probably eaten at great feasts and family gatherings'. Beef was not

<sup>1</sup> *Rig-Veda*, II. 301 (trs. Wilson).

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taboo, as has already been pointed out. There was no objection to strong drink. In fact *soma*, an intoxicating beverage, was most popular and was even deified. We are told that 'water was praised but people only bathed in it, and the cattle drank it. Man drank *sura* [brandy made from corn or barley] and *soma* "the sorrow-dispeller"'. The following is an account of how it was made :

O Soma, you have been crushed ; you flow as a stream to Indra, scattering joy on all sides, you bestow immortal food.

Seven women stir you with their fingers, blending their voices in a song to you ; you remind the sacrificer of his duties at the sacrifice.

You mix with water with a pleasing sound ; and the fingers stir you over a woollen strainer, and filter you. Your particles are thrown up then, and a sound arises from the woollen strainer.

The woollen strainer is placed on a vessel, and the fingers repeatedly stir the Soma, which sends down a sweet stream into the vessel.

O Soma, you are then mixed with milk. Water runs towards you with a pleasing sound.<sup>1</sup>

Drink was usually kept in leather bottles and widely sold at one time, but it was gradually given up.

War was often waged against the Dasas. There were both open battles and constant guerrilla warfare, and the *Rig-Veda* is full of references to these dark-complexioned people who seem to have given the Aryans endless trouble. A frequent prayer of the Aryans was :

We are surrounded on all sides by Dasa tribes. They do not perform sacrifices ; they do not believe in any-

<sup>1</sup> *Rig-Veda*, IX.66. 7, 8, 9, 11, 13.

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thing ; their rites are different, they are not men ! O Destroyer of foes ! Kill them, destroy the Dasa race.<sup>1</sup>

Indra seems to have been the chief god who helped the Aryans in their wars. Many songs of praise are addressed to him :

Indra, who is invoked by many, and is accompanied by his fleet companions, has destroyed by his thunder-bolt the Dasyas and Simyus who dwelt on earth, and then he distributed the fields to his white-complexioned friends [Aryans]. The Thunderer makes the sun to shine and the rain to fall.<sup>2</sup>

The Aryans had superior weapons to their foes, for they were highly skilled in the use of the bow and arrow, the sword, spear and battle-axe. Their armies were also organized into divisions of foot-soldiers, cavalry and war-chariots. The chariot could carry at least two men, a driver and a fighter. The war-chariots could only be manœuvred on level plains, but cavalry could pursue the enemy anywhere. The individual warrior was well equipped, as he was usually provided with a bow, arrows and quiver, a coat of mail, hand-guards and a helmet.

The Dasas uttered weird yells when they were attacked, and were often scoffed at :

As people shout and raise a cry after a thief who has purloined a garment, even so the enemies yell and shout at the sight of Dadhikra. As birds make a noise at the sight of the hungry hawk on its descent, even so the enemies yell and shout at the sight of Dadhikra careering in quest of plunder, of food and cattle.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Rig-Veda*, X. 22. 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Rig-Veda*, I. 100. 18.

<sup>3</sup> *Rig-Veda*, IV. 38. 5.

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Barter was in vogue, and the trader was called *vanik*. Ten cows was the price for an image of Indra. The *Rig-Veda* has the following reference to profiteers : ' One sells a large quantity for a small price and then goes to the purchaser and denies the sale and asks for a higher price. But he cannot exceed the price once fixed on the plea that he has given a large quantity. Whether the price was adequate, the price fixed at the time of sale must hold good.'<sup>1</sup> There is no direct allusion to coined money in the *Rig-Veda* and the word *nishka* is often used meaning either money or gold ornaments. According to Professor Wilson, however, who quotes Arrian, ' the Hindus had coined money before Alexander's invasion '.

Property was inherited by the son and not the daughter unless she was the only issue. Adoption was recognized. Property was acknowledged in moveable things such as cattle, horses, gold ornaments and slaves. Land was also considered as property.

A system of blood-money or fines in compensation to relatives was in vogue. The price of a man's blood was a hundred cows.<sup>2</sup>

Burial customs were much more clearly defined in the Aryan civilization than in the earlier Indus valley culture. The dead body was either buried or cremated and there were vague ideas of a future state where the souls of men after death dwelt in a world controlled by Yama. There was no conception of hell ; the notion of transmigration of souls took shape later.

In the later Vedas, the *Sama*, *Yajur* and *Atharva*, and other literature of the period such as the

<sup>1</sup> *Rig-Veda*, IV. 24. 9.

<sup>2</sup> *Rig-Veda*, II. 32. 4.

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Brahmanas, the Aranyakas and Upanishads, we hear of the Aryans sweeping on in their occupation of India until they reached the Ganges valley and conquered it. But now they were no longer satisfied with territorial expansion. They sought to increase their knowledge, to discover new sciences and evolve a philosophy deeper than the simple nature-worship which was evident in the *Rig-Veda*. Life became more complex and a new form of civilization arose ruled by dogmatic priests and an elaborate court life. People became class-conscious and caste was defined.

The origin of caste is difficult to guess, but it seems clear that the Aryans' first simple rules of living gradually became more and more complicated until they hardened into taboos which curbed individual freedom. After they had settled in the fertile plains of the Ganges and Jumna and had begun to concentrate on learning and ruling, the Aryans came to despise anyone who plied a mere trade, and so the four castes took shape on the basis of profession. The same thing happened in Egypt and Mesopotamia, but there caste never developed the rigidity it acquired in India.

The priests alone held the keys to learning, for they knew the Vedas and made it a rule that only they could perform sacrifices. The head of each house was no longer considered fit to perform his own household sacrifices. Thus priests were set apart as an exalted caste, a caste of Brahmins who served God and were holy. The royal caste arose in a similar way. Wars had to be waged more and more frequently, and the kings who ruled the people were naturally those who carried on the wars and protected their subjects. These rulers were called Kshatriyas and were equally

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set apart from the common people. The mass of the Aryans, who were traders and agriculturists, were called Vaisyas. All these castes were regarded as twice-born ; they were all Aryan-speakers.

The last caste, the Sudras, were the Dasas, the representatives of the people driven away or conquered by the invaders. The darker pigmentation of their skin was an obvious mark of difference, and so the word *varna* came to mean the impregnable barrier between the white Aryans and the black Sudras. The Sudras were the people who served the higher classes ; they were humble and considered common.

Later the four castes were each associated with a colour : white for the Brahmins, red for the Kshatriyas, yellow for the Vaisyas and black for the Sudras. Though caste has brought with it many evils which are only too evident today, it had originally the great merit of giving everyone a place in society. It made the individual realize that he lived not for himself but was part of a useful and necessary social unit.

For instance, when Rama was exiled, Sita begged him to renounce the world and become a hermit. Rama, however, had but one reply, that, much as he would like to give up the pleasures of a transient life, he was first and foremost a Kshatriya and therefore had no right to retire from the struggle. As a fighting man he must fight. The same idea—that of working for society and not for individual gain—is accentuated in the *Bhagvad-Gita*. Each class of society had its duties : thus the Lord Krishna pointed out to Arjuna that his duty as a Kshatriya was to fight and conquer evil.

It was in this period that the position of the king



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began to be clearly defined: he became something more powerful and sacred than the chief of a tribe. The *Aitareya Brahmana* gives the following account of the origin of kingship: 'The Devas and Asuras were fighting . . . the Asuras defeated the Devas . . . the Devas said, "It is on account of us having no king that the Asuras conquer. Let us elect a king". All consented.'<sup>1</sup> As their responsibilities increased, the prestige and importance of the kings' courts grew. Kings encouraged the study of philosophy in their courts, and wise men were invited from far and wide to assemble for the discussion of abstruse problems. The idea of a king of kings also began to emerge, and such terms as *Adhiraj*, *Rajadhiraj*, and *Ekarat* were coined. According to the *Aitareya Brahmana*, *Ekarat* meant 'sole ruler of the territory up to the seas'.<sup>2</sup>

Ceremonials developed for the anointing of emperors, and sacrifices such as *Asvamedha* and *Rajasuya* for paramount kings took place; but monarchy was not absolute. The king was supreme head of his people, but nevertheless he had to pay deep respect to his priests, and though hereditary, the king had also to be confirmed by democratic election. Other evidence of popular control is that conditions were imposed on the king's autocracy at his coronation; he was made to understand that his position depended a great deal on his ministers and that the assemblies of the people—the *Sabha* and the *Samiti*—were checks on his supreme authority. The king had to take the following vow at his coronation: 'If I play thee false, may I lose the merit of all my religious

<sup>1</sup> I. 14.

<sup>2</sup> VIII. 15.

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performances and gifts, of my good deeds, my place, my life and even my progeny.'

The following advice was given to kings: 'If thou shalt be a ruler, then from this day judge the strong and the weak with equal justice, resolve on doing good incessantly to the public, and protect the country from all calamities.'<sup>1</sup>

The coronation was followed, however, by a rite in which the king's assistants struck him on the back with a rod, thus placing him beyond the reach of judicial power, and so strengthened the basic idea of autocratic government, that 'the king can do no wrong'.

The *Sabha* and *Samiti* were the two earliest institutions of Indian polity, and were regarded as the twin daughters of Prajapati.<sup>2</sup> They were simple political unions where men gathered together for the public discussion and decision of important points. Debating was therefore an art much cultivated and held in high esteem. There were actually prayers that 'the speaker may hold the *Sabha* spell-bound by drawing unto himself the enlightenment and the wisdom of all its members', 'that the members of the *Sabha* be of one voice with the speaker', and 'that the attention of all the members of the *Sabha* may be riveted on one's speech, the delight of all'.<sup>3</sup> A point was decided by majority vote. The *Sabha* also acted as

<sup>1</sup> *Vajasaneyi-Sanhita*, X. 27.

<sup>2</sup> The many gods mentioned in the *Rig-Veda* were later 'boldly questioned and the ultimate unity of the Universe was asserted as the creation of one God to whom different designations were applied such as *Visvakarma*, *Hiranya-garbha*, *Prajapati* or *Aditi* the primeval mother'.—R. K. Mookerji, *Hindu Civilization*, p. 88.

<sup>3</sup> *Atharva-Veda*, VII. 12.

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a court of justice. Below the king there were officers and administrators of justice. A strict code of law regulated life and society.

Agriculture was still the main means of livelihood of the people, but the farmers were now taxed through the villages where they lived, and, to a great extent, settled their own affairs. We read of heavy ploughs that required twenty-four oxen to draw them. The furrow was called Sita, on which later was founded the story of the heroine of the *Ramayana*. Industries also developed and the variety of occupations increased. The beginnings of Vedic architecture are discernible in the fire-altar, which was constructed with 10,800 bricks and shaped like a large bird with outspread wings. Life became richer and more diversified. Organized entertainments took place, with acrobats, strolling players and musicians with drum and flute. Boatmen and ferrymen plied their trade across the rivers, using oars and rudders. Money-lenders began to make their exorbitant demands and merchant princes took charge of trade guilds. Women dyed and embroidered cloth and started a trade in basket-work. There was greater use of metals.

In the early Aryan settlements there had been no towns or cities, but now large cities were erected. New tribal formations exhibited models of good living and exemplary citizenship. Precise Sanskrit was learnt, intricate sacrifices were performed and academies attained a high standard of learning. Some households enjoyed great wealth and boasted of vast possessions. They had carts, horses, mules and slaves. Every Aryan boy was educated before he became a householder.

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Criminals were punished according to a strict sense of justice, for the *Brihadaranyaka* says: 'This is the power (*ksatra*) of the Kshatriya class (*ksatra*), viz. Law. Therefore there is nothing higher than Law. So a weak man controls a strong man by Law, just as if by a king. Verily, that which is Law is truth.'<sup>1</sup> Judicial procedure was still undeveloped however, and a criminal was at times tried by fire, just as Sita in the epic submitted to the ordeal. Theft, murder, drunkenness and adultery were considered to be among the major crimes.

In every way life was beginning to adjust itself to the very advanced position it held in the post-Vedic and heroic period when, in the epics and other later Sanskrit literature, we read of a well-balanced Indian society and a highly civilized state of living.

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<sup>1</sup> *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, I. 4. 14.

#### IV. LIFE IN THE AGE OF THE EPICS



TRADITION has it that Agastya was the first to cross the Vindhya mountains and go south, taking with him Vedic culture and civilization to the Dravidians. The highly imaginative story of his journey south is a symbolic myth which is probably founded on historical events. Agastya is said to have subdued the proud Vindhya mountain range as follows. The mountain king in the pride and glory of his great height is depicted by the poet as a human personality who grew so arrogant that he gibed at the sun and asked the latter to go round and round him. The sun naturally refused. Vindhya was angered and grew and grew to such a height that the daily path of the sun across the heavens was stopped and the sun was held up on one side. The whole world was now in turmoil and Agastya was asked to intervene and reason with Vindhya, who happened to be a disciple of the great sage. Agastya went to the mountain immediately and Vindhya bowed low to him in obeisance. Agastya blessed the mountain but commanded Vindhya to remain in this prostrate position until he returned from the south, whither he was journeying ; but Agastya never came back, and the Vindhya range in everlasting obedience to the command of the guru has had to remain in this prostrate position and the sun has once more been able to traverse the heavens.

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May this legend have grown out of the difficulties the Aryans found in crossing the Vindhya range? Did they compare themselves to the sun which finally went across the mountain after the pioneer, Agastya, had showed them the way? Perhaps the theory is far-fetched, but the fact remains that at last the Aryans did conquer the great height of the Vindhya mountains and go south.

A brilliant epoch in history begins with the spreading of the Aryans out of the Gangetic valley; their civilization, which we may now call Hindu, began to extend far and wide. Bengal was overrun, the South and West were no longer lands of mystery, and finally Ceylon was discovered and developed into a trading centre.

The epics deal with this period. The famous battle mentioned in the *Mahabharata* was fought on the fields of Kurukshetra and the second well-known epic, the *Ramayana*, deals with the princes of Ayodhya who were exiled and went south as far as Lanka or Ceylon. The two epics stress the importance of men of action, the Kshatriyas, though deep respect is always given to Brahmins, probably through fear of the great powers they claimed. The king, being the head of the military power, was the chief figure in the state. He was almost always portrayed as a ruler with a sense of justice and a regard for the welfare of his subjects. So high a standard did the king have to set for his subjects that he himself had to live a blameless and pure life. Rama, for instance, against his own conscience had to exile Sita for no fault of hers because it was the custom that no wife who had stayed for any length of time in another man's house,

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whether willingly or under force, could be received back into her husband's house no matter how innocent she was. Despite Sita proving her purity and despite Rama's great love for her and his belief in her chastity she had to be sent away, until finally Mother Earth opened her arms and Sita was carried into the Furrow from which she had been born. One feels today that it was a blot on the otherwise perfect character of Rama that he should have treated his faithful wife so cruelly, but his subjects demanded it, and in his time no alternative course of action was open to him as a king.

The epics tell of a settled life, despite constant wars. They describe cattle-ranches, barbarian settlements with forts to protect them, villages, towns and cities. A city had defences, battlements and seven moats. It was laid out in squares. The streets were well watered and lighted; and the king's palace stood in the middle of the city near the court of justice, the public hall and a hall for music, wrestling and entertainments. Beyond the city proper were booths for traders and pleasure-grounds. The wall of the city had four gates. Some extracts from the *Sutras* also throw light on the king's duty to build a town and a palace for himself :

The palace shall stand in the heart of the town.

In front of that there shall be a hall. That is called the hall of invitation.

At a little distance from the town to the south he shall cause to be built an assembly house with doors on the south and on the north sides, so that one can see what passes inside and outside.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Apastamba*, II. 10. 25.

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Guests were lodged in the hall, and were given rooms, a couch, meat and drink. These guests were often men learned in the Vedas. There was a table on which to play dice, and Brahmins, Vaisyas and Sudras. were all allowed to use it. The king's servants were permitted to practise music, dancing and singing and to perform feats of arms. Vasishtha describes a king's duties thus :

The particular duty of a king is to protect all beings :  
by fulfilling it he obtains success.

Let him appoint a domestic priest to perform the rites  
obligatory on the order of householders.

Let him punish those who stray from the path of  
duty.

Let him not injure trees that bear fruit and flowers.

He may injure them in order to extend cultivation.

Let him not take property for his own use from the  
inhabitants of his realm.<sup>1</sup>

The next power to that of the king was the priests', after whom came the merchants whose chiefs were of great political importance. The farmers who came after the tradespeople were also of Aryan stock, and lastly came the Sudras, slaves and people who lived in a wild state in forests and mountains.

We have seen that gambling was allowed in the hall of the king's palace and indulged in by Brahmins, Vaisyas and Sudras, but in the epics gambling became a favourite entertainment of kings and princes and a royal sport. In the *Mahabharata*, Yudhishtira the Pandava prince loses his whole kingdom and stakes even his wife to his cousin Duryodhana. In fact the whole battle described in the great epic is

<sup>1</sup> *Vasishtha*, XIV. 1, 3, 8, 11, 12, 14.



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based on the weakness of the large-hearted Dharma-raj for gambling. Court life generally was lived on a grand and splendid scale as can be gauged from the following description of Yudhishtira's palace in the *Mahabharata* :

Jumna's dark and limpid waters laved Yudhishtir's  
palace walls

And to hail him Dharma-raj, monarchs thronged his  
royal halls,

He to honoured kings and chieftains with a royal  
grace assigned

Palaces with sparkling waters and with trees um-  
brageous lined,

Honoured thus, the mighty monarchs lived in man-  
sions milky white,

Like the peaks of famed Kailasa lifting proud their  
snowy height !

Graceful walls that swept the meadows circled round  
the royal halls,

Nets of gold belaced the casements, gems bedecked  
the shining walls,

Flights of steps led up to chambers many-tinted,  
carpet-graced

And festooning fragrant garlands were harmonious  
interlaced.<sup>1</sup>

The *Mahabharata* also gives a vivid picture of a picnic : ' Cleanly cooks, under the superintendence of diligent stewards, served large pieces of meat roasted on spits, and meat cooked as curries, and sauces made of tamarinds and pomegranates ; young buffaloes roasted on spits dressed by dropping ghee thereon ; the same fried in ghee, seasoned with acids and sochel salt and sorrel leaves ; large haunches of venison

<sup>1</sup> *The Ramayana and the Mahabharata*, trs. R. C. Dutt, p. 227.

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boiled in different ways with sorrel and mangoes, and sprinkled over with condiments ; shoulders and rounds of animals dressed in ghee, well sprinkled over with sea-salt and powdered black pepper, and garnished with radishes, pomegranates, lemons, sweet basil, asafoetida, ginger and the herb.'<sup>1</sup> At these rare feasts there were also roasted birds, sweetmeats, curds, fruit, vegetables, milk, whey, cream and other delicacies.

It must be remembered, however, that such feasts were not everyday occurrences, that meat was gradually becoming less popular and that it was by no means the staple food. In the *Dharmasastras* Manu allowed meat to be eaten only on certain occasions : ' One may eat meat when it has been sprinkled with water while *mantras* are recited, when Brahmins desire, when one is engaged in the performances of a rite, according to the law, and when one's life is in danger.' Manu goes on to say : ' The Lord of Creatures [Prajapati] created this whole world to be the sustenance of the vital spirit ; . . . but let him never seek to destroy an animal without a lawful reason.' Yajnavalkya, another law-giver, provides a more human touch when he says : ' I for one eat it [beef] provided that it is tender ! ' A disciple of the sage Valmiki, author of the *Ramayana*, is also said to have uttered the following words during a visit from the sage Vasishtha : ' Why, know you not, the Vedas which enshrine our holy law, direct the householder shall offer those who are skilled, the honeyed meal, and with it flesh of ox, or calf or goat ? ' Manu said : ' Wine is unfit to be drunk,

<sup>1</sup> Rajendralal Mitra, *Indo-Aryans*, Vol. II, p. 422.

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unfit to be given, unfit to be accepted.’<sup>1</sup> But he added that there was ‘no turpitude in drinking wine’, though ‘a virtuous abstinence from it produces a signal compensation’. In the epics even women could drink and Sita was ‘not averse to a cheering cup’, while the good queen Sudeshana, wife of Maharaja Virata, sent for a ‘flagon of good wine’.

There are darker parts of the picture too. The people had to pay heavy taxes. There were both municipal and military officials and others who looked after agriculture, irrigation, forests and the administration of rural areas. As in most times and most countries, there were inequalities between the different classes of people, for the Brahmins were punished lightly for their crimes and the Sudras most cruelly. The laws were intricate and often severe, capital punishment being quite common. Then, after several centuries of soft living, the strength of the people began gradually to deteriorate. The Brahmin began to take advantage of the protection afforded to his caste while neglecting his duty to acquire the knowledge necessary to a Brahmin. He began to feed on the charity of the industrial classes without deserving such charity, and Vasishtha condemns such Brahmins thus: ‘[Brahmins] who neither study nor teach the Veda nor keep sacred fires become equal to Sudras.’ ‘The king shall punish that village where Brahmins, unobservant of their sacred duties and ignorant of the Vedas, subsist by begging, for it feeds robbers.’ ‘Those kingdoms where ignorant men eat the food of the learned will be visited by drought; or some other great evil will befall them.’<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Laws of Manu*, III. 119-20.    <sup>2</sup> *Vasishtha*, III. 1, 4, 12.

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Decadence nevertheless continued and the stalwart Aryans with the expansion of their territory became soft and almost degenerate. In the *Ramayana* princes were mighty in their feats of arms; they could bend the powerful bow and strike down their enemies, but ceremonials and obedience to priests and the soft influence of a luxurious court life are the lot of princes. The time was ripe for the law-givers to lay down their rules and regulations of life, and the *Dharmasastras* were written by Manu, Yajnavalkya, Narada and Vishnu. The caste system became more rigid than it had ever before been, and apart from the four original castes innumerable sub-castes were classified, originating from mixed marriages between the castes. In the law-books too we first find the four stages of every twice-born clearly laid down; the first stage of *Brahmachari* (pupil) began with the upanayana or thread-ceremony and ended with the completion of his studies; the second stage of *Grihastha* (office of a householder) was spent as a married man, experiencing the pleasures and sorrows of the world; this was followed by the third stage of *Vanaprastha*, the renouncing of worldly duties. The householder retired to the forest and spent his days in prayer and meditation until he passed on to the fourth stage of *Sannyasi* where severe austerities and mortifications led to the realization of ultimate truth.

The *Dharmasastras* do not attribute a very high status to women, but tend to suppress all individual characteristics and to mould men and women into citizens conscious of their duties and restricted to the narrow groove of life allotted to them. Side by side with these rigid Hindu dogmas, however, the Buddhist

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doctrine preached a purely humanitarian religion and strove to eliminate reactionary tendencies. In the welter of Brahmanical complexities Buddha's life shines out like a beacon, guiding the rather bewildered Hindu to a simple and kind philosophy.

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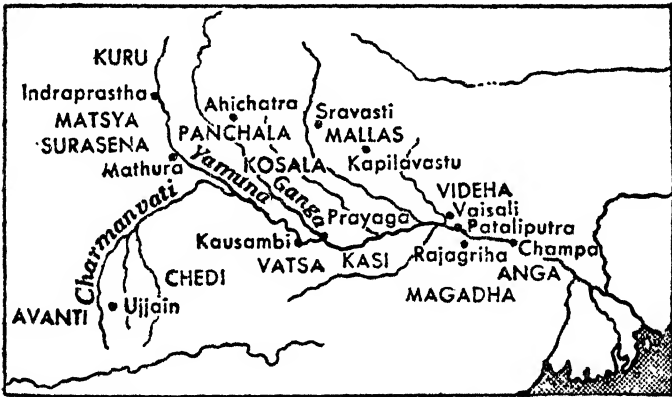
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## V. BUDDHIST AND MAURYAN TIMES



THE Aryans were well established in Magadha (which corresponds to southern Bihar) by the sixth century B.C., and Buddhist, Jain and Brahmanical literature of the period gives us a fairly clear picture of life in the states of Kosala, Kasi and Videha, a picture which probably holds true generally of life in northern India. Records of brilliant patches of almost ideal administration by Buddhist kings put the everyday life of ancient India on an equal footing with that



THE GANGES BASIN ABOUT 500 B.C.

