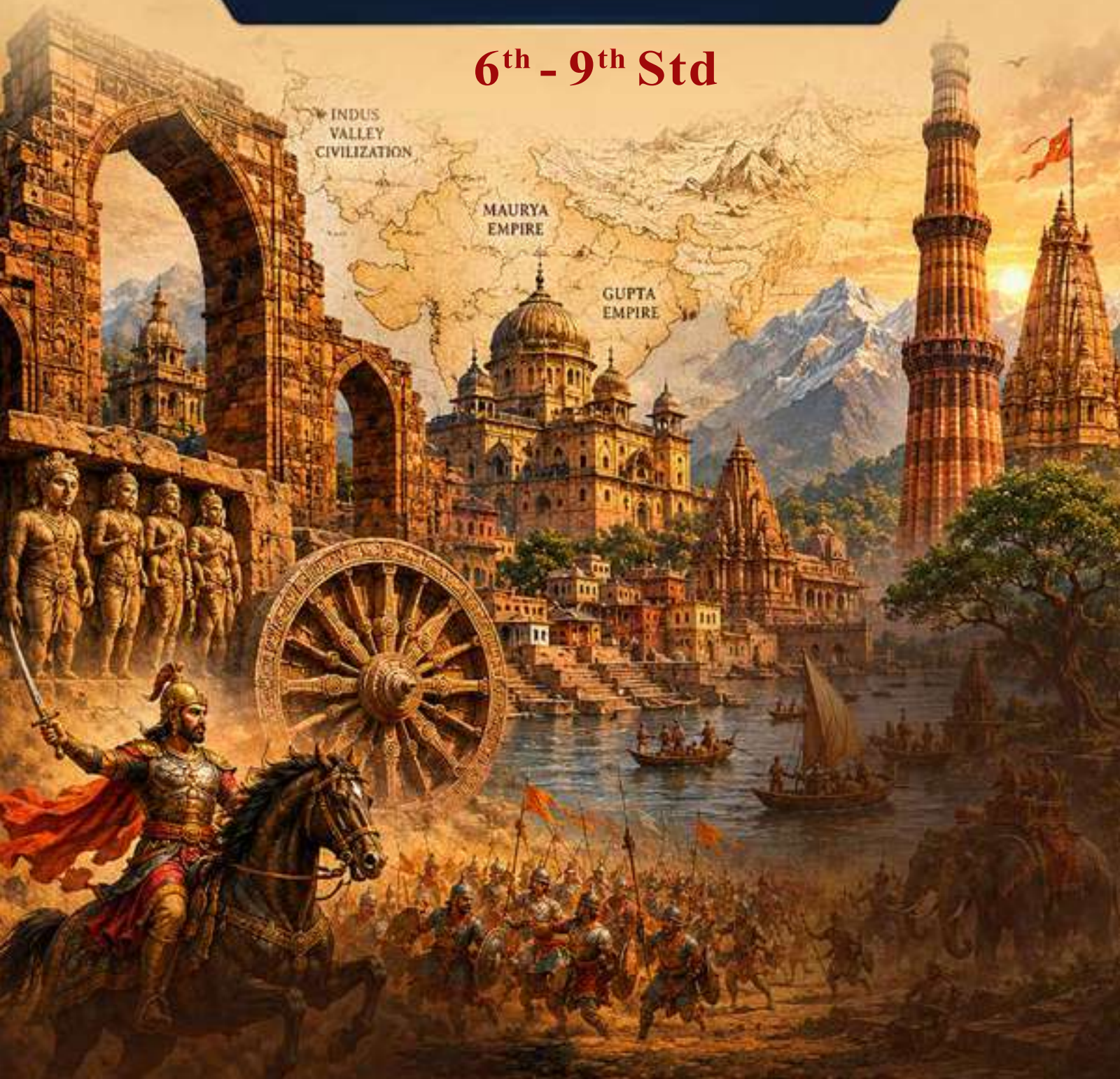
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HISTORY

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6th - 9th Std



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NCERT has not yet released Volume 2 for Class 9 - the compilation will be updated immediately once it is published.

CHAPTER 4

Timeline and Sources of History

History is "an unending dialogue between the present and the past ... between the society of today and the society of yesterday. ... We can fully understand the present only in the light of the past."

— E.H. Carr



National Museum, New Delhi. Such museums preserve objects from the past, such as statues, coins and ornaments, all of which help us understand our history.

The Big Questions

1. *How do we measure historical time?*
2. *How can various sources help us understand history?*
3. *How did early humans live?*

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How Do We Learn About the Past?

THINK ABOUT IT

- What is the earliest memory you can recollect? Do you remember how old you were at that time? Those memories together are a part of your past, maybe going five or six years back.
- How do you think understanding the past will help us understand the present world?

History: The study of the human past.

You will discover in Science that the Earth has a very, very long **history**, of which we humans occupy only a tiny part — the most recent one.

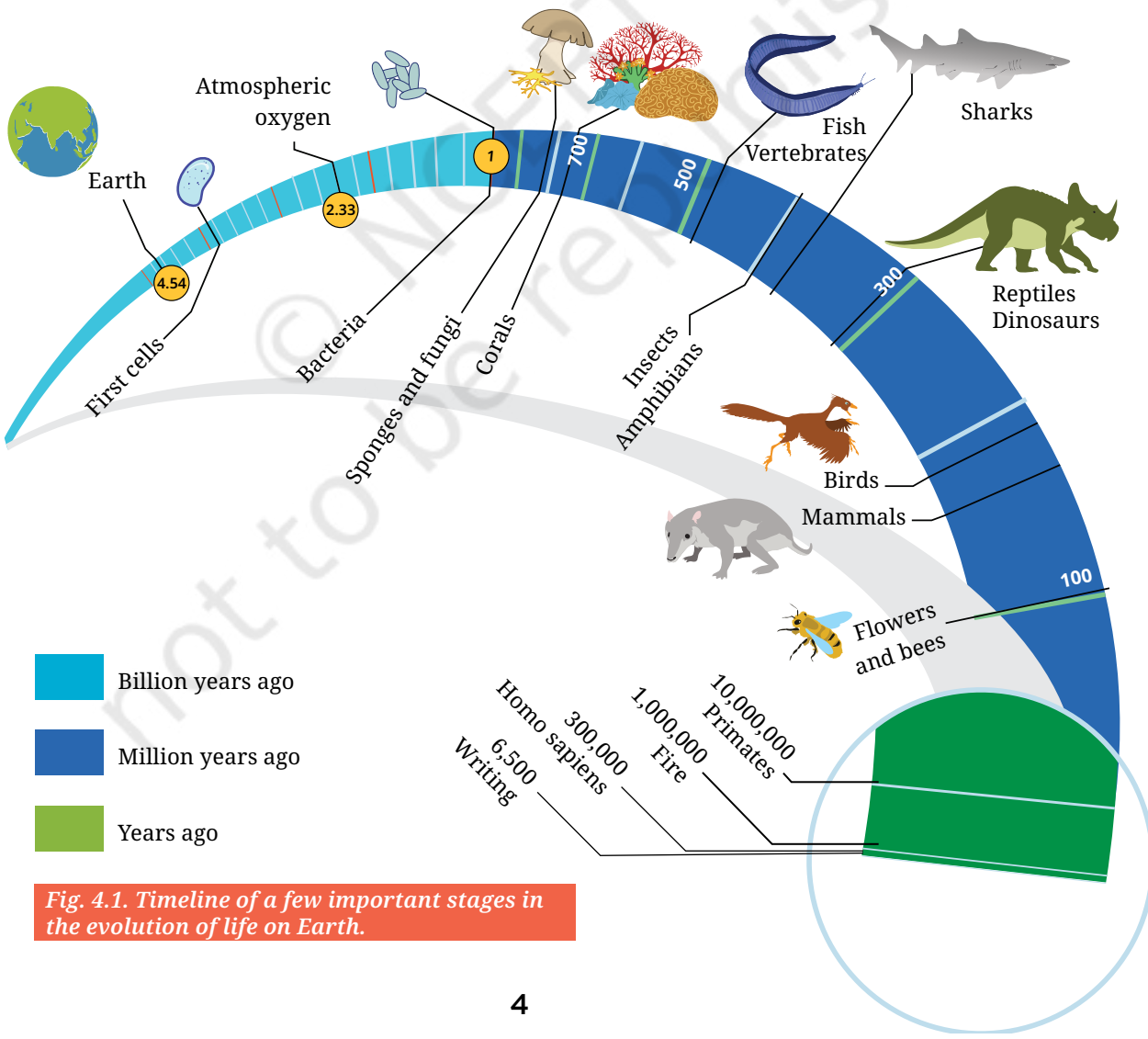


Fig. 4.1. Timeline of a few important stages in the evolution of life on Earth.

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Many people study the history of the Earth. Some of them are trained to uncover the secrets left beneath the Earth's surface and help us learn about its past — and also our past.



Fig. 4.2.1: Geologists



Fig. 4.2.2: Palaeontologists



Fig. 4.2.3: Anthropologists



Fig. 4.2.4: Archaeologists

Observe these four pictures and the activities involved. From top left:

- **Geologists** (Fig. 4.2.1) study the physical features of the Earth, like the soil, stones, hills, mountains, rivers, seas, oceans and other such parts of the Earth.
- **Palaeontologists** (Fig. 4.2.2) study the remains of plants, animals and humans from millions of years ago in the form of **fossils**.
- **Anthropologists** (Fig. 4.2.3) study human societies and cultures from the oldest times to the present.
- **Archaeologists** (Fig. 4.2.4) study the past by digging up remains that people, plants and animals left behind, such as tools, pots, beads, figurines, toys, bones and teeth of animals and humans, burnt grains, parts of houses or bricks, among others.

Fossils: Impressions of footprints, or parts of plants or animals that are found preserved within layers of soil or rocks.

How Is Time Measured in History?

Each society and culture has had its own ways of measuring time. Major events, such as the birth of an important person or the start of a ruler's reign, have often marked the beginning of a new **era**. At present, the **Gregorian**

Era: A distinct period of time.

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Gregorian calendar: The calendar now used the world over; it has 12 months adding up to 365 days, and a leap year every four years. However, century years — for example, 1800, 1900, 2000 — are leap years only if they are multiples of 400; so in the three centenary years above, only 2000 is a leap year.

calendar is commonly used worldwide; side by side, Hindu, Muslim, Jewish, Chinese and other calendars are also used for calculating the dates of festivals and other **auspicious** events.

In the West, the conventional year for Jesus Christ's birth has generally been taken to be the starting point for this calendar. Years are counted forward from this point and used to be marked with 'AD' (an abbreviation for a Latin phrase that refers to the years after Jesus' birth). However, this is now called the **Common Era** or CE across the world. For example, 1947, the year India gained independence, can be written as 1947 AD (sometimes AD 1947) or 1947 CE.

Similarly, the years before the conventional date for the birth of Jesus are counted backward and used to be marked with BC (or Before Christ). They are now called **Before Common Era** or BCE. For example, 560 BCE is an approximate year of birth of Gautama Buddha (whom we

Auspicious: favourable or bringing luck; for instance, 'an auspicious beginning'.

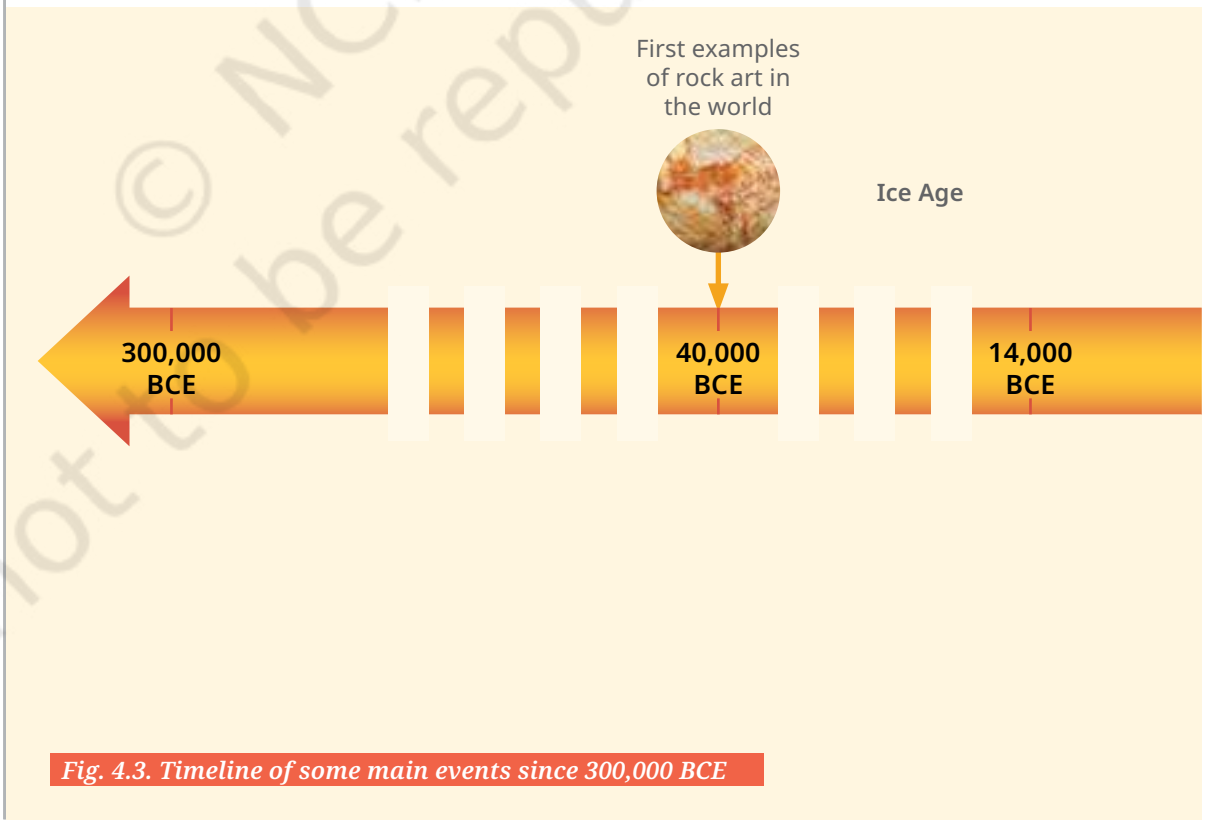


Fig. 4.3. Timeline of some main events since 300,000 BCE

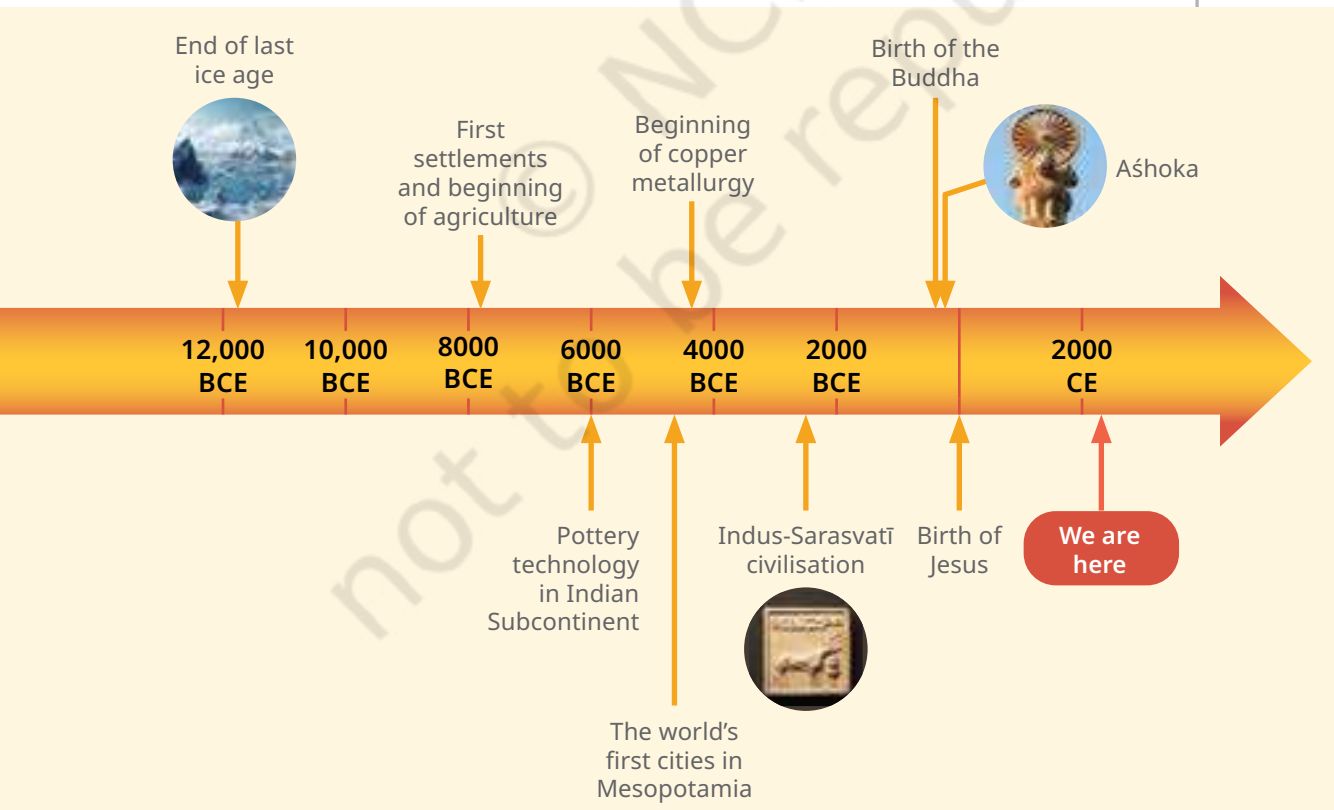
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will meet in Chapter 7). Can you calculate how many years ago that was?

LET'S EXPLORE

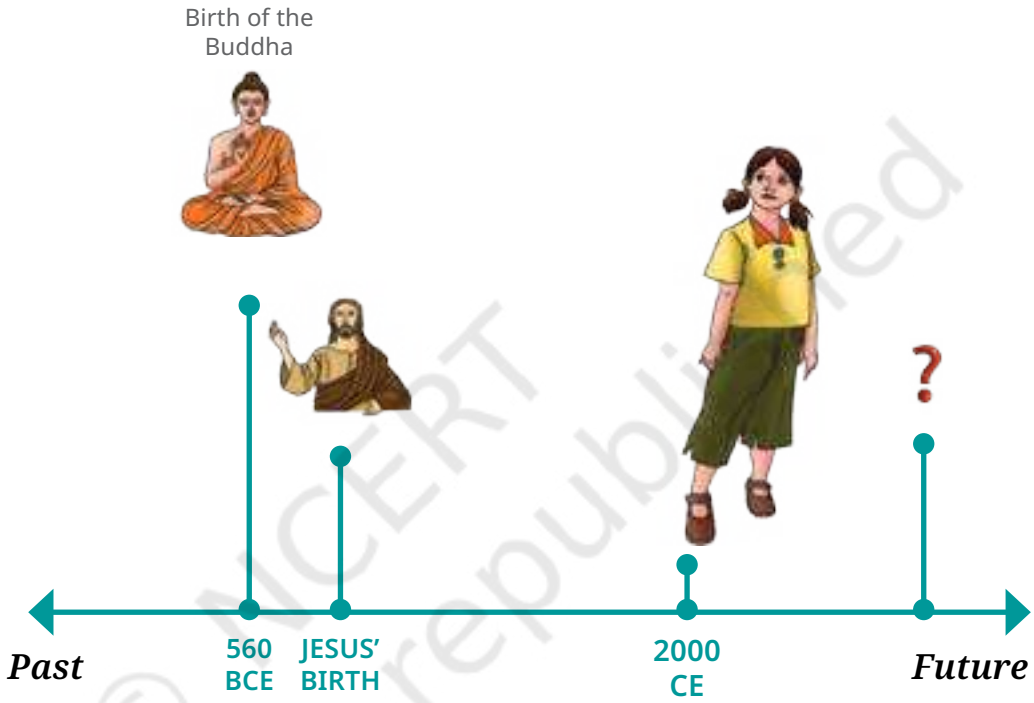


- → Such calculations are simple, but there is a catch. In the Gregorian calendar, there is no 'year zero'. The year 1 CE follows immediately the year 1 BCE. Draw a simple timeline marking every year from 2 BCE to 2 CE; you will see that because of the absence of a year zero, only 3 years have passed between those two dates.
- → So to calculate the number of years between a BCE date and a CE date, you should add them but subtract 1 — in the above case, 2 + 2 – 1 = 3.
- → Practice a few examples with your classmates. For example, to return to the question about the Buddha, suppose we are now in the year 2024 CE, then the Buddha was born 560 + 2024 – 1 = 2,583 years ago.



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A **timeline** (see Fig. 4.3 on pages 62 and 63) is a convenient tool to mark such events, as it shows a sequence of dates and events covering any particular period. It runs from the beginning of humanity to the present, with a few important landmarks. Note that the dotted portion marks a skipped period; otherwise, this timeline would have to be almost 3 metres long!



A timeline also helps in understanding the order in which historical events take place. For example, even without looking at dates, you can now see that the birth of Buddha occurs before that of Jesus.



DON'T MISS OUT

Along with a year and a decade (a period of ten years), we often use other terms to understand longer durations of time. Two of these are quite commonly used when learning about history.

1. **Century:** It is any period of 100 years. In history, specific centuries are counted every 100 years starting from the year 1 CE. For instance, we are currently in the 21st century CE, which runs from 2001 to 2100.

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The centuries BCE are calculated beginning from the year 1 BCE and keep going back in time. For example, the 3rd century BCE would include the years 300 BCE to 201 BCE.

2. **Millennium:** It is any period of 1,000 years. In history, specific centuries are counted every 1,000 years from the year 1 CE. For instance, we are currently in the 3rd millennium CE, which began in 2001 CE and will go up to 3000 CE.

   As with centuries, millenniums BCE are also calculated beginning from 1 BCE and go backwards. So the 1st millennium BCE would include the years 1 BCE to 1000 BCE.

   In the timeline given on pages 62 and 63 (Fig. 4.3), can you mark the beginning of the 8th millennium BCE? *(Note: In English, the plural of 'millennium' is 'millenniums' or 'millennia'; both are correct.)*

LET'S EXPLORE



Create a timeline stretching from 1900 CE to the current year and place the dates of birth of your grandparents, parents, siblings and yourself. Also, mark the years that the 20th century CE begins with and ends with.



DON'T MISS OUT

Do you know how calendars have been traditionally made in India? Many Indian calendars rely on the positions of the sun and the moon to define the months of the year. A *pañchānga* is a book of tables which lists the days of each month along with related astronomical data; for instance, it precisely predicts events like solar and lunar eclipses, times for sunrise and sunset, etc. *Pañchāngas*, still widely used in India, often also give weather predictions for the year, dates and timings of festivals, and more.

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Source of history: A place, person, text or an object from which we gather information about some past event or period.

What Are the Sources of History?

LET'S EXPLORE

Can you collect information about at least three generations of your family on your mother's and father's sides? Create a family tree with your parents, grandparents and great-grandparents. Find out their names, what they did for a living and where they were born. Also, write the sources from where you got this information.



Relation	Name	Occupation	Place of birth	Source of information
Grandparents (paternal)				
Grandparents (maternal)				
Great-grandparents (paternal)				
Great-grandparents (maternal)				

How did you find details about your family's past? Did you rely on things like photographs, diaries, ID cards or memories from your parents and relatives?