Based on Map 2 in C. C. Davies' *Historical Atlas of the Indian Peninsula*

of any nation of today. Kosala was in the earlier period the most important state of Upper India. It

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had annexed Kasi, one of the most sacred areas in Buddhist religious history, for it was in this small state that the 'wheel of Buddha's Law' was first set rolling and his preaching first heard. Later the centre of religious and political India shifted eastwards to Magadha.

The Puranas, though not actually compiled in their final form until about the sixth century A.D., give us a fairly clear outline of the history of the time, and they fulfilled their object of dealing with the 'five topics of primary creation, secondary creation, genealogies of gods and patriarchs, reigns of various Manus, and the histories of the old dynasties of kings'.

The first historical dynasty mentioned in the Puranas is that of the Saisunaga, and Bimbisara was the first monarch of this line who is at all important. He is supposed to have built new Rajagriha, a town at the base of a hill crowned by a fort, and to have annexed Anga, which probably corresponds to modern Bhagalpur. This is the first indication of the later importance of Magadha, where probably both Mahavira and Buddha preached during the time of Bimbisara.

Thanks to the records of Greek historians we know much more of Chandragupta, the contemporary of Alexander the Great. Chandragupta's powerful armies welded northern India into a state of unity never known hitherto and he was the founder of a dynasty which lasted from 321 to 184 B.C. These 150 years of the Mauryan dynasty form one of the most glorious chapters in our history.

Chandragupta seized the throne of Magadha by

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killing Dhananada and his entire family and making sure of his position as emperor. He pursued his ambition by seizing state after state in Upper India, as far south as the river Narbada. Two sources of information give a clear idea of his reign. They are the records of Megasthenes<sup>1</sup> and Kautilya's *Arthashastra*.

Kautilya was Chandragupta's Brahmin adviser and was known also as Chanakya or Vishnugupta. He has been described as 'the greatest Indian exponent of the art of government', and the wisdom of his statecraft is said to have been greater than that of Machiavelli. Chandragupta formed the first Empire of India after his treaty with Seleucus Nikator, whose daughter he eventually married. Seleucus Nikator was the Greek Satrap of Babylon who crossed the Indus from Bactria about 305 B.C. and was met in battle by Chandragupta with 9,000 war-elephants, many chariots, 30,000 cavalry and 600,000 infantry—these figures are perhaps much exaggerated. By the simple process of exchanging 500 elephants for territory up to the Hindu Kush mountains in the north, Chandragupta considerably widened his dominions and created his empire. In the west his domains stretched to the highlands of Herat and Sind; and Kathiawar, Gujarat and Malwa also fell to him.

The king was naturally the head of his state and according to the prescriptions of Kautilya had to be

<sup>1</sup> Megasthenes was a Greek officer of Seleucus who was sent to the court of Chandragupta after the conclusion of peace between Syria and India in 303 B.C. He resided at Pataliputra, the capital of the Mauryan Empire, and compiled a most interesting account of the geography, customs, products and institutions of the country. Unfortunately his account has only been partially preserved in citations by later Greek and Roman authors.



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both energetic and wakeful, for it was said 'if a king is energetic his subjects will be equally energetic'.<sup>1</sup> At the time of his coronation he took a solemn oath of service to his subjects, saying: 'May I be deprived of heaven, of life and of offspring if I oppress you.' A timetable was laid down for the king which allowed four and a half hours for sleep; three hours for bathing, meals and private study; an hour and a half for religious devotions; and an hour and a half, if the king so wished, for recreation. The remaining part of the day was devoted to affairs of state. The day began with greetings from the priest and ended with evening prayer (*sandhya*).

The king had to be protected from assassins, and the play *Mudra-Rakshasa* describes 'the brave men who were concealed in the subterranean avenue that led to Chandragupta's sleeping chamber, thence to steal by night and kill him as he slept'.<sup>2</sup> In fact the king's life does not seem to have been very peaceful for he had constantly to keep changing his couch by night, moving from one to another in order to defeat plots. There were guards outside also, and the care of the king's person was entrusted to women who were bought from their parents. Chandragupta loved to be massaged, and the massage was usually done with ebony rollers by four attendants. While being massaged, he gave audiences and attended to administrative affairs.

Pataliputra, now known as Patna, was the capital of Chandragupta's empire. It was situated on a tongue of land between the rivers Son and Ganges and was

<sup>1</sup> *Arthasastra*, trs. A. Shamasastri, p. 36.

<sup>2</sup> *Mudra-Rakshasa*, Act II.

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an oblong city about nine miles by two. It was defended by stockades of heavy timber. It had 570 towers and was pierced by 74 portcullised gates. A deep moat about 200 yards wide surrounded the outer walls and was filled by water from the river Son. The palace was magnificent and stood in a park where there were fish-ponds, peacocks, pheasants and ornamental trees and shrubs. The king lived in 'barbaric splendour in his timber-built palace with its gilded pillars, being served at his table with golden dishes six feet across'. There were also copper vessels set with precious stones, and Megasthenes tells us: 'When Indians are at supper a table is placed before each person, this being like a tripod. There is placed



Part of a design engraved on a bronze *lota*, dated about A.D. 200. The procession here consists of a graceful female dancer, followed by two women (with enormous head-dresses) playing on a vina and a long flute and by a chariot drawn by four high-stepping horses.

Reproduced from G. C. M. Birdwood's *Industrial Arts of India* with permission from the Keeper of the Victoria and Albert Museum. The vase, which was unearthed in Kulu in 1857, is now in the British Museum.

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upon it a golden bowl into which they first put rice, boiled as one would boil barley, and then they add many dainties prepared according to Indian receipts.'<sup>1</sup>



A royal fly-flapper (*chamara*), made from the hair of a yak's tail (Fig. 111 in Rajendralal Mitra's *Indo-Aryans*, Vol. I)

Chandragupta wore gorgeous robes and appeared in public in a golden palanquin decorated with tassels of pearls, or mounted on an elephant. Hunting was a royal sport and the king often went out on an elephant surrounded by women, some armed and some holding the royal umbrella, the royal fan and the royal pitcher. They were preceded by men beating drums and gongs and an escort of spearmen. Processional routes were roped off, and anyone crossing the rope was punishable by death. Gladiatorial shows were a favourite pastime and animal-fights between bulls, rams, elephants and rhinoceroses were popular. There were races at which betting took place. The race-course was a long one, of about 6,000 yards, and there were races between horses and between oxen drawing cars.

The above description of Chandragupta and his court life gives the impression that he was nothing but a luxury-loving monarch indulging in all the plea-

<sup>1</sup> McCrindle, p. 74, Fragment xxviii.

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tures of a degenerate prince ; but the administration of his day was anything but lax, and state affairs were well conducted. The king's duties were many. He had to post watchmen, to supervise the revenue and expenditure, to make appointments, gather information from spies, superintend his army and stables and also follow religious precepts and study. Kautilya says that when in court the king 'shall never cause petitioners to wait at the door',<sup>1</sup> and that he should carefully attend to the requirements of his subjects. We are also told by Greek evidence that the king 'remains in court for the whole day, without allowing the business to be interrupted, even though the hour arrives when he must needs attend to his person'.<sup>2</sup> Thus though the government was autocratic and 'merciless in its precepts' it was guided by 'the noblest ideals of beneficence', and, as Asoka later put it, the king realized that 'all men were his children'. Kautilya says of the king: 'In the happiness of his subjects lies his happiness, in their welfare his welfare, whatever pleases himself he shall not consider as good, but whatever pleases his subjects he shall consider as good.'<sup>3</sup> The fatherless and orphans were provided for and women were specially protected.

Chandragupta Maurya possessed his own crown lands which were partly cultivated by slaves, but most of his revenue came from taxes paid by agriculturists. Agriculture continued to be the main occupation of the people and the village was therefore an important place for purposes of administration. Each village

<sup>1</sup> *Arthasastra*, op. cit., p. 38.

<sup>2</sup> McCrindle, p. 72, Fragment xxvii.

<sup>3</sup> *Arthasastra*, op. cit., p. 38.

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had its headman or *gramani* and its council of elders or Panchayat. The government made an even distribution of population by building villages in out-of-the-way places. There were officials to supervise village government, and irrigation services were provided, though at a high rate. A *gopa* controlled about twelve villages, and above him were higher officials. In the reign of Asoka a *rajuka* was at the head of a large number of people.

Pataliputra was divided into six municipal boards, in each of which there were five officials managing various departments such as sanitation, finance, water-supply and famine relief. Stores were always kept in reserve against famine. There was a special council to look after public buildings and harbours. A strict census was kept of population and also of property. Above an elaborate official system was the king's cabinet or Inner Four consisting of the Diwan, the *purohita*, the *senapati* (Commander-in-Chief) and the Yuvaraja (heir apparent). During the Nanda and Mauryan dynasties a low-born man could, if he was sufficiently gifted, work himself up to a high official position.

Megasthenes says: 'Of the great officers of state, some have the charge of the market, others of the city, others of the soldiery. Some superintend the rivers, measure the lands as is done in Egypt, and inspect the sluices by which water is let out from the main canals into their branches, so that everyone 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 super-

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intend the occupations connected with land as those of the woodcutters, the carpenters, the blacksmiths, and the miners. They construct roads, and at every ten stadia set up a pillar to show the by-roads and distances.'<sup>1</sup> There was, however, a good deal of corruption in the administration, and it is amusing to read Kautilya's comments on this very human weakness: 'Just as fish moving under water cannot possibly be found out either as drinking or not drinking water, so government servants employed in the government work cannot be found out [while] taking money [for themselves].'<sup>2</sup>

There was an elaborate War Office divided into sections for the Infantry, the Admiralty, Chariots, the Quartermaster-General, Cavalry and Elephants. The waging of war was studied as an art and a number of books were written on the subject. The *Arthashastra* laid down the main principles. Even in those early days prisoners of war were spared, though criminals were punished with execution or mutilation. Kautilya proudly repeated the fearless phrase that 'never shall an Arya be subjected to slavery', which shows that Chandragupta's warriors scarcely knew the meaning of defeat.

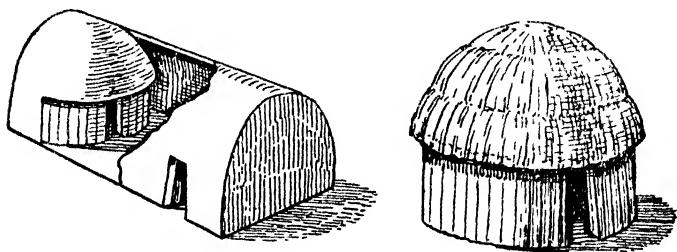
The houses being made of wood, there was constant danger of fire in the towns and many precautions had to be taken. Vessels filled with water were kept ready in the streets and every house had to be equipped with water, ladders and hooks ready for emergencies. Efforts were evidently made to keep the streets clean, for there is a rule in the *Arthashastra*

<sup>1</sup> McCrindle, p. 86, Fragment xxxiv.

<sup>2</sup> *Arthashastra*, op. cit., p. 70.

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saying that those who throw dirt on the streets will be fined for allowing mud or water to collect on the public thoroughfares. It has already been mentioned that the roads were provided with sign-posts. The extent of the road system is not known, but there was a Grand Trunk or Royal Road, called Rajapatha, which extended from the present North-West Frontier Province right up to Pataliputra.



HUT OF THE AGE OF ASOKA

The early rock-cut caves often copied buildings of wood and thatch, and in the age of Asoka rounded huts like this were probably common. The illustration is based on Figures 1 and 2 in Plate VI of Percy Brown's *Indian Architecture*, Vol. I, and shows one of the Sudama caves (on the Barabar hill near Gaya) cut away to show the 'hut' inside; and beside it a hut as it probably appeared, showing the eaves of the thatched roof and the lines of planking in the walls. (By kind permission of the author. *Indian Architecture* is published by Messrs D. B. Taraporevala Sons and Co. Ltd.)

The earliest coinage system seems to have been introduced during the Mauryan dynasty, though small objects resembling coins have been discovered at Mohenjodaro. The coins of the Mauryan dynasty consisted of small ingots of silver, curved and punch-marked.

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Village life was generally quiet and undisturbed, but trouble sometimes arose over the collection of taxes. There were inns and hostels and places where people could gamble, provided that five per cent of the winnings was given to the state. Travelling companies occasionally sang, acted and danced to the villagers, but Kautilya seems to disapprove of so much distraction for the common people.

Rice had by this period become the staple food. The Brahmins were still allowed to eat meat, with the exception of the flesh of horned cattle. Rice-beer was a popular intoxicating drink, but people generally lived a sober life, except on holidays. Later, in Asoka's reign, life became much more austere. Asoka, in the excessive love for all living beings which he developed in his later years, forbade the killing of animals for purposes of food, and in one of his rock edicts we read: 'Formerly in the kitchen of King Priyadarsin,<sup>1</sup> beloved of the gods, many hundreds of thousands of animals were every day slaughtered to make curry. But now . . . only three lives have been killed for curry, namely two peacocks and one deer; but even that deer not regularly. Even these three animals shall not be afterwards killed.'

Tradition has it that Chandragupta finally abdicated the throne and became a Jain. In 297 B.C. he was succeeded by his son Bindusara, of whom little is known except that he held his father's territories and seems to have written to Antiochus I for figs, sweet wine and a sophist to teach him to argue. The last he could not obtain as he was told it was not lawful in Greece to sell sophists!

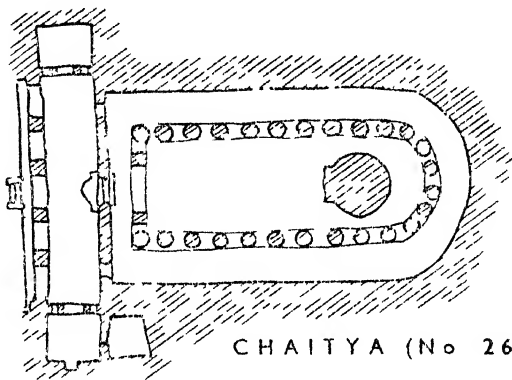
<sup>1</sup> Meaning 'one of amiable look', and referring to Asoka.



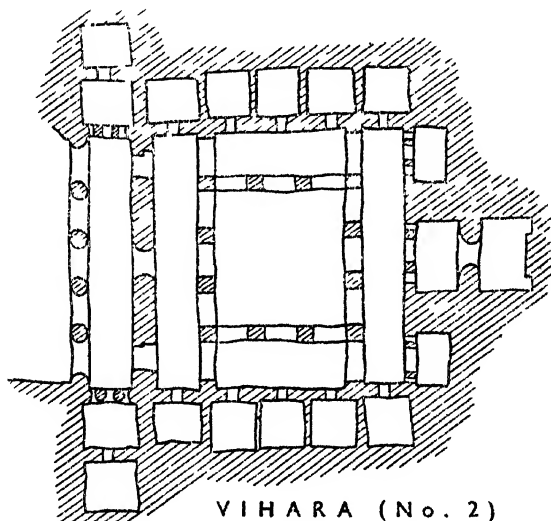
## ***Everyday Life in Ancient India***

Bindusara's son Asoka ascended the throne in 273 B.C. and for thirty-eight years exercised a benign and godly influence over almost the whole of India. For many years he lived as most of the kings of the day did, in luxury ; but his whole outlook on life changed after his war against the Kalingas of the eastern coastal region, when he achieved a tremendous victory at the cost of thousands of victims. Filled with horror at the cruelty of war, he changed his religion and became a devout Buddhist. Buddhism had by now taken a firm grip of the land, for its simple faith was meant for all without distinction of caste or position. Non-injury to living things was one of the chief precepts, and a benevolent attitude towards all men was prescribed. Duty was the stern mistress of all the Buddhists, and Asoka broadcast far and wide the Law of Piety or Duty (*Dhamma* or *Dharma*). 'Father and mother must be obeyed,' he ordered, in the second Minor Rock Edict, 'and similar respect for living creatures must be enforced ; truth must be spoken ; these are the virtues of the Law of Piety.' *Dhamma* was not a religion but a precept for all right-minded men to follow. All religions were to be respected. 'All sects deserve reverence for one reason or another. By thus acting a man exalts his own sect and at the same time does service to the sects of other people.' By his edicts and the extensive missions he maintained outside India, Asoka's law and the Buddhist religion became known not only to the whole of India, but to many other nations.

Asoka was the only king, according to H. G. Wells, who abandoned war after victory.



0 50 Feet



**AJANTA** TYPES OF BUDDHIST  
 ROCK-CUT SHRINES 7th CENT. A.D.

From Stuart Figgott's *Some Ancient Cities of India*

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Asoka's edicts supply many interesting biographical details. They are found inscribed on the granite faces of rocks and on monoliths of sandstone. They were written in three different Prakrits and were therefore meant for the public. Inscriptions intended for the public were placed in prominent places. Asoka's greatest Buddhist tenet was kindness to animals, for he considered their lives to be as sacred as those of human beings. Even the meanest animal had a right to live, if one believed that all living things existed in an endless chain of 'becoming'. The transmigration of souls developed according to a man's actions, and he might become an insect, or an insect become a man, according to the law of Karma. Human beings were certainly not exempt from suffering, however, and Buddhist and Jain kings did not hesitate to inflict capital punishment. Even Asoka killed criminals, though he gave the condemned man three days' grace to prepare himself for the great ordeal. He also allowed the right of final appeal.

In his early days Asoka is said to have been a Brahminical Hindu who did not object to shedding blood freely; but, as has already been related, gradually his kitchens became vegetarian and all butchery was stopped. Hunting for sport was also abolished, and finally Asoka had many animals protected from slaughter, while meat-eating was severely restricted in his dominions.

All living creatures, including servants and slaves, had to be treated kindly, and alms-giving was commended. Asoka did not care for ritual but greatly valued the fundamental virtues of liberality, truth,

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purity, gentleness, and saintliness. While they were on tour, all his officers were expected to exemplify and teach the *Dhamma*. Asoka showed his benevolence not only by his personal alms-giving, but in many other ways. Censors were appointed to supervise the distribution of royal charity and to see that animals were protected. Travellers were provided for, for a rock edict says: 'On the roads I have had banyan trees planted; to give shade to man and beast, I have had groves of mango trees planted and at every half kos I have had wells dug; rest-houses have been erected; and numerous watering-places have been prepared here and there for the enjoyment of man and beast.'<sup>1</sup> Sick men and animals were looked after and the old cherished. Medicinal drugs were planted and supplied where needed, and hospitals were built as far apart as in South India and western Asia. Animal hospitals similar to Asoka's still exist in Ahmedabad and Surat, and it is said that in former days even vermin such as lice and bugs were looked after.

Instead of making war on the kingdoms of southern India, Asoka made friends with them. Two favourite maxims of his were: 'Let small and great exert themselves'<sup>2</sup> and 'Work I must for the public benefit'.<sup>3</sup> His intentions were honest; his benefits to the world great, and he could justly say: 'At all times and at all places, whether I am dining or in the ladies' apartments, in my bedroom or in my closet, in my carriage or in my palace gardens, the official reporters should

<sup>1</sup> Pillar Edict VII, Rock Edict II.

<sup>2</sup> Minor Rock Edict I, Rupnath.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted by V. A. Smith, *Early History of India*, p. 169.

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keep me constantly informed of the people's business.' He could with truth inscribe in one of his edicts: 'Although a man do him an injury, His Majesty holds that it must be patiently borne, as far as it possibly can be borne.'<sup>1</sup> Asoka's cherished wish was 'that all animate beings should have security, self-control, peace of mind, and joyousness'.

Asoka died, as a Buddhist monk, about 232 or 231 B.C. After his death his kingdom was exposed to foreign invasion and fell upon dark days, for his successors were weaklings. Magadha sank into obscurity under the Sunga dynasty. Buddhism also began to lose its hold on the country and gradually the rigid customs of Brahminism again established their hold over Indian life.

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<sup>1</sup> Rock Edict, XIII.

## VI. INDIA'S GOLDEN AGE



WITH the decline of the Mauryan Empire the influence of Buddhism began to wane and Hinduism revived. Pushyamitra was the first Sunga king who actually persecuted Buddhists and revived the celebration of the *Asvamedha*, that ancient rite which only a paramount power could perform. The sacrifice was performed with a great deal of magnificence and it was a challenge to rival powers, as may be judged from the following description: 'A horse of a particular colour was consecrated by the performance of certain ceremonies, and was then turned loose to wander for a year. The king, or his representative, followed the horse with an army, and when the animal entered a foreign country, the ruler of that country was bound either to fight or to submit. If the liberator of the horse succeeded in obtaining or enforcing the submission of all the countries over which it passed, he returned in triumph with all the vanquished Rajas in his train; but, if he failed, he was disgraced, and his pretensions ridiculed. After his successful return, a great festival was held, at which the horse was sacrificed.'

No events of great importance are chronicled during Pushyamitra's reign, nor are we given any vivid accounts of Indian life during his time by poets and authors, though Patanjali lived then and wrote his *Mahabhashya*. The Brahminical revival which started at the beginning of the Sunga dynasty developed fully during the Gupta dynasty a few centuries

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later, yet it would not be proper to describe it as a Hindu renaissance. Hinduism had never died. Its practices had continued during the period of Buddhist



Notice the tiles on this building, copied from a carving on Stupa 2 at Sanchi which was probably done about 100 B.C. (From Marshall and Foucher's *Sanchi*, Vol. III, Plate XC)

and Jain supremacy, though in those times animal sacrifices had been looked upon with disgust. With the revival of the horse-sacrifice, other Hindu practices were resurrected and the Guptas, who were devout Hindus, certainly stereotyped the older Hindu faith into the form which has since been known in India. The worship of the gods Vishnu, Siva, Kartikeya, Lakshmi

and Parvati became general, and the gods of the modern Hindu pantheon were made into objects of worship by the Gupta emperors. Sanskrit also became the official court language, and a Hindu style in art and architecture was evident. Even the Buddhist survivors were generally followers of the Mahayana cult, a cult very like Hinduism and teeming with ceremonial customs. When Buddha was made an *avatar*, Buddhism can be said to have succumbed, and once more Hinduism reigned supreme.

The Gupta period, which began in A.D. 320 and had its golden age from 330 to 455, was an era of imperi-

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alism and autocracy, in spite of which the government was good and popular. Pataliputra once more became an important city with the accession of Chandragupta I, and though Samudragupta changed the capital to Ayodhya, Pataliputra continued to be a magnificent town, and was later much praised by the Chinese traveller Fa Hien.<sup>1</sup> Chandragupta extended his dominions considerably by his marriage with Kumara Devi, a princess of the famous Lichchhavi clan.

Chandragupta was succeeded by his son Samudragupta, whose ambition was to become master of Hindustan. After his sanguinary wars he employed a Sanskrit poet to write his conquests on one of Asoka's Edicts, thus showing, perhaps, his contempt for the benign king's piety and horror of war. Samudragupta also practised the horse-sacrifice which had last been heard of in Pushyamitra's time, and celebrated it with great splendour. Millions of gold coins were given away as gifts to Brahmins, and medals with the image of the horse to be sacrificed were struck. The king was a ruler possessing unusual gifts, a man of genius. He was proficient in song and music, and a coin shows him seated on a high-backed couch playing the lyre. He was also a poet and composed many literary works of a high standard. He conquered large territories and lived to an advanced age, reigning for nearly half a century.