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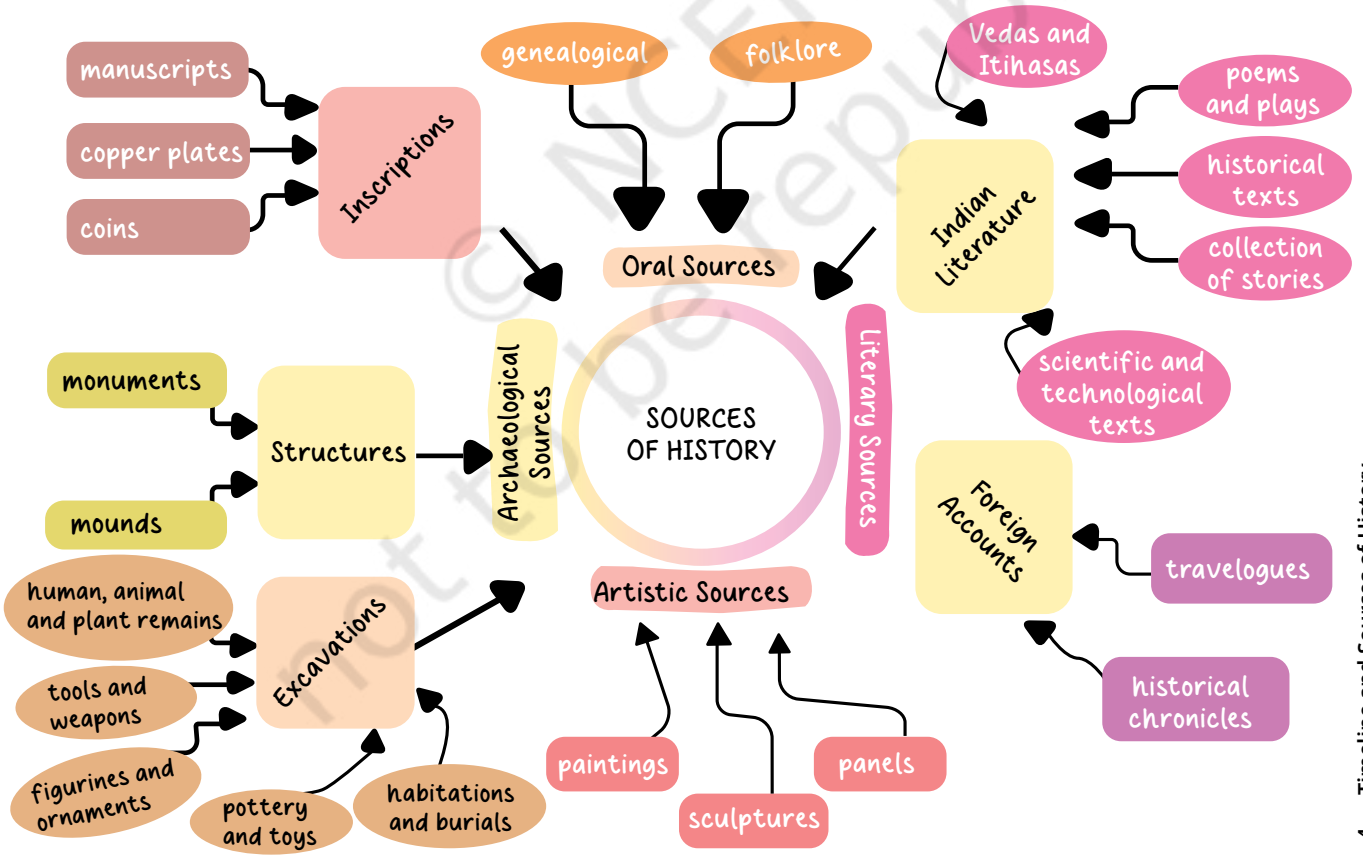
THINK ABOUT IT

Have you ever seen old coins, books, clothes, jewellery or utensils in and around your house? What type of information can we gain from such objects? Or from old houses or buildings?



Every object or structure tells a story and is like a piece in a jigsaw puzzle. The objects that you see around your house convey something of the history of your family. Similarly, we can put together historical events through a variety of sources. But keep in mind that in the case of history, quite a few pieces of the puzzle may remain missing!

Observe the figure at the bottom of the page. It brings together the main sources of history. You do not need to



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Historian: A person who studies and writes about the past.

remember them all now; we will use some of them as we go along. When **historians** study, say, a king or queen of 1,500 years ago, an ancient monument, a war or some items of trade, they take great care to gather information from as many sources as they can find and consult. Sometimes, the sources confirm each other (the jigsaw pieces match); at other times, sources may give contradictory information (the jigsaw pieces don't match), in which case they need to decide which source they can trust more. That is how they try to re-create the history of the period they are studying.

Who contributes to all these sources of history? Historians themselves, but also archaeologists, epigraphists (who study ancient inscriptions), anthropologists (who study human societies and their cultures), experts in literature and languages, and some more. In addition, in the last 50 years or so, scientific studies have been contributing more and more to the reconstruction of the past. For example, studies of ancient climates, chemical studies of excavated materials and studies of the **genetics** of ancient people have provided fresh insights, which supplement the more usual sources. And when historians study recent history (which usually means the last two or three centuries), another source is newspapers; for the last few decades, electronic media (television, the internet, etc.) can also be consulted.

Genetics: The branch of biology that studies how, in plants, animals or humans, certain features and characteristics get passed down from one generation to the next.

LET'S EXPLORE



There are a few images of different sources of history on the next page. Who and what do you think the objects show? Write down in the boxes next to the images any information that you get from these objects.

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The Beginnings of Human History

Modern humans *(Homo sapiens)* have walked the planet for about 300,000 (three lakh) years. This appears to be a very long time, yet it is only a tiny fraction of the Earth's history. Let us have a quick look at our early history.





LET'S EXPLORE

In the above picture, look at some activities of early humans in a rock shelter. Which ones can you recognise? Give a brief description for each.

Early humans faced many challenges from nature and lived in bands or groups to help each other. They were constantly seeking shelter and food, and were mainly hunters and gatherers; this means that they relied on hunting and collecting edible plants and fruits for their survival. Our early ancestors also had certain beliefs about the natural elements and possibly also some notion of **afterlife**.

Afterlife: A life that begins after death.

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These groups lived in temporary camps, rock shelters or caves, and communicated with each other using languages that are now lost. They used fire and started making objects that made their lives easier, like improved stone axes and blades, arrowheads and other tools. Aspects of their life are visible in rock paintings found in hundreds of caves all over the world. Some of those paintings depict simple figures or a few symbols; others are more detailed and represent scenes with animals or humans. In time, these early humans learned to make simple ornaments such as stone or shell beads, pendants made of animal teeth, and sometimes exchanged them with other groups.

The First Crops

Over long ages, the Earth's climate has gone through many changes. At certain times, it was very cold and much of the Earth was covered with ice — this is called an 'Ice Age', as you will learn in greater detail in Science. Later, when the climate warmed up, this ice partly melted, and the resulting waters swelled the existing rivers and eventually drained into the oceans. The last Ice Age lasted from over 100,000 (one lakh) years ago to around 12,000 years ago.

Afterwards, living conditions improved for humans; in many parts of the world, they started settling down and cultivating cereals and grains. They also domesticated animals such as cattle, goats, etc. With more food available, these communities grew in size and number, and often settled down near rivers. This was not only because of the availability of water, but also because the soil would be more fertile there. It made the process of growing crops easier.

LET'S EXPLORE

Observe the scene on the next page. It depicts an agricultural community from a few millenniums ago. List the main activities you can identify.



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THINK ABOUT IT

- Both in the earlier picture of a rock shelter and in this one, men and women are given certain roles. While they may appear to be 'natural', they are not necessarily accurate and do not cover all situations. For instance, in a rock shelter, women may have helped prepare colours for painting the rock or may have done some of the painting. In both scenes, men may have done some of the cooking or may have helped take care of children.
- Keeping in mind that we have only limited information, think about such roles and situations, and discuss in class.

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As communities grew, so did their social complexity. Leaders or 'chieftains' were responsible for the well-being of the people, and everyone collectively worked towards the community's **welfare**. For example, there was no sense of individual ownership; the lands were collectively sowed and harvested.

Welfare: Health, prosperity and well-being.

As time went by, **hamlets** grew into sizeable villages that exchanged goods — mostly food, clothing and tools. Slowly, networks of communication and exchange were established among those villages, and some of them grew into small towns. New technologies appeared — for example pottery, for making pots and other clay objects; and the use of metal (copper first, iron later), which helped make durable tools, objects of daily use and ornaments.

Hamlet: A small settlement or small village.

We will see in Chapter 6 how this stage prepared for the emergence of what is called 'civilisation'. For now, it is important to remember that this early progress of humanity had to face many challenges. At some critical times, humanity could have almost disappeared, as some earlier species did. We will never know those early humans to whose courage and persistence we owe our existence today.

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Before we move on ...

- We have explored some ways to learn more about our pasts. The concept of a timeline helps us understand the sequence of historical events at different times.
- There are different ways of measuring time: years, decades, centuries, millenniums.
- Sources of history are many; they help us reconstruct and interpret historical events.
- We have also had a brief look into the lives of early humans and how human societies grew more complex in time.

Questions, activities and projects

1. As a project, write the history of your family (or village if you live in one), using sources of history at your disposal. Ask your teacher to guide you.

2. Can we compare historians to detectives? Give reasons for your answers.

3. A few exercises with dates:

   - Place these dates chronologically on the timeline: 323 CE, 323 BCE, 100 CE, 100 BCE, 1900 BCE, 1090 CE, 2024 CE.
   - If King Chandragupta was born in 320 CE, which century did he belong to? And how many years was that after the Buddha's birth?
   - Rani of Jhansi was born in 1828. Which century did she belong to? How many years was that before India's Independence?
   - Turn '12,000 years ago' into a date.

4. Plan a visit to a nearby museum: the visit should be prepared with some prior research on the kind of exhibits the museum holds. Keep notes during the visit. Write a brief report afterwards, highlighting what was unexpected / interesting / fun about the visit and the exhibits.

5. Invite to your school an archaeologist or a historian and ask them to speak on the history of your region and why it's important to know it.

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CHAPTER 5

India, That Is Bharat

In India at a very early time the spiritual and cultural unity was made complete and became the very stuff of the life of all this great surge of humanity between the Himalayas and the two seas.

— Sri Aurobindo

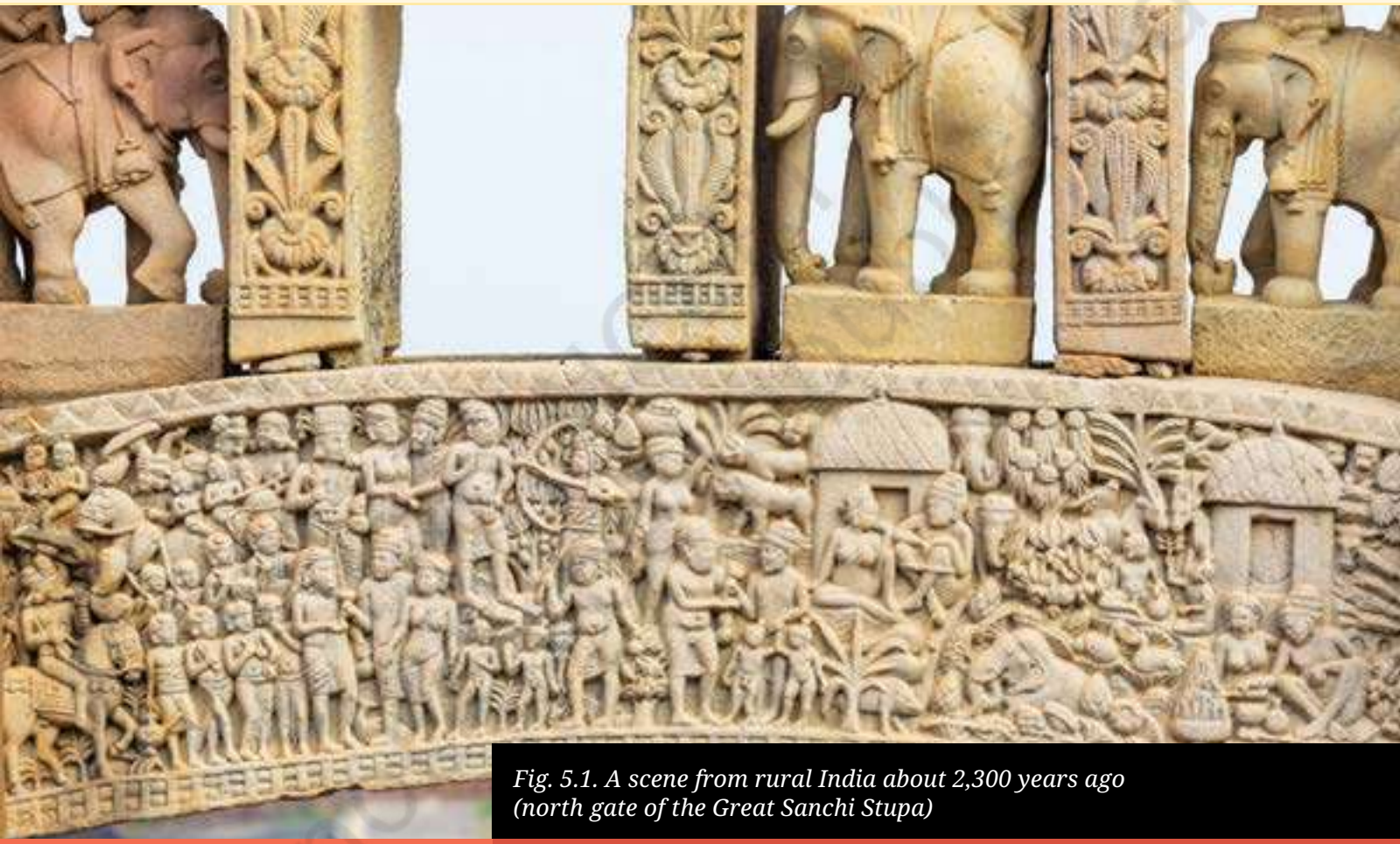


Fig. 5.1. A scene from rural India about 2,300 years ago (north gate of the Great Sanchi Stupa)

The Big Questions

1. *How do we define India?*
2. *What were the ancient names for India?*

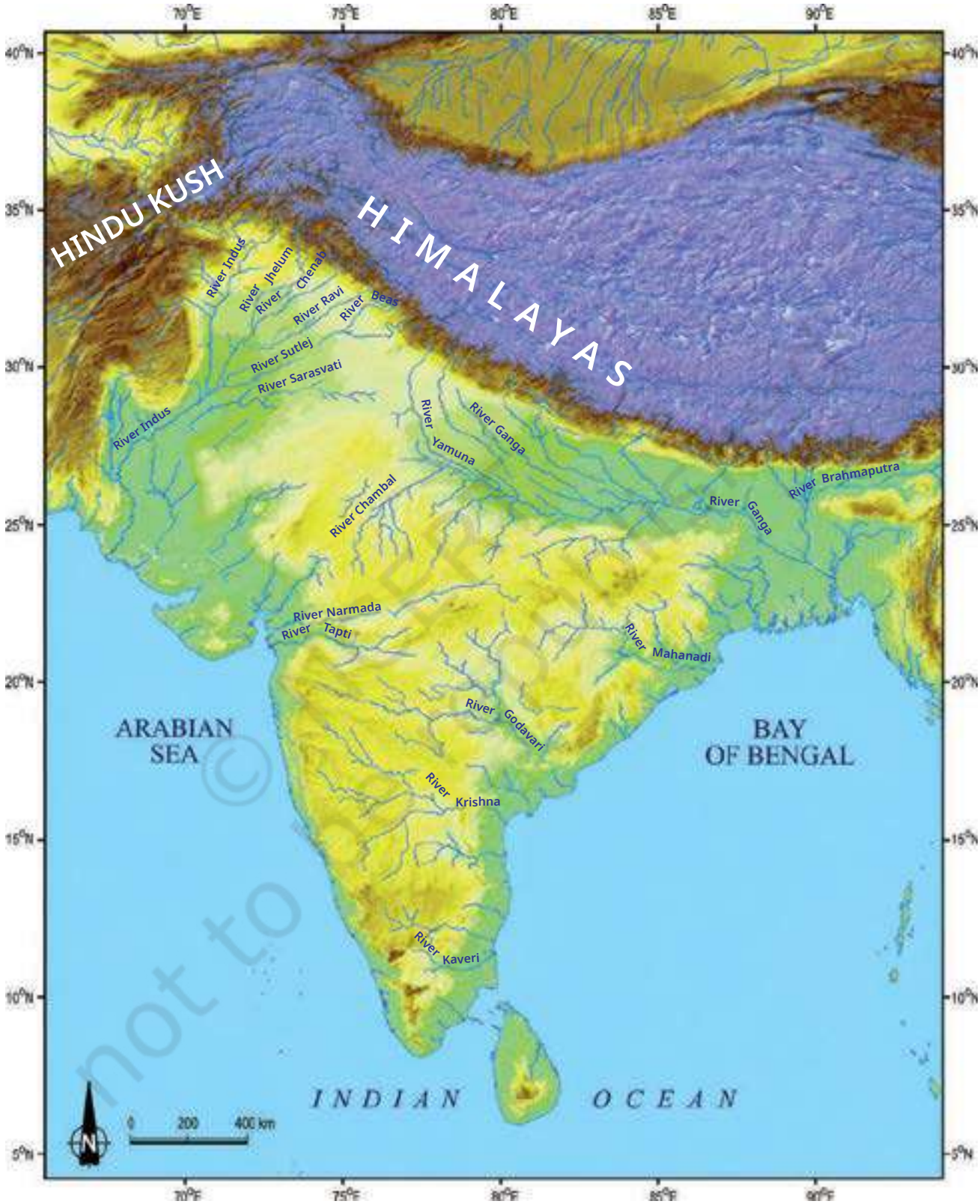


Fig. 5.2. A physical map of the Indian Subcontinent, with some of its rivers.

Today, the India we know is a modern nation, with defined borders, defined states and a known population. However, it was very different 500 years ago, 2,000 years ago or even 5,000 years ago. This region of the world, which we often call the 'Indian Subcontinent', has had many different names and shifting boundaries. We can learn about India's past and evolution from many different sources. Let us explore.

THINK ABOUT IT

Consider the physical map of the Indian Subcontinent at the start of the chapter. What are its natural boundaries that you can make out?

In the course of history, India has been called by many names — both by its **inhabitants** and by visitors from outside. These names come to us from ancient texts, accounts of travellers and pilgrims, and inscriptions.

Inhabitants: People who live in a particular place.

How Indians Named India

The Ṛig Veda is India's most ancient text; as we will see in Chapter 7, it is several thousand years old. It gives the northwest region of the Subcontinent the name 'Sapta Sindhava', that is, the 'land of the seven rivers'. The word 'Sindhava' comes from 'Sindhu', which refers to the Indus River, or at times to a river in general.



Fig. 5.3. The northwest region of the Indian Subcontinent

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Moving on in time, we see names for other parts of India appear in the literature. The Mahābhārata is one of India's most famous texts (we read about it in the theme 'Our Cultural Heritage and Knowledge Traditions'). Interestingly, it lists many regions, such as Kāshmīra (more or less today's Kashmir), Kurukṣhetra (parts of Haryana today), Vanga (parts of Bengal), Prāgjyotiṣha (roughly today's Assam), Kaccha (today's Kutch), Kerala (more or less today's Kerala), and so on.

LET'S EXPLORE



Do you recognise the names of any regions given in the map (Fig. 5.4) on page 79? List the ones that you have heard of.

But when do we come across a name for the entire Indian Subcontinent? Because ancient Indian texts are difficult to date, this is not an easy question to answer. The Mahābhārata uses the terms 'Bhāratavarṣha' and 'Jambudvīpa', and scholars generally agree that this long poem was written from a few centuries BCE onward.

The first term, 'Bhāratavarṣha', clearly extends to the entire Subcontinent, and the text includes the names of numerous rivers and peoples. 'Bhāratavarṣha' means 'the country of the Bharatas'. 'Bharata' is a name that first appears in the Ṛig Veda, where it refers to one of the main Vedic groups of people. In later literature, several kings named 'Bharata' are mentioned.

The second term, 'Jambudvīpa', means 'the island of the fruit of the jamun tree'. This is indeed a common tree native to India, also called 'jambul tree', 'Malabar plum tree', etc. 'Jambudvīpa' came to mean the Indian Subcontinent.

In fact, we get a good clue from an Indian emperor — his name is Aśhoka and we will meet him later; for now, we can take his date to be about 250 BCE. As we will see, he left us many inscriptions. In one of them, he used the same

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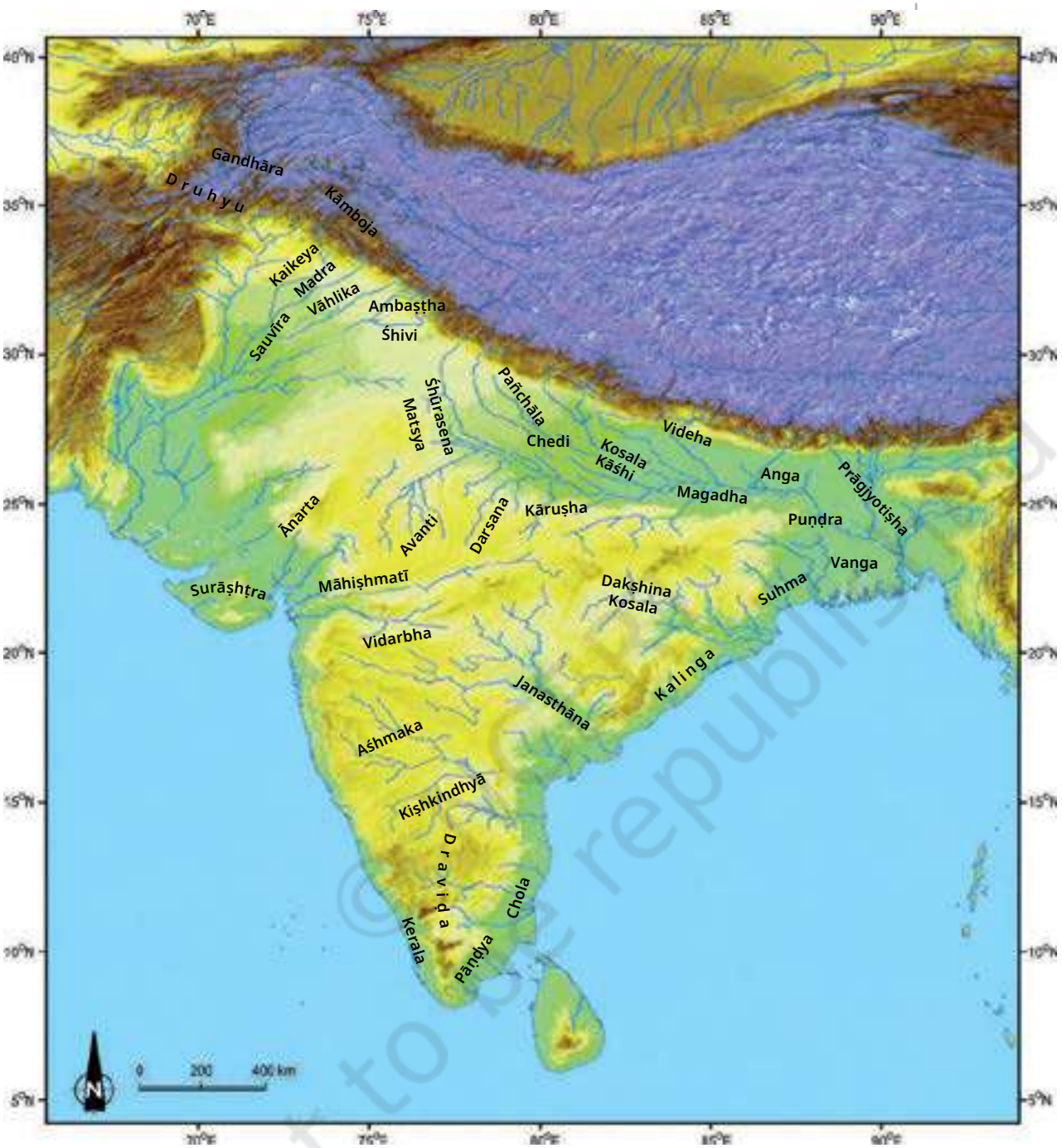
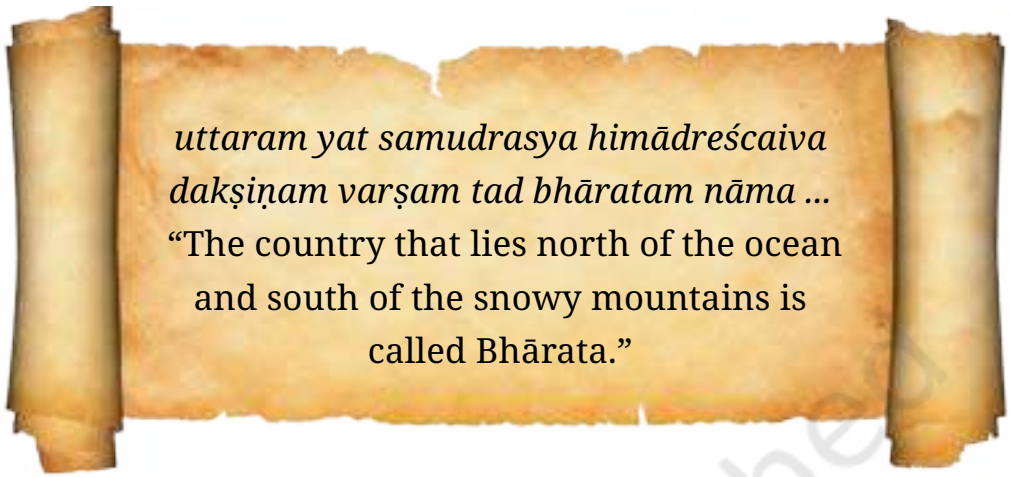


Fig. 5.4. Map of a few regions listed in the Mahābhārata. (Many of them are also mentioned in the text as kingdoms.) You do not need to remember those regions, but notice how they cover the entire geography of the Subcontinent.

name 'Jambudvīpa' to describe the whole of India, which at the time included what is today Bangladesh, Pakistan, as well as parts of Afghanistan.