His son Chandragupta II (or Vikramaditya) followed his father's policy of conquest and was master

<sup>1</sup> The earliest of the Chinese pilgrims (399-414), who wrote *Ko-kho-ki* (*Record of the Buddhistic Kingdoms*) and gave a vivid chronicle of the life of Chandragupta Vikramaditya.



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of about half of India at the time of his greatest power. He marched right up to the shores of the Arabian Sea through Malwa and Gujarat and subjected Kathiawar, which had been ruled for centuries by the Sakas. He reigned as emperor for nearly forty years, till A.D. 413. He was a strong ruler and was fond of depicting himself fighting the lion, yet he did not harass the Buddhists and Jains although he was an orthodox Hindu. He was followed by his son Kumaragupta I, at the close of whose reign the Huns invaded India.

Vikramaditya is said to be identical with the original 'Vikram of Ujjain', well-known for his magnificent court in which the 'nine gems' of Sanskrit literature flourished. Not only was there a literary renaissance and a pageant of poets and artists in Vikram's time, but architecture was encouraged during the Gupta period and elaborate Hindu temples were built which were to culminate in the ornate style of medieval India. After the death of Kumaragupta, however, the brilliant dynasty began to decline. Skandagupta had to combat the invading Huns, and at first was successful. He celebrated his victory by telling the news immediately to his mother and erecting a pillar of victory to his father. Skandagupta died about 480 and the empire crumbled with him.

Historically there follows a blank until 606, when Harsha Vardhana once more brought India into prominence and with his great army made himself master of the North and brought India 'under one umbrella'. He punished evil-doers and rewarded the meritorious. He moved about a great deal, and as tents had not as

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yet been invented he made himself a 'travelling palace' of reeds and branches wherever he happened to camp. Bana the court poet has written a biography of Harsha called *Harsha Charita* in which he says: 'With his necklace of pearls and other ornaments he looked like a jewel mountain with its outstretched wings of jewels spread on both sides.'

The officers and councillors had now become very much like feudal lords. Taxes were light, and the main state revenue was one-sixth of the produce of the crown lands. Government officials were paid in grants of land and not with money.

Buddhism survived in a few monasteries, including the monastery of Nalanda, but the famous buildings of Sanchi had crumbled into complete ruin. Brahminism was the common religion; but a surprising increase in the popularity of Buddhism arose when Harsha, though a worshipper of the Sun and of Siva, was almost, if not quite, converted to Buddhism. Perhaps it was due to the fact that his sister Rajyasri was a Buddhist, and also because of his friendship with Hiuen Tsang.<sup>1</sup> Harsha erected many Buddhist stupas and monasteries, and every year he summoned an assembly of Buddhist monks to discuss religious matters. He stopped the slaughter of animals, fed the

<sup>1</sup> Also spelt Yuan Chwang, and in several other ways. A learned Chinese pilgrim who visited India in the seventh century. He has left us valuable records and chronicles of King Harsha and of many parts of India, and his descriptions give a vivid picture of life in India in the seventh century. His *Buddhist Records of the Western World* have been translated by Samuel Beal. Hiuen Tsang studied for many years at Nalanda, the famous Buddhist university, for the support of which he says that a fourth of Harsha's revenue was devoted.

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poor and looked after the sick. Hiuen Tsang says Harsha 'was indefatigable and the day was too short for him'. Of the Indians of Harsha's time Hiuen Tsang adds: 'They will not take anything wrongfully, and they yield more than fairness requires. They fear the retribution for sins in other lives, and make light of what conduct produces in this life. They do not practise deceit and they keep their sworn obligations.'

Pataliputra and Ayodhya were now no longer the chief cities. Kanauj near Kanpur was made the premier city. Its original name is said to have been Kanya Kubja (hunch-backed girl) because the hundred daughters of a king were cursed by an angry rishi and converted into hunch-backs. Kanauj was five miles long, and a mile and a quarter wide. It was well-defended and very beautiful, crowded with Buddhist monasteries and Hindu temples. Every five years the king held a magnificent festival at Allahabad (Prayag), attended by many rulers of neighbouring kingdoms. The festival lasted for seventy-five days and included worship of Buddha, Siva and the Sun. Gifts were distributed to Buddhist priests, to Brahmins and to Jains. Vast sums of money were given away to the poor during this quinquennial festival, and in his excessive charity Harsha gave away his own garments and goods and finally took from his sister Rajyasri a worn garment and worshipped the Buddha. It is said that such charity has not been equalled in Indian history.

During Harsha's reign literature and the sciences flourished. Banabhatta, or Bana as he is more com-

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monly known, was the author not only of the *Harsha Charita*, but also of *Kadambari*, a poetic novel. Harsha was himself the author of three Sanskrit plays entitled *Priyadarsika*, *Ratnavali* and *Nagananda*.

Although Harsha encouraged Buddhism, Brahminism remained the predominant religion and the gods chiefly worshipped by the people were Aditya (the Sun), Siva and Vishnu. The Chinese pilgrim says that Buddhism was distinctly on the decline.

Harsha's death in 648 was followed by years of war and confusion, during which time the Rajputs first became powerful. They claimed descent from the Sun, Moon and Sacrificial Fire. Vincent Smith says: 'They became so prominent that the centuries from the death of Harsha to the Muhammadan conquest of Hindostan, extending in round numbers from the middle of the seventh to the close of the twelfth century, might be called with propriety the Rajput period. Nearly all the Kingdoms were governed by families or clans which for ages past have been called collectively Rajputs.' They were also staunch defenders of the Hindu traditions. Tod has paid them appropriate homage when he says: 'What nation on earth would have maintained the semblance of the civilization, the spirit or the customs of their forefathers, during so many centuries of overwhelming depression, but one of such singular character as the Rajput? Rajasthan exhibits the sole example in the history of mankind, of a people withstanding every outrage barbarity can inflict or human nature sustain, and bent to the earth, yet rising buoyant from the pressure and making calamity a whetstone to courage.'

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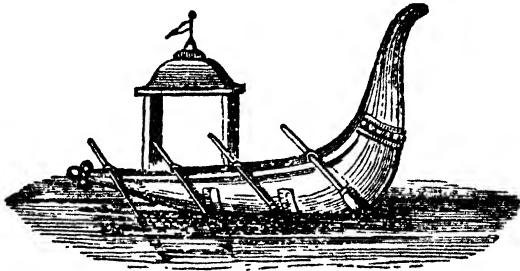
The Brahminical revival set a certain standard of living and manners which has remained the foundation of the common customs of the Hindus through the ages. The daily bath, for instance, was insisted upon, to be followed by the repeating of *mantras* and the performance of religious duties. After bathing, drinking, yawning, sleeping, eating, walking, dressing or reading one had to rinse one's mouth. According to I-Tsing, priests washed their feet and hands before their meals and sat on separate small chairs. The *shradh* ceremony, or prayers for the dead, was at this time well established. Caste was broken up to a certain extent through intermarriage, but as we have already seen, Manu, by forming sub-castes, prevented any further intermingling.

Etiquette and manners became elaborate. Salutations were very courteous. A disciple fell at the feet of his preceptor and a son did likewise to his parents. A sage blessed a king and prayed that he might have a son who would be invincible. Inferior men bowed slightly to their superiors when speaking to them. A guest was offered water and asked to sit on a cane seat. Girls and old women showered rice upon the head of a king when he entered his capital.

The aristocratic pastime of hunting became exceedingly popular. Dandin, a well-known Pallava writer, praises it thus: 'There is nothing so beneficial as hunting. It gives the legs magnificent exercise; and long-winded speed might prove very handy after a defeat. It dries up the phlegmatic humour; thus promoting digestion, the sole foundation of health. By reducing fat, it makes the body vigorous, sinewy, agile.' Kalidasa also commended hunting.

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In the home, cane chairs, cots, corded benches and bamboo couches became common pieces of furniture. The flat stool, seven inches high and seen today in South Indian dining-rooms, for people to sit on while eating off the floor from leaves or large silver or brass



A river boat shown on the Puri temple. There is a curious absence of sea-going vessels from the tenth-century sculptures at Puri and Bhuvaneshvar (both near the coast) but by the eleventh century the Cholas had become a big naval power. (Fig. 130 in Rajendralal Mitra's *Indo-Aryans*, Vol. I)

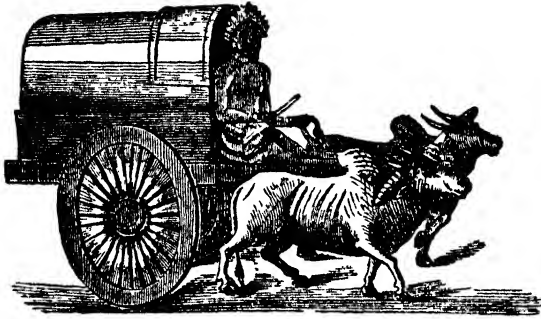
dishes, was also found in the Gupta period. Utensils were of gold in rich houses. Water was stored in vessels. Birds were kept as pets and taught to imitate common sounds.

Houses were built of mud, stone or timber and arranged in rows with lanes and roads running between them. They had lofty terraces and high roofs with arbours. According to Fa Hien the people ate no meat or onions or garlic and drank no liquor.

Sea-borne traffic was common and voyages increased. The beginnings of insurance may be found

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in the fact that owners of ships were recompensed for their losses at sea. Commerce with foreign countries was encouraged and began to thrive.



A bullock-cart shown in the Amara-vati sculptures (From Mitra, *Indo-Aryans*, based on Fergusson's *Tree and Serpent Worship*, Plate LXV)

Indigenous trades also flourished. Dairies were formed and milk and ghee sold. An excise system was established, to control the breweries and distilleries. Music, dancing and concerts kept the people entertained.

The Dasas were still regarded as outcastes. They had to live outside the villages, near the cremation grounds and other unhealthy places. They possessed only broken utensils and their wealth consisted of dogs and donkeys. They were not allowed to enter a village by night and only on very urgent business by day. They carried away unclaimed corpses and worked as hangmen. According to Fa Hien a class called the Chandalas worked as butchers, fishermen,

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public performers and scavengers, living apart from other castes.

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## VII. LIFE IN THE SOUTH



OUTH INDIA from the earliest ages was isolated from the North by its remote geographical position and also by the great range of the Vindhya mountains which formed a natural and almost impassable barrier. The legend of Agastya crossing the great mountain shows to a certain extent how difficult it was to reach South

India even in historical times, and an original theory put forward by A. C. Das in his book *Rig-Vedic India* points to much greater isolation of the South from the North. He says the former was actually a huge continent in itself. Geologists agree that southern India was once part of a great sea-girt continent (called Gondwanaland), but this was at a period long before man existed.

Many prehistoric tombs have been found in South India, and people have lived there from the earliest times; and while the North was developing under Aryan domination the South continued her old form of living undisturbed. Material evidence is scanty as to the conditions of life, but it is likely that the people of the South developed an advanced culture corresponding to that of the Dravidians whom the Aryans found inhabiting India. So well advanced were they that Vincent Smith says: 'Early Indian history, as a whole, cannot be viewed in true perspective until the non-Aryan institutions of the South receive adequate treatment.'

## *Life in the South*

Little is known of the South until the establishment of the great Andhra dynasty in 220 B.C. but vague references are made to this vast tract of land in Vedic literature, in fragments of Megasthenes and the edicts of Asoka. The epics also tell us of the South, and of how Rama and Sita rested on the banks of the Godavari and how the adjoining country was uncultivated and full of wild animals and demons. South India has long had sea-communications with western Asia, and Solomon (950 B.C.) had commodities imported to him which were actually known by their Indian names to the Greeks. Rice was the chief export from India and was a common food during the time of Sophocles (450 B.C.) and the Greek name *oryza* probably owed its origin to the Tamil *arisi*.

Pearls, ivory, gold, rice, pepper, peacocks, and even monkeys, were sent to Babylon, Egypt and Greece, and later to Rome. Teakwood from the Malabar coast was taken even earlier to Chaldæa and Babylonia. And all this trade, or most of it, was carried in Indian ships, manned by Dravidians.

Merchants of various races came to the South eager to buy pepper, pearls, beryls and other commodities peculiar to India. Pepper fetched an enormous price and pearl fisheries have been functioning for centuries and are still productive. A small town in the District of Coimbatore was early known for its mines where beryls could be obtained which were much valued by the Romans. These commodities were paid for in gold, and the Roman golden coin *aureus* was in general circulation in South India. During the first two centuries of the Christian era Roman soldiers were a sufficiently common sight for a contemporary his-

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torian to refer to the presence of 'Yavanas, dumb Mlechchhas [barbarians] clad in complete armour'.

Foreign ships were also seen off Muziris (Cranganore) and there was a Yavana colony at the mouth



A 'COMBINED OPERATION'

Elephants and horses being carried over the sea in rowing-boats. Notice the great variety of weapons and the long rectangular shields. Here the warriors are bare-footed, and the horses have no stirrups. Probably this scene represents the invasion of Ceylon by Vijaya. It is painted on the wall of Cave XVII at Ajanta, and is reproduced from a woodcut appearing in Mrs Speir's *Life in Ancient India*, 1856.

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of the Cauvery. Yavana lamps, wines and vases are frequently mentioned in Tamil poems and some megalithic finds in the Nilgiris have confirmed this literary evidence.

Ship-building was so early an art that tradition credits Vijaya with having gone from India to Ceylon, and there is a representation of the conqueror crossing the sea to Ceylon in ships which carried horses and elephants. Vijaya is supposed to have given the name Sinhala to the island, and Andhra coins of the early Christian centuries are impressed with a large ship with two masts. The South also showed great enterprise in establishing colonies in most of the islands in the East. Malaya, Java, Sumatra, Cambodia and Borneo were colonized and Indian culture and art established there. There must have been colonies in Burma, Siam and Indo-China as well, as many of the place-names there are South Indian. The colonists must very soon have intermarried with the original inhabitants, as it was not easy to keep up the connexion with India. Great cities were built, the mighty ruins of which still exist. The extensive spread of Aryan civilization in the islands of the East can be gauged from the fact that, when a new legislative building was put up in Manila recently, four figures were erected representing the four sources of Philippine culture, and Manu was one of them.

Historically South India became known from the days of her great Andhra dynasty. The power of the Andhras spread from sea to sea and some of their kings were so victorious in battle that they performed the *Asvamedha* sacrifice. Gautamiputra Satakarni is said to have 'crushed down the pride and conceit

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of the Kshatriyas, furthered the interests of the twice-born [apparently the Brahmins] as well as the lowest orders, and stopped the contamination of the four castes'.<sup>1</sup>

Apart from the Andhras the three kingdoms of the Cholas, the Pandyas and the Cheras of the far South were well-known. In the middle of the second century B.C. a Chola named Elara is said to have conquered Ceylon. The Cholas are mentioned in the *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea* in the first century A.D. and also by Ptolemy a century later. They declined sometime later and Hiuen Tsang, who visited South India in the seventh century, found the country 'deserted and wild, a succession of marshes and jungles'. He further commented that the population was small and that troops and brigands went through the country openly. The Cholas regained some of their power in the ninth century. They were famous for their sea trade and produced a fine cotton which was much in demand. Their chief port was Kaveripattinam at the mouth of the Cauvery, which was indeed a busy place. Here, as already mentioned, a settlement of the Yavanas was formed.

Madura was the capital of the Pandyan kingdom. The Pandyas were mentioned in the fourth century B.C. by Megasthenes, who strangely enough says that the land was governed by women. Asoka referred to them as an independent people. A Pandyan king is known to have sent an embassy to the Roman emperor Augustus.

The Cheras or Keralas belonged to Malabar and Travancore, and their port Muziris was an important

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from Sinha and Banerjee, *History of India*, p. 94.

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centre for foreign trade. The Cheras also are mentioned by Asoka as an independent people. Tamil literature speaks of a famous Chera king called Senguttavan who carried arms as far as the Himalayas.

The Chalukyas were another power which was very great in the south and west of India. Pulakesin I reigned about the middle of the sixth century A.D. and performed the *Asvamedha*. Pulakesin II defeated Harsha and raised a terrorizing army. Hiuen Tsang says of the Chalukyas: 'The inhabitants were proud-spirited and warlike, grateful for favours and revengeful for wrongs, self-sacrificing towards suppliants in distress and sanguinary to death with any who treated them insultingly. Their martial heroes who led the van of the army in battle went into a conflict intoxicated, and their war-elephants were also made drunk before an engagement.' 'The king, in consequence of his possessing these men and elephants, treats his neighbours with contempt. His plans and undertakings are widespread, and his beneficent actions are felt over a great distance. His subjects obey him with perfect submission.' Pulakesin II's death was followed by a breaking-up, but the Chalukyas revived about the middle of the seventh century and repulsed the Arabs when they tried to invade southern Gujarat from Sind.

The Rashtrakutas finally defeated the Chalukyas and took Maharashtra. The Rashtrakutas were Brahminical Hindus but tolerant toward other religions, for there were many Buddhist monasteries in their kingdom, and they also encouraged the Jains. They built large temples to Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. During their time many cave temples were excavated,

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and some of the Ajanta cave frescoes may belong to this period.

The Rashtrakutas ruled large portions of South India and their mother-tongue may have been Kannada. Krishna I, a Rashtrakuta prince, built the famous rock-cut temple of Siva at Ellora. The Rashtrakutas were friendly with the Arabs and traded with them. Their power declined in the tenth century.

One more interesting kingdom should be mentioned in connexion with South India. The Pallavas were a powerful people who were masters of Kanchi or Conjeevaram. Their origin is rather obscure, for they may have been of Parthian stock or have come from the Chola-Nagas of the far South or even have been of pure Brahmin heritage. They were the enemies of the Cholas and 'the traditional hostility of the Pallavas to the Cholas and the obviously northern character of their culture'<sup>1</sup> preclude the possibility of a pure Tamil extraction. Their language was a Prakrit and they patronized Sanskrit learning and performed the *Asvamedha*. They were actually worshippers of Siva. They are first heard of in the third and fourth centuries A.D. and their capital, Kanchi, was famous for its culture and learning. Hiuen Tsang found 10,000 Buddhist priests and a number of monasteries at Kanchi, which testified to a tolerant religious outlook. The Jains also prospered, as did Vaishnavism under the influence of the pious songs of the Alvars. The history of South Indian sculpture and architecture can be said to begin under Pallava rule, the 'Seven Pagodas' of Mahabalipuram being the most famous of their monuments. The great poet Bharavi

<sup>1</sup> Sinha and Banerjee, op. cit., p. 95.



### VILLAGE LIFE

Outside the thatched huts of a village, Mittavindaka and his wife are standing with children in their arms. There is a window in one of the houses, and it appears to be barred. Below, the children have grown and their mother is cooking food. At the left and bottom, the king's warriors are approaching on horses and an elephant to punish the village. The elephant has stuck in the mud of the tank.

The full story of Mittavindaka is told in C. Sivaramamurti's *Amaravati Sculptures*, and the drawing was made from a photograph supplied by the Superintendent, Government Museum, Madras, where the fragment is now to be seen.



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and Dandin, the authority on poetics, were of the Pallava school.

South India was therefore by no means backward in her civilization or culture. After the Mauryan Empire South India was distinctly more powerful than North India, which was being invaded by wave upon wave of foreign armies from Central Asia—the Bactrians, the Sakas, the Scythians, and the Kushans. All these invaders were referred to as 'barbarians' by Indians, though they later became Buddhist. In fact Upper India underwent so many attacks that South India became the truer representative of Hindu culture because it was more stable and more protected. Many of the Aryans migrated to southern India, a process which was repeated a thousand years later when the Muslims overpowered the North. South India is therefore a stronghold of Hindu culture, superimposed on its Dravidian civilization and intermingled with it. It is also predominantly orthodox in its religious practices, and has maintained ancient Hindu traditions in art and politics. Builders, artists, artisans and craftsmen went South because of the invasions in the North, trade flourished and the Aryans found a welcome home in the Andhra kingdom which stretched from the Bay of Bengal to the Arabian Sea and afforded a stable civilized empire where the immigrants could take shelter. The Andhras were one of the greatest powers in India and they are now represented by the Telugu-speaking people. Their territory included thirty walled towns and they had a very large army. During the Mauryan supremacy they came under the rule of Chandragupta but after Asoka's death

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resumed their power and shook off the Mauryan yoke. It is not known exactly why the Andhras fell, but their decline coincided with the death of the Kushan king Vasudeva, and after their fall India went through a stagnant period until the coming of the Guptas.

The geographer Ptolemy wrote a treatise about A.D. 140 in which the Tamil country was described. He called it Damirike, which may have been a translation of Tamilakam. Only Tamil was spoken in the southern parts at this time, as Malayalam developed later. Early Tamil literature gives a vivid picture of the social state of the country in the first few centuries of the Christian era. Wars were constantly being fought between independent states and the three kingdoms of the Cholas, the Pandyas and the Cheras. It is not surprising therefore that the population was sparse. Slavery was unknown among the ancient Tamils. Megasthenes says that 'all the Indians are free, and not one of them is a slave'.<sup>1</sup> A popular theory exists that there were five assemblies of people in the South: the people, the priests, the astrologers, the physicians, and the ministers, and that these assemblies never allowed the king to be an autocrat. Poetry and the arts were encouraged and city-dwellers enjoyed luxuries and wealth, which appears strange considering there was constant warfare.

Alongside Tamil literature, music, sculpture and painting flourished. Unhappily all traces of these works of art have perished in the intervening centuries.

<sup>1</sup> McCrindle, *Megasthenes*, pp. 68-9.

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## VIII. GREEK AND CHINESE VISITORS



INDIA was known to the outside world long before Alexander's time. As early as about 1500 B.C. we hear of the Egyptians and the Phœnicians, the most ancient navigators known to history, setting out from the Mediterranean and the Red Sea and trading with ports on the Arabian Sea and thus communicating with India. Many passages in the *Mahabharata* mention the fact that at the great Rajasuya sacrifice of Yudhishtira gifts were brought from outside India. A voyage on the open sea is also mentioned. This took place when Prince Bhujya was said to have set sail in a hundred-oared ship. He was nearly drowned, but the Aswins brought the gallant prince back to safety :

Safe comes the ship to haven,  
Through billows and through gales :  
If once the great twin brethren  
Sit shining on the sails.

A trade was undoubtedly carried on at a very early time between western Asia and Babylonia on the one hand and Hindustan on the other, for Shalmaneser of Assyria in about 720 B.C. received camels from Bactria and elephants from India. Nebuchadnezzar III had a beam of Indian cedar in his palace at Birs Nimrud, part of which is in the British Museum today. The *Baveru Jataka* mentions merchants taking the first peacock to Babylon : this *Jataka* was written about 500 B.C., and based on much earlier folk-tales. Peacocks,

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rice and Indian sandalwood were known in Palestine under their Tamil names in the days of the Hebrew *Chronicles*, *Kings* and *Genesis*.

The ancient Greeks did not know of India, though Homer mentions Indian products such as tin and elephants, from which it may be surmised that they had heard of its existence. They probably thought it was an eastern extension of Ethiopia stretching away to the end of the world. Even Alexander first took the Indus for the Nile.

To the Greeks India was at first a land of mystery, as they only heard of the great subcontinent from exaggerated accounts given by Hecateus, author of a geographical treatise called *Periodus* or 'Description of the Earth', Herodotus and Ctesias.<sup>1</sup> There were strange tales of pigmies with dogs' heads and feet reversed, of griffins and four-footed birds; also of a barbarous people who lived in woods and mountains by hunting. Indians were referred to as people without noses and with long ears. Later accounts, of course, were much more authentic, and fairly truthful pictures were given by Megasthenes and Arrian.<sup>2</sup> It was Herodotus who first made it known to the outside world that India was famous for her cotton and bamboo; but he also spoke of gold-digging ants which were as large as foxes!