A few centuries later, 'Bhārata' became the name generally used for the Indian Subcontinent. For instance, in an ancient text called the *Viṣhṇu Purāṇa*, we read:



uttaram yat samudrasya himādreścaiva dakṣiṇam varṣam tad bhāratam nāma ...
"The country that lies north of the ocean and south of the snowy mountains is called Bhārata."

This name, 'Bhārata' remains in use even today. In north India, it is generally written as 'Bharat', while in south India, it is often 'Bharatam'.



THINK ABOUT IT

Have you identified the 'snowy mountains'? Do you think this brief description of Bhārata is correct?

It is interesting to note that different parts of the country adopted a similar definition for India. For instance, a poem of ancient Tamil literature, from about 2,000 years ago, praises a king whose name is known "from [Cape] Kumari in the south, from the great mountain in the north, from the oceans on the east and on the west..." You can now recognise 'the great mountain in the north', and it should not be difficult to identify 'Cape Kumari'. It looks like ancient Indians knew their geography well!

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DON'T MISS OUT

The Indian **Constitution**, which was first written in English, uses the phrase 'India, that is Bharat' right at the beginning. Similarly, the Hindi version of the Constitution mentions the same as *'Bhārat arthāth India'*.

Constitution:
A document that spells out the basic principles and laws of a nation. The Indian Constitution, which will be studied in Grade 7, came into force in 1950.

LET'S EXPLORE

In this reproduction of the first page of the original Constitution of India in Fig. 5.5 (page 82), can you make out the phrase 'India, that is Bharat'?

How Foreigners Named India

The first foreigners to mention India were the Persians, the ancient inhabitants of Iran. In the 6th century BCE, a Persian emperor launched a military campaign and gained control of the region of the Indus River, which, as we saw, was earlier called 'Sindhu'. So, it is no surprise that in their earliest records and stone inscriptions, the Persians referred to India as 'Hind', 'Hidu' or 'Hindu', which are adaptations in their language of 'Sindhu'. (Note that in ancient Persian, 'Hindu' is a purely geographical term; it does not refer here to the Hindu religion.)

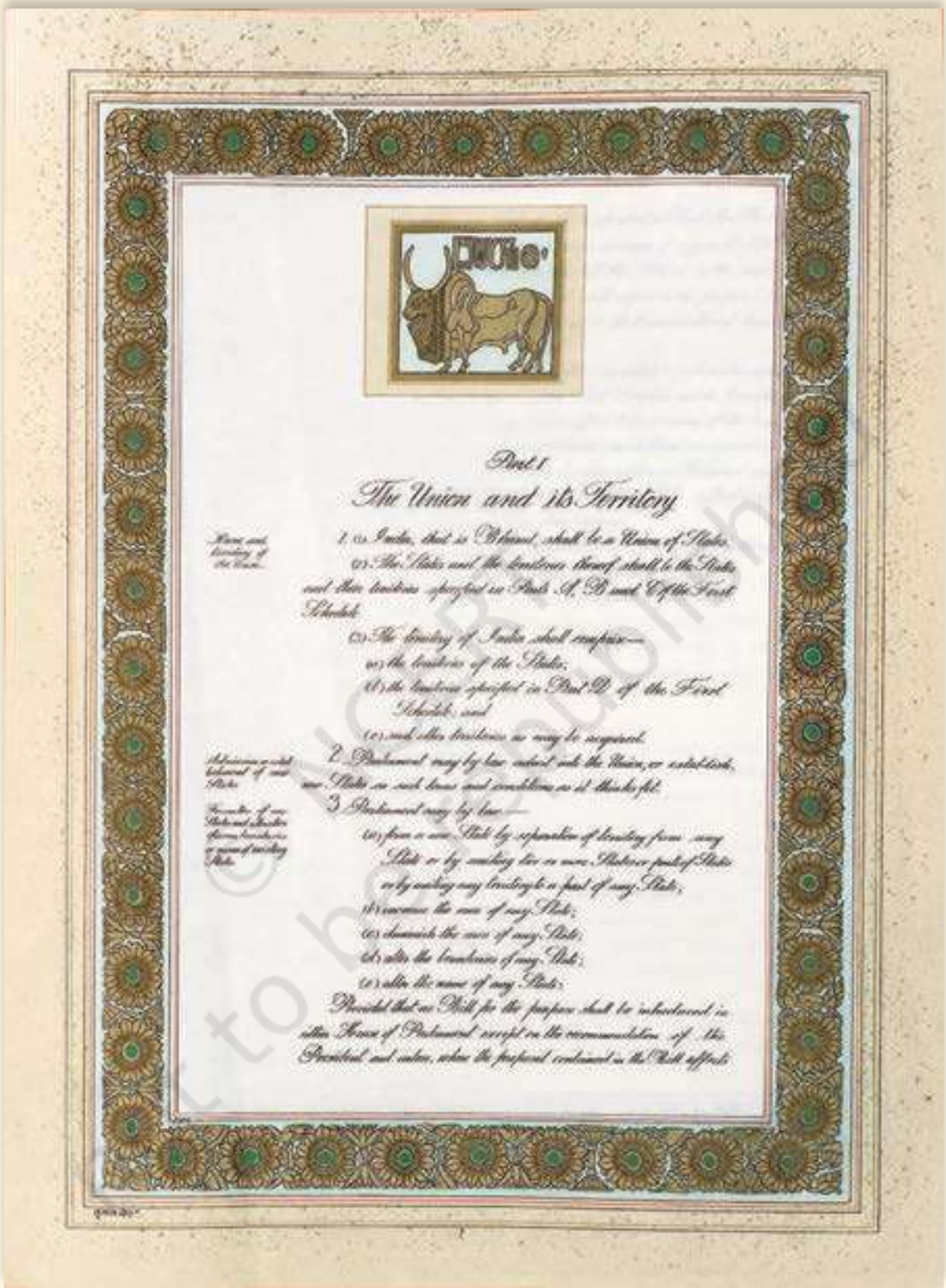
Based on these Persian sources, the ancient Greeks named the region 'Indoi' or 'Indike'. They dropped the initial letter 'h' of 'Hindu' because this letter did not exist in their Greek language.

Sindhu → Hindhu → Indoi / Indike

The ancient Chinese also interacted with India. In several texts, they refer to India as 'Yintu' or 'Yindu'. This word also originally comes from 'Sindhu', in the following manner:

Sindhu → Hindhu → Indu → Yindu

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Part I

The Union and its Territory

1. (1) India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States.

(2) The States and the territories thereof shall be the States and their territories specified in Parts A, B and C of the First Schedule.

(3) The territory of India shall comprise—

(a) the territories of the States;

(b) the territories specified in Part D of the First Schedule; and

(c) such other territories as may be acquired.

2. Parliament may by law admit into the Union, or establish, new States on such terms and conditions as it thinks fit.

3. Parliament may by law—

(a) form a new State by separation of territory from any State or by uniting two or more States or parts of States or by uniting any territory to a part of any State;

(b) increase the area of any State;

(c) diminish the area of any State;

(d) alter the boundaries of any State;

(e) alter the name of any State;

Provided that no Bill for the purpose shall be introduced in either House of Parliament except on the recommendation of the President and unless, where the proposal contained in the Bill affects

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Fig. 5.5. First page of the Constitution of India (source: Reprint of the original Constitution of India, Ministry of Culture, Government of India, 2000)

DON'T MISS OUT

Xuanzang (formerly spelt Hiuen Tsang, Hsuan Tsang, etc.) travelled from China to India in the 7th century CE. He visited many parts of India, met scholars, collected Buddhist texts, and returned to China after 17 years. There, he translated the manuscripts he took back with him from Sanskrit into Chinese. Several other Chinese scholars visited India over the centuries.



Another Chinese word, also derived from 'Sindhu', was 'Tianzhu'; but this word could also be understood as 'heavenly master'. This reflects the respect the ancient Chinese had for India as the land of the Buddha.

You are probably quite familiar with a more recent term, 'Hindustān', but you may not know that it was first used in a Persian inscription some 1,800 years ago! Later on, this became the term used by most invaders of India to describe the Indian Subcontinent.

LET'S EXPLORE

Can you complete this table of the many names of India?

Persian	
Greek	
Latin	India
Chinese	
Arabic & Persian	
English	India
French	Inde

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Before we move on ...

- India is an ancient land, which has had many names in the course of its history.
- The names given by the ancient inhabitants of India include 'Jambudvīpa' and 'Bhārata'. The latter became widespread in time and is the name of India in most Indian languages.
- Foreign visitors to, or invaders of, India mostly adopted names derived from the Sindhu or Indus River; this resulted in names like 'Hindu', 'Indoi', and eventually 'India'.

Questions, activities and projects

1. Discuss what could be the meaning of the quotation at the start of the chapter.
2. True or false?
   - The Ṛig Veda describes the entire geography of India.
   - The *Viṣhṇu Purāṇa* describes the entire Subcontinent.
   - In Aśhoka's time, 'Jambudvīpa' included what is today India, parts of Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan.
   - The Mahābhārata lists many regions, including Kashmir, Kutch, and Kerala.
   - The term 'Hindustān' first appeared in a Greek inscription more than 2,000 years ago.
   - In ancient Persian, the word 'Hindu' refers to the Hindu religion.
   - 'Bhārata' is a name given to India by foreign travellers.
3. If you were born some 2,000 years ago and had the chance to name our country, what name or names might you have chosen, and why? Use your imagination!
4. Why did people travel to India from various parts of the world in ancient times? What could be their motivations in undertaking such long journeys? (*Hint: There could be at least four or five motivations*)

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CHAPTER 6

The Beginnings of Indian Civilisation

The most ancient civilisation of India, known variously as the Harappan, Indus or Indus-Sarasvatī Civilisation, was indeed remarkable in many ways. ... [It showed how] a well-balanced community lives — in which the differences between the rich and the poor are not glaring. ... In essence, the Harappan societal scenario was not that of 'exploitation', but of mutual 'accommodation'.

— B.B. Lal

The Big Questions

1. *What is a civilisation?*
2. *What was the earliest civilisation of the Indian Subcontinent?*
3. *What were its major achievements?*



Fig. 6.1. The North Gate entrance to Dholavira's 'Castle' area.

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What Is a Civilisation?

Metallurgy: Includes the techniques of extracting metals from nature, purifying or combining them, as well as the scientific study of metals and their properties.

At the end of Chapter 4, we saw the first human groups settling down, practising agriculture, developing some technologies (such as construction, **metallurgy**, transport) and moving towards 'civilisation'.

What, then, is civilisation? In general, the term is used for an advanced stage of human societies. To be precise, we will consider here that a 'civilisation' should have at least the following characteristics:

- some form of **government and administration** — to manage a more complex society and its many activities;
- **urbanism** — town-planning, the growth of cities and their management, which generally includes water management and a drainage system;
- a variety of **crafts** — including the management of raw materials (such as stone or metal) and the production of finished goods (such as ornaments and tools);
- **trade** both internal (within a city or a region) and external (with distant regions or other parts of the world) — to exchange all sorts of goods;
- some form of **writing** — needed to keep records and to communicate;
- **cultural ideas** about life and the world, expressed through art, architecture, literature, oral traditions or social customs;
- a productive **agriculture** — enough to feed not just the villages, but also the cities.

THINK ABOUT IT

Which of the above characteristics do you think is the most fundamental — that is, a characteristic essential to the development of all others?

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LET'S EXPLORE



For each characteristic in the list above, can you make a list of professions or occupations that might exist in such a society?

It is easy enough to see that all these characteristics are present in most societies in the world today. But when did civilisation begin, in the sense we have now defined?

Civilisation began at different times in different parts of the world. In the region known as Mesopotamia (modern Iraq and Syria), that happened about 6,000 years ago, and the civilisation in ancient Egypt followed a few centuries later. You will learn about these and a few more civilisations in a later grade. In many ways, humanity would not have reached its present stage without the enormous contributions and advances of those ancient civilisations.

For now, however, we will only look at the Indian Subcontinent, and its northwest region is where our story begins.

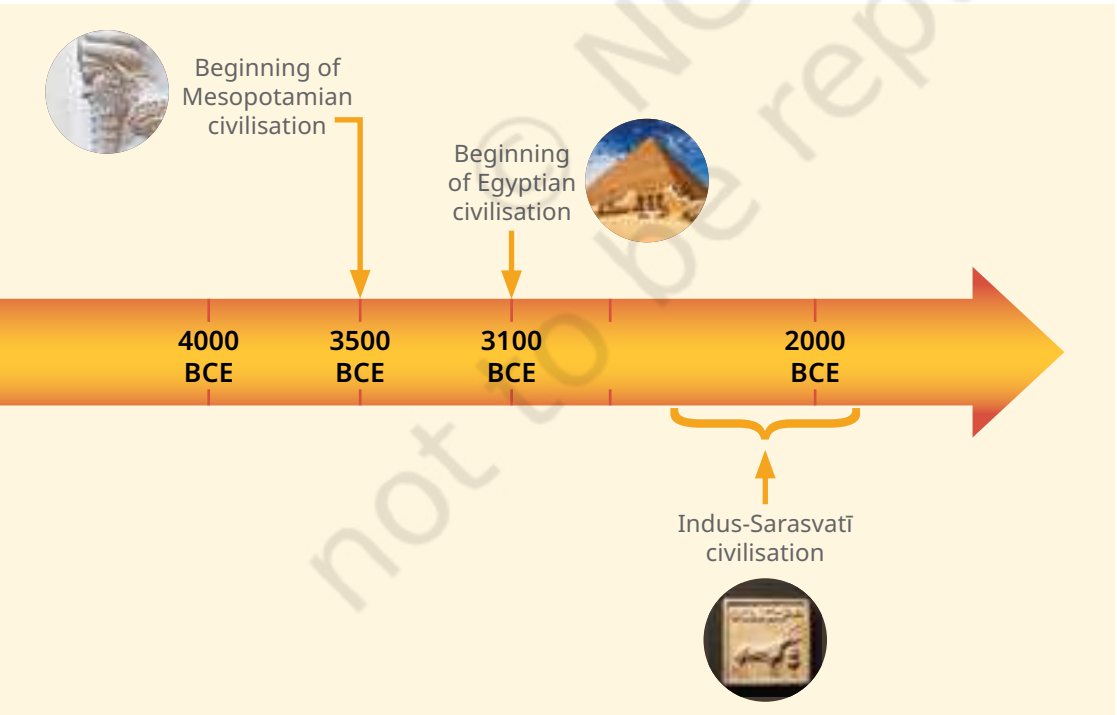


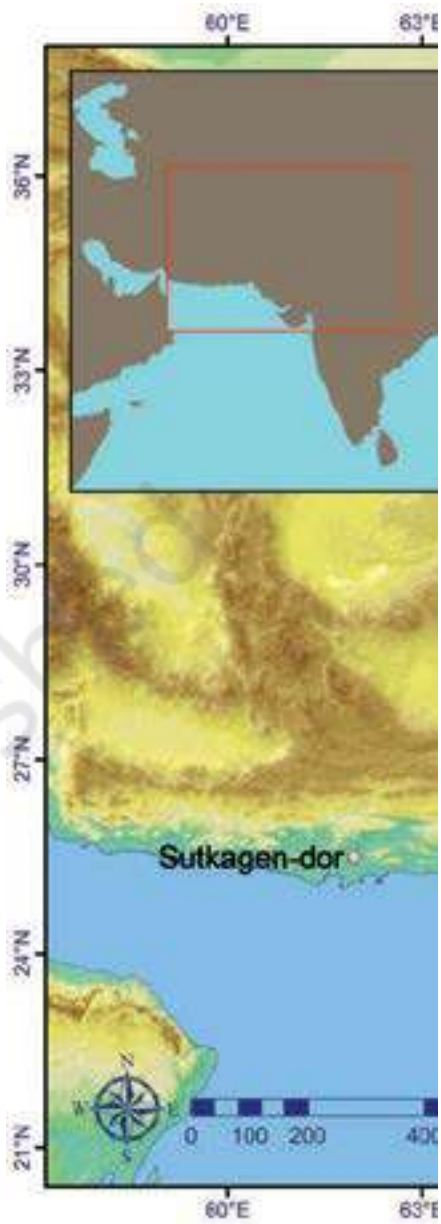
Fig. 6.2. Timeline showing the period of the Indus-Sarasvatī civilisation, from about 2600 to 1900 BCE.

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From Village to City

Tributary: A river that flows into a larger river (or lake). For instance, the Yamuna is a tributary of the Ganga.

The vast plains of the Punjab (today divided between India and Pakistan) and Sindh (now in Pakistan) are watered by the Indus River and its **tributaries**. This made those plains fertile and, therefore, favourable to agriculture. A little further east, a few millenniums ago, another river, the Sarasvatī, used to flow from the foothills of the Himalayas through Haryana, Punjab, parts of Rajasthan and Gujarat (see Fig. 6.3). In this whole region, from about 3500 BCE, villages grew into towns, and with increasing trade and other exchanges, those towns further grew into cities. This transition happened around 2600 BCE.



Archaeologists gave this civilisation several names — 'Indus', 'Harappan', 'Indus-Sarasvatī' or 'Sindhu-Sarasvatī' civilisation. We will use all these terms. Its inhabitants are called 'Harappans'. It is one of the oldest civilisations in the world.



DON'T MISS OUT

Why are the inhabitants of this civilisation called 'Harappans' today? That is simply because the city of Harappa (today in Pakistan's Punjab) was the first of this civilisation to be excavated, way back in 1920–21, over a century ago.

This development is also called the 'First Urbanisation of India'.

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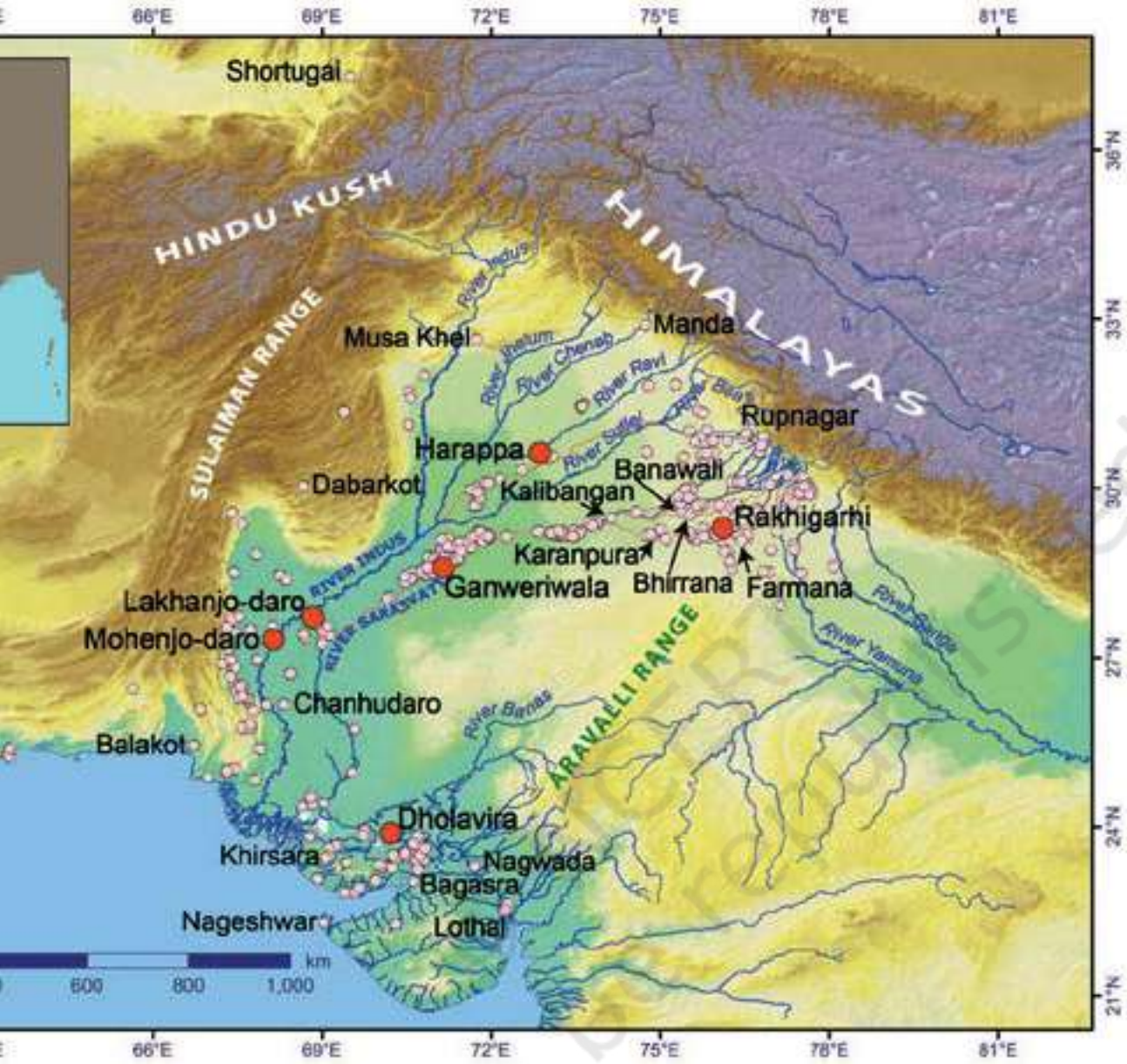


Fig. 6.3. Map of some of the main settlements of the Indus-Sarasvatī civilisation. Notice the natural boundaries formed by the mountain ranges (in brown colour).

LET'S EXPLORE



Some of the important cities of this civilisation are marked in the map (Fig. 6.3). As a class activity, can you try to match these cities with the modern states or regions in the table on the next page?

Harappan city	Modern state / region
Dholavira	Punjab
Harappa	Gujarat
Kalibangan	Sindh
Mohenjo-daro	Haryana
Rakhigarhi	Rajasthan

The Sarasvatī River

The map (Fig. 6.3 on page 89) shows the Indus (or Sindhu) and its five main tributaries; important cities grew along those rivers, such as Mohenjo-daro and Harappa. But there are also many sites along the Sarasvatī River, which today goes by the name of 'Ghaggar' in India and 'Hakra' in Pakistan (hence the name 'Ghaggar-Hakra River'). This river is now seasonal, because it flows only during the rainy season.

The Sarasvatī River is first mentioned in the Ṛig Veda, an ancient collection of prayers which we will read about in Chapter 7. In this text, Sarasvatī is worshipped both as a goddess and as a river flowing 'from the mountain to the sea'. Later texts describe the river as drying up and eventually disappearing.

Town-Planning

Harappa and Mohenjo-daro, now in Pakistan, were the first two cities of this civilisation to be discovered; their identification goes back to 1924, a century ago. Several sites followed in the Indus plains, which is why the civilisation was initially called 'Indus Valley civilisation'.

Later on, other major cities, such as Dholavira (in Gujarat), Rakhigarhi (in Haryana), Ganweriwala (in the Cholistan desert of Pakistan), and hundreds of smaller sites (such

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THINK ABOUT IT

You may have come across the term 'Indus Valley civilisation' and noticed that we have not used it. A look at the map (Fig. 6.3 on page 89) explains why the term 'Valley' is obsolete, as we now know that the civilisation extended much beyond the Indus region.

as Lothal in Gujarat), were discovered, some of them excavated. Such discoveries continue even today! It is interesting to note that the Sarasvatī basin includes not only two major cities — Rakhigarhi and Ganweriwala — but also several smaller ones (Farmana in Haryana, Kalibangan in Rajasthan) and a few towns (Bhirrana and Banawali, both in Haryana); indeed, the map (Fig. 6.3 on page 89) makes clear the high density of sites in that region.

The larger Harappan cities were built according to precise plans. They had wide streets (Fig. 6.4 and 6.5 on page 92), which were often oriented to the cardinal directions. Most cities seem to have been surrounded by **fortifications** and had two distinct parts — the 'upper town', where the local **elite** probably lived, and the 'lower town', where common people lived.

Some large buildings seem to have been used for collective purposes — for instance, warehouses where goods to be transported were stored. Individual houses of various sizes lined the streets and smaller lanes. Interestingly, the quality of construction was the same for small and big houses. All those buildings were generally made of bricks.

The purpose of some of the structures remains a matter of debate. This is the case of the famous 'Great Bath' in Mohenjo-daro (Fig. 6.6 on page 93), a small but elaborate tank which measured about 12 × 7 metres and had waterproofing materials (such as natural bitumen, a form of tar) applied on top of carefully laid-out bricks. The tank

Fortification: A massive wall surrounding a settlement or city, generally for protective purposes.

Elite: Here, the word refers to the higher layers of the society, such as rulers, officials, administrators, and often priests.

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(Top) Fig. 6.4. A wide street at Kalibangan (Rajasthan), in the lower town area.

(Right) Fig. 6.5. Housing area in Dholavira, with perpendicular streets, in the middle town (Dholavira had three distinct zones, not two as in other cities). Also, in this city, the foundations of most buildings were made with stones.



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was surrounded by small rooms, one of which contained a well; there was a drain in one corner of the tank to empty it from time to time and refill it with freshwater.



Fig. 6.6. Mohenjo-daro's Great Bath

What was the purpose of such a structure? Archaeologists have proposed several possible interpretations — a public bath for people; a bath for the royal family only; or a tank used for religious rituals. The first interpretation is now ruled out because it turns out that in this city, most houses had individual bathrooms.

LET'S EXPLORE



Have a debate in class about the last two interpretations. Can you think of any others? Remember that in this case, we do not have any other source of history — no inscription, no text, no traveller's account.

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Water Management

The Harappans gave much importance to water management and cleanliness. They often had separate areas for bathing in their homes; these were connected to a larger network of drains (Fig. 6.7), which generally ran below the streets and took the waste water away.



Fig. 6.7. Drainage system at Lothal (Gujarat)

In Mohenjo-daro, people drew water from hundreds of wells made of bricks. But in other regions, it may have been

from ponds, nearby streams or human-made **reservoirs**. In the case of Dholavira (in the Rann of Kutch in Gujarat), the largest reservoir measured 73 metres in length!

Reservoir: A large natural or artificial place where water is stored.

LET'S EXPLORE

As a class activity, measure the length of your classroom, a school corridor or a playground with the help of any measuring tape. Compare these lengths with the length of the largest reservoir in Dholavira.



At Dholavira, at least six large reservoirs were built with stones or even cut into the rock (Fig. 6.8). Most of them were connected through underground drains for efficient water harvesting and distribution.



Fig. 6.8. A large reservoir cut in the rock at Dholavira, measuring 33 metres in length

THINK ABOUT IT

Imagine the large number of workers required to build such a network of reservoirs. Who do you think organised their work and gave them precise instructions? How do you think they were paid for their labour? *(Hint: there was no money at that time in the way we have today.)* Since the reservoirs needed to be cleaned from time to time, was there some local authority to manage their maintenance? What clues do we get from all this about this city's ruler and municipal administration?

Use your imagination and discuss with your teacher. Archaeologists also discuss these questions, and the answers are not always final!

What Did the Harappans Eat?

The Harappans created many of their settlements along the banks of large or small rivers. This is a logical choice, not just for easy access to water, but also for agriculture, since rivers enrich the soil around them. Archaeological findings have shown that the Harappans grew cereals like barley, wheat, some millets, and sometimes rice, in addition to **pulses** and a variety of vegetables. They were also the first in Eurasia to grow cotton, which they used to weave into clothes. They made farming tools, including the plough (Fig. 6.9), some of which continue to be used by modern-day farmers.

Pulses: A category of crops that includes beans, peas and lentils (dal).



Fig. 6.9. A small clay model of a plough (from Banawali in Haryana)

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This intense agricultural activity was managed by hundreds of small rural sites or villages. Then as now, the cities could survive only if enough agricultural produce from rural areas reached them on a daily basis.

The Harappans also domesticated a number of animals for meat consumption and fished both in rivers and in the sea. This is known from the large numbers of animal and fish bones found during excavations.

What did Harappan cooking pots contain? Scientific examinations of clay pots have provided some answers, both expected ones (dairy products) and surprising ones — such as remains of turmeric, ginger and banana. Clearly, their diet was quite diverse!

LET US EXPLORE



Imagine you cook a meal in a Harappan house. What dish or dishes would you prepare, based on the data given above?

A Brisk Trade

The Harappans were engaged in active trade, not only within their own civilisation (other cities nearby or far away), but with other civilisations and cultures within and outside India. They exported ornaments, timber, some objects of daily use (Fig. 6.11 on page 98), probably also gold and cotton, and possibly some food items. The most favoured ornaments were beads of carnelian (Fig. 6.10 on page 98), a reddish semiprecious stone found mostly in Gujarat. Harappan craftspeople developed special techniques to drill them, so a string could pass through them, and to decorate them in various ways. They also worked conch shells into beautiful shell bangles, which requires sophisticated techniques as shell is a hard material.

What the Harappans imported in exchange of the exported goods is not so clear. It probably included copper, since this metal was not so common back home.

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DON'T MISS OUT

The Harappans mastered the art of working copper, a soft metal. If tin is added to copper, the resulting metal is bronze, which is harder than copper. The Harappans used bronze to make tools, pots and pans, and, as we will see later, some figurines.



Fig. 6.10. Harappan beads of carnelian beads excavated at Susa (present-day Iran)



Fig. 6.11. Harappan ivory comb (about 7 cm long) found on the coast of Oman

To conduct such a trade, they used land routes and rivers, and the sea for more distant destinations — this is the first intensive maritime activity in India. Indeed, quite a few Harappan settlements are located in the coastal regions of Gujarat and Sindh. Lothal, a small settlement in Gujarat, has a surprisingly huge basin measuring 217 metres in length and 36 metres in width — the length is just a little more than that of two football grounds! This basin must have been a dockyard, that is, a structure used to receive and send boats for further transportation of goods.

Such elaborate trade requires traders to be able to identify their goods — and also each other! This seems to have been the chief purpose of thousands of small seals, which have been excavated from many settlements. These seals

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Fig. 6.12. The huge dockyard at Lothal

were generally made of steatite, a soft stone that would be hardened through heating. They measure only a few centimetres and generally depict animal figures with, above them, a few signs that are part of a writing system. But that system and the symbolic meaning of the animal figures are yet to be understood. What is certain is that they somehow relate to trade activities.



Fig. 6.13-1, 6.13-2, 6.13-3. (Left to right) Harappan seal showing a unicorn; Harappan seal showing a bull; Harappan seal showing a horned tiger

LET'S EXPLORE



Looking at these three Harappan seals with some writing signs, what goes through your mind? Would you like to suggest any interpretations? Let your imagination run!

The Lives of the Ancients

Archaeologists have unearthed many objects made and used by Harappans.

Objects of daily use





Fig. 6.14-1 (top), 6.14-2 (right). A bronze mirror; a terracotta pot (both from Dholavira)





Fig. 6.14-3 (top), 6.14-4 (right). A few stone weights; a bronze chisel (both from Dholavira)





Fig. 6.14-5, 6.14-6. A gamesboard engraved on a stone, about 25 cm in length (from Dholavira); a terracotta whistle, about 4 cm in length (from Karanpura in Rajasthan). Harappans designed many games and toys to keep both adults and children amused!

Cultural and symbolic objects



Fig. 6.15-1, 6.15-2, 6.15-3. A statuette of a figure often called 'Priest King' (although it is not known whose figure was this); a seal showing a swastika; a seal depicting a three-faced deity seated on a raised platform, surrounded by powerful animals (Pashupati Seal)



Fig. 6.15-4, 6.15-5, 6.15-6. The 'Dancing Girl', a bronze figurine from Mohenjo-daro (it is 10.8 cm high); a terracotta figurine seated in a 'namaste'; a design on a pot which seems to tell the story of the thirsty crow, who finds a clever way to drink water at the bottom of the pot (from Lothal).

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THINK ABOUT IT

- Looking at the objects on pages 100 and 101 — or any other pictured in this chapter — can you make out what activities or aspects of life were important for the Harappans?



LET'S EXPLORE

- Complete the story found on the Lothal pot. How was such a story remembered for more than 4,000 years, in your opinion?
- Consider the 'Dancing Girl' figurine. What do you make of the attitude the figurine expresses? Observe her bangles covering an entire arm, a practice still visible in parts of Gujarat and Rajasthan. Where else in this chapter can you spot bangles worn in this manner. What conclusion should we draw from this?

The End or a New Beginning?

Around 1900 BCE, this Sindhu-Sarasvatī civilisation, despite all its achievements, began to fall apart. The cities were abandoned one by one. If any inhabitants remained, they adopted a rural lifestyle in the changed environment — it appears that the earlier government or administration no longer existed. Gradually the Harappans scattered over hundreds, if not thousands, of small rural settlements.

THINK ABOUT IT

The Harappans returned to rural settlements because a rural lifestyle gives easier access to food and water than an urban lifestyle. Then as now, cities depended on villages to provide food, and sometimes water.

What caused this decline? Archaeologists have proposed many factors. Long back, it was thought that warfare or

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invasions may have destroyed the cities, but there is no trace of warfare or invasion. Indeed, the Harappans do not seem to have kept any army or weapons of war; as far as the evidence goes, it seems to have been a relatively peaceful civilisation.

Two factors are currently agreed upon. First, a climatic change which affected much of the world from 2200 BCE onward, causing reduced rainfall and a drier phase. This would have made agriculture more difficult and could have reduced food supply to the cities. Second, the Sarasvatī River dried up in its central basin; suddenly, cities there, such as Kalibangan or Banawali were abandoned. There could have been other factors, but these two remind us of how much we depend on climate and the environment for our well-being.

Although the cities disappeared, much of the Harappan culture and technology survived and was passed on to the next phase of Indian civilisation, which we will explore in a future chapter.

Before we move on ...



- The Indus, Harappan or Sindhu-Sarasvatī civilisation is one of the oldest of the world. Its inhabitants, the Harappans, created planned cities with efficient water management, diverse crafts and a brisk trade.
- A productive agriculture brought a variety of crops to the cities.
- The civilisation eventually declined, probably because of climatic and environmental changes; people returned to a rural lifestyle.

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Questions, activities and projects

1. Why does the civilisation studied in this chapter have several names? Discuss their significance.
2. Write a brief report (150 to 200 words) summing up some of the achievements of the Indus-Sarasvatī civilisation.
3. Imagine you have to travel from the city of Harappa to Kalibangan. What are your different options? Can you make a rough estimation of the amount of time each option might take?
4. Let us imagine a Harappan man or woman being transported to an average kitchen in today's India. What are the four or five biggest surprises awaiting them?
5. Looking at all the pictures in this chapter, make a list of the ornaments / gestures / objects that still feel familiar in our 21st century.
6. What mindset does the system of reservoirs at Dholavira reflect?
7. In Mohenjo-daro, about 700 wells built with bricks have been counted. They seem to have been regularly maintained and used for several centuries. Discuss the implications.
8. It is often said that the Harappans had a high civic sense. Discuss the significance of this statement. Do you agree with it? Compare with citizens in a large city of India today.

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CHAPTER 4

New Beginnings: Cities and States

The kingdom shall be protected by fortifying the capital and the towns at the frontiers. The land should not only be capable of sustaining the population but also outsiders in times of calamities. ... It should be beautiful, being endowed with cultivable land, mines, timber forests, elephant forests, and good pastures rich in cattle. It should not depend [only on] rain for water. It should have good roads and waterways. It should have a productive economy, with a wide variety of commodities ....

– Kauṭilya, Arthaśhāstra

Fig. 4.1. Ruins of a major structure at Rājagṛiha (modern-day Rajgir in Bihar), when it was the capital of the Magadha mahājanapada.



The Big Questions

1. *What is meant by 'Second Urbanisation of India'?*
2. *Why were the janapadas and mahājanapadas an important development in India's early history?*
3. *What kind of system of governance did they evolve?*

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Let us recall that in the early 2nd millennium BCE (that is, over a few centuries after 2000 BCE), the Indus/Harappan/ Sindhu-Sarasvatī civilisation, which we called India's 'First Urbanisation', disintegrated. Some of its cities were abandoned; in others, some people continued living there, but reverting to a rural or village lifestyle. They had to, since all the components of the Harappan urban order had disappeared: elaborate structures, both private and public; crowded streets and busy markets; different communities with specialised occupations (metalsmiths, potters, builders, weavers, craftspeople, and so on); a writing system; a sanitation system; the presence of an administration; and, behind it all, a larger state structure with a ruling class at the head. And for a whole millennium, urban life remained absent from India, though there may have been a few towns here and there in north India.



Fig. 4.2. The fertile Gangetic plains helped the mahājanapadas to grow and prosper.

Indeed, there were important regional cultures, which we need not study here.

Then, in the 1st millennium BCE, a vibrant new phase of urbanisation began in the Ganga plains, parts of the Indus (or Sindhu) basin and neighbouring regions, gradually spreading to other parts of the Subcontinent. How do we know this? Mainly from two sources: (1) archaeological excavations that have confirmed the existence of those ancient urban centres, and (2) ancient literature describing them—late Vedic, Buddhist and Jain literatures are full of references to these new urban centres.

This new phase is often called India's 'Second Urbanisation'—which, incidentally, has continued right up to today! Let us see how this phase emerged.

Janapadas and *Mahājanapadas*

Towards the end of the 2nd millennium BCE, regional cultures gradually reorganised themselves in north India. As people formed clans or groups, probably sharing a common language and common customs, each clan came to be associated with a territory or *janapada* led by a *rājā* or ruler. ('*Janapada*' is a Sanskrit word which means 'where the people (*jana*) have set foot (*pada*),' that is, have settled down.)

The *janapadas* grew as trade networks expanded and connected them. By the 8th or 7th centuries BCE, some of those early states had merged together; the resulting bigger units were known as *mahājanapadas*. Although the texts have different lists of them, the more frequent list gives the names of 16 *mahājanapadas*, extending from Gandhāra in the northwest to Anga in the east and to Aśhmaka in central India, close to the Godavari River (see map). There may have been a few more, along with some smaller *janapadas* continuing independently.

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THINK ABOUT IT

Notice how many of the *mahājanapadas* are concentrated in the Ganga plains. There are several possible reasons for this, including the growth of agriculture in the fertile Ganga plains, the availability of iron ore in the mountains and hills (see below about iron), and the formation of new trade networks.

LET'S EXPLORE



- → The most powerful of these new states were Magadha, Kosala, Vatsa and Avanti. Looking at the map, can you identify their capitals? Also, how many can you match with Indian cities of today?
- → Compare this map with the map of the regions mentioned in the Mahābhārata (see Fig. 5.4 in the chapter 'India, That Is Bharat' in Grade 6) and list the names common to both maps. What do you think this implies?

Moat: A deep, wide ditch surrounding a fort or a fortified city and filled with water.

The map (Fig. 4.3) shows the *mahājanapadas*' capitals. Most were fairly large well-fortified cities, with a **moat** running outside the fortifications as further defence. Often, the gateways through the rampart walls would be deliberately kept narrow, so guards may control the movement of people and goods entering or leaving the city. It is fascinating to note that most of those ancient capitals continue to be living cities today—'modern' cities that are often 2,500 years old!

Early Democratic Traditions

Each *janapada* had an assembly or council, called *sabhā* or *samiti*, where matters concerning the clan would be discussed. (Remember, from the chapter on 'India's Cultural Roots', that the words *sabhā* and *samiti* first appear in the Vedas, India's most ancient texts.) We may assume that most of the members were elders in the clan. The *rājā* was not expected to rule independently or arbitrarily;

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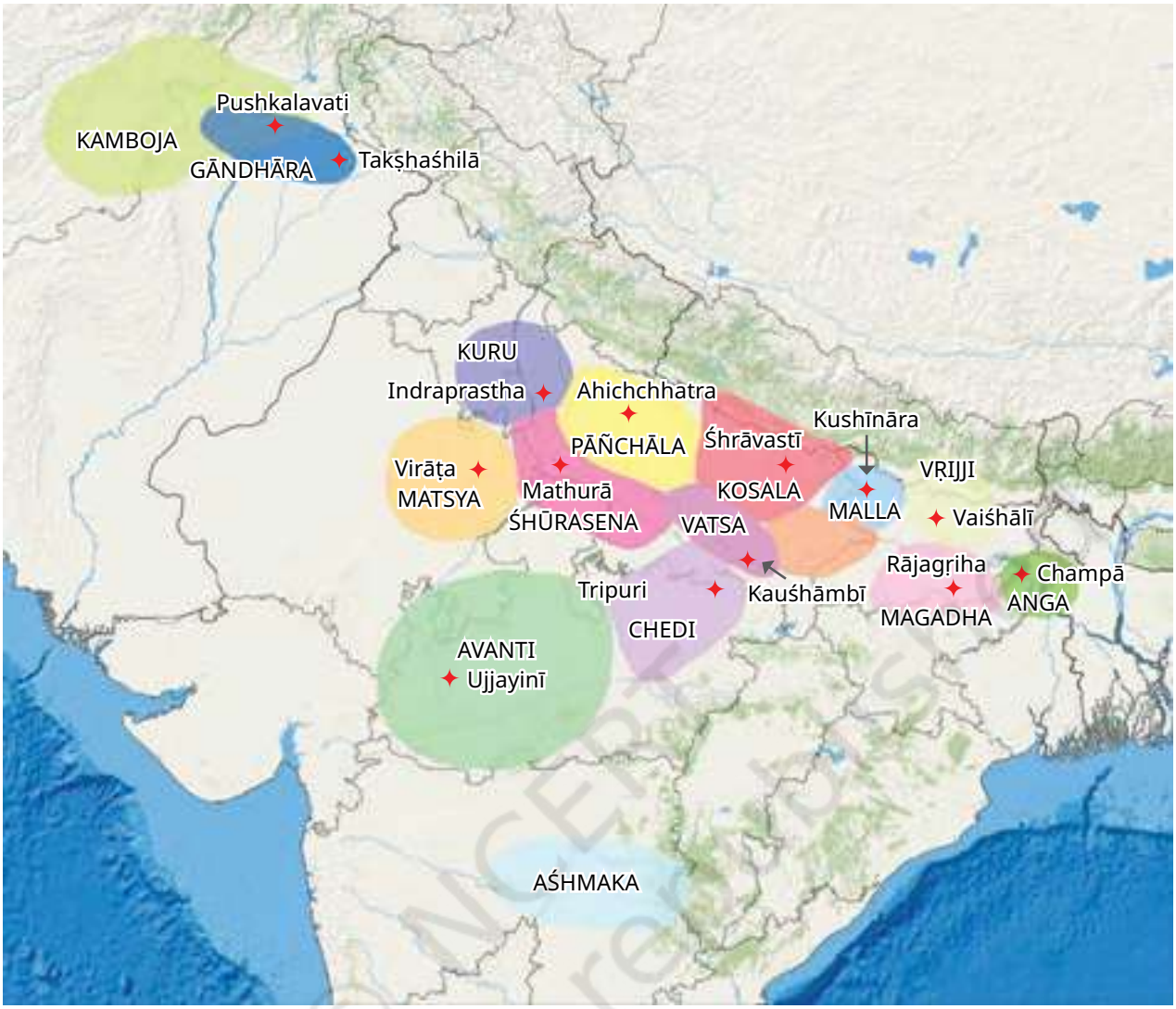


Fig. 4.3. Map of the sixteen mahājanapadas. Note that their borders are approximate.

a good ruler was supposed to take the advice from those assemblies, apart from the ministers and administrators. Indeed, according to some texts, an incompetent ruler could be removed by the assembly. Of course, while such mentions are significant, it does not mean that this was an established law; let us remember that the data we have for such remote periods is incomplete.

In their political systems, the *mahājanapadas* expanded the basic principles of the *janapadas*. Some were, in effect, monarchies, in the sense that the *rājā* was the ultimate authority, supported by ministers and an assembly of

elders. His position was hereditary, in the sense that a *rājā* would usually be the son of the previous one. The king would collect taxes or revenue, maintain law and order, get impressive fortifications built around their capital, and maintain an army to defend the territory or wage war with neighbouring ones, as the case may be. Magadha (located in part of today's Bihar), Kosala (in part of today's Uttar Pradesh) and Avanti (in part of today's Madhya Pradesh) were among the most powerful such states.

However, at least two *mahājanapadas*, Vajji (or Vṛijji) and the neighbouring Malla, had a different system: the *sabhā* or *samiti* had more power and took important decisions through discussion, and, if necessary, through vote. Surprisingly, this included the selection of the *rājā*! This means that those *mahājanapadas*, which were called *gaṇas* or *sanghas*, were not monarchies—their functioning might be called democratic, since members of the assembly were the ones to select the ruler and take major decisions. In fact,



Fig. 4.4. Ruins of a complex at Kauśhāmbī, capital of the Vatsa mahājanapada

scholars have often called them 'early republics', as they are indeed one of the earliest such systems in the world.

More Innovations

The age of the *janapada*s and *mahājanapadas* was an age of profound change, which would impact Indian civilisation until present times. In the chapter 'India's Cultural Roots' in Grade 6, we saw the emergence of several new schools of thought—late Vedic, Buddhist, Jain in particular, and their respective literatures. Those schools disseminated their teachings and literature through scholars, monks and nuns travelling across India or people undertaking pilgrimages. Indian art also underwent a renewal; it will blossom in the age of empires.

Urbanisation does not happen without technologies. Let us remember that the Harappan civilisation mastered copper and bronze metallurgy. Now, in this Second Urbanisation, a major shift in technology involved iron metallurgy. In several regions of India, the techniques of extracting and shaping iron were actually perfected from the early 2nd millennium BCE, but it took a few centuries for iron to become a part of daily life. By the late 2nd millennium BCE, iron tools had become widespread, facilitating agriculture on a bigger scale. Iron also made better weapons than bronze, lighter and sharper—swords, spears, arrows, shields, etc. As it happens, there is some evidence of warfare between neighbouring *mahājanapadas*—how frequent or how intense it was, of course, is impossible to tell. Such military campaigns, but occasionally alliances too, gave rise to new kingdoms and empires, which we will turn to later in our journey.

Another innovation was the first use of coins in India, made necessary by growing trade. Very soon, coins were exchanged across different regions and even with other parts of the world. The first Indian coins were made of

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silver, a soft metal into which symbols could be 'punched'; they are called 'punch-marked coins'. Later, coins of copper, gold and other metals were also made. Generally, a *mahājanapada* issued its own coins, but coins from neighbouring regions were used as well as exchanged in trade.



LET'S EXPLORE

Fill up the following table with a Yes (or tick mark) or No (or cross mark) in each square, which provides an interesting comparison between these two phases of Indian civilisation.