Alexander's expedition into India brought the Greeks into much closer contact with Indian culture

<sup>1</sup> Ctesias, a Greek doctor at the Persian court in the late fifth century B.C. and author of the first separate work on India, described 'the cochineal plant, the fly, the monkey and the parrot'.—McCrindle, *Megasthenes*, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Flourished in the second century A.D. Author, among other books, of the *Indike*—an account of India from Megasthenes. But for Arrian, little would be known of Alexander.

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and art, and there was even an intermingling of the races, though the marriages were slave marriages, the owners being the Greeks. The Greek alphabet was known in India at the time of Panini, in the fourth century B.C., and the Indian theory of the transmigration of souls was familiar in Greece. In the third century B.C. Asoka sent missions to neighbouring Greek kings, and in the next century, Menander, the Greek king from Bactria, who became ruler of almost the whole of Greek India, was converted to Buddhism.<sup>1</sup> There was therefore a mutual exchange of culture and thought between Indians and the Greeks and Persians.

A number of tales of voyages are mentioned in Sanskrit, Pali and Tamil literature. The *Baveru Jataka*, we are told, actually speaks of a lighthouse at the mouth of the Cauvery, 'a big tower or big palmyra trunk carrying on the top of it a huge oil-lamp'. There is also the Greek farce written in the second century A.D. referring to a lady named Chariton, who was shipwrecked on the Kanarese coast. Dion Chrysostom, a Greek of the first century A.D., says that Indians were found in Alexandria who had come 'by way of trade'. Even during Asoka's time Alexandria was a great trading centre and possessed a colony of Indian merchants, while the Alexandrians in their turn created a settlement in South India on the Malabar coast.

Before the invasion of Alexander the Great, the Indus valley had already been entered by the Persians in the sixth century B.C. and Herodotus tells us of a satrapy formed there which paid a large tribute. So

<sup>1</sup> Or, more probably, while he thought highly of Buddhism, his 'conversion' was merely assumed for political reasons.

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strong was Persian influence that Indian troops actually joined the forces of Xerxes, the son of Darius, against Greece ; but at the time of Alexander's invasion the Persian Empire was weak, and Alexander had no difficulty in overcoming and defeating the Persians and occupying the Punjab. Herodotus says that India was the greatest nation of the age. It was divided into tribes and the people spoke different languages. There were wild trees, he said, which produced wool from which the Indians wove their clothes. The Persians left their mark in India by introducing the Aramaic form of writing and out-



Design on the medal commemorating Alexander's battle with Poros. The Greeks on horses were able to out-manceuvre the Indians in chariots and on elephants. (Actual size)

side influence can be traced in Asoka's thirteenth inscription. Firdausi describes in his *Shahnamah* the battles which took place between Darius and Alexander when Darius sought the help of Indians. 'Camels with the pace of the wind' were sent to him from India, and Firdausi mentions swords and daggers of Indian make being used by Persian noblemen and by the king.

In 325 B.C. Alexander the Great crossed into India with 30,000 men, the Greeks forming the cavalry and the Macedonians the heavy infantry. Alexander himself was a Macedonian who had previously consolidated the whole of Greece. As soon as he crossed the Indus, Ambhi, King of Taxila, which was then a Brah-

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minical seat of learning, sent him elephants, silver, sheep and oxen and invited him to his capital, for he felt that by helping the foreigner or Yavana, Poros his rival in India would be easily defeated. Alexander advanced against the latter and defeated him with the help of Ambhi. Poros however behaved in so dignified a manner and was so courageous that Alexander gave him back his kingdom to be held under Greek suzerainty. Alexander never got beyond the Sutlej into Magadha, because his men were unwilling to fight any more and longed to return to their native land, from which they had been away for seven years. Strabo says : ' He [Alexander] was prevented from proceeding farther partly out of deference to certain oracles and partly compelled by his army, which was now exhausted with its toils, and suffering most of all from its constant exposure to rain.' <sup>1</sup> They knew too that they would have a hard fight, as the following Greek opinion of the Indian warriors shows : ' In the art of war they were far superior to the other nations by which Asia was at that time inhabited.' Alexander therefore thought it better to withdraw after a year's sojourn in India and his campaign did not make any lasting impression on the country as a whole nor change the mode of living of the Hindus. Not even in the tactics of war did India wish to learn anything from the Macedonian, for we read : ' The Kings of Hind preferred to go in the old way, trusting to their elephants and their chariots, supported by enormous hosts of inferior infantry. They never mastered the shock tactics of Alexander's cavalry.' There was no

<sup>1</sup> McCrindle, *Classical Literature*, p. 32.



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other invasion of India by the people of Europe until Vasco da Gama came in 1498 and set up his marble pillar at Calicut.

Alexander brought many men of Science with him and also a number of chroniclers including Nearchus, who wrote minute descriptions of the life and conditions of the countries through which they passed. Nearchus' writings have perished, but his works were later used by Strabo, Pliny, and Arrian. Speaking of the Indian war equipment of the time, we are told by these chroniclers that there were chariots drawn by four horses. Each carried six men—two archers, two shieldbearers and two charioteers—and when the battle grew fierce the charioteers dropped their reins and flung darts at the enemy. Each infantryman had a two-handed sword and a long shield of ox-hide; he also carried a javelin or a bow. Arrian describes the bow thus: 'The foot-soldiers carry a bow made of equal length with the man who bears it. This they rest upon the ground, and pressing against it with their left foot thus discharge the arrow, having drawn the string backwards; for the shaft they use is little short of being three yards long, and there is nothing which can resist an Indian archer's shot—neither shield nor breast-plate, nor any stronger defence if such there be.'<sup>1</sup> These bows can almost compare with the bows of the epics and earlier Indian literature, which heroes had to wield in order to win their brides. It was only mighty Rama who could bend the bow set up by Janaka and thus prove himself to be worthy of the hand of Sita.

<sup>1</sup> McCrindle, *Megasthenes*, pp. 220-1.

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Matthew Arnold has memorably described Alexander's campaign in India and the indifference with which the country regarded it :

The East bowed low before the blast  
In patient, deep disdain.  
She let the legions thunder past,  
And plunged in thought again.

No mention is made of Alexander's campaign by Jains or Buddhists. India remained unhellenized. So Alexander came and went, and after him, like a brilliant sun, rose Chandragupta Maurya. The everyday life in India during his time has already been described ; but Megasthenes has a great deal more to add, a little of which may be repeated here as it throws important light on the mode of living. Although his own accounts have been lost he has been extensively quoted by Arrian and others.

Megasthenes stresses the point that the 'Indians stand almost alone among the nations in never having migrated from their own country', that India was peopled by a number of races of indigenous character and that she had never received a colony from abroad nor sent one out. He refers to legends being told to him of the primitive times when the inhabitants lived on fruit and 'were clothed with the skins of the beasts found in the country as was the case with the Greeks ; and that in like manner as with them, the arts and other appliances which improve human life were gradually invented'. The inhabitants of India further told Megasthenes of the strange connexion which India had with Greece years before Alexander came to India, when the country was invaded by Dionysus and Hercules.

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When the Indians were still nomadic, Dionysus was said to have come with a large army but, finding that the heat was too great, retired to the hill Meros. He introduced ploughing, tilling and sowing and also cultivated the vine, and taught Indians how to crush the grape. He founded cities and taught the people to dance and worship the deity. The Indians ranked him among the gods and worshipped him. He then marched to all parts of the world, teaching the planting of the vine and drinking. Modern writers say that Dionysus may have been an Indian god and Meros Mount Meru, which is so famous in Indian mythology. Dionysus may be identical with Balarama, Siva or Soma. Legend says that Dionysus was born from his father's thigh, and it is strange that *meros* also means 'thigh' in Greek. That the Indians seemed to have believed in an ancient connexion with Greece is further emphasized by the fact that, when Alexander attacked the sacred Mount Nysa, the people craved the invader's pardon saying that they were of the same stock as Dionysus and the Greeks, because they cultivated the vine and ivy, and said that the triple-peaked mountain which overshadowed their town was none other than the famous Mount Meros. Alexander's men were by this time homesick and wanting to go back to Greece, and Alexander found it would be stimulating to them if he encouraged this fanciful tale of the Indians. So, instead of sacking the place, he allowed his men to mix freely with the inhabitants and indulge in ten days' feasting and rest. The inhabitants were supposed to have been the ancestors of the Kafirs of today, and their dancing and singing resembled the

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Bacchanalian rites of Greece, which encouraged Alexander's soldiers not a little, for they felt they had found their own kinsmen. The Nysæans were so grateful that they gave him 300 horsemen to help him in his campaign. While the Greeks were in the hill called Nysa, Alexander paid a visit to the mount known as Meros, which is probably the same place as the hill later called Koh-i-Mor.

Megasthenes also relates legends told to him of Hercules, who was said to have been born among the Indians. He was strong and cleared the earth and seas of all evil beasts. He had many sons and only one daughter. He divided India into portions for his sons and also gave a portion to his daughter whom he made a queen. This queen the Greek chronicler connects with the Pandiyans of South India. We have already seen that he made a reference to their being governed by women, and he says: 'Hercules begat a daughter in India whom he called Pandaia. To her he assigned that portion of India which lies to the southward and extends to the sea, while he distributed the people subject to her rule into 365 villages, giving orders that one village each day should bring to the treasury the royal tribute, so that the queen might always have the assistance of those men whose turn it was to pay the tribute in coercing those who for the time being were defaulters in their payments.'<sup>1</sup> Hercules was also supposed to have given his daughter 500 elephants, 4000 cavalry and 130,000 infantry. However mythical the tales connecting Greece with India may be, it is interesting to note that the two greatest civilizations of the world

<sup>1</sup> McCrindle, *Megasthenes*, pp. 158-9.

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were at one time supposed to be related to each other, even though this connexion may only have originated in the fanciful imagination of an ancient race.

Megasthenes, referring to the inhabitants of India, mentions seven classes, meaning probably the various kinds of occupations, but Kautilya only mentions four main castes. The first were the philosophers, who were exempted from all public duties and performed religious rites. They were dear to the gods and were prophets in that they foresaw droughts and diseases. 'The philosopher who errs in his predictions incurs no other penalty than obloquy, and he then observes silence for the rest of his life.'<sup>1</sup> After studying, philosophers often ate 'flesh but not that of animals employed in labour. They abstain from hot and highly seasoned food. They marry as many wives as they please'.<sup>2</sup> The second class of men, composed of husbandmen, according to Megasthenes was the most numerous. 'Being moreover exempted from fighting and other public service they devote the whole of their time to tillage; nor would an enemy coming upon a husbandman at work on his land do him any harm.'<sup>3</sup> Indians neither ravaged an enemy's land, nor cut down its trees. Therefore the cultivation never being interfered with was always productive, supplying 'the inhabitants with all that is requisite to make life very enjoyable'. The cultivators lived entirely in the country and never went to the towns. They paid a land tribute to the king and a fourth part of the produce of the soil went into the

<sup>1</sup> McCrindle, *Megasthenes*, p. 41.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 41.

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royal treasury. The third class were the shepherds and all herdsmen, who 'lived in tents'. They hunted 'noxious birds and wild beasts'. 'They freed India from the pests with which it abounds—all sorts of wild beasts, and birds which devour the seeds sown by the husbandmen.' The fourth class were the artisans, who were exempted from taxes and received a maintenance from the royal exchequer. The fifth and second largest class was the military class. This was well organized and maintained at the king's expense. The sixth class were the overseers who superintended all departments of work and reported to the king, and the last class of men were the Councillors and Assessors; this was the smallest and most respected class of all. We are told further that 'among the Indians officers are appointed even for foreigners, whose duty is to see that no foreigner is wronged'. The foreigner was looked after when sick and, if he died, was buried and his property delivered to his relatives. The foreigner therefore always seems to have enjoyed a favoured place in India.

Megasthenes gives us many more interesting details of everyday life in ancient India. Indians were tall and slender, of light weight but proud bearing. The ordinary man rode a camel, a horse or an ass, and the wealthy rode on elephants. Chariots were common conveyances. 'The greatest proficient test their skill by driving a chariot round and round in a ring; and in truth it would be no trifling feat to control with ease a team of four high-mettled steeds when whirling in a circle.'<sup>1</sup> The horses did not have their tongues tortured by 'spiked muzzles' nor were their

<sup>1</sup> McCrindle, *Megasthenes*, p. 90.

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mouths hurt. They were trained by being forced to gallop round and round in a ring. Indians evidently knew much about training horses. There was no private ownership of horses or elephants. 'The manner of hunting the elephant is this. Round a bare patch of ground is dug a deep trench about five or six stadia in extent, and over this is thrown a very narrow bridge which gives access to the enclosure. Into this enclosure are introduced three or four of the best-trained female elephants. The men themselves lie in ambush in concealed huts. The wild elephants do not approach this trap in the daytime, but they enter it at night, going in one by one. When all have passed the entrance, the men secretly close it up; then, introducing the strongest of the tame fighting elephants, they fight it out with the wild ones, whom at the same time they enfeeble with hunger.'<sup>1</sup>

Wild animals were hunted as the Greeks hunted them. Tigers were described as being twice the size of a lion. Monkeys, as large as big dogs, were white with black faces and long tails. There were snakes, and scorpions that were winged and could fly. Dogs were of great strength and courage and would not let go their hold until water was poured into their nostrils. A lion, or even a bull, could be held fast by a dog. There were also one-horned horses with heads like deer! We are told that 'serpents are so big that they swallow bulls and stags'.

There were innumerable trees, some even found in the sea, and ebony was common. There were huge mountains with fruit trees and the plains were of great fertility. The greater part of the soil was under

<sup>1</sup> McCrindle, *Megasthenes*, pp. 90-1.

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irrigation. There was much gold, silver, copper, iron and tin in the soil, and these metals were used to make implements of war and useful or ornamental articles. The fertile plains were intersected by a multitude of rivers, many of which were navigable. The soil bore two crops in the year. The land teemed with beasts of the field and fowls of the air of different degrees of strength and size. 'In addition to cereals there grows throughout India much millet, which is kept well-watered by the profusion of river streams, and much pulse of different sorts, and rice also, and what is called *bosporum*, as well as many other plants useful for food, of which most grow spontaneously. The soil yields, moreover, not a few other edible products fit for the subsistence of animals about which it would be tedious to write. It is accordingly affirmed that famine never visited India, and that there has never been a general scarcity in the supply of nourishing food. For since there is a double rainfall in the course of each year,—one in the winter season, when the sowing of wheat takes place as in other countries, and the second at the time of the summer solstice which is the proper season for sowing rice and *bosporum* as well as sesamum and millet,—the inhabitants of India almost always gather in two harvests annually; and even should one of the sowings prove more or less abortive, they are always sure of the other crop. The fruits moreover, of spontaneous growth, and esculent roots which grow in marshy places and are of varied sweetness, afford abundant sustenance for man.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> McCrindle, *Megasthenes*, pp. 31-2.



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According to Megasthenes the average Hindu was law-abiding. 'They live happily enough being simple in their manners and frugal. They never drink wine except at sacrifices. Their beverage is a liquor composed from rice instead of barley, and their food is principally a rice pottage. The simplicity of their laws and their contracts is proved by the fact that they seldom go to law. They have no suits about pledges or deposits, nor do they require seals or witnesses but make their deposits and confide in each other. Their houses and property they generally leave unguarded. These things indicate that they possess sober sense. . . . Truth and virtue they hold alike in esteem.'<sup>1</sup> Megasthenes however is not all praises and in his mild way puts forward a criticism of the Indians with whom he lived so long and whom he liked and admired so much. 'They possess good sober sense,' he writes, 'but other things they do which one cannot approve. For instance, they eat always alone and they have no fixed hours when meals are to be taken by all in common but each one eats when he feels inclined. The contrary custom would be better for the ends of social and civil life.'<sup>2</sup>

Indians were buried and not cremated according to Megasthenes, and they raised low tombs over the dead. Death was frequently discussed, and the Indians underwent a discipline preparing themselves for death. Like the Greeks they believed the world had a beginning, was liable to destruction, was spherical in shape and that God was diffused through its

<sup>1</sup> McCrindle, *Megasthenes*, pp. 69-70.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 70.

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parts. 'They wrap up their doctrines about immortality and the future judgement, and kindred topics, in allegories, after the manner of Plato.'<sup>1</sup>

Diseases were treated more by diet than by medicine, though ointments and plasters were used. People practised fortitude by undergoing toil and suffering pain. They made a habit of remaining motionless for a whole day—these were obviously Yogic practices already in vogue.

The interesting observations of Megasthenes cover many more pages and we refer readers to McCrindle's translations. We cannot however omit the glowing picture which Dion Chrysostom painted of India during the first century A.D. Dion Chrysostom wrote: 'They have besides at hand water-baths of two kinds; that which is hot and clearer than silver, and the other dark-blue by reason of its depth and coldness. In these the women and children swim about together—all of them models of beauty. Emerging from the bath, I can fancy them lying down in the meadows, commingling their sweet voices in mirth and song. And there the meadows are of ideal loveliness, and decked by nature with flowers, and with trees, which from overhead cast a protecting shade, and offer fruit within reach of all who would pluck it from the depending branches.'<sup>2</sup>

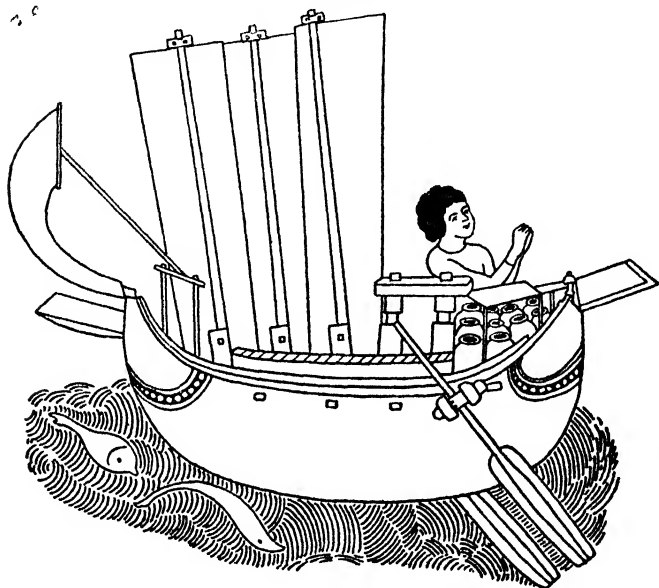
There is an interesting story of some Arabian guards on the coast of the Red Sea finding a man in a boat about 200 B.C. who said he was Indian and had lost his ship-mates. He was willing to show anyone

<sup>1</sup> McCrindle, *Megasthenes*, p. 101.

<sup>2</sup> McCrindle, *Classical Literature*, p. 175.

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the route to India, and the Greek navigator Eudoxus (of Cyzicus in Asia Minor) was then given a ship to go with the Indian and see the vast country of which the lost voyager spoke so glowingly, and we are told



**SEA-GOING SHIP OF THE SIXTH CENTURY  
(From Cave II at Ajanta)**

This must have been a large ship to have three masts, and the jars indicate that it is provisioned for a long voyage. The oars are passed through rowlocks. The sails seem rectangular, but could evidently be moved. At the prow, there is a fourth sail bellying in the breeze.

that he actually went to India and brought back a cargo of spices and precious stones.

Trade between Egypt and India nevertheless was

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mostly done overland, with camels, during the reigns of the Ptolemies, and it was not till the first century B.C. that there was heavy maritime traffic from India. 'Not twenty Egyptian vessels in the year ventured forth under the Ptolemies from the Arabian Gulf; now 120 merchantmen annually sail to India from the port of Myos Hormos<sup>1</sup> alone.' It was only in A.D. 41, however, during the reign of Claudius, that the route through Egypt to India became well known to Europeans. Pliny wrote in his *Natural History*: 'In no year does India drain our Empire of less than 550 millions of sesterces [80 lakhs of rupees] giving back her own one hundred times their cost price. . . . To those who are bound for India, Ocelis is the best place for embarkation. If the wind called Hippalus happens to be blowing, it is possible to arrive in 40 days, at the nearest mart in India called Muziris [Cranganore]. This however is not a desirable place for disembarkation, on account of the pirates which frequent its vicinity; nor in fact is it very rich in articles of merchandise. Besides, the roadstead for shipping is at a considerable distance from the shore, and the cargoes have to be conveyed in boats, either for loading or for discharging.' 'Another port and a much more convenient one is that which lies in the territory of the people called Nelcyndi—Barace by name. Here king Pandion used to reign, dwelling at a considerable distance from the mart in the interior, at a city known as Modeira. Travellers set sail from India on their return to Egypt, at the beginning of the Egyptian

<sup>1</sup> 'Mussel Harbour', or Abu Sha'ar, on the Egyptian coast in the Red Sea. Founded by Ptolemy II in the second century B.C., it was an important port for trade with the Orient.

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month Tybus, which is our December ; if they do this, they can go and return in the same year.'

For the trade between Greece and Persia on the one hand and northern India on the other, Barygaza<sup>1</sup> on the Gulf of Cambay earned a pre-eminent position. After the discovery of the monsoon winds, Greek ships sailed direct for Barygaza from Aden. 'Conducted by royal pilots from the Kathiawar coast and towed to the town, they brought merchandise, presents and Roman coins.'<sup>2</sup> From Barygaza, Indian ships sailed to the Persian Gulf, Arabia and Somaliland.

These early references to commerce with India also point to a flourishing trade with South India. Many of the places mentioned by Pliny have been identified with South Indian sites. Roman coins have been found buried under a tree in Calicut in Malabar. The merchant who left them there meant to return but evidently never did so.

India was famous for her exports of silk, diamonds, precious stones, ginger, spices and ivory. She commanded a good trade in Western Asia, Greece and Rome, not only because she had men who were good sailors and merchants ; but because of her excellent handicrafts and progress in chemistry which produced special methods of dyeing cloth. Indigo came from India, as its name indicates.

India suffered many invasions after the fall of the Mauryan empire. Among the many Bactrian rulers who invaded the country Menander is the most celebrated. He was probably a Buddhist. He was known as Milinda and Strabo says he conquered 'more

<sup>1</sup> Broach.

<sup>2</sup> *Oxford Classical Dictionary.*

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nations than Alexander'.<sup>1</sup> The Bactrian Greeks were followed by the Scythians, commonly known as Sakas, who, driven out by the Chinese nomads (Yueh-chi), moved across Central Asia and conquered Bactria and poured into India near the Lower Indus. The Pahlavas (Parthians) were associated closely with the Sakas. About the first century A.D. Gondophernes the Pahlava conquered southern Afghanistan. The Sakas were driven forward by the Kushans, who in their turn came into India and formed a great empire which extended up to Banaras and the Vindhya mountains and covered the whole of North India.

Their empire lasted for 300 years and corresponded to the Andhra rule in the South. The majority of the Sakas had become Hindus, but the Kushans were generally Buddhists like their famous king Kanishka. Through the Kushans Buddhist learning and culture travelled to Chinese Turkestan, China, Mongolia and also to western Asia. New ideas had by now affected the faith and Buddhism had split into Mahayana (the Great Vehicle) and Hinayana (the Little Vehicle). Art and culture also changed, and images crept into Buddhist shrines, no doubt as a result of the Brahminical revival which was then sweeping India.

The Kushans accepted the Mahayana creed. Kanishka held great *sanghas* in Kashmir. He built a famous seat of learning at Purushapura (Peshawar), and Kushan kings ruled in Kabul till the Huns came

<sup>1</sup> Menander's coins have been found far and wide. 'Plutarch describes him as the ruler of many cities. Some modern scholars identify Menander with the Yavana invader who was repulsed by Pushyamitra Sunga. The identification with King Milinda, who is mentioned in the Buddhist work *Milindapanho*, is less open to doubt.'—Sinha and Banerjee, *History of India*, pp. 141-2.

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in the fifth century A.D. Like the Sakas, the Kushans did not rule as aliens, but maintained Indian religions and forms of government.