	First Urbanisation	Second Urbanisation
Ganga plains		
Monasteries		
Literature		
Trade		
Warfare		
Copper/bronze		
Iron		

The *Varṇa–Jāti* System

We saw earlier how human societies grew more complex with the rise of civilisation. Whenever this happens, a society organises itself in several groups based on class, occupation or some other criteria. For instance, there could be different groups concerned with governance, administration, religion, education, trade, town-planning, farming, crafts, arts and all kinds of other professions.

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Fig. 4.5. A panel of the Sanchi stūpa depicting a smithy (or metal workshop), where different workers bring firewood, water, stoke the fire, beat the iron, etc.



Fig. 4.6. A few punch-marked coins from various ancient cities of north India.



LET'S EXPLORE

→ Why should a complex society divide itself into such groups? Think about several possible factors why this happens.

→ List other such professions you expect in a complex society of the 1st millennium BCE.

In an ideal society, all those groups would complement each other and work in harmony. But most of the time, these divisions also lead to inequalities: some groups acquire more wealth, power or influence than others. In other words, while equality is an ideal that human societies have often aspired to, very few, if any, have ever achieved it.

In India, the society was organised in a two-fold system. One category was the *jāti*, a group or community of people with a specific professional occupation closely tied to their livelihood. The skills that defined a particular *jāti*—for instance, skill in agriculture, metallurgy, commerce or any craft — was generally transmitted from generation to generation. Often, a *jāti* would get further subdivided into sub-*jāti*s, each of which developed customs and traditions of its own, for instance concerning marriage, rituals or food habits.

Along with the *jāti*, there is another category, that of *varṇa*, a concept that emerged from Vedic texts. There were four *varṇa*s: Brahmins were engaged in preserving and spreading knowledge, and in the performance of rituals; Kshatriyas were expected to defend the society and the land, and to engage in warfare if necessary; Vaishyas were supposed to increase the society's wealth through occupations of trade, business or agriculture; finally, Shudras were the artisans, craftspeople, workers or servants.

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DON'T MISS OUT

You may have heard the English word 'caste'. It comes from a Portuguese word, *casta*, as Portuguese travellers to India in the 16th century CE tried to make sense of Indian society. While a few scholars consider 'caste' to refer to *varṇa*s, most take it to apply to *jātis*; yet others consider 'caste' to refer to the whole *varṇa–jāti* system.

There is historical evidence, both in texts and inscriptions, that in the early period individuals and communities changed their professional occupations if circumstances demanded. For instance, a long drought or some natural calamity could force a community of farmers to migrate to a city and take up other occupations, or some Brahmins would turn to trade or even military activities. This complex system structured Indian society, organised its activities, including economic ones, and therefore gave it some stability. In time, however, the system became rigid and led to inequalities and discrimination towards the lower *jātis* or some communities excluded from the *varṇa-jāti* system. This process will be studied in a higher grade.

The *varṇa-jāti* system has had a deep impact on Indian society, and generations of scholars have studied its countless aspects. There is a broad agreement that the system was significantly different (more flexible, in particular) in earlier periods and became more rigid with the passage of time, in particular during the British rule in India. Let us also keep in mind that while *varṇa-jāti* has been an important mechanism at work in Indian society, it is not the only one; there have been many others, some of which we will explore later, especially in the theme 'Our Cultural Heritage and Knowledge Traditions'.

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THINK ABOUT IT

Inequalities within society can exist in many forms. Have you encountered any incident where you or anyone you know might have been made to feel different from others? Do you think equality is desirable in a society? If so, why? Have you come across people or initiatives that lessened inequalities?

Developments Elsewhere in India

In this 1st millennium BCE, important communication routes opened up for purposes of trade, pilgrimage, military campaigns, etc. Two routes became widely used and are often mentioned in the literature: the Uttarapatha and the Dakṣhiṇapatha. The first connected the northwest regions to the Ganga plains, all the way to eastern India; the second started from Kauśhāmbī (near Prayagraj), then a capital of



Fig. 4.7. Śhiśhupalgarh (today a suburb of Bhubaneswar, first excavated in 1948): one of the ways into the city, through the fortifications; the moat, full of water, is visible outside the gateway. Notice the narrowing in the gateway, for control of movement of people and goods.

one of the *mahājanapadas*, and crossed the Vindhya Range of hills to proceed all the way south. We will return to these routes when we explore the formation of empires in India.

Many lateral roads also connected with other parts of India, especially the important ports on the western and eastern coasts, which were vibrant centres of trade. In the eastern region, major cities emerged, such as Śhiśhupalgarh (today Sisupalgarh, part of Bhubaneswar), which was the capital of the Kalinga region and followed a strict square ground plan, with imposing fortifications and broad streets.

In the Subcontinent's southern regions, cities began emerging from about 400 BCE, although recent excavations claim to find some signs of commercial activities going further back. Around this time, three kingdoms emerged—the Cholas, the Cheras and the Pāṇḍyas.

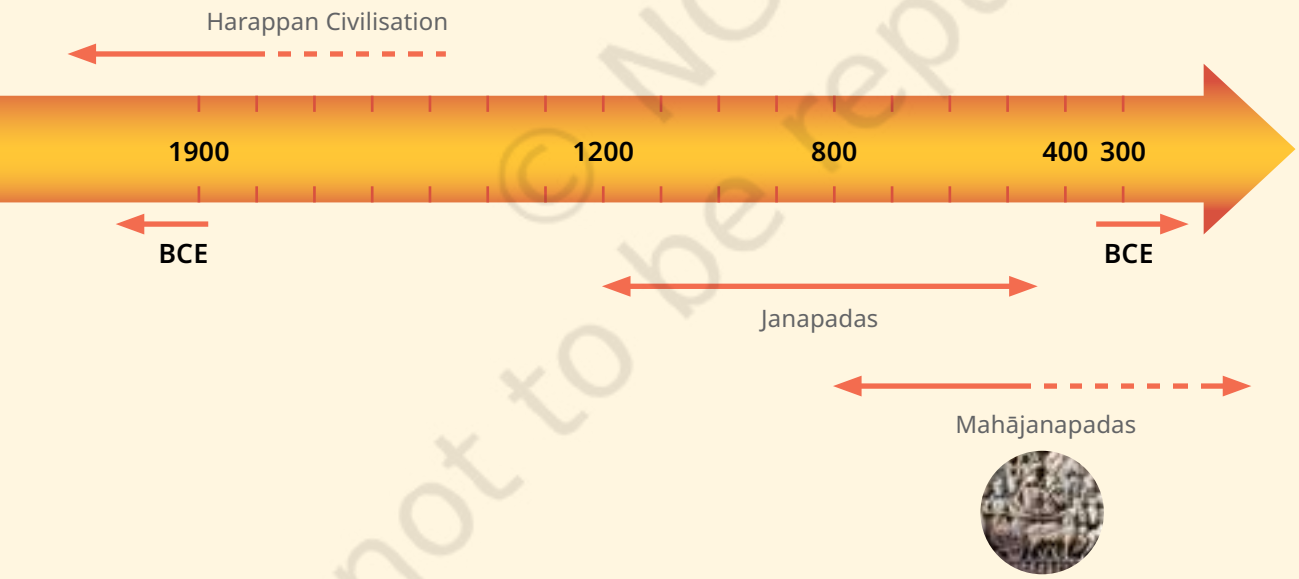


Fig. 4.8. Timeline covering the period from 1900 BCE to 300 BCE.

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Fig. 4.9. Shell and gemstones industries at the site of Kodumanal (near Erode, Tamil Nadu)

Apart from archaeological evidence, the most ancient Tamil literature mentions those kingdoms and several of their kings.

Because the southern regions are rich in resources such as precious and semiprecious stones, gold, and spices, they profitably traded not only with the rest of India but also with kingdoms and empires overseas.

By 300 or 200 BCE, almost the entire Subcontinent, including regions in the Northeast, was one vibrant interconnected land; goods and culture travelled from region to region, and often beyond India to parts of Central and Southeast Asia.

About the same time, the *mahājanapadas* ceased to exist, leaving the place to fresh developments that were going to reshape India.

Before we move on ...



- From the end of the 2nd millennium BCE, *janapadas* rose in parts of north and central India; they were smaller states with a *rājā* at the head taking counsel from an assembly of elders.
- The 16 *mahājanapadas* were the first organised states of the 1st millennium BCE; they witnessed the Second Urbanisation of India, which spread in all directions from the Ganga region, all the way to south India. By 300 BCE or so, the *mahājanapadas* ceased to exist.
- In the same period, a vast network of roads connected north and south, east and west, and eventually all regions of the Subcontinent. People, goods, ideas and teachings travelled along all those roads.

Questions and activities

1. Consider the quotation at the start of the chapter and discuss in several groups. Compare your observations and conclusions on what Kauṭilya recommends for a kingdom. Is it very different today?
2. According to the text, how were rulers chosen in early Vedic society?
3. Imagine you are a historian studying ancient India. What types of sources (archaeological, literary, etc.) would you use to learn more about the *mahājanapadas*? Explain how each source might contribute to your understanding.
4. Why was the development of iron metallurgy so important for the growth of urbanism in the 1st millennium BCE? You may use points from the chapter but also from your knowledge or imagination.

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Noodles

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*'Noodles' is our abbreviation for 'Notes and Doodles'!



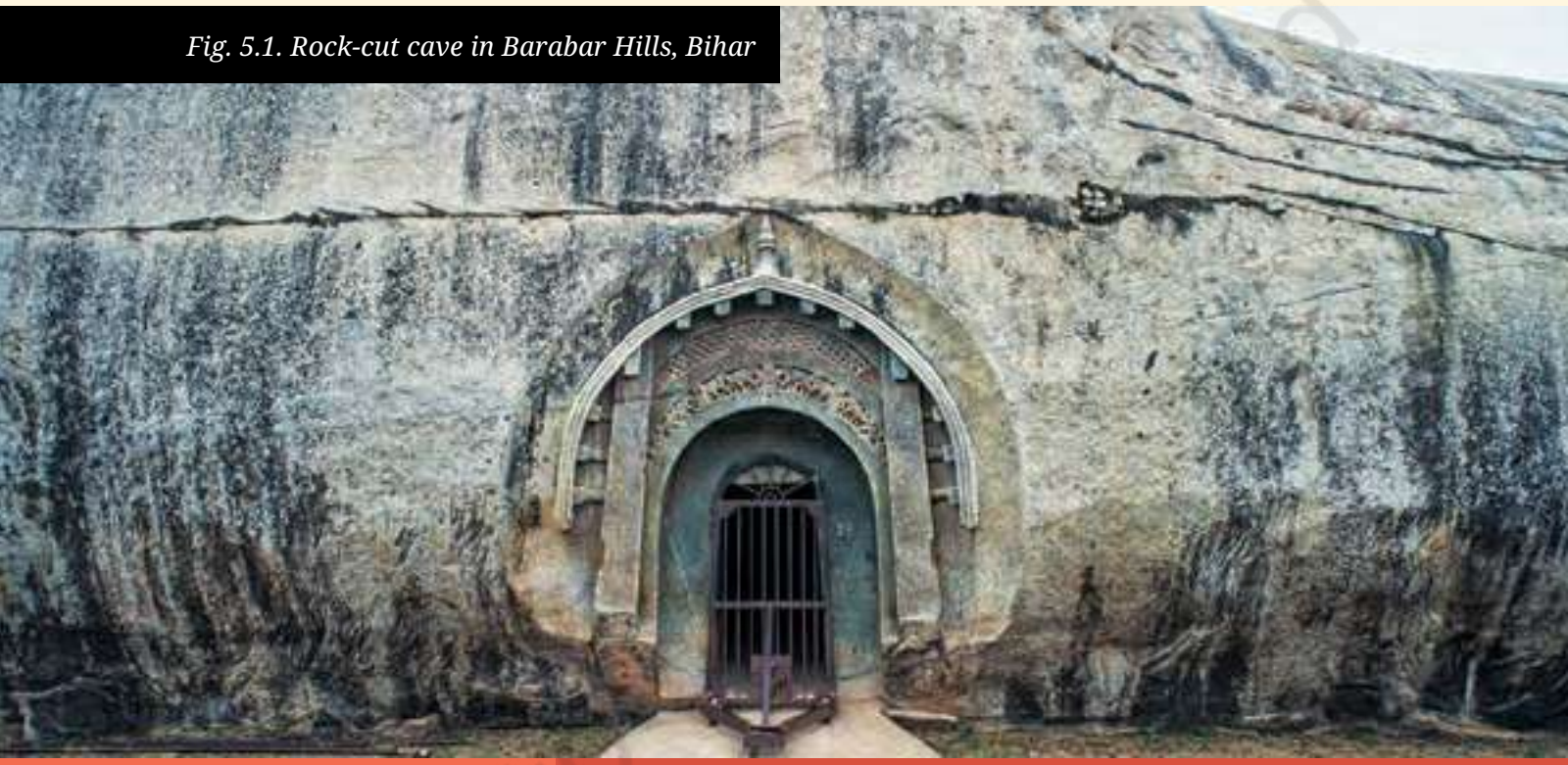
CHAPTER 5

The Rise of Empires

There cannot be a country without people and there is no kingdom without a country.

Kauṭilya in Arthaśhāstra

Fig. 5.1. Rock-cut cave in Barabar Hills, Bihar



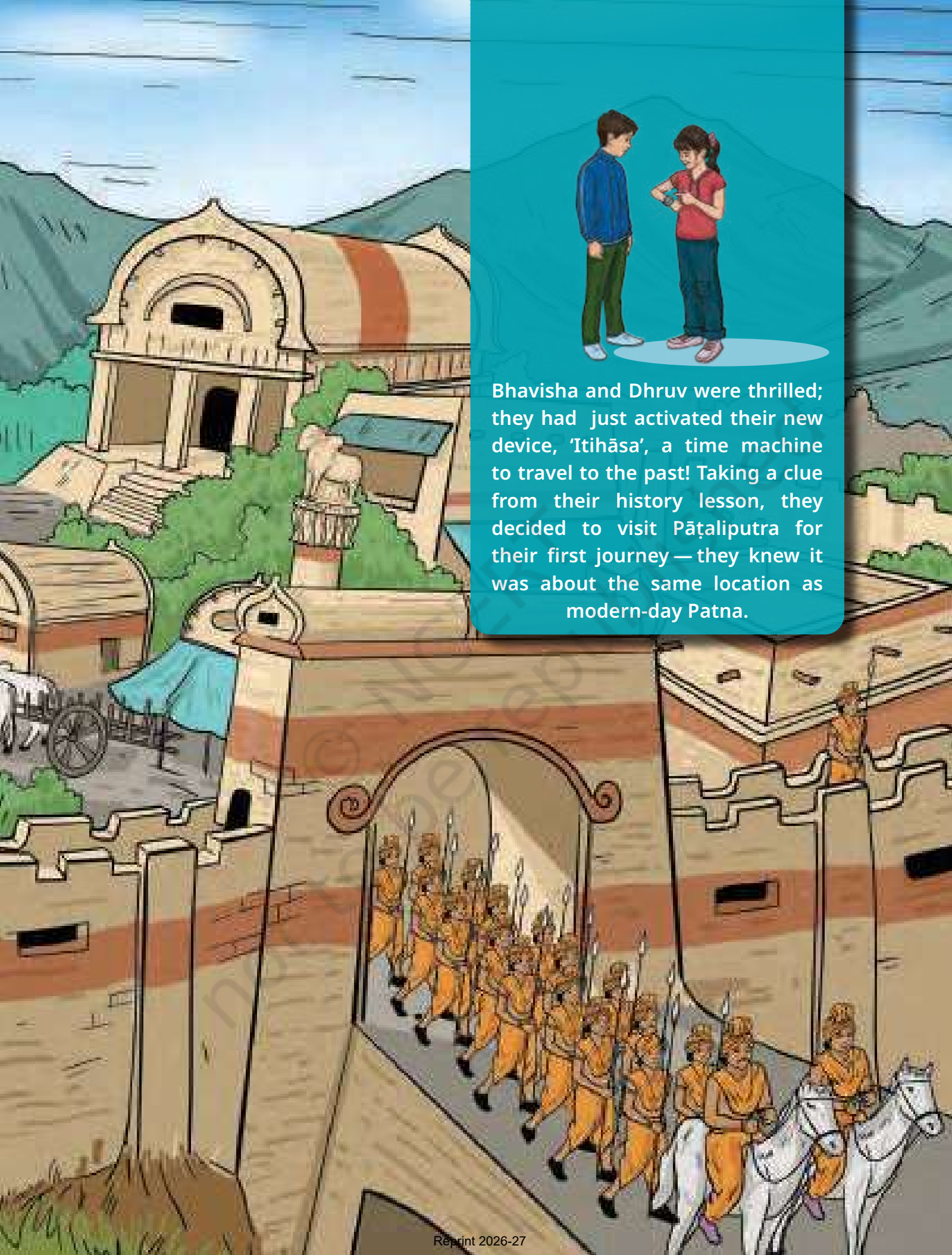
The Big Questions

1. *What is an empire?*
2. *How did empires rise and shape Indian civilisation?*
3. *What factors facilitated the transition from kingdoms to empires?*
4. *What was life like from the 6th to the 2nd century BCE?*

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Fig. 5.2. An artistic representation of Pāṭaliputra, located around modern-day Patna



Bhavisha and Dhruv were thrilled; they had just activated their new device, 'Itihāsa', a time machine to travel to the past! Taking a clue from their history lesson, they decided to visit Pāṭaliputra for their first journey — they knew it was about the same location as modern-day Patna.

Landing on the outskirts of the great city, a little dizzy, they saw a girl talking to a person on horseback dressed in strange clothes. As he left, she turned to them, and they asked her for her name.

"My name is Ira, daughter of Kanhadas, the ironsmith. Welcome to Pāṭaliputra!"

"Glad to meet you, Ira. Our names are Bhavisha and Dhruv."

"Sshh! Keep your voices down! Do you see those soldiers marching past? They're heading to battle against a neighbouring kingdom that has been troubling us. Our king avoids war when he can, but he also protects his people when needed. My father helped forge many of the swords they carry, and my uncle is one of the soldiers in the group. I just came to see him off... I don't know when he'll return."

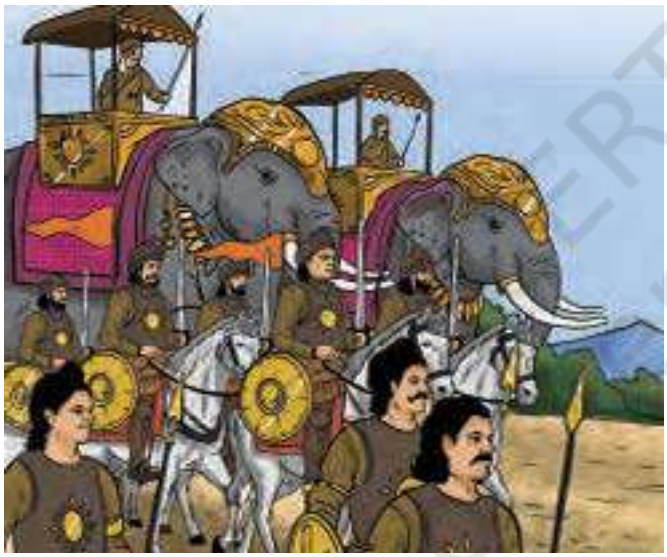


Fig. 5.3

(The group watches as an impressive procession of soldiers crosses a sturdy drawbridge leading out of the city, some on horseback and the army chiefs on elephant back. Then, the three children cross the same drawbridge to enter the city.)

"What kind of bridge is this?" asked Bhavisha. "And is it a river below?"

"This bridge keeps us safe," explained Ira. "It's lifted whenever there is a danger of attack on the city. And no, it's not a river, it's a moat; once the drawbridge is lifted, it makes it more difficult to approach the fortifications. Can you see those hills and forests in the distance? They provide us with timber, herbs, and many other valuable resources. Elephants for the army are also captured from the forest and trained for the army."

"What is the opening in that hill?" asked Dhruv.

"It's a cave. Our king is getting it carved out for a community of monks. I hope we can visit it when it's finished!"

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(As they move through Pāṭaliputra, they take in its splendour—towering wooden ramparts with watch towers, majestic palaces and buildings, lively streets. Ira gestures towards a bustling market filled with traders from distant lands.)

"You must visit our main market before you leave! Our king welcomes travellers from all over, so you'll get silk from China, spices and gems from the south, fine clothes from different regions—there's nothing you won't find in Pāṭaliputra!"

"What are those people over there doing?" asked Dhruv.

"Oh, these are street acrobats; they build human pyramids, sing and dance, or act in short plays to entertain people. Sometimes, they perform in front of the king!"

"Your king sounds very powerful," remarked Bhavisha. "Does he rule the region around Pāṭaliputra?"

"Much more than that!" answered Ira. "He rules over a vast land, far, far beyond this city. His authority extends over many villages, towns and kingdoms. My uncle told me that it takes close to two months on horseback to reach the borders of the territory!"

"That sounds bigger than just a kingdom... What do you call it?"

"It is called an Empire," Ira stated with evident pride.

What is an Empire?

The word 'empire' comes from the Latin 'imperium', which means 'supreme power'. Simply put, an empire is a collection of smaller kingdoms or territories over which a powerful ruler or group of rulers exert power, often after waging war against the smaller kingdoms. The smaller territories still had their own rulers, but they were all **tributaries** to the emperor, who ruled the whole territory from a capital, usually a major centre of economic and administrative power.

In ancient Sanskrit texts, words commonly used for 'emperor' made this clear; they included *samrāj*, meaning 'the lord of all' or 'supreme ruler'; *adhirāja* or 'overlord'; and *rājādhirāja* or 'king of kings'.

Tributary: A tributary, in our case, is a ruler or a state that has submitted to an emperor and pays tribute—that is, money, gold (or other precious metals), grain, livestock, elephants or other valuable goods produced in their kingdom and is given to the emperor as a sign of submission, loyalty or respect. A synonym for 'tributary' is 'vassal', and another way to express this is to say that the tributary or vassal kingdoms accepted the emperor's overlordship.

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Indian history is full of empires. They rose, expanded, lasted for a while, declined, and disappeared. In fact, the last empire that ruled the Subcontinent existed less than a century ago! But now is not the time to tell that story; we start at the other end of time, so we may understand how empires functioned in the distant past and how they deeply impacted India's evolution at all levels — political, economic, social, and cultural.



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LET'S EXPLORE



- → Empires extended over vast areas and had diverse people with differing languages, customs and cultures. How do you think the emperors made sure that they lived in harmony? Discuss in groups and share your thoughts with the class.
- → Looking at the many challenges involved in managing an empire, why should a king be so keen to expand his kingdom into an empire and become an emperor? Here are a few possible answers; see if you can think of a few more:
  - An ambition to 'rule the entire world', a metaphor for controlling large territories and ensuring that they would be remembered for **posterity;**
  - A wish to bring large areas under control and gain access to their resources to build economic and military strength;
  - A desire for great wealth for himself and for the empire.

Posterity: The generations to come.

In return for tribute and loyalty, emperors generally allowed regional kings or chiefs to continue to govern their areas.



Fig. 5.4.1. Trained armies were deployed to conquer neighbouring kingdoms, maintain control over them and defend the empire's borders.

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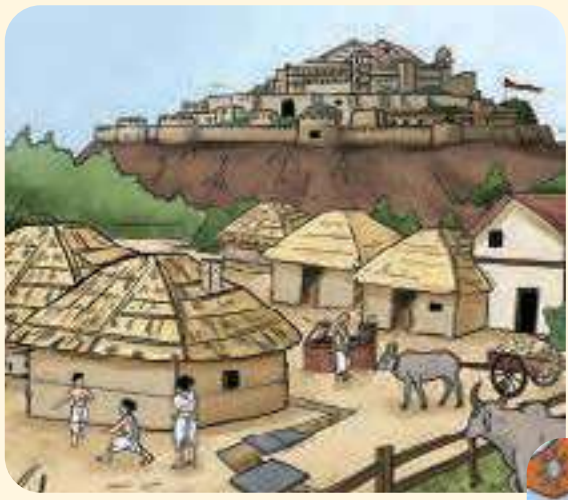


Fig. 5.4.2. Fortified settlements would be built in strategic places, such as the empire's borders.