During these foreign invasions there were many Chinese travellers, and several Buddhist monks who came to India have written of their impressions. India was first known to China as *T'ien Du* or *T'ien-chu* in the first century B.C., and a more ancient name was *Shindu*. Indian missionaries probably entered China about 227 B.C., and in 122 B.C. a Chinese expedition entered India and took back an image of Buddha in gold. Afterwards communications became frequent. Fa Hien was among the most famous travellers and came to India about the beginning of the fifth century A.D. during the reign of Vikramaditya. There was a suspension bridge in those days over the Indus, which Fa Hien crossed, finally coming to the Hooghly. He was a pious man and came with a religious object. His descriptions therefore deal largely with relics and legends of the Buddhist religion, but he has also given a vivid picture of India during the Gupta dynasty. 'The people are numerous and happy,' he wrote, speaking of those who lived in the Ganges valley. 'They have not to register their households or attend to any magistrates and their rules: only those who cultivate the royal land have to pay [a portion of] the gain from it. The king governs without decapitation or other corporal punishments; criminals are simply fined lightly or heavily, according to the circumstances. Even in cases of repeated attempts at wicked rebellion, they only have their right hand cut off. The king's bodyguards and attendants all have salaries. Throughout the whole country the

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people do not kill any living creature, nor drink intoxicating liquors; nor eat onions or garlic. The only exception is that of the Chandalas, being the butchers, who are wicked men living apart. In that country they do not keep pigs and fowls, and do not sell live cattle; in the markets there are no butchers' shops and no dealers in intoxicating drink. In buying and selling commodities they use cowries.<sup>1</sup> Fa Hien mentions houses of charity and dispensaries run by the Vaisyas, where the maimed and crippled, orphans, widowers and the childless or diseased were fed and treated until they were well enough to leave these institutions. There were rest-houses for travellers and free hospitals. No passports were necessary. 'Those who want to go, may go,' says Fa Hien. 'Those who want to stop may stop.' He describes splendid processions which used to take place in great cities annually in which many singers and musicians accompanied the holy images. His descriptions of the government of Vikramaditya and the social conditions of the Gangetic valley are invaluable to the student of ancient India. Although most of India was prosperous, and the people wealthy and happy, Fa Hien mentions some places, including Buddh Gaya and Kapilavastu, which had fallen into decay and ruin for some unknown reason.

Another important Chinese pilgrim is Hiuen Tsang who came to India during the reign of Harsha and lived here from A.D. 629 to 645. He travelled over the whole of India except the extreme South and his work is a mine of accurate information of political,

<sup>1</sup> Fa Hien, *A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms*, trans. Legge, p. 43.



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religious and social conditions. He speaks of the defeat of the great Indian monarch in spite of his troops from the 'five Indias and the best generals from all countries'.

'Benevolent institutions on the Asokan model, for the benefit of travellers, the poor, the sick, were established throughout the empire. Rest-houses (*dharm-salas*) were built in both the towns and rural parts, and provided with food and drink, physicians being stationed at them to supply medicine to the necessitous without stint.'<sup>1</sup> Harsha also built Buddhist monasteries at sacred places and we have already seen how magnanimous he was during his quinquennial convocations. At the royal lodges every day viands were provided for 1000 Buddhist monks and 500 Brahmins. Hiuen Tsang mentions strained relations between the two sections of Buddhist faith and also ill-feeling against the Buddhists on the part of the Puranic Hindus. Harsha was in the habit of arranging many discussions, but he always favoured the arguments of the Master of the Law and to guard against any danger befalling his favourite he issued the following proclamation: 'If any one should touch or hurt the Master of the Law, he shall be forthwith executed; and whoever speaks against him, his tongue shall be cut out; but all those who desire to profit by his instructions, relying on my good will, need not fear this manifesto.' The very natural consequence of this proclamation is related by Hiuen Tsang's biographer: 'From this time the followers of error withdrew and disappeared, so that when eighteen days had passed, there had been no one to enter on the

<sup>1</sup> Smith, *Early History*, p. 347.

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discussion.’<sup>1</sup> Harsha maintained diplomatic relations with the Chinese Empire and in the year 641 he sent a Brahmin envoy to China, who returned to India with a Chinese mission.

The Chinese looked upon India as their Holy Land, the birth-place of the Enlightened One. It was natural that pilgrims from China should fall under her spell, but we see that even those who came to conquer were impressed by the abounding wealth, superior system of administration and rich culture that flourished here two thousand years ago.

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<sup>1</sup> Beal, *Life of Hiuen Tsang*, p. 180.

## IX. INDIA'S ANCIENT LITERATURE



THE peculiar peninsular qualities of the Indian subcontinent have throughout the ages attracted many peoples of many lands, and it is therefore not surprising that four of the nine great families of human speech—the Austro, the Tibeto-Chinese, the Dravidian and the Indo-European—are represented in the languages existing in India today and that the inhabitants speak some 220 dialects. Though the Himalayas formed a natural barrier, hordes of people have come from the west and from the east, making use of the river valleys and mountain passes, especially from western Asia and China. At first the immigrants came in slow persistent movements of tribes with women and children, probably driven towards an unknown land through lack of food in their original countries or because of physical changes of the earth or climate which made it impossible for them to sojourn there any longer. Later, great armies came and conquered parts of India. But we know that the Dravidians were in India when the Aryans came, and the languages they established are still very much alive. These Dravidian languages are Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Kannada. The ancient Dravidian alphabet was called Vatteluttu and may have been of Semitic origin. The Aryan languages were introduced by the Indo-Europeans. Chronologically, therefore, the linguistic strata in India are probably

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Austic (languages still spoken by isolated hill and forest tribes), Dravidian, Indo-European, and Tibeto-Chinese. India has indeed rightly been called the 'epitome of the world', for she is one of the most cosmopolitan countries that has ever existed.

Despite her infinite variety, the Sanskritic language of the earliest Hindu literature and the Buddhist writings in Pali (a Sanskrit derivative) have given India an essential unity. Sanskrit was the vehicle in earliest India of political thought, religious outpourings and aspirations, sacred literature and culture.

The first four Vedas, the *Rig*, the *Sama*, the *Yajur* and the *Atharva*, were composed in Vedic Sanskrit, a language of priestly poets and quite different from the classical Sanskrit of the epics. The first work in classical Sanskrit was Yaska's *Nirukta*, a commentary on the Vedas sometimes assigned to the eighth century B.C. Sanskrit was the language of religion and scholarship throughout Aryavarta (the land of the Aryans) during the second century B.C. and has since undergone no changes. In common speech, popular forms of the language were used, one of the earliest dialects (*prakrits*) being Pali, the language of the Buddha, in which therefore his sayings were recorded.

The earliest examples of non-pictographic writing so far found in India are Asoka's rock edicts, and during Asoka's reign writing was commonly used for administration and business purposes. The oldest forms of writing were Kharosthi and Brahmi, though Semitic symbols may have been introduced as early as 800-700 B.C. by traders between Babylonia and India.

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Kharosthi was not used after the fifth century A.D. but Brahmi is the father of all Indian alphabets, of the Dravidian as well as Aryan languages. The first writing was done on bark and palm leaves, with a reed pen or stylus, the ink being rubbed in after the words had been scratched. Strabo says : 'The Indians write letters upon cloth very closely woven.'<sup>1</sup>



SEALS FROM MOHENJODARO—ACTUAL SIZE

The writing of Mohenjodaro has not yet been deciphered. These seals show rhinoceros, elephant, bison and tiger feeding from what looks like a trough, but as it is unlikely that tigers or rhinoceroses were kept in captivity, perhaps the 'troughs' represent offerings made to animal gods. (From exhibits in the Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay)

<sup>1</sup> McCrindle, *Classical Literature*, p. 56.

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No literature earlier than the *Rig-Veda* is known in India, but archæological findings have given us some knowledge of the religious practices of the inhabitants of Mohenjodaro and Harappa. They worshipped the mother-goddess and also a male deity, probably the ancestor of Siva. They set up phallic symbols. They had faith in amulets and charms. They must have studied Yoga, for seals have been discovered in which deities are in yogic postures. The people of the Indus may have been the lineal progenitors of the religion which prevails in the cults of Sakti and Siva, of the Nagas, of animal-, tree- and stone-worship and of phallism. The figures of goddesses, for example, have a quaintly-shaped headdress with two cup-like objects on either side, some of them smoke-stained, which suggests that oil or incense was burned to make the goddess hear her suppliants' prayers. There are male figures wearing the horns of a goat or bull, which indicates that both animals were sacred. The stone and pottery seal-amulets and talismans are of great interest. There is one of a nude deity with horns and three faces seated on a stool with two deer, a rhinoceros, an elephant, a tiger and a buffalo. Sir John Marshall thinks this god may have been Siva represented by Pasupati, Lord of the Beasts. In one seal-amulet a man is playing a drum before a tiger. Neem and peepul trees were worshipped.

The religion of the Dravidians was also phallic. They worshipped the mother-goddess and demons and believed in human sacrifice. Some of these demons were later given new names, identified with Hindu gods and goddesses, and worshipped by the Hindus.

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The Aryan religion and literature, however, are the foundations of all Indian culture : the Vedas were the first Hindu religious compilations. Of the four Vedas, the *Rig* is the oldest and most interesting. It was composed by priestly bards and consists of 1028 hymns divided into 10 *mandalas* or books. The hymns can perhaps be compared to the Psalms of David. The length of the *Rig-Veda* alone is about equal to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* of Homer put together, and when we realize that all the Vedas and many other religious texts were learnt by rote and passed on from father to son for centuries—for writing was not introduced till the seventh century B.C. in India—we can imagine the tremendously retentive memories which our ancestors possessed. Even today the Vedas are learnt by heart in religious schools. As the celebrated philologist Max Müller noted, if all the written records were suddenly destroyed they could be restored out of the versions memorized by India's holy men.

The Rig-Vedic hymns extended over a long period and were the spontaneous expression of a people who lived in a land of sublime and exceptional beauty. When they were composed they were supposed to be of human origin but later they were thought to be divine and eternal. The religion they reveal is by no means primitive, but rather a culmination of the beliefs of the Aryans. As Max Müller has pointed out, the Roman Jupiter is linked with the Greek Zeus Pater and the Vedic Dyaus-pitar, meaning sky-father ; and again the Avestan Haoma, which was the Persian divine drink, corresponds closely with the Vedic Soma. The English word 'divine' must originate

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from the verbal stem *div* 'to shine', which similarly produced *deva* meaning god, or the shining one, in Sanskrit.



A HORNED DEITY

From a seal found at Mohenjodaro  
(Actual size of exhibit in the  
Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay)

The *Rig-Veda* reveals a childlike wonder at the magnificence of nature and its daily phenomena. We can imagine our ancestors falling down in worship of the rising sun and bowing low to the great ball of fire as it shone on the golden fields and the sparkling rivers. The early Aryans were nothing if not nature-worshippers. Their hearts abounded with thankfulness for whatever benefits they received from the bounteous gods whom they created out of the phenomena of nature.

The elements of nature were the arbiters of destiny



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to the Aryans, each element being created into a god. According to Yaska, the divine classification was as follows: There were three spheres—the Shining Heaven, the Atmosphere and the Earth. The first was represented chiefly by Dyaus, Varuna, Mitra, Savitar, Surya, Vishnu, Usas and the twin Asvins; the second by Indra, the Maruts, Rudra and Vayu; and the last by Agni, Soma and Yama. Indra was the god of storms, a giant with a thunderbolt who shattered demons and recovered stolen cows. His lightning pierced the clouds and he showered rain on the parched earth. Some of the hymns are of profound beauty and throw indirectly a great deal of light on the everyday life of Vedic India.

Indra slayed Ahi [cloud] resting on the mountains, Twashtri had made the far-reaching thunderbolt for him. Water in torrents flowed towards the sea, as cows run eagerly towards their calves.<sup>1</sup>

The hymns to Indra are full of vigour and strength, while those to Varuna are more purely religious. Varuna is the sky-god, and his name means 'to cover'. He was one of the holiest of gods and held a pre-eminent place in the *Rig-Veda*:

King Varuna has spread out the path for the course of the sun. He has made the path for the sun to traverse in pathless space. May he rebuke our enemies who pierce our hearts.

'O King Varuna! a hundred and a thousand medicinal drugs are thine; may thy beneficence be vast and deep. Keep unrighteousness away from us, deliver us from the sins we have committed.'<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Rig-Veda*, I. 32. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Rig-Veda*, I. 24. 8-9.

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Agni was the fire-god and was represented in heaven by the sun and lightning, and on earth by the sacrificial fire which was produced by the friction of sticks. He was the link which connected man with the gods, which was the real significance of the religious sacrifice. So much store was set on the starting of the sacrificial fire by friction that it is done even today in many religious rites.

The gods of the *Rig-Veda* are too many for us to describe them in further detail here. There were quite a number of goddesses as well; but Usha was the most romantic and poetic figure. The Sanskrit Usha or Dawn derives from the same root as the Greek Eos, the Latin Aurora and the English word East.

She, the young, the white-robed daughter of the sky, the mistress of all earthly treasure, dawns upon us, dissipating darkness! Auspicious Ushas! shine upon us today on this spot.

Following the path of mornings that have passed, to be followed by endless mornings to come, bright Ushas dispels darkness, and awakens to life all beings, unconscious like the dead in sleep.

How long have the Dawns risen? How long will the Dawns arise? The present morning pursues those that are gone, future mornings will pursue this resplendent Ushas.<sup>1</sup>

And here is another very beautiful hymn about Usha :

There heaven's daughter has appeared before us.  
The maiden flushing in her brilliant garments.  
Thou sovran lady of all earthly treasures,  
Auspicious Dawn, flush here today upon us.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Rig-Veda*, I. 123. 7, 8, 10.

<sup>2</sup> *Rig-Veda*, I. 113. 7.

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In the sky's firmament she has shone with splendour :

The goddess has cast off the robe of darkness.  
Wakening up the world with ruddy horses,  
Upon her well-yoked chariot Dawn is coming.

Bringing upon it many bounteous blessings,  
Brightly shining, she spreads her brilliant lustre.  
Last of the countless morns that have gone by,  
First of bright morns to come has Dawn arisen.

Arise ! the breath, the life, again has reached us :  
Darkness has gone away and light is coming.  
She leaves a pathway for the sun to travel.<sup>1</sup>

Another well-known goddess is Sarasvati, after whom the river is named on whose banks the Aryans first settled and composed their hymns. She is one of the few Vedic goddesses who is still worshipped. Because of her power of inspiration she has been called the goddess of speech and learning. Later she became the consort—Sakti or Prakriti—of Brahma and was depicted as a lovely woman with a crescent on her brow, seated upon a swan or peacock with a musical instrument in her hand. The other goddesses in the *Rig-Veda* were mostly the wives of the gods, though one hymn<sup>2</sup> is devoted to Prithivi the Earth and a few to Ratri or Night. In the time of the epics the pantheon of gods and goddesses had increased a great deal. We have already mentioned Sita the Furrow, and then there were the celestial nymphs or Apsaras. Side by side with the growth of the number of gods the idea of a Supreme Being governing the universe also began to gain ground, and many rishis propounded this monotheistic theory and

<sup>1</sup> *Rig-Veda*, I. 113. 14-16.

<sup>2</sup> *Rig-Veda*, VI. 12. 5.

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declared the Truth which was the Ultimate Being.

Of the other three Vedas, the *Sama* and the *Atharva* are not important for us, but the *Yajur* introduces a transformation of religious and social conditions and marks the advance of the Aryans into the Gangetic plain. Complicated Brahminical sacrificial rites had now been evolved, and it was about this time that the *Rig-Veda* was divided into its ten *mandalas* attributed to various rishis, among whom we find the ancient and renowned names of Vasishtha, Kanva and others familiar in Indian myths. Nature-worship changed into ceremonial, and caste became rigid. In the *Rig-Veda* sin was the transgression of the divine law, whereas in the *Yajur-Veda* it was the omission of rituals. Snake-worship now appeared and was probably borrowed from the aboriginals of India. It is important however to draw a clear line between sacrifice and sorcery, of which witchcraft was an essential element. The direct worship of gods as animals is hardly found in the *Rig-Veda*, although snake-worship did take place almost as early as the Vedic period. In the epics we come across many animals deified into gods, such as Hanuman and Garuda. The *Atharva-Veda* is full of spells and incantations.

The Brahmanas, which are the earliest Indo-Aryan prose works, are religious manuals and theological treatises explaining Vedic sacrificial ceremonies to the priests. They are very dogmatic and not very interesting, for the spontaneous religion of the early settlers has been replaced by assertions that the key of life on earth and in the hereafter lies in the correct performance of sacrifices.

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The Brahmanas were composed, probably, about the eighth century B.C., when the Aryans had settled in the plains of the Ganges and the Jumna. The last portion, called the Aranyakas, deals with forest rites, and is of importance because it is the basis of the speculations leading on to the Vedantic philosophy of the Upanishads.

The sacrifice was a magical ceremony by means of which benefits could be obtained from the gods. Vincent Smith says: 'By the sacrifice of Prajapati the world came into existence, by sacrifice he renewed his strength after the exhaustion of creation, and it is likewise by sacrifice on earth that the world is sustained.' The Brahmin aimed to have the knowledge necessary for the correct performance of these sacrifices and therefore he became all-important. Though caste had now become more or less rigid, those belonging to a lower caste could, by learning, become Brahmins. Thus Janaka, king of the Videhas, was made a Brahmin by the sage Yajnavalkya, for when Janaka imparted knowledge to Yajnavalkya, the latter offered a boon, and because the king's request was for supreme knowledge, the sage made him, a Kshatriya, into a Brahmin. The incident is related thus: 'Yajnavalkya offered the king the choice of a boon. He replied, "Let me inquire of thee whenever I desire, O Yajnavalkya." Henceforth, Janaka became a Brahmin.'<sup>1</sup> The later supreme position of the Brahmin, therefore, originated from the fact that he was a learned man, but it is certain that the distinctions between the castes were not nearly so rigid in early times.

<sup>1</sup> *Satapatha Brahmana*, XI. 6. 2.1.

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Certain standards of human conduct are enunciated in the Brahmanas. Murder, theft and adultery are condemned, and honour to parents is praised. A story in the *Aitareya Brahmana* says that a Brahmin was to be sacrificed to Varuna, when the god himself appeared and released him ;<sup>1</sup> and in the same Brahmana it is said that instead of human sacrifice, first animals and then mere rice-cakes were sufficient to satisfy the gods.<sup>2</sup>

In the *Tandya Brahmana* we are told of non-Brahmin Aryans who were admitted into the Brahmin community. 'They pursue neither agriculture nor commerce ; their laws are in a constant state of confusion ; they speak the same language as those who have received Brahminical consecration ; but nevertheless call what is easily spoken hard to pronounce.' This is an obvious thrust at the ignorance prevailing among the non-Brahmin communities.

The Upanishads are the third stage of Vedic literature and consist of philosophical reflections. They cast aside the sacrificial teaching of the Brahmanas and propound a theory that the soul or Atman is one with Brahma, a theory which tends to reduce the importance of Brahmins and which is therefore supposed to have originated with the Kshatriyas. 'The inner self of man was none other than the universal Soul of the Universe.' Brahma became the only reality, in whom all things merged. The *Chandogya Upanishad's* phrase, *tat tvam asi* 'Thou Art That', epitomizes the philosophy of the Upanishads, and he who sought for the Truth prayed :

<sup>1</sup> *Aitareya Brahmana*, VII. 111.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, II. 1.

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From the unreal lead me to the real !  
From darkness lead me to light !  
From death lead me to immortality.<sup>1</sup>

The joys of earth and heaven are transient, and the aim is to obtain *mukti*, or release from birth and re-birth by right knowledge, and to realize that the individual soul is one with the world soul, which is the only reality. This Vedantic philosophy was indeed a revolt against the tyranny of the Brahminical code, and perhaps led the way to the teachings of Buddha and Mahavira, who strove to abolish birth and re-birth altogether.

Of the four works of Vedic literature, the Vedas and Brahmanas can be said to teach the religion of actions and deeds and the Aranyakas and Upanishads the religion of knowledge. These works correspond strangely to the four stages of life in the twiceborn : the student, the householder, the retirement to the forest and the final renunciation of all worldly things.

From about the fifth century B.C. to the Christian era, *smṛiti* or 'recollections' were written and they contrast strongly with literature known as *śruti* or 'revelations', for while the Vedas, Brahmanas and Upanishads were said to be of divine origin, the *smṛiti* were merely human. The *smṛiti* embrace the Sutras, the *Dharmasastras* or Law Books, and the *Itihāsa Purāna* or Epics. The Sutras are meant for students and explain the Vedic lore in epigrammatic style. It is said of them : ' An author rejoiceth in the economizing of half a short vowel as much as in the birth of a son.' The Sutras are concise compendiums

<sup>1</sup> *Bṛihadāranyaka Upanishad*, I. 3. 28.

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of knowledge, and they were brief because they had to be committed to memory. The three great Sutras, the *Srauta*, *Grihya* and *Dharma* (all three are called *Kalpa* or Practice Sutras), are a mine of information on religious rites, the rites connected with a man's life and the four periods in the life of caste Hindus.

Fire is an important element in nearly all rites. The *agnihotra* or fire-offering was performed every morning and evening. The sacred domestic fire had to be lit before all sacred acts and was essential at weddings, for the cooking fires were kindled from it. Before going on a journey the householder had to bid farewell to the flame and on his return he had to feed it with fresh fuel.

The *Dharmasastras* are commentaries on the *Dharmasutras*. They explain religious duties and civil law. The best-known are those ascribed to Manu, Vishnu, Yajnavalkya and Narada. The dates of their composition cannot be verified, but probably they range from two or three centuries before Christ to the fifth century A.D. The Code of Manu, because of its freedom from sectarian influence, became an authoritative textbook for Hindu society generally. Manu was not an individual law-giver like Moses but personified *manas* or mind. The *Manu Smriti* emphasized the fact that society was made up of a number of castes which were subjected to the spiritual caste. The Brahmin has by now become all-important, because he has proved himself the most learned. Many concessions are given him. He cannot be punished with death 'though he have committed all possible crimes'. 'No greater crime is known on earth than



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slaying a Brahmin.’<sup>1</sup> The duties of the four castes were well defined, for the Brahmins performed religious duties, studied, and gave and received alms; the Kshatriyas protected the people, studied the Vedas and abstained from sensual pleasures; the Vaisyas cultivated land or carried on other occupations and also studied the Vedas; and the Sudras served the three twice-born castes. Twice-born referred to birth from the human father and also from Brahma. The poor Sudras only possessed their earthly father. Manu represents Hindu thought and manners and marks the transition from Vedic to Puranic Hinduism. He propounds and develops the theory of transmigration of souls, traces of which were found earlier in the Upanishads. For instance, in *Kaushitaki* we read: ‘And according to his deeds and according to his knowledge he is born again here as a worm, or as an insect, or as a fish, or as a bird, or as a lion, or as a boar, or as a serpent, or as a tiger, or as a man, or as something else in different places.’

The *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* have grown with time, though the earliest sections of the former are supposed to have been written between 400 and 200 B.C. and the latter between 200 B.C. and A.D. 200. Vyasa is reputed to have been the author of the *Mahabharata* and Valmiki of the *Ramayana*. The epics relate the wars of the Aryans when they founded their great kingdoms. The battle of the Great Bharatas occurred near Delhi and Agra, while the *Ramayana* takes us further south.

Krishna, like Rama, is said to be an incarnation of Vishnu. Krishna himself, in the *Bhagvad-Gita* (The

<sup>1</sup> *Laws of Manu*, VIII. 380-81.

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Lord's Song, or Song Celestial) explains these incarnations thus :

For whenever the law fails and lawlessness uprises, O thou of Bharata's race, then do I bring myself to bodied birth.