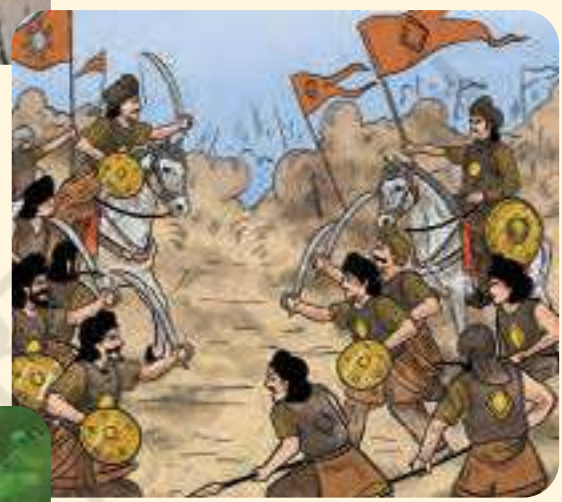


Fig. 5.4.3. To expand into an empire, a kingdom might first wage war against neighbouring territories so as to conquer them.

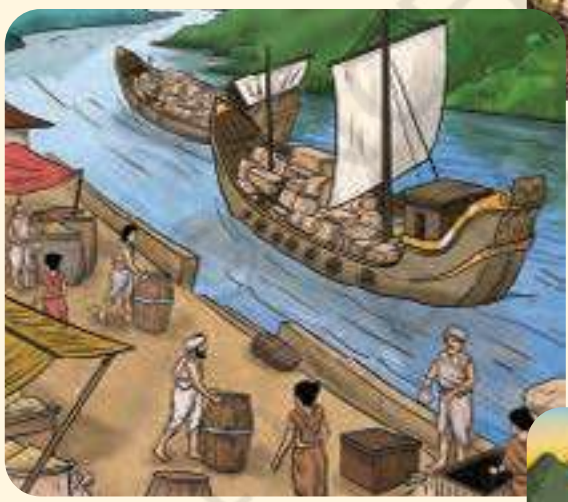


Fig. 5.4.4. Rulers endeavoured to control rivers and trade networks as that would give them control over precious resources, apart from tax revenue from the trade.



Fig. 5.4.5. With many smaller kingdoms warring for control, the one with access to stronger military power and surplus resources would eventually become the overlord.

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LET'S EXPLORE



Warfare apart, what other methods do you think the rulers might have used to expand their empires? Pen your ideas and share them with your class.

Trade, trade routes and guilds

Conducting military campaigns, especially in distant lands, is not as simple as it might seem. Maintaining an army is a costly affair: soldiers need to be fed, clothed, equipped with weapons, and paid; elephants and horses need to be cared for; roads or ships have to be built, and so on. All this requires considerable economic power, control over the workforce, and access to resources.

We can now understand that economic activity — especially production and trade — is one of the keys to maintaining an empire and ensuring people's welfare and quality of life, which a good ruler should be concerned with. Therefore, establishing and controlling **trade routes** all over the empire's territory and beyond is of great importance. That way, the goods traded will grow in quantity and variety, and more trade means more income for the producers and increased tax collections for the ruler.

Returning to the case of ancient India, what would have been the traded goods? There is plenty of evidence on this, at least, both from the literature and archaeological excavations — textiles, spices, agricultural produce, luxury items such as gems and handicraft products, and various animals were among the main items of trade. All this brisk trade was not limited to India; many Indian goods travelled towards distant countries by land or sea.

More often than not, traders were not just isolated individuals carrying out their own business. They soon understood the benefits of joining forces and creating **guilds** *(śhrenīs)*. Guilds were powerful associations of traders, craftsmen, moneylenders or agriculturists. As far as evidence shows, a guild had a head (who was usually elected) and executive

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officers who were supposed to have all kinds of ethical qualities. Two things made traders' guilds a remarkable institution. First, they brought together people who ended up being collaborators

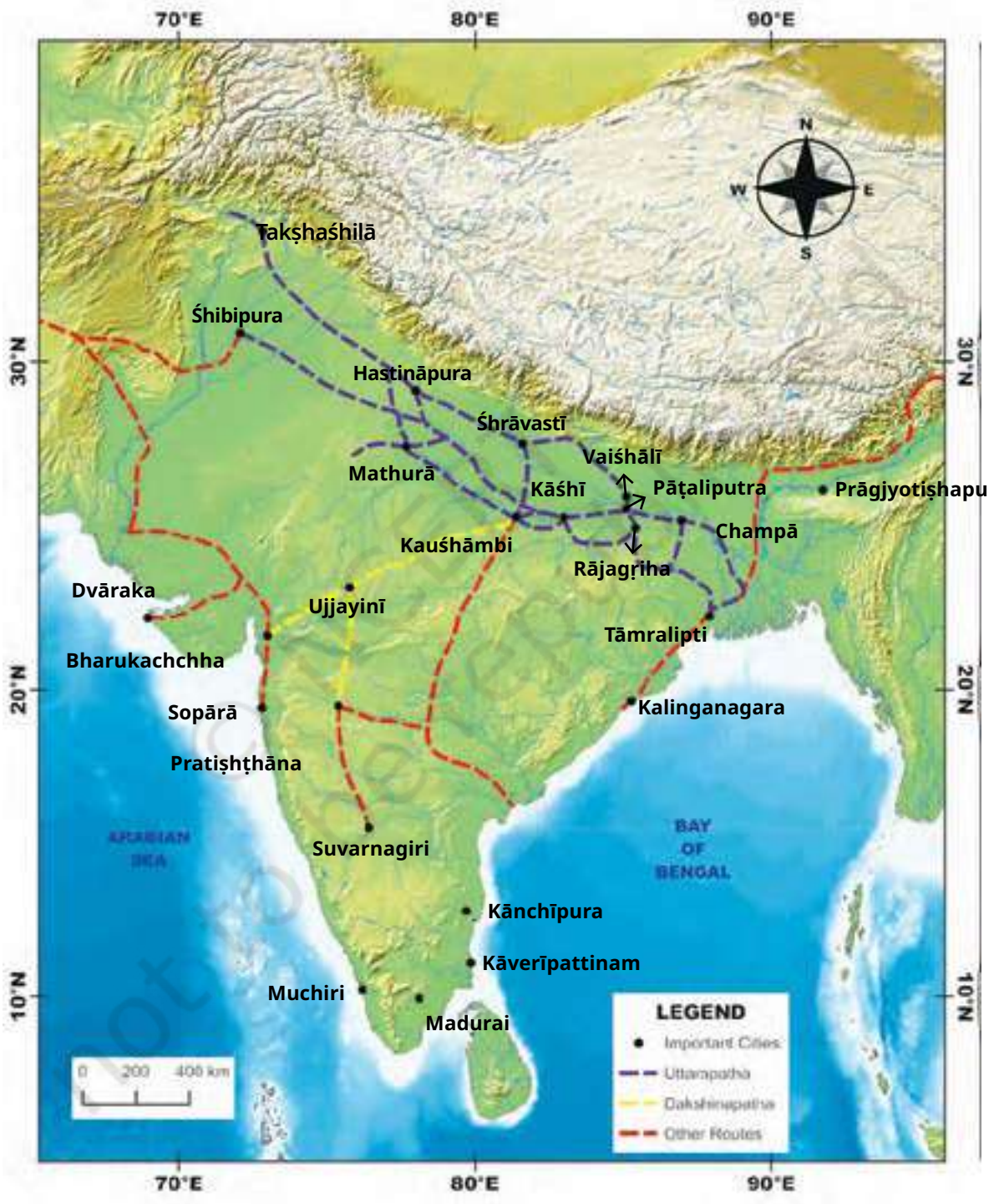


Fig. 5.5. Some important trade routes from about 500 BCE onward and major cities marked on them. Notice the Uttarapatha and the Dakṣhiṇapatha routes.

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rather than competitors, as they realised that sharing resources and information on markets, supply and demand, workforce, etc., was to everyone's benefit. Second, as an ancient text put it, "Cultivators, traders, herdsmen, moneylenders, and artisans have authority to lay down rules for their respective classes"; in other words, guilds had the autonomy to create their own internal rules, and the king was not to interfere with them (and why should he, if trade flourished?).

Guilds spread over large parts of India and endured for centuries. Even after they ceased to exist formally, their spirit continued to influence India's trade and business activities, sometimes even to this day. The institution of guilds provides an excellent example of the **self-organising abilities** of Indian society. The ancient village unit, with its various committees and councils, provides another. Indeed, an enlightened ruler would let people organise themselves and refrain from interfering if the local institutions worked satisfactorily.

LET'S EXPLORE



- → Observe the map of the trade routes. Identify geographical features that helped the traders travel across the Subcontinent.
- → What modes of transport on those roads do you think were available at the time?

The Rise of Magadha

The period between the 6th and the 4th century BCE was one of profound change in north India. We briefly visited the sixteen *mahājanapadas* earlier — those large kingdoms of north and central India with their assembly system. One of them, Magadha (modern-day south Bihar and some adjoining areas), rose in importance and set the stage for the fusion of many kingdoms into India's first empire. Powerful early kings, such as Ajātaśhatru, played a crucial role in establishing Magadha as a dominant centre of power.

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DON'T MISS OUT

Two of the most famed religious figures of the world—Siddhārtha Gautama, who became known as the Buddha, and Vardhamānan, better known as Mahāvīra—lived in the time of King Ajātaśhatru. Revisit their teachings in the Grade 6 textbook's 'India's Cultural Roots' chapter.

Magadha was located in the resource-rich Ganga plains, with fertile land, abundant forests for timber, and elephants. Also, remember how the use of iron transformed other technologies, such as agriculture and warfare. Iron ore and other minerals from the nearby hilly regions proved crucial for the expansion of the kingdom. The use of iron ploughs to till the land increased agricultural produce, and lighter and sharper iron weapons strengthened the capabilities of the army.



Fig. 5.6. An elaborate panel from the Sanchi Stūpa depicting soldiers riding elephants, horses, or on foot, waging battle and laying siege to Kusinārā (today Kushinagar), a city of north India, to recover relics of the Buddha (seen carried away on an elephant in the left part of the panel).

LET'S EXPLORE

→ Take a close look at the panel given above. How many types of weapons can you identify? What different uses of iron can you make out?

→ In the left part of the panel, a parasol (*chhattra)* is kept over the casket containing the Buddha's relics. Why do you think this was done?

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The production of surplus food grains allowed more people to focus on the arts and crafts, which were in demand inside and outside the empire's borders. The Ganga and Son rivers provided a geographical advantage for trade, as they could be used for transportation. The flourishing trade boosted the empire's income and contributed to Magadha's rise.



Fig. 5.7. A punch-marked silver coin of Mahāpadma Nanda

Around the 5th century BCE, Mahāpadma Nanda rose to prominence in Magadha and founded the Nanda dynasty. He successfully unified many smaller kingdoms and extended his empire across parts of eastern and northern India. As the economy thrived, he began issuing coins, demonstrating his economic power. We also learn from Greek accounts that the Nanda dynasty maintained a large army.

From various accounts of the Nanda dynasty, it appears that its last emperor, Dhana Nanda, though very rich, became highly unpopular as he oppressed and exploited his people. This paved the way for the Nanda empire to be conquered and absorbed into what would become one of the largest empires India ever knew — the Maurya empire.

Sūtras: Sutras are concise, carefully crafted phrases that capture knowledge and important ideas (from ancient Indian text) in a way that's easy to remember and pass on.

DON'T MISS OUT

The famed Sanskrit grammarian Pāṇini lived around the 5th century BCE, during the time of the Nandas. He is known for composing the *Aṣhṭādhyāyi*, an ancient text that lists the rules of Sanskrit grammar in 3,996 short ***sūtras.***



Fig. 5.8. An India post stamp commemorating Pāṇini

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The Arrival of the Greeks

While events unfolded in Magadha, located in the eastern part of the subcontinent, what was happening in the northwestern region? This area was home to smaller kingdoms along an ancient route connecting to the Mediterranean. Among them, according to Greek accounts, were the Pauravas, led by their king, Porus.

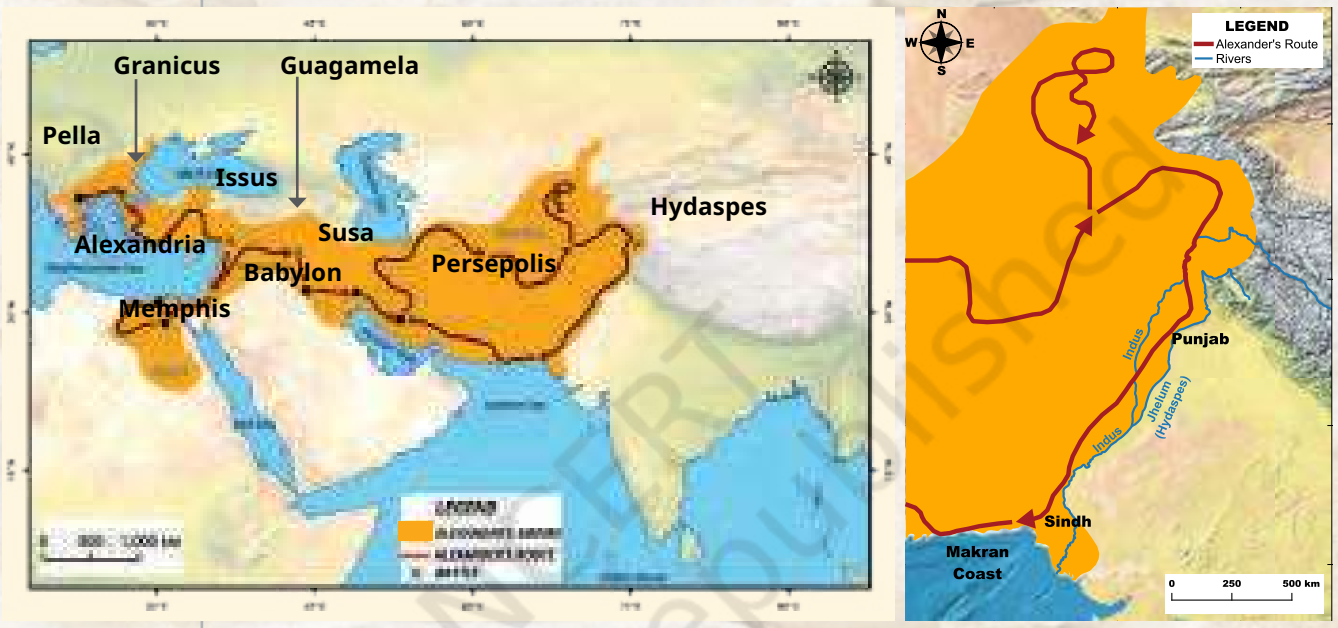


Fig. 5.9



Fig. 5.10



334–331 BCE:

Alexander, a young and powerful Greek king from Macedonia, campaigned against the Persian Empire to avenge earlier Persian invasions of Greece (during which some Indian soldiers from the Persian-ruled northwest of India fought against Greeks!). Alexander conquered the Persian Empire; the influence of Greek culture spread. His empire now spread over three continents, one of the largest in world history.

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DON'T MISS OUT

The **satraps** were governors of provinces of Persian and Greek empires who were left behind by the overlord (like Alexander) to manage the far-off territories. These satraps had significant power and freedom despite being mere officials of the rulers. Can you guess how it was possible for them to exercise such power?

THINK ABOUT IT

Why do you think Alexander wanted to rule over the entire world? What would he have gained from it?

LET'S EXPLORE

When, after the battle, Alexander asked Porus how he wished to be treated, Porus answered, "Like a King." Alexander then left Porus at the head of his kingdom, as satrap. With the help of your teachers, find more details on the battle between Porus and Alexander. Enact a play of this battle scene using your imagination in addition to what you have discovered.



327–325 BCE

Eager to reach the "end of the world", Alexander pushed on further east and brought his campaign to India, defeated Porus in Punjab and, encountering fierce resistance from local tribes and rulers, massacred the population of several cities. Greek records mention that in a few battles, "women fought side by side with their men." Alexander himself was seriously wounded in a battle. Tired and homesick, his soldiers lost the will to fight and refused to move deeper into India, towards the Ganga River. Alexander and part of his army retreated to Persia, but through the coastal route in the south and Iran's harsh desert regions, resulting in heavy losses to his troops out of thirst, hunger and disease.

324–323 BCE

Back in Persia, Alexander faced rebellions and political turmoil. After he fell ill and died in Babylon at the age of 32, his immense empire was soon divided between his generals and the satraps, who created their own kingdoms.



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Alexander's dialogue with the Gymnosophists

Alexander heard of a group of Indian sages whom the Greeks called 'Gymnosophists' or 'naked philosophers' (probably because they wore very little clothing), who were renowned for their wisdom. Alexander challenged them with tricky questions in the form of riddles, warning that he would put those who gave wrong answers to death. However, the Gymnosophists responded to his questions calmly and intelligently. Alexander was impressed and, in the end, spared them all. Over the centuries, different versions of this story have been told, making it one of the most fascinating encounters in history!



Fig. 5.11. A Greek coin probably showing Alexander on horseback attacking Porus on his elephant.

According to one account, Alexander asked, "Which is stronger, life or death?" One of the sages replied, "Life, because it endures while death does not." Alexander then asked, "How can a man be most loved?" "If he is most powerful and yet does not inspire fear," came the reply, perhaps as a hint to the mighty ruler!

Historians view such exchanges as a meeting of two great traditions — Greek and Indian philosophies.



The Mighty Mauryas

After that brief sojourn to the northwest, let us return to Magadha, where we witnessed the decline of the Nanda empire. Around 321 BCE, just a few years after Alexander left India with his army, a new dynasty and new empire emerged: the Maurya Empire founded by Chandragupta Maurya. It quickly absorbed the Nanda empire's territories and went on expanding beyond.

As per many accounts, Chandragupta managed this feat with the help of an able mentor named Kauṭilya, who used his knowledge of politics, governance and economics to create an empire that remains one of the greatest in Indian history.

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The story of Kauṭilya

According to Buddhist texts, Kauṭilya—sometimes referred to as Chāṇakya or Viṣhnugupta—was a teacher at the world-renowned Takṣhaśhila (modern-day Taxila) university. His legendary tale begins in the court of Dhana Nanda, who as we saw, had become highly unpopular.

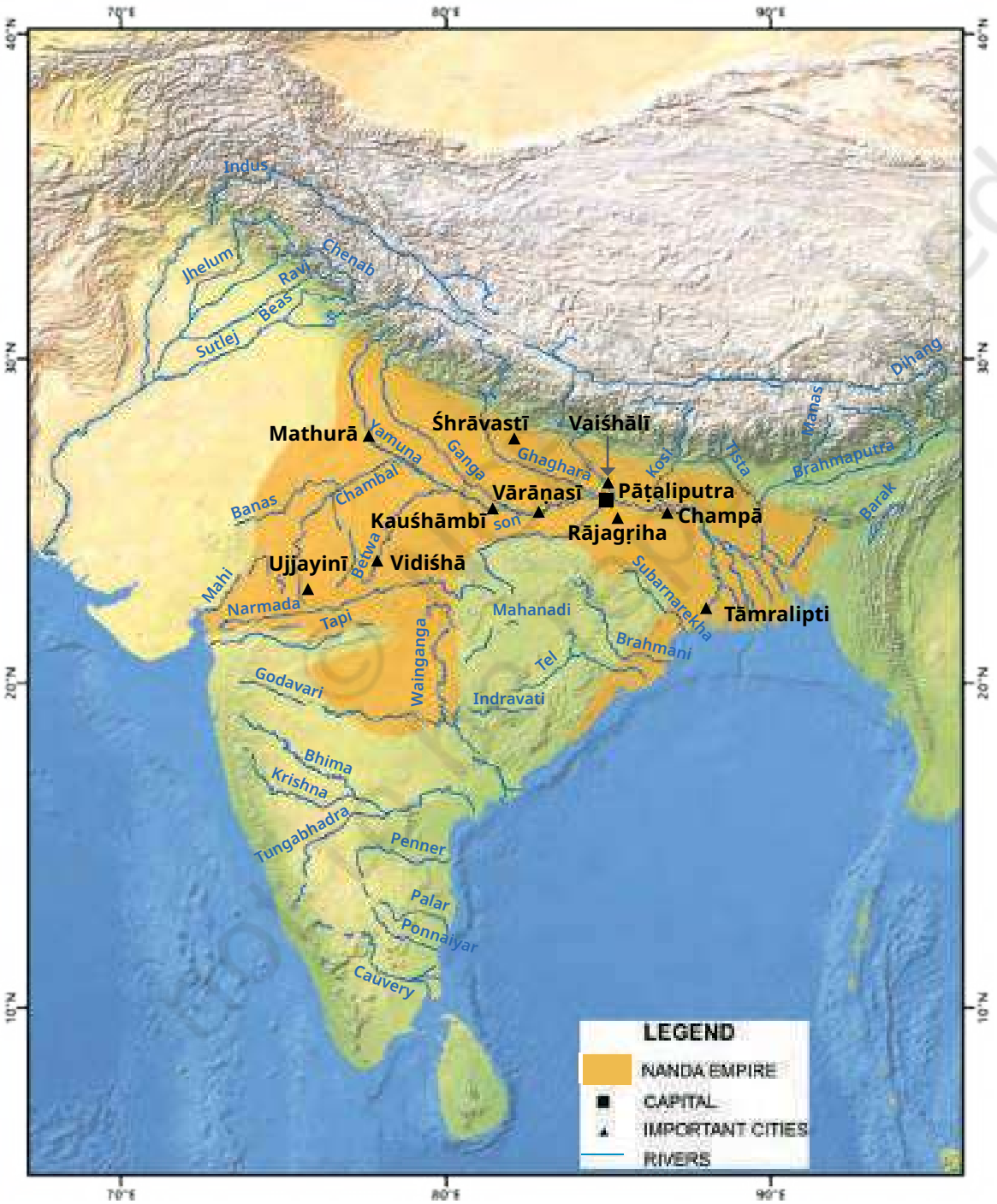


Fig. 5.12. Nanda Empire



Fig. 5.13. Maurya Empire

Observing this, Kauṭilya advised Dhana Nanda to change his ways or witness the collapse of his empire. Angered, Dhana Nanda insulted Kauṭilya and threw him out of his court. This led to Kauṭilya's vow to end the 'evil Nanda' rule.

The rise of Chandragupta Maurya

There are many stories about the origin and adventures of Chandragupta Maurya, but their common theme is that he

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Fig. 5.14. Megasthenes in the court of Chandragupta Maurya (A 20th-century painting by Asit Kumar Haldar)

overthrew the Nandas and took control of Magadha to establish his rule, with Pāṭaliputra as his capital. Do you remember that Magadha had many advantages because of its geography, an established economic system and a flourishing trade? These, combined with the advice of the master strategist, Kauṭilya, helped Chandragupta Maurya gradually expand his empire. He defeated the Greek satraps left behind by Alexander in the northwest and integrated the region into an empire that stretched from the northern plains to the Deccan plateau.

After Chandragupta Maurya defeated the Greeks, he maintained a diplomatic relationship with them and hosted in his court a Greek historian and diplomat, Megasthenes, who wrote about his travels in India in his book *Indika* — the first such written account — unfortunately lost except for some excerpts quoted by later Greek scholars.

Kauṭilya's concept of a kingdom

Kauṭilya had a clear vision of how a kingdom *(rājya)* should be established, managed and consolidated. In his famous work *Arthaśhāstra* (literally, 'the science of governance and economics'), he listed directives in many areas like defence,

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Kauṭilya's Saptānga



the king (*swāmi*)



[the group of] councillors, ministers and other high officials (*amātya*)



the territory of the state along with the population inhabiting it (*janapada*)



the fortified towns and cities (*durga*)



the treasury or the wealth of the kingdom (*koṣha*)



the forces of defence and law and order (*daṇḍa*), and



the allies (*mitra*)

Fig. 5.15

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economics, administration, justice, urban planning, agriculture and people's welfare. One of his most important political concepts is the *saptānga* (see fig 5.15) or the seven parts that constitute a kingdom.

According to Kauṭilya, the *saptānga* together must create a settled, well-protected, and prosperous kingdom to be maintained both through warfare and through alliances for peace, as the case may be. He emphasised the importance of law and order in society, which necessitated a strong administration. He also detailed many laws to deal with corruption and specified punishments for any activities that went against the wellbeing of the people.

THINK ABOUT IT

- Kauṭilya says, "A king shall increase his power by promoting the welfare of his people, for power comes from the countryside which is the source of all economic activity. [The king] shall show special favours to those in the countryside who do things which benefit the people, such as building embankments or road bridges, beautifying villages, or helping to protect them."
- Why do you think it was important to take special care of the countryside? (*Hint: Think back to what you have learnt at the beginning of this chapter*)

Kauṭilya's central philosophy of governance is in tune with Indian values: "In the happiness of his subjects lies the king's happiness; in their welfare his welfare. He shall not consider as good only that which pleases him but treat as beneficial to him whatever pleases his subjects." In other words, however powerful a king may be, he must give first place to the people's interests.

LET'S EXPLORE

Organise a group discussion in your class and compare the features of Kauṭilya's idea of an empire with a modern nation.

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The King Who Chose Peace



Fig. 5.16. Aśhoka visiting the Ramagrama stūpa in Nepal (from a panel at the Sānchi stūpa)

Another king of the Maurya dynasty was Aśhoka (268–232 BCE), Chandragupta's grandson, who came to be credited with major administrative and religious achievements.

At the beginning of his reign, Aśhoka was quite ambitious. He had inherited a vast empire but further expanded it to cover almost the entirety of the Indian subcontinent, except for the southernmost region, but including present-day Bangladesh and Pakistan and parts of present-day Afghanistan. One encounter, however, is said to have changed the path of his life. According to one of his **edicts** he once marched on Kalinga (modern-day Odisha), where he waged a ferocious war. Seeing the enormous amount of death and destruction on the battlefield, Aśhoka chose to give up violence and, to the greatest extent possible, adopt the path of peace and non-violence that the Buddha taught.

Edict: An official declaration issued by authorities or, in our case, a king.

THINK ABOUT IT

Aśhoka, in his edicts, tells the story of the Kalinga war. He could have chosen not to mention it and maintain his image as a peaceful, benevolent king for future generations. Why do you think he admitted to this destructive war?

Embracing Buddhist teachings, Aśhoka sent **emissaries** to Sri Lanka, Thailand, Central Asia and beyond to spread the message of the Buddha far and wide.

Emissary: Someone sent on a special mission, often of a diplomatic nature.

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Historians have sometimes called Aśhoka a 'great communicator' since he issued in many parts of his empire edicts engraved on rocks or pillars that contained his messages for the people and encouraged them to follow dharma. Most of these edicts were inscribed in Prakrit, which was the popular language in many parts of India and written in the Brahmi script (Brahmi is the mother of all regional scripts of India).

We have referred to the Prakrit language written in Brahmi script. What does this mean? Very simply, a language is what we speak, while script is what we write a language in. Can you think of examples of this in our everyday life?



Fig. 5.17. A few of the many Aśhokan edicts across the Subcontinent

In his edicts, Aśhoka called himself 'Devanampiya Piyadasi'; the first word means 'Beloved of the Gods'; the second, 'one who regards others with kindness'. And indeed, the language of the edicts makes it clear that he was interested in depicting himself as a benevolent and compassionate ruler. Let us see a few examples of this.

Although some southern kingdoms were not part of the Mauryan kingdom, Aśhoka supported their overall wellbeing. He claimed to provide medical care for people and animals even beyond his



Fig. 5.18. (Left) A reproduction of a part of Aśhoka's rock edict at Girnar, Gujarat. (Right) Detail of the Topra Aśhokan pillar at Feroz Shah Kotla, Delhi

empire, prohibited hunting and cruelty to animals, and ordered medical treatment for them when necessary. If so, Aśhoka was an early contributor to nature conservation and wildlife preservation. He said he had established rest houses and wells at regular intervals along the main roads of his empire and got fruit and shade trees planted. He also claimed to encourage all sects (the different schools of thought present in his time) to accept each other's best teachings and study them.

Although we need not take all of Aśhoka's claims literally, it is clear that in line with Kauṭilya's philosophy of governance, he paid attention to the welfare of his subjects and made efforts to reach out to them.

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DON'T MISS OUT

You read about the word 'dharma' *(dhamma* in Prakrit) in Grade 6. Its essence cannot be easily captured. In simple terms, dharma means moral law or someone's religious or ethical duties towards family, community or country. At a deeper level, however, dharma extends to living according to the order of the universe or *ṛitam.* This includes doing one's duty truthfully, following rules of righteous conduct and leading a life in harmony with the cosmic order. Dharma is, therefore, duty, law, truth, order and ethics—all of it together!

LET'S EXPLORE



Aśhoka details instructions on the conduct of his officials and mentions ways to ensure that they practised fairness in one of his edicts. Read the translation below and share your thoughts on whether those ways would have been successful in helping manage his empire and how.

"By order of the Beloved of the Gods—the officers and city magistrates [...] are to be instructed thus:

[...] You are in charge of many thousands of living beings. You should gain the affection of men. All men are my children, and just as I desire for my children that they should obtain welfare and happiness both in this world and the next, the same do I desire for all men. [...] You should strive to practice impartiality. [...] The root of all this is to be even-tempered and not rash in your work. [...] This inscription has been engraved here in order that the city magistrates should at all times see to it that men are never imprisoned or tortured without good reason. [...] And for this purpose, I shall send out on tour every five years, an officer who is not severe or harsh; who, having investigated this matter..., shall see that they carry out my instructions."

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The Maurya empire continued for half a century after Aśhoka's death. However, his successors were unable to hold the empire together, and many of the smaller kingdoms broke off and became independent. Around 185 BCE, India started on another phase of her journey. Bhavisha and Dhruv will join us on this journey in the next chapter.

Life in the Mauryan period

Cities like Pāṭaliputra were bustling centres of governance and commerce. They had palaces, public buildings, and well-planned streets. With a well-organised taxation system and brisk trade, the treasury remained strong, fuelling the empire's growth and prosperity. Officials of the administration of the empire, merchants and artisans played key roles in the city life.

DON'T MISS OUT



Fig. 5.19

The Sohagaura copper plate inscription, dating back to the 4th–3rd century BCE, is one of India's earliest known administrative records. Discovered in Sohgaura, Uttar Pradesh, it is written in Prakrit using the Brahmi script and is believed to have been issued during the reign of Chandragupta Maurya. The inscription mentions the establishment of a granary to store grain as a precaution against famines, highlighting the state's efforts to ensure food security and support its people during times of crisis.

Megasthenes' account also throws some light on the society of that time. A substantial proportion of the population was engaged in agriculture, which was an important source of revenue for the empire. Two crops were sown in a year, as rain fell in both summer and winter. This ensured that famines were

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rare and people had ample food. Granaries were well stocked for any eventualities. Even if war raged nearby, farmers were protected from it, and agriculture was not disturbed.

Blacksmiths, potters, carpenters, jewellers and other artisans lived in the cities. The cities were well-planned and had signage on the streets. Communication happened through couriers who carried messages from place to place. The houses were made of wood and could be up to two storeys tall. The streets had vessels of water stored at regular intervals in case of fire.

Later accounts describe the cotton dresses people wore — a lower garment that reached below the knee halfway down to the ankles and an upper garment that they threw over their shoulders. Some wore leather shoes with designs and thick soles to make them look taller.

LET'S EXPLORE

Wear the hat of a historian. Look carefully at the artefacts presented on the spread on the next page. What conclusions can you draw about people and life during the Mauryan era?

Fig. 5.20 has many messages for us, apart from the beauty and perfection of the sculpture, and is a fine example of Mauryan art. This capital (a word which, here, means 'top portion' or 'head') was the top of a pillar that Aśhoka got erected at Sarnath, near Varanasi, where the Buddha gave his first teaching. The four lions symbolise the royal power; on the ring below, four powerful animals (an elephant, a bull, a horse and one more lion) are depicted, along with the *dharmachakra* or wheel of dharma, which symbolises the Buddha's teachings.



Fig. 5.20. The Mauryas were renowned for their highly polished stone pillars, as can be seen in this capital of the Sarnath pillar.

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Some Contributions of the Mauryas
Life and people



Fig. 5.21. Terracotta figurine of a dancing girl (notice her elaborate headdress, hairstyle and jewellery).



Fig. 5.22. Terracotta figurine of a female deity.



Fig. 5.23. Female deity (yakshī) holding a fly whisk.



Fig. 5.24. Terracotta of Saptamātrikās or seven mother goddesses (a continuing tradition).



Fig. 5.25. Head of a terracotta horse (notice the elaborate design of the bridle).

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Art and architecture



Fig. 5.26. As one of India's oldest stone structures, the Great Stūpa at Sanchi is among the finest examples of Indian architecture. Note that the original structure was made of bricks and was later enlarged using stone. Aśhoka is said to have constructed many such stūpas, chaityas, and vihāras for worship, study, and meditation.



Fig. 5.27. Rock sculpture of a life-size elephant at Dhauli (in present-day Odisha, near Bhubaneswar), which symbolises the Buddha — intelligent, powerful, patient, and calm. An edict of Aśhoka was engraved on a rock nearby.

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Fig. 5.28

This image may be familiar to some of you. Indeed, this capital was chosen as India's national emblem, to which was added the Sanskrit motto *satyameva jayate* or "truth alone triumphs" (see the national emblem on the left). Besides, the *dharmachakra* is depicted at the centre of our national flag, as you may also have noticed. The motto comes from the Muṇḍaka Upaniṣhad; in full, it reads *satyameva jayate nānṛitam*, that is, "truth alone triumphs, not falsehood".



LET'S EXPLORE

Notice the different symbols on the coins. Can you guess what any of the symbols in the coins below might mean?





Fig. 5.29.1. A hoard of Mauryan punch-marked coins,
Fig. 5.29.2. A punch-marked coin of Aśhoka



DON'T MISS OUT

The big, round hemispherical structure in the centre of the stūpa is called the aṇḍa. It represents the universe and is often built to house sacred relics. People walk around it in a circle as a form of worship *(pradakṣhiṇa).*

The Fragile Nature of Empires

You will hear in higher grades about past mighty empires elsewhere in the world, such as the Roman, the Persian, the Ottoman, the Spanish, the Russian, the British empires, and so on. All of them are long gone, but historians keep debating the causes of their decline.

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One of those causes, as we saw, is the temptation for some of the empire's regions to try and become independent. This could happen if, for example, the emperor needed more resources for long military campaigns or in times of drought; local rulers would be burdened with increasing demands for tribute, leading to resentment. Or if a powerful emperor was followed by one perceived to be weak, local kings or chieftains might simply decide to take a chance and stop paying tribute. Also, the larger an empire, the more difficult it is to hold it together, as Alexander experienced; far-off territories are often the first to split away from the empire. Finally, economic crises caused by natural calamities (such as a long drought or floods) could also shake an empire's structure.

Empires are, therefore, something of a paradox. On the one hand, they can bring about political unity, as the Mauryan empire did to almost the entire Subcontinent, and reduce or eliminate warfare among the smaller kingdoms — indeed, a well-managed empire could lead to greater prosperity than smaller, warring kingdoms. On the other hand, empires have almost always been established through war and have maintained their existence

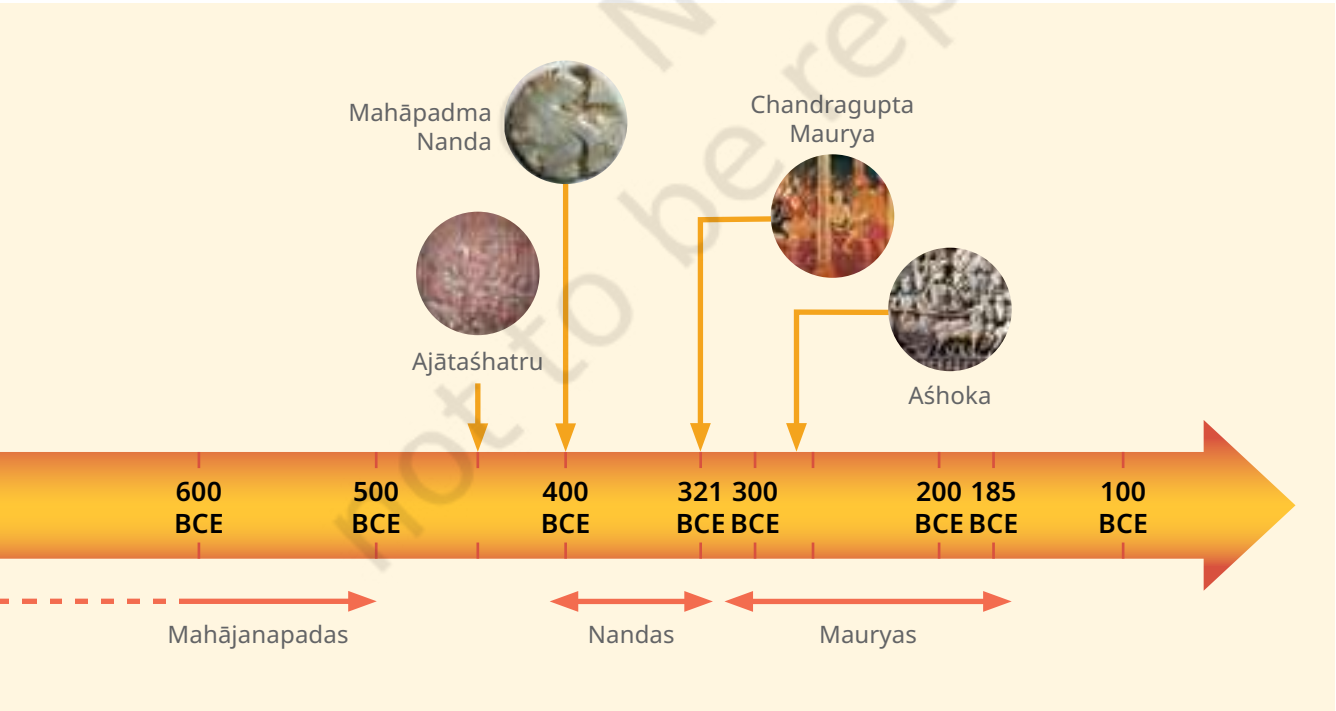


Fig. 5.30

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through force and repression. This makes them fragile at their core and unstable over time.



Before we move on ...

- An empire is a large territory made up of many smaller kingdoms or territories. Emperors expanded their kingdoms mostly to gain fame, amass power, including military power, and control resources and economic life.
- The first empires of India emerged in regions blessed with abundant natural resources, rivers for irrigation and transport, and the production of a variety of goods for trade.
- Alexander's campaign in northwest India had a limited political impact but opened the door for Indo-Greek cultural contacts.
- The Mauryas created a vast empire with a legacy that lasted centuries. Their legacy includes strengthening trade routes and economic systems, extensive use of coins for trade, well-designed urban settlements, and an elaborate system of administration. They also promoted art and architecture.
- Aśhoka was keen to advertise his achievements and project the image of a benevolent ruler who encouraged his subjects to follow dharma.

Questions and activities

1. What are the features of an empire, and how is it different from a kingdom? Explain.
2. What are some important factors for the transition from kingdoms to empires?
3. Alexander is considered an important king in the history of the world —why do you think that is so?
4. In early Indian history, the Mauryas are considered important. State your reasons.
5. What were some of Kauṭilya's key ideas? Which ones of these can you observe even today in the world around us?

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6. What were the unusual things about Aśhoka and his empire? What of that has continued to influence India and why? Write your opinion in about 250 words.
7. *Thus speaks the Beloved of the Gods, the king Piyadasi: My officers of Dhamma are busy in many matters of public benefit, they are busy among members of all sects, both ascetics and householders. I have appointed some to concern themselves with the Buddhist Order, with brahmans and Ājīvika..., with the Jains..., and with various sects. There are many categories of officers with a variety of duties, but my officers of Dhamma are busy with the affairs of these and other sects.*

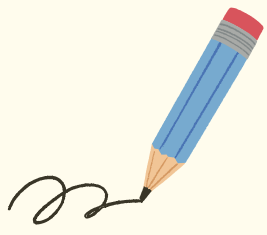
   After reading the above edict of Aśhoka, do you think he was tolerant towards other religious beliefs and schools of thought? Share your opinion in the classroom.
8. The Brahmi script was a writing system that was widely used in ancient India. Try to learn more about this script, taking help from your teacher wherever required. Create a small project and include what you have learnt about Brahmi.
9. Suppose you had to travel from Kauśhāmbī to Kāveripattanam in the 3rd century BCE. How would you undertake this journey, and how long would you expect it to take, with reasonable halts on the way?

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Noodles

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*'Noodles' is our abbreviation for 'Notes and Doodles'!



CHAPTER 6

The Age of Reorganisation

By continuous living tradition and a vital power of rejuvenescence, this land has readjusted itself through unnumbered transformations.

— Jagdish Chandra Bose (1917)

Fig. 6.1.1. A glimpse of the art from the age of reorganisation



The Big Questions

1. *Why is the period that followed the Maurya empire sometimes called the 'Age of Reorganisation'?*
2. *What were the values or principles that guided emperors of that period?*
3. *How did foreign invaders assimilate into Indian society and contribute to cultural confluence?*

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Bhavisha and Dhruv had recovered from their journey to the Maurya empire and were itching for another adventure. They decide to use Itihāsa again and landed in a new historical period. They came across a collection of art pieces, each one quite different from the other. (See Fig. 6.1.1) They wondered—could these artefacts belong to multiple kingdoms rather than just one? They guessed right. In this chapter we will travel over a fairly long period. Here we go...



Fig. 6.1.2.

Very little is known about Aśhoka's successors to the throne. It is generally accepted, however, that the last Maurya emperor was assassinated around 185 BCE by his commander-in-chief Puṣhyamitra Śhunga. This led to a breakup of the empire—hardly half a century after Aśhoka, as we mentioned in the last chapter. Many new kingdoms emerged across the subcontinent, which, often, were earlier tributary kingdoms under the overlordship of the Maurya empire. The northwest region became weak, exposing it to invasions from outside the subcontinent.

This period is also known as the 'age of reorganisation' by some scholars as the existing regions were being reorganised into new kingdoms that were constantly competing to become powerful. The map of India changed significantly in that age, as did people's lives.



LET'S EXPLORE

Create a timeline on a sheet of paper marking the period from the first year of the 2nd century BCE and ending in the last year of the 3rd century CE. How many years does this period cover? As we progress through the chapter, mark the key individuals, kingdoms and events on the timeline.

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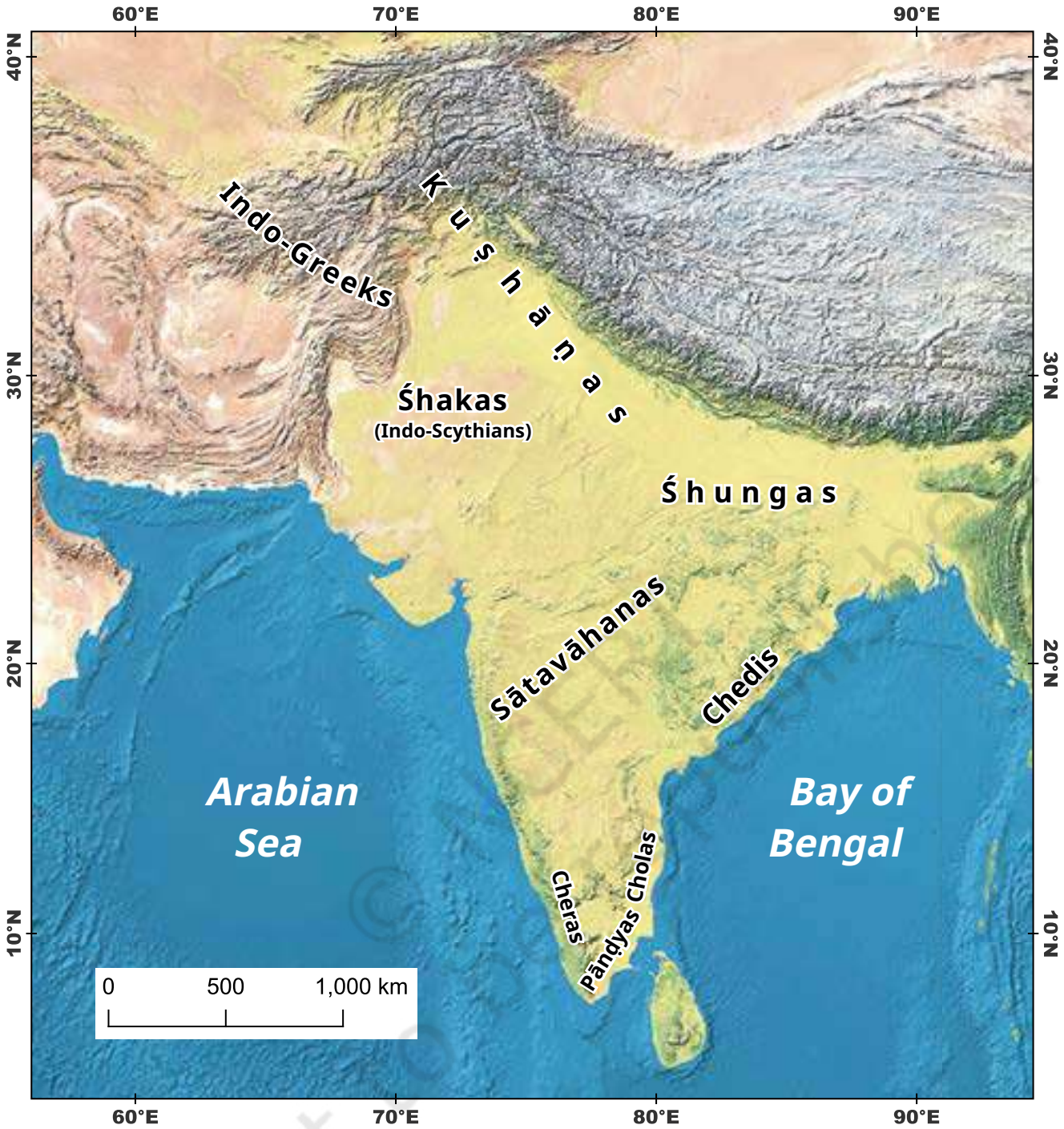


Fig. 6.2. Prominent dynasties of India during the age of reorganisation

LET'S REMEMBER

While working on the timeline, did you notice the transition from BCE to CE? Remember what you learned in the Grade 6 chapter 'Timeline and Sources of History' about how time is measured in history.

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Matrimonial alliance : An alliance arranged through a marriage, generally between two members of royal families. In practice, this would often mean a king offering his daughter for marriage into the royal family of a neighbouring kingdom, with the intention of cementing an alliance between the two kingdoms.

LET'S EXPLORE

In the previous chapter, you studied the map of the Maurya empire (see page 100). Above is a map of the post-Maurya period. How many kingdoms can you count in the area that were previously under the control of the Maurya empire?



The 'new' kingdoms now competed for territorial control. Peaceful methods like **matrimonial alliances** between neighbouring kingdoms, or the use of force in warfare, were means of gaining control. Remember that there was constant wrestling for control over areas along the borders, as gaining control over them was important to keep the kingdom safe from attacks.

Together with those political events, there was a burst in the development of art, architecture and literature, and enriching cultural exchanges. We will get a peek into this in the following sections.