To guard the righteous, to destroy evil-doers, to establish the law, I come into birth age after age.<sup>1</sup>

The *Bhagvad-Gita* is the advice given by Krishna to Arjuna when the latter hesitated to fight against the armies of his cousins and be the cause of great bloodshed and sorrow. Krishna reconciles Arjuna to the waging of the war, convincing him that it is the duty of a Kshatriya to fight to overcome evil forces ; but Krishna makes it plain that war must not be undertaken for any base motive, be it for personal gain or through personal enmity. The warrior must also worship Krishna, who was really Brahma : ' They who strive for deliverance from age and death and turn to Me, know Me to be that Brahma, the universal, One over Self, and the whole of Works.'<sup>2</sup> Man's actions should be selfless, undertaken without thought of reward. The doctrine is similar to Christ's Sermon on the Mount. Krishna stresses the duties of men as members of a society. Arjuna, being a Kshatriya, had to fulfil his duty of overcoming evil. But all things were to be done in the name of the Lord :

If one of earnest spirit set before Me with devotion a leaf, a flower, a fruit or water, I enjoy this offering of devotion.<sup>3</sup>

Krishna advises Arjuna to follow *Karma Yoga*, the path of action, provided that action is selfless, followed

<sup>1</sup> *Bhagvad-Gita*, IV. 7-8.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, VII. 29.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, IX. 26, trans. L. D. Barnett, p. 129.

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by *Bhakti Yoga* or the path of devotion to Krishna himself.

The Gita is so much loved by Hindus because it makes it possible for the practical man, the warrior and the citizen to understand and practise Hindu philosophy. It even makes it possible for the Sudra to share in religious worship and to reach God.

The Puranas were recast in their present form quite late, but they are ancient stories and tell us of the origin of the world and of gods and sages and kings of olden times.

Buddha and Mahavira repudiated the Vedas and Brahmanas and based their teachings on the Upanishads. The soul being bound by action (*karma*) to births and re-births, they sought a way to free the soul from this bondage. Mahavira was the founder of the Jain religion. His name was Vardhamana Jnatriputra, but he was also called the conqueror (*jina*). He lived from 599 to 527 B.C. and was a Kshatriya. His purpose was to free the soul by means of the three jewels—right faith, right knowledge and right action.

Vardhamana was the son of the head of the warrior house of Jnatrikas, who lived near Videha. Until he was thirty he lived the life of an ordinary man and settled down and married. After the death of his parents he left his home and became a wanderer for thirteen years, keeping himself in utter privation and want, subduing his senses and living a pure life. He found great knowledge, and was called Jina, the conqueror, and Mahavira, the great hero. He preached in Magadha and Videha and died at Pawa near Giribraja (Rajgir).

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Jainism is a pessimistic religion, looking upon life as an evil which must be brought to an end. It advocates both external and internal austerities, fasting even to suicide, the practice of Yoga and intense contemplation, in order that the body may finally be freed from all earthly trammels.

The Jain writings, called Agama, were preserved orally for nearly a thousand years before being recorded in Prakrit. Towards the beginning of the second century B.C. Jainism began to lose its hold in eastern India and migrated westward. Some two hundred years later a schism occurred which split the Jains into two groups, the white-robed or *Svetambara* and the naked or *Digambara* (sky-clad), and at the time of the Brahminical revival Jainism deteriorated both in ideals and popularity. The Jains, however, can boast of a proud heritage in architecture and have contributed generously to the literature of India, to grammar and astronomy.

Prince Siddhartha, the founder of Buddhism, lived from 563 to 483 B.C. He also was a Kshatriya and bore the name of Gautama. Both Jains and Buddhists rose and flourished in Madhyadesa (the middle country), in Videha, Kosala and Magadha, and produced a fair amount of literature. The origin of the Buddha was very like that of Mahavira. The prince forsook his wealth at about the age of thirty and adopted an ascetic life of wandering, meditation and rigorous austerity. He also regarded life as an evil and something to be renounced. Jainism and Buddhism, however, are poles apart.

Gautama was born at Lumbini near Kapilavastu, the son of Suddhodana, king of the Sakyas. After

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early years of ease and luxury he lived in self-inflicted privation until, one day, while meditating under a banyan tree, he was 'enlightened' and found the Middle

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ASOKA'S INSCRIPTION OF 249 B.C. ON A  
PILLAR IN THE LUMBINI GARDEN

The pillar on which this inscription is carved stands at Rummidei, in Nepal, and there is no doubt it occupies its original position and marks the site of the Lumbini Garden, the traditional scene of the birth of Gautama Buddha.

In *Edicts of Asoka*, Vincent Smith gives the following translation: 'His Sacred and Gracious Majesty, when he had been consecrated twenty years, having come in person did reverence and because "Here Buddha was born, the Sakya sage" [?] a great stone railing was prepared and a stone pillar was erected.

'Because "Here the Venerable One was born" the village of Lumbini was made free of [religious] cesses and declared entitled to the eighth share [of the produce due to the Crown].'

Way between asceticism and pleasure. He accepted the theory of *karma* but denied the existence of the

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soul or of God. He propounded the theory that pain was the result of human desires, and that release from desire could be won by following the eightfold path.

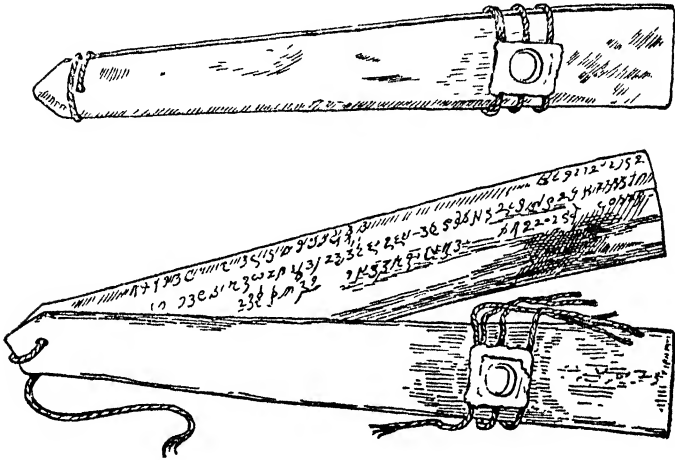
The *Tripitaka* (Three Baskets), preserved in Pali in Ceylon, contains the Buddha's teachings. His main gospel was the 'path of good living' which condemned not only the sacrificing of living things to the gods but also called for the abandonment of evil qualities such as anger, hatred, envy and wrong thinking. Buddha denounced the rituals of the caste system, pujas and ceremonies, which had been elaborated to such an extent by the priests that they no longer had any significance for ordinary people. Instead Buddha laid stress on purity of life, love and kindness.

The *Jatakas*, or birth stories of the Buddha, were written in the third century B.C. Other later works are the two Pali epic poems of Ceylon, called the *Dipa Vamsa* and the *Maha Vamsa*.

A great deal of secular literature was produced between the fifth and seventh centuries A.D. It is rightly said that 'the Gupta period is in the annals of classical India almost what the Periclean age is in the history of Greece'. This great fertilization of art and literature may have arisen because of the peace and unity which prevailed, and also because the kings themselves were highly cultured and encouraged learning. As we have already seen, many of the kings were themselves poets. Another reason, as Vincent Smith points out, may have been that 'the extraordinary intellectual vitality of the Gupta period undoubtedly was largely due to the constant and lively exchange of ideas with foreign lands in both East and West'. Sanskrit had never been given up as a literary

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script, and both the *Arthasastra* of Kautilya and the *Mahabhashya* of Patanjali were written in this language. During the reign of Vikramaditya, poetry and the drama developed rapidly, especially the latter.



This document was written on the inside of two wedge-shaped pieces of wood, which were then fastened together and sealed. Double-wedge tablets like these were generally used for official correspondence in Central Asia (where Sir Aurel Stein found this example) and northern India in the first to the third centuries. The writing is Kharoshthi, read from right to left.

(From Plate 38 in Sir Aurel Stein's *On Central Asian Tracks* by permission of the publishers, Macmillan & Co. Ltd. The tablets are about 15 inches long)

Tradition, which assigns to Bharata Muni the authorship of the *Natyasastra* or the Science of Dramaturgy, says that drama in India originated from

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the nymph Urvashi, who while playing the part of a heroine in a theatrical performance in heaven acted her part unsatisfactorily, and was sent down to earth as a punishment. This curse on her, however, benefited mankind, for she brought the art of the drama to mortal man. Fantastic though the story may be it has, as Yajnik says, 'at least the advantage of emphasizing the original nature of drama, for here the services of music, dancing, gesture and dramatic expression were all utilized in the same representation'. Dancing therefore was an inevitable adjunct of the drama, the dance in India being nothing but a story related in gestures. The origin of the dance was also claimed as divine, for Brahma himself took the essence of the four Vedas and made of them the art of dancing. This new creation was called *Natya-veda* and was bestowed on Bharata and his hundred sons and disciples, who passed the art on to mortals. Dancing played an important part in religious ceremonies during Vedic times, and the temples of India are a great storehouse of ancient dance-poses. The entire fourth chapter of the *Natyasastra* is said to be pictured in the Siva Nataraja temple at Chidambaram in South India. Siva was supposed to have been the first dancer. He expressed his ecstasy of motion and the cosmic energy of creation, preservation and destruction.

Hindu drama at first had more rhythm and lyrical movements than action. The Sanskrit drama was actually a dance drama and *abhinaya* meant both dancing and acting. The *natya* or drama flourished long before Kalidasa, and may even be traced to the first century B.C. There are many who think that the



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theatre originated in India. During the reign of Vikramaditya, the theatre became a place of amusement for princes and noblemen, and performances were given at palaces by great actors who relied on acting and dancing alone, with little or no scenic decoration. After a musical overture, the leading lady and manager usually spoke a prologue. Then the play proper followed, interspersed by song and dance. The Sanskrit dramatist's object was to inspire *rasa* or sentiments, but his play also had a moral, and Yajnik says it was 'classical in form and romantic in spirit'.

The greatest Sanskrit dramatist was Kalidasa, who lived about the fifth century A.D. in Malwa. He wrote many famous plays and poems which will live for ever, the most famous being *Raghuvamsa*, *Kumara-Sambhava*, *Meghadutha*, *Malavikagnimitra* and the famous *Sakuntala*. He was the greatest classical writer India has ever produced and in his profound reading of human nature can vie with Shakespeare. *Sakuntala*, for instance, is often compared with *Miranda*. How beautifully has Goethe expressed her character, brought up in her forest hermitage in seclusion and simplicity and thrust into the sophisticated and luxurious court life by a force of circumstances quite beyond her power to overcome!

Would'st thou the young year's blossoms and the  
fruit of its decline,  
And all by which the soul is charmed, enraptured,  
feasted, fed,  
Would'st thou the Earth and Heaven itself in one sole  
name combine?  
I name thee, O *Sakuntala*! and all at once is said.

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The play describes the Gandharva form of marriage (love marriage), by which a maiden could give herself to a man at short notice, and other customs and traditions of the day.

This story is too well known to be repeated here, but in all its poignant pages and in all Kalidasa's plays the everyday life of India is revealed in innumerable ways and the men and women of India stand before us as human beings, either simple and lovable, or cruel and tyrannical. Throughout the plays there is the feeling of inevitable fate driving the characters on to their goal, and the conviction that no matter how tragic a life may be on earth there is a better understanding in the eternal worlds to follow.

Many other artists, writers and philosophers flourished in the Gupta period, including the 'nine gems' of Vikramaditya's court—of which Kalidasa was one. Visakhadatta wrote the famous *Mudra-Rakshasa*, and Sudraka the *Mrichchhakatika* or Little Clay Cart. In the meanwhile the Puranas assumed their modern form and were brought by the Brahmins into line with what was needed in this new renaissance. Literature reached another peak during Harsha's reign, he being a great patron of learning. Bana wrote his famous *Harsha Charita* and *Kadambari*, and Harsha himself produced well-known plays. One fourth of the revenue of the crown was set aside for scholars and learned men, according to Hiuen Tsang.

A period of decadence set in from about A.D. 800, although the great religious leader Sankara gave new shape to Hinduism at this time. He set up Hindu schools of learning in all parts of India and his

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interpretation of Hinduism is accepted as the most authoritative of the Vedic *sruti*.

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## X. THE POSITION OF WOMEN



ALTHOUGH many rules and customs restricted an orthodox Hindu woman's life until very recent times, the position of women in ancient India was free and emancipated and women were well-educated and respected members of society. A wife shared all her husband's privileges and was his companion and helpmate in his activities. This freedom for women continued even after the Vedic age, and it is only when we reach the time of Manu that we find women regarded as chattels whose place is nowhere but in the home, though even he allows that there they are like goddesses. 'Where women are honoured, there the gods are pleased.'<sup>1</sup> But Manu's attitude is summed up in the following quotation: 'A woman's father protects her in childhood, her husband protects her in youth and her sons protect her in old age; she is never fit for independence.'<sup>2</sup>

Why women lost their high position is not quite clear, nor why Manu depreciated them; but perhaps one of the reasons may have been the fact that when the Aryans first came to India it was not essential to be specially trained in order to take part in sacrifices and religious ceremonies. We hear of Gosha and Lopamudra who were skilled in composing hymns and in philosophical discussions. Later, when years of study in learning the Vedas were required of a priest, women were necessarily excluded because

<sup>1</sup> *Laws of Manu*, III. 56.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, V. 148.

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their household duties left them no time to prosecute Vedantic studies. Whatever be the cause, gradually women were deprived of rights and given a status inferior to that of men.

The Vedic wife was supreme in her household and free to do what she liked. In richer houses there were separate apartments for ladies, where they met and sewed and chatted. A woman could sing and play on the vina and dance, especially on festive occasions.<sup>1</sup>

Some could also probably read and write. Early marriage was not the practice, and girls were able to choose their own husbands when they came to years of discretion. A father often prayed thus: 'May Savitar lead and bring thee the husband whom thy heart desires.'<sup>2</sup> The girl waited at home for a suitor, but if a suitor did not come, it was customary to propitiate and consult the oracles. If for any reason a daughter remained unmarried, she stayed on with her parents and obtained a share of her father's property.

In the epics we hear of many Swayamvaras when the bride was asked to select a husband out of a number of worthy young men who had come to be chosen by her. A royal Swayamvara was an elaborate and luxurious ceremony, before which the proud father of the eligible girl boasted far and wide of his daughter's beauty in order that princes and heroes from all parts of India should come to seek her hand. In the story of Nala and Damayanti the princess, slender-waisted and very beautiful, was so much in demand that the gods themselves came to seek her hand. They knew that Damayanti was already in love with Nala,

<sup>1</sup> *Atharva-Veda*, XIV. 2. 61.      <sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, II. 36. 8.

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and to confuse her they each assumed the outward form of the chosen man. At the Swayamvara all the great people of the kingdom were gathered together, and in the midst of this magnificent assembly Damayanti had to step out and garland the man whom she wished to wed. She went towards Nala, but great was her confusion when she found a number of Nalas standing before her ! With all her heart she wanted to choose the correct man. She therefore prayed the gods for guidance, saying that in her mind she had already betrothed herself to Nala and that no chaste maiden could love one man and marry another. The gods then, feeling pity for her, gave her the sign she wanted. She looked around and found that of all the Nalas present only one cast a shadow. Only a mortal could cast a shadow, and therefore he must be her beloved. She duly garlanded him and the other Nalas resumed their godlike shapes.

Girls were expected to marry for love, for we read : ' Many a woman is attracted by the wealth of him who seeks her. But the woman who is of gentle nature and of graceful form selects, among many, her own loved one as her husband.'<sup>1</sup> It was however usual for the wife to take a dowry to her husband, and the bride's father loaded her with ornaments and rich garments for her wedding. The standard of morality was high and a marriage was indissoluble.

The marriage ceremony was a pleasing one, and many prayers were addressed to the happy bride, of which a few examples may be quoted : ' May Pushan lead thee by the hand from this place. May the two Asvins lead thee in a chariot. Go to your (husband's)

<sup>1</sup> *Rig-Veda*, X.27.12.

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house, and be the mistress of all, and exercise thine authority over all in that house.’<sup>1</sup>

‘Mayest thou have influence over thy father-in-law, and over thy mother-in-law, and be as a queen over thy sister-in-law, and over thy brother-in-law.’<sup>2</sup> A young wife was evidently by no means ill-treated by her husband’s people, but on the contrary regarded as the supreme mistress of his house. The husband usually took his young bride home with such cheering words as : ‘By the right hand for happiness I take thee that thou mayest reach old age with me, thy husband ; Aryaman gave thee to me to rule our house together.’<sup>3</sup>

In later times, when polygamy was more common, a wife in her anger would perhaps mutter an incantation : ‘Blow thou the rival wife away, and make my husband only mine.’<sup>4</sup> Sometimes there must have been unpleasantness between the members of the large joint-families which existed even in ancient India, and a bride was often blessed with words such as the following : ‘Let the wife, calm and gentle, speak words sweet as honey to her lord. No brother hate his brother, no sister be unkind. Unanimous with one interest speak ye your speech in friendliness.’<sup>5</sup> In this passage can be seen the germs of the gentle, chaste, courteous, kind and generous-hearted heroines described so vividly in the epics.

The women of ancient India, like the great majority of women in this country today, possessed a calm philosophy and a tranquil outlook on life. They were capable of enduring untold hardships or receiving

<sup>1</sup> *Rig-Veda*, X. 85. 26.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, X. 85. 46.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, X. 85. 36.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, X. 145.

<sup>5</sup> *Atharva-Veda*, III. 30. 2-3.

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the highest honours that could be paid to mortal beings with the same equanimity. The one did not make them bitter or the other conceited. Prosperity did not turn their heads or misfortune deflect them from the path of duty. Time and again we almost hold our breaths at the extraordinary goodness of the heroines described in the epics. The picture of Sita alone is enough to cause a thrill of wonder and reverence in the reader of the *Ramayana*. In early Vedic literature, as we know, she was referred to as the Furrow : ' May Indra accept this Furrow ! May Pushan lead her onwards ! May she be filled with water, and yield us corn year after year ! ' <sup>1</sup> She is mentioned in the *Yajur-Veda* and was later given human form and made the heroine of the *Ramayana*. But her ideals and her beauty must have had human counterparts in order to have stirred the poet to such depths. Valmiki, the author of the *Ramayana*, extols Sita and places her on the very peak of perfection. How beautiful is the picture of her when exiled in Ravana's *asoka* grove :

Like the moon obscured and clouded, dim with  
  shadows deep and dark,  
Like the smoke-enshrouded red fire, dying with a  
  feeble spark

Like the tempest-pelted lotus by the wind and torrent  
  shaken,  
Like the beauteous star Rohini by a *graha* over-  
  taken ! <sup>2</sup>

And Fire itself assured the world of her innocence  
when she was rescued by Rama. Sita is the ideal

<sup>1</sup> *Rig-Veda*, IV. 57. 7.

<sup>2</sup> *The Ramayana and the Mahabharata*, trs. R. C. Dutt, p. 119.



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which every true-hearted Indian woman desires to emulate.

A striking characteristic of Hindu women of old is that they took no delight in revenge, but almost always forgave those who had done evil to them. Draupadi's attitude towards Ashvatthama, who killed her five sons, is the classic example of this strange aptitude for forgiveness, for when she was asked by her husbands whether Ashvatthama should be killed and sent to hell she replied, 'No, let not Gautami, his mother and the devoted wife of her husband, weep for the loss of her son as I am weeping for my sons at present.'

The Vedic woman shared the social and religious duties of her husband. An ancient hymn runs thus : 'O ye gods ! The married couple who prepare oblations together, who purify the *soma*-juice and mix it with milk, may they obtain food for their eating, and come united to the sacrifice ! May they never have to go in quest of food !'<sup>1</sup> Widow remarriage was not common, though a childless widow was allowed to marry her husband's brother. Suttee was not an early Indian custom. In fact the words of the priest at the husband's funeral were nothing if not encouraging to the widow : 'Rise up, woman ; thou art lying by one whose life is gone. Become the wife of him who holds thy hand and is willing to marry thee.'<sup>2</sup>

Dr Rajendralal Mitra, commenting on the funeral ceremony in ancient India, says : 'The remarriage of widows in Vedic times was a national custom, and can be established by a variety of proofs and arguments ; the very fact of the Sanskrit language having, from

<sup>1</sup> *Rig-Veda*, VIII. 31. 5-6.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, X. 18. 8

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ancient times, such words as *didhishu*, "a man that has married a widow," *parapurva*, "a woman that has taken a second husband," *paunarbhava*, "a son of a woman by her second husband," are enough to establish it.'

Neither did widows have to give up wearing ornaments and shave their heads, for we hear: 'May these women suffer not the pangs of widowhood. Let these women, without shedding any tears and without sorrow, first proceed to the house wearing valuable ornaments.'<sup>1</sup> Even Manu's strictures did not make it obligatory for a woman to commit suttee. She could live on if she so wished but should pass the rest of her days in deep austerities, and it is obvious that suttee was often voluntary because the widow genuinely felt life would be worthless without her husband.

A woman's legal position even in early times was not very secure, for she was considered her husband's property. Manu later clearly stated: 'A wife, a son and a slave, these three are declared to have no property, the wealth which they earn is acquired for him to whom they belong;'<sup>2</sup> Vasishtha considers women as property,<sup>3</sup> but another law-giver, Yajna-vaalkya,<sup>4</sup> said, 'After the death of a father let a mother also inherit an equal share with her sons in the division of her property left by the father,' and in spite of Manu's ideas of women it has been stated

<sup>1</sup> *Rig-Veda*, X. 18.7.

<sup>2</sup> *Laws of Manu*, VIII. 416.

<sup>3</sup> *Vasishtha*, XVI. 18.

<sup>4</sup> The great sage who lived during the reign of Janaka, king of the Videhas. He is often mentioned in the Brahmanas and Upanishads and was the promulgator of the White *Yajur-Veda*.

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in the code that an unmarried daughter is entitled to one-fourth of the share of the father's property. But this share is in the charge of the brother, who may give it as a dowry to his sister. This was the custom even in Vedic days, though whether the portion was exactly one-fourth we are not told. If there was no son the property in Vedic times went to the daughter's son. Laws of inheritance, however, are confusing and contradictory and require detailed study.

The chief occupation of a woman was domestic. Most of her time was devoted to looking after the house. We have already seen how she welcomed her husband home with curds or gruel. The custom that a wife should not partake of a meal until her lord and master had eaten was an old one and still prevails in orthodox circles. A woman's day began with cleaning and sweeping her house, smearing the floor with cow-dung and probably decorating it with patterns of rice flour. Another duty was to rise early, bathe and don clean clothes. A woman's main duties, according to Manu,<sup>1</sup> were to manage the house and attend to the family budget. A wife always accompanied her husband to the altar to offer the daily sacrifice, and it was impossible for a husband to perform this sacrifice without her. Cooking took up a great part of her time, and even if the household was rich the wife usually took it upon herself to cook her husband's meals. She had to extract the *soma* juice. Drawing water from the well, churning, husking, winnowing and other such homely tasks all fell to the woman; but the remarkable fact was that she was also in entire charge of the finances, and was the

<sup>1</sup> XI. 11.

## The Position of Women

paymaster in her house, taking complete control of her husband's earnings. She was thrifty and an intelligent financier, and even Manu assigns to her the duty



A KING'S ANOINTING

Women are prominent on this ceremonial occasion, playing on cymbals and presenting gifts. The scene probably depicts the anointing of Vijaya after his conquest of Ceylon, and is to be found on the wall of Cave XVII at Ajanta. It is reproduced from a woodcut appearing in Mrs Speir's *Life in Ancient India*, 1856. The scene on p. 88 is part of the same picture.

of collecting and spending money and keeping down expenses with a frugal hand. In the *Mahabharata*

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Draupadi was in charge of Yudhishtira's treasury, and in the Sutras a man had to take his wife's advice as to how to spend his income, prepare an annual budget and keep strict accounts with her help. The women of India were thrifty to such an extent that they even used old clothes as wicks for the lamps. Women could weave and sew. The needle was called *suchi* and there are many passages in the *Rig-Veda* which refer to sewing.

Women could also plait mats and convert the wool of sheep into clothing and coverings for animals. Outdoor work was by no means prohibited, and women took part in field-work and farming. The men ploughed, prepared the seed-beds and sowed the seed and the women transplanted and weeded.

We find women too in professions usually reserved for the other sex. Vishpala lost a leg in war and was supplied with an iron one by the Asvins. Some women were so learned that their hymns are included in the *Rig-Veda*. Gosha is said to be the first woman in Indian history to have achieved the ambitions of her father by becoming a scholar. There is a story that she suffered from leprosy and remained unmarried until the Asvins, in answer to her prayers, cured her and gave her a husband. Other women poets were Visvavara and Sukanya. Maitreyi and Gargi were philosophers of a later age who argued with the learned sage Yajnavalkya. Indeed, Maitreyi was the sage's wife and acquired the knowledge of Brahma from her husband. Even in Manu's age women must have been learned, for he compared one unlearned in the Vedas to 'falsehood itself'. Visvavara was not only a poet but a rishi who composed

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riks and a priestess who worshipped the gods with prayers and oblations. Girls could become Brahma-charinis as boys became Brahmacharis. In institutions called Gurukulas boys and girls were educated together. In the ashram of Valmiki, Atreyi studied with Kusha and Lava, Rama's children. In the *Atharva-Veda* it is prescribed that a maiden was only entitled to marry after completing her Brahma-charini's course. According to Panini, girls were admitted to Vedic schools called Charanas. A female student was called a *kathi*, and there were hostels for girls called *chhatri-sala*.<sup>1</sup> In very early days women were allowed to wear the sacred thread. There were indeed women of two orders in ancient India: those who devoted themselves to the study of the Vedas and those who married and stayed at home. Megasthenes says, 'Women are allowed to share in the philosophic life',<sup>2</sup> and Maitreyi, the wife of Yajnavalkya, and Gargi proved themselves great philosophers. It is significant that the deity of learning is a woman, the Goddess Saraswati. 'The teacher (*acharya*) is ten times more venerable than a sub-teacher (*upadhyaya*), the father a hundred times more than a teacher, and the mother a thousand times more than the father.'<sup>3</sup>

In later times girls no longer attended the Gurukulas, and Manu never refers to the Brahmacharini in his code. The education of women became a thing of the past, though Harita condescendingly allows them to be taught by their parents, brothers or any

<sup>1</sup> Panini, VI. 2. 86.

<sup>2</sup> McCrindle, *Megasthenes*, p. 103.

<sup>3</sup> *Vasishtha*, XIII. 48.

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other relative in the house. Women were none the less regarded with great respect by Buddhists, for it was laid down among the categories of duties that a husband should cherish his wife by treating her with respect and kindness, by being faithful to her, causing her to be honoured by others, and by giving her suitable clothes and ornaments.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

Feminine hair styles of the seventh century, from Bhuvaneshvar. In No. 1, evidently padding is used. In No. 2 the chignon, instead of being placed behind the head, is made to rest on the left shoulder. It is not clear how the twisted cone shown in No. 3 was kept in position. In No. 4, the hair is bunched at an angle and tied round with a string of pearls. (Figs. 37, 41, 43 and 45 in Rajendralal Mitra's *Indo-Aryans*, Vol. I)

In Chandragupta's time, civil law dealt with marriage and dowries, and widows were allowed to

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remarry. The Emperor Harsha is said to have given his widowed sister a seat by his side when he listened to the Master of the Law, and she is said to have been most interested in the discussions. Hiuen Tsang even alleges that Harsha ruled in conjunction with his sister.

A remarkable sect of learned women was formed in the early days of Buddhism, consisting of nuns who had renounced earthly life in order to practise religion. These women were called Sisters or *Theri-Bhikkhunis* of the Buddhist order and they formed the second order of the Buddhist elders—Brethren and Sisters. The Pali canon was put into writing about 80 B.C. and Mrs Rhys Davids says: ‘Whether the verses in search of an owner have missed their way, whether, indeed, in some of the first few stanzas a name may not have been created to fit the word, still may we see, in this dream-pageant of Sisters of the antique world conjured up for us by the Chronicler, a reiterated testimony to high quest, to devoted heart, to indomitable resolve.’<sup>1</sup> The motives which drove the Sisters to their solitary and religious lives are many, one of the most important being the attainment of freedom from domestic trammels:

So sit I here  
Upon the rock. And o’er my spirit sweeps  
The breath of Liberty!<sup>2</sup>

Home have I left, for I have left my world!  
Child have I left, and all my cherish’d herds!  
Lust have I left, and Ill-will, too, is gone,  
And Ignorance have I put far from me;

<sup>1</sup> *Psalms of the Sisters*, by Mrs Rhys Davids.

<sup>2</sup> No. XXIV.



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Craving and root of Craving overpowered,  
Cool am I now, knowing Nibbana's peace.<sup>1</sup>

A grief-stricken woman became a nun and wrote the following verse :

Now here, now there, lightheaded, crazed with  
grief,

Mourning my child, I wandered up and down,  
Naked, unheeding, streaming hair unkempt,  
Lodging in scourings of the streets, and where  
The dead lay still, and by the chariot-roads—  
So three years long I fared, starving, athirst.

And then at last I saw Him, as He went  
Within that blessed city Mithila :  
Great Tamer of untamed hearts, yea, Him,  
The Very Buddha, Banisher of Fear.

Now all my sorrows are hewn down, cast out,  
Uprooted, brought to utter end,  
In that I now can grasp and understand  
The base on which my miseries were built.<sup>2</sup>

There is a sister Mutta who escaped from her  
hunch-backed husband and wrote :

O free, indeed ! O gloriously free  
Am I in freedom from three crooked things :  
From quern, from mortar, from my crook-back'd  
lord !

Ay, but I'm free from rebirth and from death,  
And all that dragged me back is hurled away.<sup>3</sup>

Patachara had lost her mind because of the loss all  
together of husband, children, parents and brother.  
She finally came to the Buddha when he was teaching,  
and the people objected to a lunatic being with them,

<sup>1</sup> No. XVIII by Sangha.

<sup>2</sup> No. LI.

<sup>3</sup> No. XI.

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but the Buddha said: 'Sister, recover thou presence of mind. O Patachara, to one passing to another world no child nor other kin is able to be a shelter or a hiding-place or a refuge. Therefore, let whoso is wise purify his own conduct, and accomplish the Path leading even to Nibbana.'<sup>1</sup> Patachara not only became a nun, but comforted many other stricken women.

This brief review of the position of women in ancient India shows that for many centuries after the Aryans came to this country women enjoyed more freedom than they have ever since enjoyed. Child-marriage and purdah were unknown, and Indian women at least can look back to a past that was indeed a Golden Age.

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<sup>1</sup> *Psalms of the Sisters*, p. 71.

## XI. THE FIRST UNIVERSITIES



THE Vedas are the source of all learning in India. The composition of the *Rig-Veda* extended over a long period and as the hymns were composed they were learnt and stored in the memories of pupils and handed down from generation to generation by a wonderful system of oral teaching and memorizing, carried on in schools where men spent all their lives learning and teaching the Vedas. This system is perhaps one of the most wonderful in the world, and even today the Vedas are learnt orally in the religious schools of India, and not from books. More stress was laid on the sound than on the sense and, as the commentator Sayana very aptly put it, 'it is no fault of the post if the blind man cannot see it'.

It was however from among the Brahmins who underwent penance and austerities as a means of self-realization that the great teachers arose. Around such men gradually developed the forest universities which form an integral part of Indian life. It was here, as Sir Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan has said, that was 'evolved the beginning of the sublime idealism of India'. The rules of studentship are clearly defined in the *Atharva-Veda* and the *Yajur-Veda*. The pupil was initiated by the teacher at the Upanayana ceremony when the sacred thread was tied and the boy was recognized as a twice-born. Henceforth he was known as a student or Brahmachari. He then went away with his teacher to the forest ashram, where he remained for about twelve years. These years

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of studentship were of an austere type. The senses were restrained and the boy was expected to be modest and humble. A Brahmin pupil had to wear the skin of a black buck and a girdle of kusa grass and to let his hair grow long. He had to gather fuel morning and evening to be offered to Agni. He went out begging for food with his staff, and had to hand over all that was given to him to his guru. He gave no other gifts to his teacher except at the end of his schooling. Classes were carried on under the shade of trees within sight of green barley or within hearing of cattle, and the student's tasks included looking after the cattle, which provided healthy exercise in the open air. Students were forbidden to sleep during the day.

From early times there came to be small differences in the texts of the four Vedas, and those who studied a particular version of a Veda were said to constitute a *charana*, or school, of that Veda. A student's first duty was to learn the Veda of his school, and in earlier times it seems that all four Vedas were taught within twelve years, for in the *Chandogya Upanishad*<sup>1</sup> we read of a Brahmin youth who, 'having begun his apprenticeship when he was twelve years of age, returned to his father when he was twenty-four, having then studied all the Vedas—conceited, considering himself well-read, and stern'.

The objects of education in ancient Hindu India were five: the first was to develop scholars and leaders; the second to cultivate obedience, patience and hard work; the third to inculcate self-control and abstention from all luxuries; the fourth to revere

<sup>1</sup> VI. 1. 2. 3.

## *Everyday Life in Ancient India*

authority and to respect whatever was an established rule; and the fifth to attain a full understanding of God, the only reality. Apart from meditation, simple living and imbibing knowledge, every boy was taught to be hospitable; for the chief requirement of the household—the second stage or *asrama* of man's life—was to be courteous and hospitable towards his guests, 'for the reception of guests is an everlasting sacrifice offered by the householder to God'. The curriculum doubtless varied greatly from ashram to ashram, according to the inclination of the presiding guru, but apart from the oral learning of the Vedas, to which most time was devoted, practical subjects such as medicine, agriculture, and soldiering were taught, as well as Shastric subjects such as grammar, phonetics and prosody and the 'science of the eternal', or the doctrine of *karma*.

The teachers themselves were most exemplary. Hiuen Tsang says of the Brahmins: 'The teachers (of the Vedas) must themselves have closely studied the deep and secret principles they contain, and penetrated to their remotest meaning. They then explain their general sense, and guide their pupils in understanding the words which are difficult. They urge them on and skilfully conduct them. They add lustre to their poor knowledge and stimulate the desponding.'<sup>1</sup> Attached to each university was a kind of post-graduate department, a group of learned Brahmins known collectively as a *parishad*. A *parishad* seems usually to have consisted of about ten men; four 'walking encyclopædias' each of whom had learnt all the four Vedas by heart, three who had specialized in one of

<sup>1</sup> *Hiuen-Tsang*, trs. Samuel Beal, Vol. I, p. 79.

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the Sutras, and representatives of the three orders of *brahmachari*, *grihastha* and *vanaprastha*—student, householder and hermit. The *parishad* gave decisions on disputed points of religion or learning.



### COUNTRY LIFE

The artists of Sanchi were close observers of nature, and an astonishing variety of animal and vegetable life is recorded in their carvings. Here one can see two lions, a monkey, a cow, elephants, deer and ducks; there are lotus buds, a palm tree and plantain trees, and at the top left-hand corner are stylized bignonia and mango leaves (the mango fruits are shown hanging).

(From Marshall and Foucher's *Sanchi*, Vol. II, Plate XXIX)

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By the time of the Upanishads an elaborate astronomical science had been developed, and the year was divided into twelve months, with a thirteenth to adjust the lunar and the solar year. The seasons were also defined and related to the movements of the sun, the moon and the constellations. The waging of war had also become an art and we hear of great teachers like Drona, a Brahmin instructor of the Pandavas. Every prince had to be an athlete. He learnt to draw the mighty bow, chariot-driving and horsemanship, and became a highly skilled hunter and wrestler.

Astronomy, geometry, grammar and philosophy seem all to have been studied in this country earlier than anywhere else in the world. Dr Thibaut was of the opinion that 'the want of rule by which to fix the right time for the sacrifices gave the first impulse to astronomical observations; urged by this want, the priest remained watching night after night the advance of the moon through the circle of the *Nakshatras*, and day after day the alternate progress of the sun towards the north and the south. The laws of phonetics were investigated, because the wrath of the gods followed the wrong pronunciation of a single letter of the sacrificial formulæ'.<sup>1</sup> Whatever science was 'closely connected with the Ancient Indian religion must be considered as having sprung up among the Indians themselves', says the Doctor. Algebra and arithmetic, including the decimal system, are also said to have originated in India, but the greatest contribution which India has made to world knowledge has been in grammar. Panini as a grammarian is unrivalled.

<sup>1</sup> *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1875.

## The First Universities

Buddhism's great contribution to the progress of education in India was that its famous monastery-universities were open to all, not only to the twice-born or to Buddhists. Nalanda may even claim to have been an international university, for students came from China to study Buddhism in the land of its founder.



EVERYDAY LIFE IN A BUDDHIST  
MONASTERY

Primitive axes are used to split the fuel, the fires are fanned with matting, and the hearths and oblation spoons are of curious shape. Notice too the way burdens are carried slung on a pole, or on the shoulder. The hermits wear skirts of bark beaten into long strands and have high turbans, but the villagers seem to be without turbans. In the background is a stupa of the most archaic form known. (From a scene on the East Gateway of Stupa I at Sanchi, drawn from Plate LII of Marshall and Foucher's *Sanchi*, Vol. II)



## Everyday Life in Ancient India

Nalanda is mentioned in literature of the fourth and fifth centuries B.C., but not much evidence has been found of its greatness prior to the Gupta period. It was situated seven miles south-west of Bihar-Sharif near Patna, where there were also two monasteries, one Mahayana and one Hinayana. At Tiladaka, twenty-one miles west of Nalanda, there was another monastery, and the whole tract was known as Vihara (monasteries).

Nalanda is a very old place-name which was current at the time of Mahavira and Buddha in the sixth century B.C. It was described as the abode of all sacred lore, and a Tibetan account says that Nalanda was a university and had a grand library. There were three buildings called Ratnasagara, Ratnodadhi and Ratnarajaka. The second building is said to have been several stories high and its walls were



This seal of about the eighth century was found at Nalanda. The inscription means: 'Of the Court of Justice in the district of the Sona-doab.' Clay seals like this were affixed to documents to prove their authenticity, and many have been found testifying that a scholar had studied at Nalanda. (Actual size. From Hirananda Sastri's *Nalanda*, Plate V)

## *The First Universities*

inscribed with sacred texts and Tantric works. It is supposed to have been burnt down by opponents of Buddhism. In the sixth century A.D. however Nalanda was a great centre of Buddhist culture.

Buddhist texts were sent to China as early as the second century B.C., from which time Buddhism spread rapidly in that country. When Fa Hien came to India about A.D. 400 Buddhism was well established, though he does not mention Nalanda. Hiuen Tsang and I-Tsing, two hundred years later, nevertheless have a great deal to say about this Buddhist seat of learning, where thousands of priests lived. Hiuen Tsang writes: <sup>1</sup> 'Learned men from different cities, who desire to acquire quickly a renown in discussion, come here in multitudes to settle their doubts, and then the streams [of their wisdom] spread far and wide. For this reason some persons usurp the name [of Nalanda students], and in going to and fro receive honour in consequence.' A severe oral examination had to be passed to obtain admission, and Hiuen Tsang says the percentage of failures was as high as 70 or 80.

Hiuen Tsang says that Nalanda was purchased by about 500 merchants and given to the Buddha, who preached the Law for three months. After the Buddha had achieved Nirvana, a king constructed the first buildings and six kings in succession then added to the original structures. The women's convent was surrounded by a brick enclosure with one gate which gave admittance to the great college. We are told that the richly adorned turrets and towers resembled

<sup>1</sup> Beal's translation, Vol. II, pp. 170 ff.

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pointed hill-tops and were lost in the clouds. They were used for astronomical observations. There were ponds with the blue lotus and *kanaka* flowers. The resident priests and students numbered 10,000. They studied the Mahayana and eighteen rival sects of Buddhism and also the Vedas and works on magic. 'Within the temple they arrange every day about 100 pulpits for preaching, and the students attend these discussions without fail, even for a minute.' The priests were dignified and grave, respected by their students and by the temporal powers, the kings of neighbouring territories. The revenue of about a hundred villages was given as an endowment to the monastery, so that its inmates were well supplied with rice, butter and milk. Studies were pursued unremittingly, and Hiuen Tsang says: 'The day is not sufficient for asking and answering profound questions. From morning till night they engage in discussion; the old and the young mutually help one another.'<sup>1</sup> I-Tsing says there were eight halls and 300 rooms and the residents exceeded 3,000. The pupil had first to serve his teacher, after which he read the scriptures and meditated on what he had read. He had to acquire knowledge day by day and not lose a minute.

Boys as young as six or eight years of age were admitted as students, and grammar was the foundation of all their studies. They began by learning Panini and some of the Sutras by heart. From grammar they went on to compositions in prose and verse, to metaphysics and other subjects.

<sup>1</sup> Beal's translation, Vol. II, pp. 170 ff.

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I-Tsing reports<sup>1</sup> that at the end of their course of studies, 'to try the sharpness of their wit' some men 'proceed to the king's court to lay down before it the sharp weapon of their abilities: there they present their schemes and show their talent, seeking to be appointed in the practical government. . . . When they are refuting heretic doctrines all their opponents become tongue-tied and acknowledge themselves undone. . . . They receive grants of land, and are advanced to a high rank; *their famous names are*, as a reward, *written in white on their lofty gates.*'<sup>2</sup> After this they can follow whatever occupation they like.'

Physical exercise in the monasteries was slight, but both priests and laymen took habitual walks, 'going backwards and forwards along a path at suitable hours and at their pleasure; they avoid noisy places'. These walks were said to cure diseases and help digestion. Pupils and teachers thus kept 'a healthy mind in a healthy body'. Hiuen Tsang says there were many similar institutions in India, though none was comparable to Nalanda in grandeur. He was himself so enamoured of Nalanda that he studied to become a Master of the Law there, and finally became Vice-Principal of the university.

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HIUEN TSIANG, *Si-yu-ki, Buddhist Records of the Western World*, trans. Samuel Beal  
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<sup>1</sup> *I-Tsing*, pp. 176 ff. I-Tsing reached the mouth of the Hooghly from China about the year 673, after studying Sanskrit for seven years in Sumatra. He then studied at Nalanda.

<sup>2</sup> The translation from the Chinese here is only tentative.

## ***Everyday Life in Ancient India***

**J. TAKAKUSU**, *A Record of the Buddhist Religion as Practised in India and the Malay Archipelago (A.D. 671-695)*, by I-Tsing

**ROMESH CHUNDER DUTT**, *A History of Civilisation in Ancient India*

**JAWAHARLAL NEHRU**, *The Discovery of India*

**F. E. KEAY**, *Indian Education in Ancient and Later Times*

## XII. ARTS, CRAFTS AND OCCUPATIONS



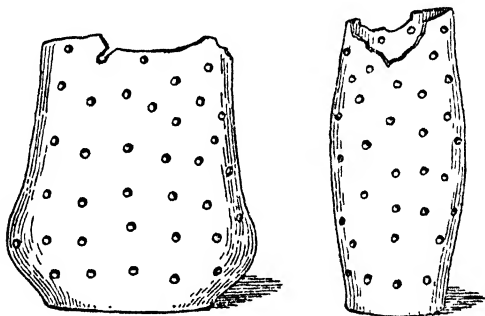
THE artisans of Vedic India were numerous and had reached a high state of excellence in their various industries. Weaving was known from the earliest Vedic times and was carried on mostly by women, for mention is made of the warp and the woof being woven by deft female fingers. Sheep's wool was woven and bleached, and Pushan was the god of the shepherds who gave the Aryans abundance of wool. There were carpenters in each village, as carts and chariots were made, and also gold- and iron-smiths, for we have already seen that implements, vessels and ornaments were plentiful. The ubiquitous barber seems to have existed even in earliest times, for a forest fire was compared to the earth being shaved. He was called *vapta*.<sup>1</sup> Even weapons of war could be things of beauty, for we read of golden helmets and shields.

The arts and crafts of the Indus valley were even more advanced than those of Vedic times. Silver vessels have been discovered at Mohenjodaro, as well as copper and bronze axe-blades, copper swords, spear blades, daggers, arrow-heads, and chisels. Lead was used for mace heads. Saddle-querns, stone palettes, seals and weights are evidence of highly developed artisans. These Indus valley folk knew how to handle alabaster, limestone, quartzite and slate. Their

<sup>1</sup> *Rig-Veda*, X. 142. 4.

## *Everyday Life in Ancient India*

whetstones have been found, and also candlesticks. Cotton was spun and woven as in Vedic times and spindle-whorls were used. Men and women probably spent their spare time spinning. There were also rolling-pins and pottery of stone. Stone was probably better manipulated in the Indus civilization than in the early Vedic period, for the Indus civilization centred round large cities. The ancient Dravidians too seem to have been better builders than the Aryans, for we read of the great buildings of the Dasas and of mansions with a thousand pillars. Sculpture proper is never mentioned in the *Rig-Veda*, though there is reference to a hundred stone-built towns in one hymn.<sup>1</sup>



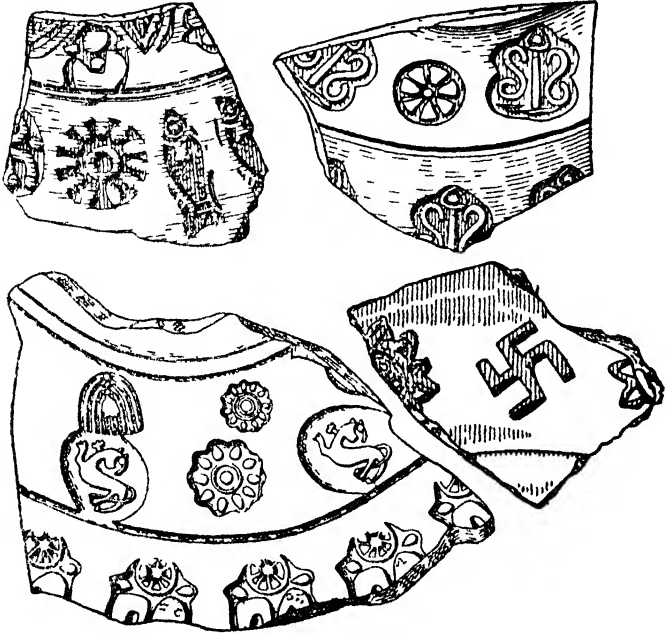
Perforated pots found at Mohenjodaro, probably used for holding hot charcoal. (Drawn from exhibits in the Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay, by courtesy of the Curator)

In the Indus valley, clay pottery was highly developed and an abundance of products still survive. The

<sup>1</sup> *Rig-Veda*, IV. 30. 20.

## Arts, Crafts and Occupations

pottery was coated with red on which were drawn designs in thick black pigment. Clay was taken from the river, and mixed with sand and a little mica. The pots were shaped on a wheel. Men did this work



These fragments of pottery found at Ahichatra (see map on p. 59) were made in Kushan times (between the second and fourth centuries). The designs on them were usually stamped from dies, but sometimes incised by hand, painted or (on big jars) applied. On these fragments are to be seen characteristic ornaments: (top right) Naga symbol, showing snakes on each side of a central pillar; (top left) twin fish; (bottom right) swastika; (bottom left) a figure like a bull, and the Buddhist *dharma-chakra*.

(Reproduced from *Ancient India*, No. 1, by permission of the Government of India, Archæological Department)

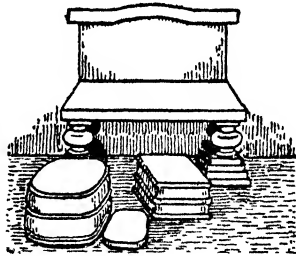


## *Everyday Life in Ancient India*

while women put the finishing touches and painted the designs. The kilns in which the pottery was baked have survived. Red ochre was used not only for decoration but for sealing and was probably obtained from Hormuz on the Persian Gulf. Some Mohenjodaro pottery has the sheen, colour and appearance of Chinese lacquer, though undecorated grey ware is also found. Clearly pottery was a highly developed art. Glazed and vitreous pastes were used for small ornaments and animal figures. Shell was a common medium for inlay work. Ivory too was used for the base or top of vases. In the Indus valley there were awls of bone, ivory and copper, and the beauty of many seal amulets, seals and pottery figures of Mohenjodaro and Harappa has proved the excellence of the art of ancient India.

Apart from jewellers, weavers, potters, and other artisans there were usurers, sellers of dried fish, and even professional acrobats in Vedic India. The astrologer was there, probably inciting men and women to peep into the future much as he does today. In the *Rig-Veda* medicine is claimed to be a science though its practice was accompanied by spells and incantations.

Carvings and sculptures throw quite a light on the everyday life of days of yore, though these depict a



Seat, stool and foot-rests of the second century. (From C. Sivaramamurti, *Amaravati Sculptures*, Plate L)

## *Arts, Crafts and Occupations*

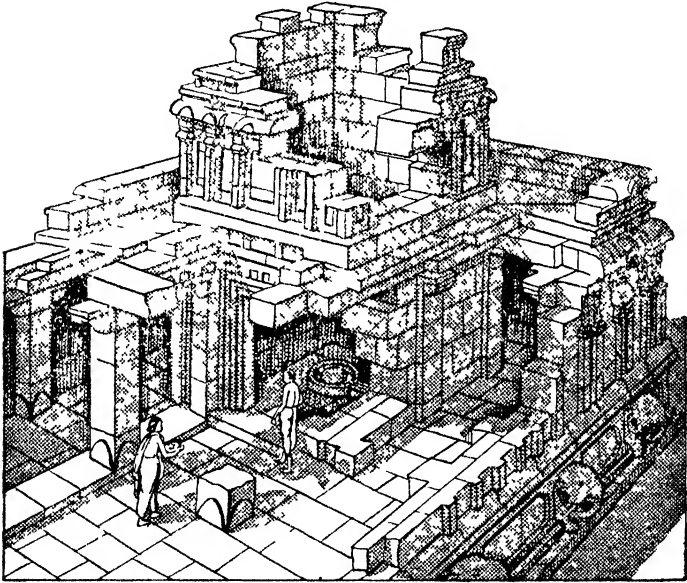
time later than the Vedic period. The great variety of musical instruments, for instance, proves that music was much indulged in. There were flutes, conch-shells, harps, vinas, guitars, skin instruments such as mridangas, drums, tom-toms and tambourines ; and percussion instruments including cymbals, castanets, and gongs. The carvings at Amaravati depict sofas and *moras*, chairs and benches, and there are small one-legged tables in the Bhuvanesar temple. A kitchen scene at Sanchi shows a winnowing fan, wooden pestle and mortar, a curry-stone and a table on which pastry was probably rolled.

A great leather industry flourished in ancient India, for bottles and vessels of hide were used to store water, and everyday articles such as bow-strings, slings, thongs to fasten the various parts of a chariot or wagon together, reins, lashes of whips and bags were made of leather. The leather was well tanned before use. Among the other occupations of olden days were those of butchers and washermen, fire-rangers and footmen, messengers, basket-makers, dyers, smelters and fishermen. Though there were no large factories, men and women were busy producing articles of everyday use and also works of art which laid the foundation for the fame India has earned for her handloom and cottage industries and her masterpieces of oriental art.

During the time of development of the Jain and Buddhist religions a new kind of architecture was developed. Jain architecture is first to be seen in the rock-hewn caves of Orissa, dating from the first century B.C., but it really came into its own about A.D. 900 when a number of Jain temples were built with

## *Everyday Life in Ancient India*

domed roofs, magnificent carvings and lavishly ornamented towers. Traders also developed during the Mauryan dynasty and there were guilds of workmen resembling the London city companies of a later age; the merchants at the head of these guilds were



### BUILDING METHODS IN THE SEVENTH CENTURY

Note the way in which the massive blocks of stone are laid on each other, no use being made of the arch, vault or buttress. As Percy Brown observes, the Indian craftsman 'achieved his purpose solely by the judicious observance of the laws of gravity'.

This picture of a small ruined temple at Badami is copied from Percy Brown's *Indian Architecture*, Vol. I, published by D. B. Taraporevala Sons & Co. Ltd, by permission of the author.

## *Arts, Crafts and Occupations*

veritable merchant princes. In Puranic times Yajnavalkya speaks of woollen and cotton fabrics, and skilfully woven fabrics and fabrics covered with wool. He also mentions silks.<sup>1</sup>

The rules of the merchant companies are interesting: 'The profits and losses of merchants, who work in concert for profit, shall be determined according to their shares, or according to agreement previously made.'<sup>2</sup>



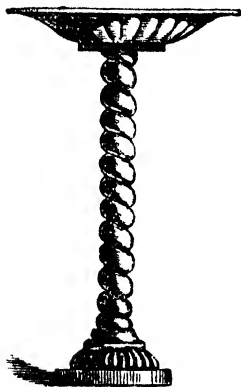
A terracotta medallion of the Mauryan period, actual size, probably made from an ivory die. Sir John Marshall says it 'might almost be a copy in miniature of the relief work on the Sanchi gateways, so exactly does it resemble it in style'. (Copied from the *Cambridge History of India*, Vol. I, by permission of the Cambridge University Press)

<sup>1</sup> *Yajnavalkya Samhita*, II. 182-3.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, II. 262.

## *Everyday Life in Ancient India*

A Superintendent of Commerce controlled the distribution and prices of articles. Imports, such as skins from Asia Minor and silks from China, were encouraged subject to the payment of duties at the city gates, but articles for religious use were admitted free of duty. Goods from the mofussil also had to pay octroi duties. The king was warned in the *Arthasastra* not to profiteer, for he was himself a commercial magnate with numerous warehouses filled with the products of work done in his prisons, forest factories and work-houses.



BETEL-BOX STAND  
FROM  
BHUVANESVAR—  
TENTH CENTURY

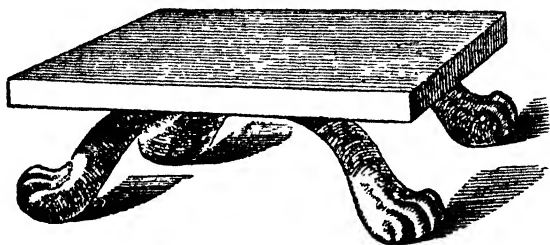
(Fig. 106 in Rajendralal Mitra's *Indo-Aryans*, Vol. I)

Mauryan art excelled in terracotta work, and china was made in India at this time. Bricks were coming into use, though even in Asoka's time, a period famous for its monuments, the pillars and the Buddhist chaitya caves are cut out of solid rock. The monolith pillars of polished sandstone are massive and simple, and stone began to be used for building purposes, as can be seen at Sarnath and Buddh Gaya.

In post-Vedic times the number of occupations and professions increased by leaps and bounds. Many men served in Government departments where they were paid in cash or kind. The blacksmith, the dyer, the launderer, the oilman,

## *Arts, Crafts and Occupations*

the tailor, the weaver, cane and bamboo workers, leather workers and innumerable others practised



Simple wooden bed of the tenth century depicted in the Muktesvara Temple at Bhuvanesar (Fig. 88 in Rajendralal Mitra's *Indo-Aryans*, Vol. I)

their trades. Soap berries had been discovered for use in washing blankets, and white mustard for linen. The oilman had made himself a press and the weaver ginned his cotton, separated the seed and wove the cloth. Silk, linen, and wool were also produced.

Among the monuments of Buddhist architecture, the palace of Asoka stands out prominently as a magnificent work of art. It was still erect in the fifth century during the reign of Vikramaditya, and Fa Hien was much impressed by it and attributed its building to supernatural aid. He says: 'In the city is the royal palace, the different parts of which he [Asoka] commissioned the genii to construct by piling up the stones. The walls, doorways, and the sculptured designs are no human work.' It is indeed sad that this great building should now be entirely destroyed. The Lumbini gardens—where Maya gave birth to Buddha—was a sacred place which Asoka

## ***Everyday Life in Ancient India***

visited after his war with the Kalingas. When his preceptor said : 'Here, Great King, was the Venerable One Born,' Asoka ordered a pillar to be built on the spot ; and it still stands today with the preceptor's words engraved on it. Kapilavastu, the home of Buddha's childhood, Sarnath near Banaras where he first preached, and Buddh Gaya where he found Nirvana while meditating under the Bodhi tree, have all been commemorated by Asoka's monuments. The Sanchi stupas in Central India near Ujjain, built where Asoka held court as Viceroy before his accession to the throne, are perhaps the finest relics of Asoka's constructive genius left to remind us of the glory of Buddhist India. Fergusson, speaking of the four gateways at Sanchi, remarks : 'The sculptures of these gateways form a perfect Picture Bible of Buddhism, as it existed in India in the first century of the Christian era.'

### SOURCE BOOKS

VINCENT A. SMITH, *The Early History of India*

ERNEST MACKAY, *The Indus Civilization*

ABINAS CHANDRA DAS, *Rig-Vedic India*

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RAJENDRALAL MITRA, *Indo-Aryans*

### XIII. CLOTHES AND ORNAMENTS



THE dress the people of the Indus valley wore has to be deduced from the slender evidence obtained from the figures in pottery and from the seal-amulets which have been discovered at Mohenjodaro and Harappa.

In one stone image of white steatite, showing a head and bust, a robe can be seen going over the left shoulder and under the right arm : the figure also has a necklace. Many of the pottery figurines are nude, but some wear a short skirt, usually secured by a girdle round the loins. There is always a great deal of jewellery. Women's hair was allowed to grow long and was secured in a loop coiled inwards at the end. One figure wears a cloak over the upper part of the body, which may indicate that both men and women wore some sort of a cloth which needed no pinning. There is a nude figure in bronze which probably represents a dancing girl. There are also nude male figures, though some have a skirt. One seems even to be wearing a pair of breeches, or a dhoti. There was no footwear.

The head-dresses of the female figures usually prevent the hair from being seen ; but one has curly hair hanging in a mass at the back of the head. Some goddesses have plaits with a bow at the end. The men indulged in a variety of hair styles. One has a parting in the middle and locks at the back and another is kept tidy by a woven fillet. Others have the hair gathered in a chignon, or plaited and then coiled in a ring around the head, concealing the ears. One



## *Everyday Life in Ancient India*

figure has a plaited lock at the back of the head, secured in a large loop by a fillet. An infant has curly hair. Men wore beards trimmed in a variety of ways, such as a short beard with a shaven upper lip or a stiff flat beard.

Jewellery in the Indus valley consisted mostly of necklaces and hard stone beads, some of which have been found in a silver jar and some loose. An elaborate girdle was discovered in a copper bowl on top of which was a copper dish. Metal ornaments consisted of gold, electrum, silver, copper, and bronze. A bracelet of six strings of globular gold beads, separated by flat gold spacers with a terminal of gold at each end, shows that jewellery was of a valuable kind. Beads of cornelian, jadeite, steatite, lapis-lazuli, tachylite, heliotrope, faience and other materials have been found, and earrings on some figurines. The love of finery is evident in the abundance of finger-rings, bangles, bracelets, anklets and hairpin combs at Mohenjodaro. Near one young girl were found a fine ivory-toothed comb, another V-shaped comb, buttons of copper, bronze, faience and steatite, and three mirrors, one of them for a child. A unique find was kohl pots and a stick to smear the kohl. There was also rouge in a cockle shell, which forms a link with contemporary Sumer.

In Vedic times clothing was not so scanty as in the Indus valley. Though we do not know whether a woman was in the habit of covering her head, we know that a bride did so for in a bridal hymn we are told of 'the fringe, the cloth that decks her head, and the triply parted robe'. Their hair was the crowning glory of Vedic women, who wore it in long plaits.

## *Clothes and Ornaments*

One lady had four plaits and another is described as having 'lovely hands and arms, and broad hair-plaits'.<sup>1</sup> Women actually resorted to spells and incantations in order to have an abundance of hair. Though we do not know whether men wore their hair long or not in early times, they certainly did so when the Greeks came to India, for Megasthenes says: 'If one is guilty of a very heinous offence, the King orders his hair to be cropped, this being a punishment to the last degree infamous.'<sup>2</sup> Draupadi, the Pandava queen, is described as having hair as black as the black bee, and when she was seized by the hair and insulted by Duryodhana she cried out in anger:

'Stay thy sinful deed, Duhsasan, nameless wrongs  
and insults spare,  
Touch me not with hands uncleanly, sacred is a  
woman's hair.'<sup>3</sup>

When a woman was mourning or in sorrow, she let loose her hair, and when the Pandavas were exiled Draupadi unbound her hair and went out with loose tresses, swearing she would never bind them till Bhima had avenged Dushasana.

Jewels and ornaments are mentioned a great deal in Vedic literature. Both men and women wore them, and the gods were always bejewelled. Pearls, gold chains, crowns and tiaras were used for the head. The *balapasya* was a string of pearls twisted round the hair, and the jewel known as the *jhala* was an assemblage of tiny gold flowers hanging from the back of the head. Kings and queens wore the *mukut* or

<sup>1</sup> *Rig-Veda*, X. 114. 3.

<sup>2</sup> McCrindle, *Megasthenes*, pp. 73-4.

<sup>3</sup> *The Ramayana and the Mahabharata*, trs. R. C. Dutt, p. 241.

## *Everyday Life in Ancient India*

jewelled crown, which was also worn by brides and bridegrooms. A description of Sita given by Dr Birdwood is very illuminating: 'Sita is represented as arrayed for her marriage with Rama in a light sari-like garment of rosy red colour embroidered with gold, and with jewelled butterflies and other bright ornaments in her raven hair. Her eyes are resplendent with gems, she has bracelets and armlets on her arms and wrists, a golden zone binds her slender waist, and golden anklets her ankles. She has jewelled rings on her fingers and golden bells on her toes, that tinkle as she walks with naked feet over the carpeted floor.' To mention but a few of the other jewels that were used in ancient India, there were pearl necklaces with from one to a hundred strings, amulets of gold with or without gems, bracelets and bangles. Chains, varying from one to twenty-five, circled the waist, or sometimes a plain gold band with tassels. There were anklets of hoops or bands or chains of gold set with precious stones, or with loose lumps of gold inside which clinked when walking. The *nupur* was a string of sweet-sounding bells. The jewelled aigrette worn in front of the turban and the oval pendant on the forehead were also favourite jewels. Rings and studs are not mentioned in the very early period but come into use during the first years of the Christian era.

Despite many artificial aids to beauty, natural good looks were much esteemed in olden days, for Strabo says: 'Even a child two months after its birth is subjected to examination by public authority to determine whether it has the beauty of form prescribed

## *Clothes and Ornaments*

by law.’<sup>1</sup> Beauty went hand in hand with a good character, and most of the heroines of the epics were the proud possessors of characteristics such as gentleness, kindness and sympathy which shone in their faces and made them godlike. Read, for instance, the description of Savitri, the indomitable maid who insisted on marrying the man she loved despite being warned that he had but a year to live, and who followed the spirit of her dead husband into the very valley of the shadow of death, reclaimed his body from the dreadful Yama and brought it back to life :

Grew the child in brighter beauty like a goddess  
from above,  
And each passing season added fresher sweetness,  
deeper love,  
Came with youth its lovelier graces, as the buds  
their leaves unfold  
Slender waist and rounded bosom, image as of  
burnished gold.<sup>2</sup>

Among the artificial aids to beauty were unguents and kohl. An ointment was given to Sita by the pious Anasuya which was to ensure her everlasting beauty, after which she was clothed in beautiful garments and was ready to meet her lord :

Pleased in heart, the ancient priestess, clad her  
in apparel meet  
And the young wife glad and grateful bowed to  
Anasuya’s feet,  
Robed and jewelled, bright and beauteous, sweet-  
eyed Sita softly came  
Where with anxious heart awaited Rama prince  
of righteous fame.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> McCrindle, *Classical Literature*, p. 38.

<sup>2</sup> *The Ramayana and the Mahabharata*, trs. R. C. Dutt,  
p. 255.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 76.

## *Everyday Life in Ancient India*

There were no mirrors in Vedic days, though some have been discovered in the Indus valley.

It is a matter for wonder as to how the sari, one of the most graceful costumes in the world, first came into vogue. We have already seen that the earliest Indus dwellers usually wore only a short skirt, but that some woven garment was thrown over the shoulder without being pinned. Whether the sari sprang from this, or from the thin veil which was flung over the upper part of the body over the bodice in Vedic times, is not known. The word *sari* comes from the Sanskrit *sati* and the intermediate form *sadi*. The origin of the sari may have been in Bengal, for it is seen in the ancient terracotta figures found in the temples of that province. It has been suggested that Homer, when he said that Andromache 'veiled her head in sable shade, which flowing long her graceful person clad', actually referred to the sari, of which he had heard from travellers who had been to India.

Rishis of the Vasishtha group are described as follows: 'The Vasishthas in white robes, with hair knots on the right, devoted to sacred rites',<sup>1</sup> and the student in his forest ashram usually wore the skin of an antelope. Megasthenes says of Indians: 'Their robes are worked in gold, and ornamented with precious stones, and they wear also flowered garments made of the finest muslin. Attendants walking behind hold up umbrellas over them: for they have a high regard for beauty, and avail themselves of every device to improve their looks.'<sup>2</sup> Arrian writes, 'the dress worn by the Indians is made of cotton, as Nearchos tells us,—cotton produced from trees'. He

<sup>1</sup> *Rig-Veda*, VII. 33.

<sup>2</sup> McCrindle, *Megasthenes*, p. 70.

## Clothes and Ornaments

continues: 'But this cotton is either of a brighter white colour than any cotton found elsewhere, or the



A warrior from Amaravati (Guntur District), showing that in the Buddhist period clothes were tailored. Other figures of the period show boots. (Fig. 33 in Rajendralal Mitra's *Indo-Aryans*, Vol. I)

darkness of the Indian complexion makes their apparel look so much the whiter.'<sup>1</sup> The men wore an undergarment of cloth which reached to the knees or half-way to the ankles and an upper garment which was thrown over the shoulder and partly twisted round the head. They wore earrings of ivory, beads of white and blue and red and purple, and shoes of white leather. In the epics, silks and woollen stuffs are mentioned.

It was an ancient custom to dye the feet and hands with *sapan* wood. Shoes and slippers were worn, for Bharata, Rama's brother, placed the latter's slippers on the throne and ruled as deputy until Rama returned from exile. Arrian says that Indians 'wear shoes made of white leather, and these are elaborately trimmed, while the soles are variegated, and made of great thickness, to make the wearer seem so much more taller'.<sup>2</sup> Shoes are mentioned in the drama *The Little Clay Cart*, and in a temple carving a woman has boots like mocassins. In a Vedic verse the hog skin is mentioned as fit for shoes.

<sup>1</sup> McCrindle, *Megasthenes*, p. 219.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 220.

## ***Everyday Life in Ancient India***

The fondness for ornaments which Indians have always shown may be traced to a superstitious origin. Many talismanic stones have been found at Mohenjodaro and spirit-scaring jewels have been common since earliest times. But Megasthenes is none the less right when he remarks that Indians 'love finery



In this illustration of the *Syama Jataka* the Raja of Banaras is shooting with a bow and arrow. He wears a long coat with short sleeves and a girdle round the waist. His retainers carry spears as well as bows, arrows and quivers. The painting is in Cave X at Ajanta and was probably made in the fourth century. (Redrawn from G. Yazdani, *Ajanta*, Vol. III, Plate XXIX, by courtesy of the Archæological Department, Hyderabad)

and ornament'. Even Manu prescribed: 'Let all men who are desirous of wealth continually supply women of their family with ornaments, apparel and food, at the time of festivals. A wife must be elegantly attired. When a wife is gaily adorned her whole house is embellished.' There is an old story that Sita

## ***Clothes and Ornaments***

used to rise early and appear before her husband bathed and carefully dressed so that his whole day would be bright and happy.

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RADHA KUMUD MOOKERJI, *Hindu Civilization*



## XIV. THE INDIAN HERITAGE



HIS brief survey of everyday life in ancient India touches only a fringe of the great India which is our heritage ; but I trust that the reader's interest has been aroused enough to make him realize that our nation is worthy of closer study of her past, and that there are stores of knowledge buried in her ancient cities and literature, which still remain to be unearthed, despite the many scholars who have already made it their duty to unveil the mysteries which curtain off our past. The Indian heritage is a great and glorious one which is inalienably ours. As Jawaharlal Nehru says : ' It is interesting and rather wonderful to think of the long range and continuity of Indian culture and civilization, right from the dawn of history, through long ages, down to us. In a sense, we in India are the heirs of these thousands of years. We are in the direct line, it may be, with the ancients, who came down through the north-western mountain passes into the smiling plains of what was to be known as Brah-mavarta and Aryavarta and Bharatavarsha and Hindustan.'

There are many lessons from the past which India can be proud to learn, but the one which we today perhaps are inclined to forget is that even in ancient days the whole of India was knit together by a certain unity, the first expression of which was to call India *Bharatavarsha*. Such terms as *Adhiraja* and *Chak-ravarti* were applied to the paramount power of a

## *The Indian Heritage*

universal monarch, and no matter how diverse India was in her individual states, a paramount type of Indian culture and civilization was recognized. The conquering Sakas, Kushans and Parthians all came under this influence and became Indian when once they settled in the country. Even the Greek and Chinese commentators seem to have imbibed a definite Indian outlook, and most certainly they showed the deepest regard for all the things which they found in the country they visited.

Geographically also Indian unity is patent, for this country is isolated from the rest of the world by formidable natural boundaries. Despite great variations in temperature, latitude and longitude, rainfall and humidity, flora and fauna, despite being an 'ethnological museum', India is still knit together in a peculiar brotherhood. Sir Herbert Risley has rightly said: 'Beneath the manifold diversity of physical and social type, language, custom and religion, which strikes the observer in India, there can still be discerned, as Mr Yusuf Ali has pointed out, a certain "underlying uniformity of life from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin". There is in fact an Indian character, a general Indian personality, which we cannot resolve into its component elements.'<sup>1</sup> This unity is obviously due to the fact that traditions never die in this country.

India is essentially a country which lives in the past more than in the present or the future, and the blind following of ancient tradition is in some respects over-rated. There are sections and communities in India who not only have not realized that, without losing

<sup>1</sup> Sir Herbert Risley, *People of India*, p. 287.

## *Everyday Life in Ancient India*

our Indian characteristics, we can still progress with the times, but who have misrepresented the very traditions which they revere. The Sastras, for instance, are often quoted as justifying many of the corruptions which have crept into religious and social customs, but if one probes a little deeper one realizes that the Vedas were anything but intolerant, and that the most ancient Hindu scriptures contain nothing to justify the wrongs which are meted out in the name of religion to whole classes and sections of Indian society. Even in the development of the country we hark back too much to a false tradition. Because ploughs served the purpose of our ancestors, must we needs only use ploughs today? Will not tractors cultivate the land more quickly?

~ But our present Government is beginning to think in international terms. Our heritage has to be studied, loved and cherished but in no way misused. The essential point is that in ancient India our ancestors were by no means a static race. They continually kept abreast of their times and were a progressive people. If those same Aryans who came into India had lived now they would undoubtedly have built a nation that would have vied with the greatest of modern countries and empires. Our two greatest heritages, therefore, are the spirit of unity and the spirit of progress, and if we remember them and use them well they will surely make India once more a leading nation in a peaceable and civilized world.

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