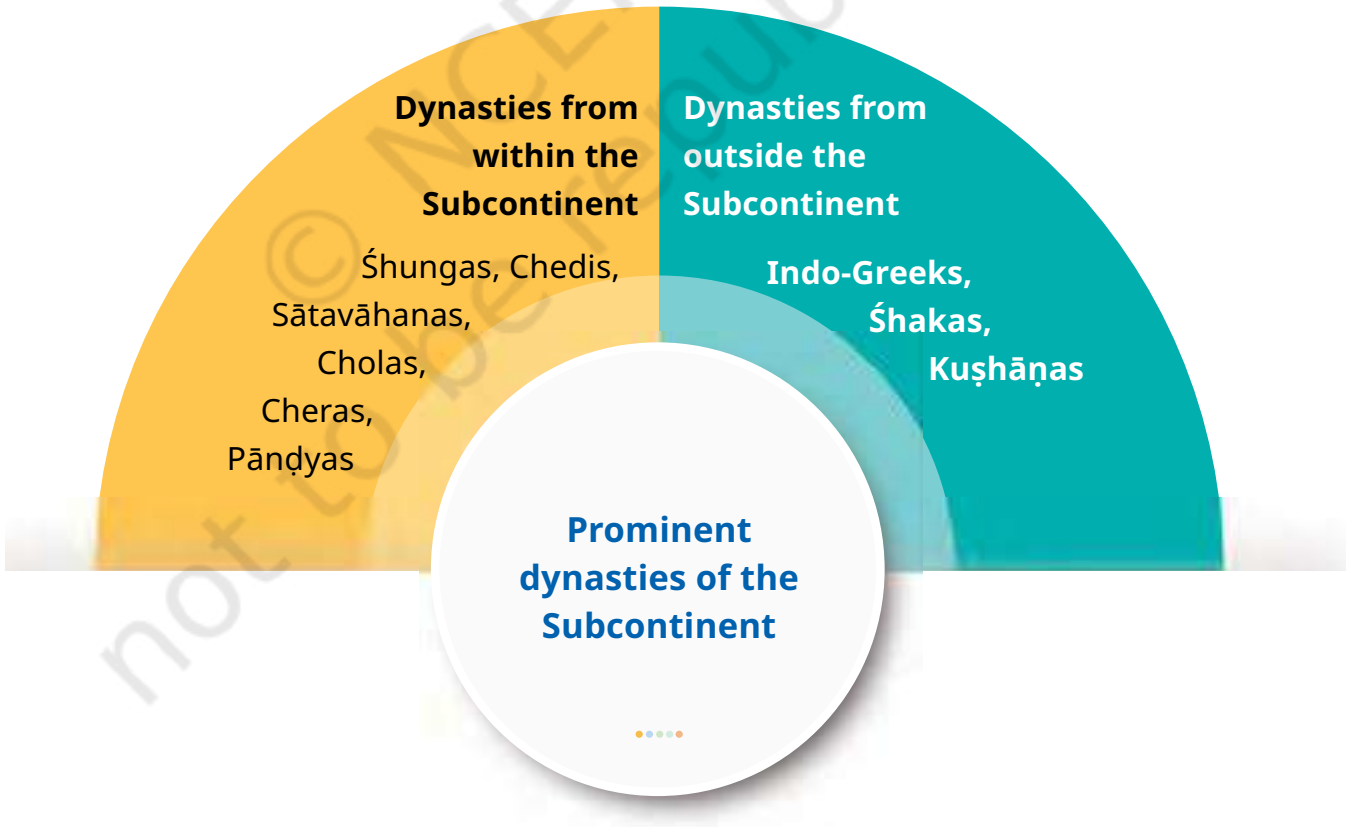


Fig. 6.3

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Surge of the Śhungas

Puṣhyamitra Śhunga founded the Śhunga dynasty, which ruled over parts of north and central India. He performed the *aśhvamedha yajña*, a Vedic ritual, to establish himself as a most powerful ruler. Although his empire was smaller than the previous Maurya Empire (compare their two maps), he kept it safe from potential invaders and maintained friendly relations with the Greeks, after some initial military campaign against them. But, again, the empire did not last long after him — a century later, it was gone.

The period witnessed the revival of Vedic rituals and practices, but other schools of thought nevertheless continued to flourish.

DON'T MISS OUT



Fig. 6.4. Scene from the Rāmāyaṇa in which King Rāma is seen performing the aśhvamedha yajña (19th century painting, National Museum)

The *aśhvamedha yajña* was a Vedic ritual conducted by many rulers to declare their position as the king. In this ritual, a horse accompanied by soldiers was left to wander freely. Any territory that the horse crossed unchallenged was considered to become a part of the king's empire. If any ruler stopped the horse, it led to a battle to determine supremacy.

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Sanskrit emerged as one of the preferred languages for philosophical and literary works. Do you recall some aspects of the *Yoga Sūtras* in your Physical Education and Well-being classes in Grade 6? These *Yoga Sūtras* were compiled by Patañjali during this period.

The Śhungas patronised literature, art and architecture. The Bharhut Stūpa (in present-day Madhya Pradesh) presents us with beautiful examples of Śhunga art. It was probably built during the time of Ashoka, but the Śhungas added beautifully carved railings and reliefs depicting stories from the Buddha's life. These are considered some of the earliest examples of Buddhist art.



Fig.6.5.1. Railings at the Bharhut Stūpa. Fig. 6.5.2. Carving of Lakshmi on a railing. Fig. 6.5.3. A group of singers and dancers. 6.5.4. Elephants holding up the wheel of dharma

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Some Śhunga Contribution to Art



Fig. 6.6.1. Pillar with a Greek warrior. Fig. 6.6.2. Male figure. Fig. 6.6.3. Woman with a child. Fig. 6.6.4. Woman with a fan. Fig. 6.6.5. A vase. Fig. 6.6.6. Female figure with hair ornaments, terracotta. Fig. 6.6.7. Royal family. Fig. 6.6.8. Bronze bangles covered with a thin layer of gold. Fig. 6.6.9. Comb of ivory. Fig. 6.6.10. Beads of a necklace.

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LET'S EXPLORE

Below is a panel from the Bharhut Stūpa. Look at the two figures on the right. What are they doing? Can you guess their profession? Notice their attire. What does this tell us about them? List other details that you notice in the panel and discuss your findings in class.



Fig. 6.7. A panel from the Bharhut Stūpa



LET'S EXPLORE

Look closely at the pictures in the collage in Fig 6.6 (on the previous page). In a note, write down your observations on the clothes, the jewellery, and other objects of daily use.

The Sātavāhanas

From the limited evidence available, the Śhungas seem to have waged wars with many of their neighbouring regions. This may have included the Sātavāhanas, who ruled large parts of the Deccan from the 2nd century BCE onward, to the south of the Śhunga Empire. Sometimes referred to as 'Andhras', the Sātavāhanas were a powerful dynasty and their empire largely comprised of present-day Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Maharashtra, with different capital cities at different times — the most famous were Amrāvatī and Pratiṣhṭhāna (Paithan). Trade and commerce appear to have flourished in the Sātavāhana kingdom.

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Coins issued by the Sātavāhana rulers have been found in various regions of India, from Gujarat to Andhra Pradesh — India's western and eastern coasts. Indeed, many coins depicted ships, suggesting that maritime trade was an important part of economic life. The type of ship depicted on the coin above suggests advanced shipbuilding and navigation technologies.



Fig. 6.8. A Sātavāhana coin bearing the image of a seafaring ship with two masts. Notice how the masts of the ship are prominently depicted with intersecting lines, possibly representing sails; the wavy lines below represent oceanic waters.

Agriculture flourished in the Krishna-Godavari river system, which provided economic stability to the kingdom. The Sātavāhanas had active trade networks that reached as far as the Roman Empire and included an exchange of goods like spices, textiles, sandalwood, and luxury items like gold-plated pearls, ivory, etc. Imports included glass and perfumed ointments. Tolls and taxes on trade added revenue to the kingdom.

Economic prosperity and a relatively peaceful political period facilitated the development of literature, art and culture, to which the Sātavāhanas made significant contributions.



Fig. 6.9. The Naneghat Caves near Pune, located close to a major trade route, were used for collection of tolls and taxes, and as resting places for traders.

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Fig. 6.10. Coin of the Sātavāhanas with an inscription in Brahmi script, 'King Lord Sātakarṇi, son of Gautamī'.

Life under the Sātavāhanas

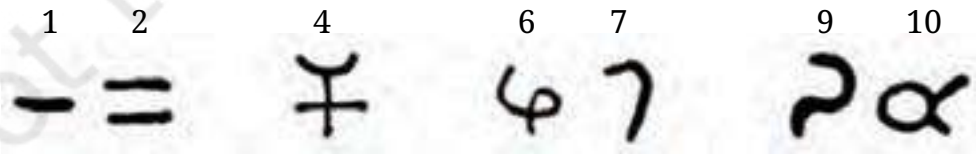
In the Sātavāhana tradition, princes were often named after their mothers. Thus Gautamīputra Sātakarṇi was named after his mother, Gautamī Balaśhrī. She was a powerful queen who donated land to Buddhist monks and had an important inscription carved in Nāśhik, showing her influence in the kingdom.

THINK ABOUT IT

What, according to you, could the tradition of using the mother's name at the beginning of a king's name signify?

Another set of inscriptions found in the Naneghat caves near Pune (Fig. 6.9) focuses on a Sātavāhana widow queen who, remarkably, performed several Vedic rituals, including the *aśhvamedha yajña*. The inscriptions mention Vedic gods like Indra, Chandra, and Sūrya. We also get a glimpse of the queen's donations (*dāna*): land, cows, horses, elephants, silver coins, and other items to priests, guests, workers, scholars, and monks.

These inscriptions are in the Brahmi script and include a few numerals (that is, symbols for numbers) which, at times, resemble today's shapes, as shown below. This is one of the many evidences showing that modern numerals ultimately originated in India.



THINK ABOUT IT

In the above series of numerals, which ones look somewhat like our modern numerals? Which ones don't?

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The Sātavāhanas were devout followers of Vāsudeva (another name for Kṛiṣhṇa), although they also patronised other schools of thought, which flourished during their rule. For instance, Sātavāhana kings often granted tax-free agricultural land to Vedic scholars, Jaina and Buddhist monks, helping them to pursue their studies and practices.

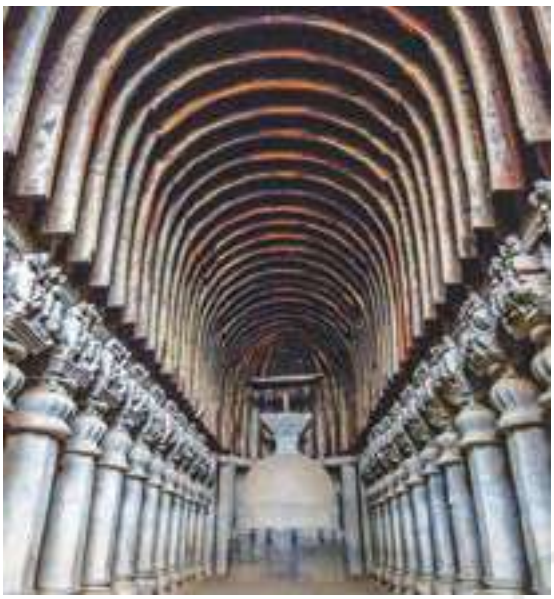


Fig. 6.11. The Karla caves (near Lonavala in present-day Maharashtra) to which the Sātavāhanas contributed during their reign. These caves were made for Buddhist monks. Notice the magnificent pillars and the stone replica of a stūpa in the centre — all of it carved out of a rocky hillside!



Fig. 6.12. A yakṣha (a minor deity associated with nature) from the Pitalkhora caves, Maharashtra, carved in the Sātavāhana period.

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THINK ABOUT IT

This sculpture of a *yakṣha* from Pitalkhora carries an inscription on its hand, *kanhadāsena hiramakarena kāṭa* meaning 'made by Kanahadasa, a goldsmith'. Is it not interesting to see that a goldsmith could also craft a sculpture made of stone? What do you think this tells us about people's professions at the time?

In the 3rd century CE, the Sātavāhana Empire fragmented into smaller independent kingdoms. Several factors contributed to its disintegration, the most significant one being weak central

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control and a gradual economic decline. Once again, this will pave the way for regional powers to assert or reassert their dominance and establish new kingdoms.

Coming of the Chedis

Let us go back a little. Do you remember the Kalinga war mentioned in the previous chapter? After the decline of the Maurya Empire, Kalinga rose as a prominent power under the kings of the Chedi dynasty.

Khāravela, one of their main rulers, was a devoted follower of Jain teachings; he was sometimes called *bhikṣhu-rāja* or monk-king, although he respected all schools of thoughts. Near Bhubaneswar, the famous Udayagiri-Khandagiri caves, likely developed for Jain monks, feature intricate panels and statues, and spacious rooms carved into the rock, showcasing the skill of the craftsmen. The design and craftsmanship of these caves make them notable examples of 'rock-cut architecture', a style of architecture that we will turn to in higher classes.



Fig. 6.13.1. Udayagiri caves near Bhubaneswar. Fig. 6.13.2. The Hāthīgumphā inscription. Fig. 6.13.3. Carved panel showing a scene from the Rāmāyaṇa

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One of the caves prominently displays the Hāthīgumphā inscription, written in Brahmi script, which records King Khāravela's accomplishments year after year, including his victorious military campaigns and his benevolent works for the welfare of his people. Khāravela also proudly declares that he created a 'council of ascetics and sages' from a hundred regions and is 'accomplished in extraordinary virtues, respector of every sect and repairer of every temple'. Once again, a ruler takes pride in extending his protection to all schools of thought. This is a fundamental part of what we may call the 'Indian ethos'.

THINK ABOUT IT

Notice the regularity of the rock-cut chambers sculpted nearly two millennia ago. How did artisans achieve such precision with just a chisel and a hammer? Picture yourself as a sculptor in that era, shaping stone into art with your own hands. What tools would you use?

Kingdoms and Life in the South

In India's southern region, this period, between the 2nd or 3rd century BCE and the 3rd century CE, saw the rise to prominence of three powerful kingdoms — the Cheras, the Cholas and the Pāṇḍyas — which often competed with each other for control over the South, while also contributing to the region's growth in trade and culture. Let's remember how Aśhoka's empire stopped at those south Indian kingdoms (which he mentions in his edicts), which suggests that they remained independent even at the height of Mauryan power. And although Khāravela claims that he defeated an alliance of south Indian kings that threatened his own territory, the location of that battle is unknown and he does not seem to have invaded the southern region.

THINK ABOUT IT

In the map given on next page, you may notice different symbols alongside the names of the kingdoms. What do these symbols represent? Think about how they highlight the unique identities of the kingdoms.

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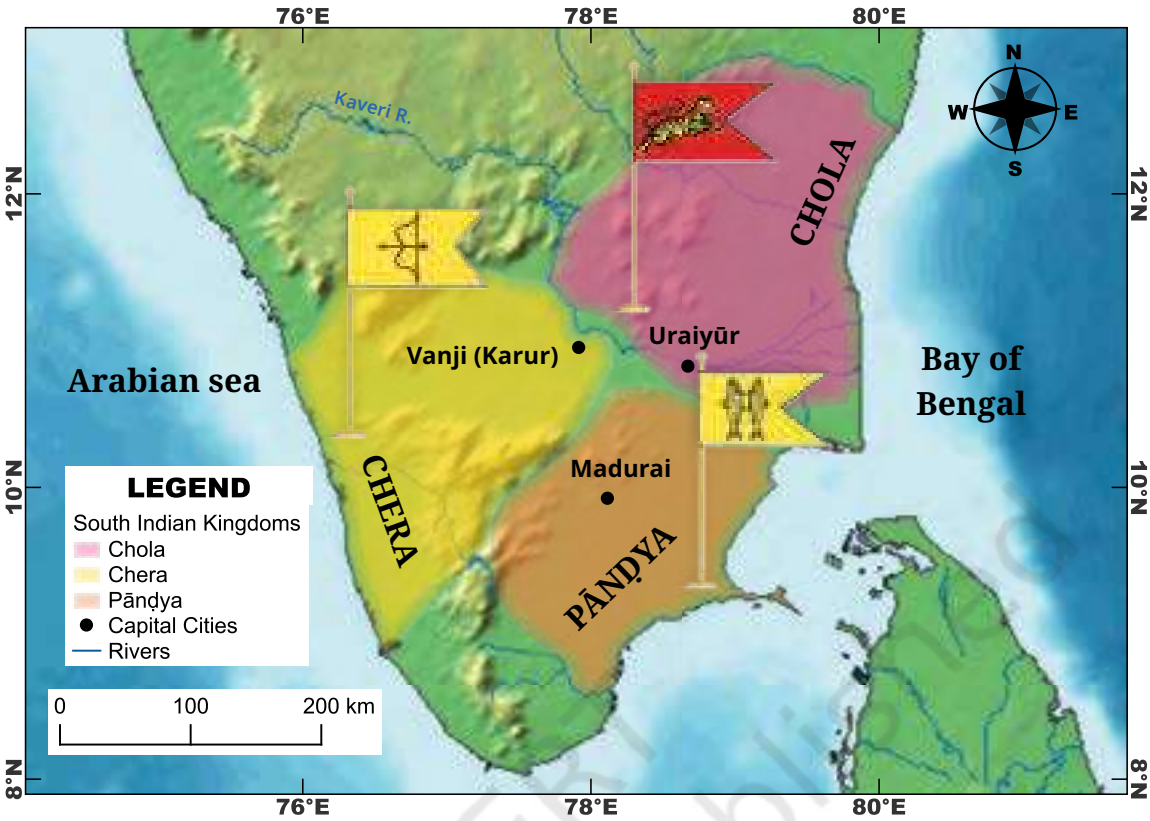


Fig. 6.14. Kingdoms in the South (note that borders are approximate and fluctuated in time).

That period saw the advent of many poets whose works, collectively known as 'Sangam literature', defined the entire era: it came to be known as the 'Sangam Age'. The word *sangam* is derived from the Sanskrit *sangha*, which translates to 'association' and 'coming together'—in this context, referring to an assembly of the poets. The Sangam literature, the oldest in south India, consists of several collections or anthologies of poems and is much consulted by historians who investigate the society and culture of the times. Primarily, Sangam poetry expresses with great skill and delicacy personal emotions such as love or societal values like heroism and generosity.

The Cholas

The Sangams refer to three 'crowned kings'—the Cholas, Cheras and Pāṇḍyas. The Cholas were a powerful dynasty that ruled parts of south India from the 3rd century BCE to the 13th century CE. The Chola king Karikāla is said to have defeated a combined force of the Cheras and Pāṇḍyas and established his supremacy.

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Silappadikāram: The Tale of the Anklet

This famous epic, composed soon after the Sangam collections, tells the story of Kaṇṇagi, who lived happily with her husband Kovalan in the prosperous Chola capital city of Puhār (identified with Kāveripattinam seen earlier). However, Kovalan fell in love with a dancer and eventually lost all his wealth over her. Realising his mistake, he returned to Kaṇṇagi, who forgave him. They then travelled to Madurai, the capital of the Pāṇḍya kingdom, hoping to rebuild their lives.



Fig. 6.15. Statue of Kaṇṇagi, Chennai

To start anew, Kaṇṇagi gave Kovalan one of her anklets to sell; however, he was falsely accused of theft and executed by the Pāṇḍya king. Devastated, Kaṇṇagi proved his innocence by revealing her second anklet. The king, realising his mistake, died of shock. Kaṇṇagi then cursed Madurai, invoking the god of fire who destroyed the city. She then walked further west to the Chera kingdom, where she was honoured as a goddess. Even today, Kaṇṇagi is worshipped in Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

Silappadikāram's exquisite poetry thus centres on the principles of justice and the ruler's dharma to protect it. It also takes us through cities rich in traded goods, through three kingdoms, and also through several schools of thought.

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THINK ABOUT IT



Observe the statue of the king. How is he depicted? What do his posture, clothing, and expression say about his power and status?

Fig. 6.16. Statue of King Karikāla at the Grand Anicut Memorial Park in Tamil Nadu

Karikāla undertook many projects for the benefit of the people. Among them is the Kallaṇai or Grand Anicut, a complex water diversion system located at a geographically strategic point just downstream of the Srirangam island. It helped to divert waters from the Kāveri to the central and southern parts of the Kāveri delta. This enabled more land to be brought under cultivation, earning this area the name 'rice bowl of the South'. Restored several times in the course of time, it is still in use and helps millions of people in Tamil Nadu by providing water for irrigation and thus supporting agriculture in the region.



Fig. 6.17. A view of the Kallaṇai or Grand Anicut

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The Cheras

Also known as the Keralaputra (sons of Kerala), the Cheras ruled over the western parts of Tamil Nadu and Kerala, with their capital at Vanji, present-day Karur in Tamil Nadu. They played an essential role in shaping the region's cultural and economic history, encouraging the growth of Tamil literature and patronising Sangam poets.

The Cheras were known for their extensive trade connections with the Roman Empire and West Asia, exporting many goods from India to the outside world. The kingdom became a hub for the export of spices, timber, ivory and pearls.

THINK ABOUT IT

Have you ever wondered how historians uncover the trade relations between two distant kingdoms many centuries ago? Let's take a moment to brainstorm and discuss how this information comes to light.

The Chera kings issued a number of coins under their reign. Do you notice the royal emblem of Cheras on one such coin given below?



Fig. 6.18. Coins under Chera Kings

The Pāṇḍyas

The Pāṇḍyas' rule over parts of Tamil Nadu and the surrounding regions, with their capital at present-day Madurai, goes back several centuries BCE. Successive kings expanded the Pāndyan kingdom. In his work *Indika*, Megasthenes mentions this kingdom as a prosperous one, with a strong administration and involved in active trade with distant powers like the Greeks and Romans, apart from much internal trade (Khāravela, for instance, states that he gets hundreds of pearls brought from the Pāṇḍya kingdom). The Pāṇḍyas were also an important naval power of the subcontinent. The later Pāṇḍyas also contributed greatly to the art, architecture, and overall prosperity of the region.

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THINK ABOUT IT

The Pāṇḍyas were known for their pearls. Why do you think pearls were an important article of trade during these times?

The Pāṇḍyas left many inscriptions in which their kings asserted their great concern for their subjects' welfare and their encouragements to all schools of thought and belief.

Invasions of the Indo-Greeks



Fig. 6.19. The Heliodorus pillar near Vidisha

Having completed our brief journey into south India, it is time to return to the north, where a very different kind of development is about to occur. So far, we have only visited a few native dynasties; yet the same period also witnessed the arrival of invaders who entered through the northwest frontier and took control of the northwestern, northern, and central regions of the Subcontinent.

Let us first examine the legacy of Alexander's brief campaign in the Indus plains. While retreating from the areas he had conquered, he left satraps behind. Over time, these regional rulers established their independent domains and came to be known as 'Indo-Greeks'.

After the decline of the Mauryas, the areas in the northwestern regions (roughly present-day Pakistan and Afghanistan) were an easy target for the Indo-Greeks. However, while they arrived as conquerors, they were much influenced by the rich local culture. This cultural interaction led to a blend of Greek and Indian elements in governance, art, language, and daily life, shaping the cultural landscape of the region.

The Heliodorus pillar, near Vidisha (Madhya Pradesh), is a notable example of such connections. It is named after an Indo-

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Greek ambassador, who in his inscription praises Vāsudeva as the 'god of gods'. The inscription also states, "Three immortal precepts (footsteps) [...] when practised lead to heaven: self-restraint, charity, consciousness."

During excavations in north India, archaeologists have found many Indo-Greeks coins, which have provided most of the information we have about these rulers. Those coins were made of gold, silver, copper and nickel often portraying a king on one side and Greek deities on the other. However, some coins, instead, depicted Indian deities like Vāsudeva-Kṛiṣhṇa and Lakṣhmī.

The rule of the Indo-Greeks ended with the invasions of the Indo-Scythians or Śhakas (see a little below).

LET'S EXPLORE

What do you think might have been the meaning of having deities like Vāsudeva-Kṛiṣhṇa or Lakṣhmī on some Indo-Greek coins?



Fig. 6.20. An Indo-Greek silver coin with Vāsudeva-Kṛiṣhṇa on one side



DON'T MISS OUT



Fig. 6.21. Notice how dates are provided in both the Gregorian and Śhaka Samvat eras on this official publication of the Government of India.

The Śhakas (sometimes called Indo-Scythians) also invaded the northwest of the Subcontinent and ruled from the latter part of the 2nd century BCE to the 5th century CE. Their kingdoms rose to power after the Indo-Greeks, and they were in power until the arrival of the Kuṣhāṇas (see below). It was during this period that the Śhaka Samvat calendar was developed. It is 78 years behind the Gregorian calendar (except from January–March, when it is behind by 79 years). It was adopted as the Indian National Calendar in 1957.

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The Emergence of the Kuṣhāṇas

The Kuṣhāṇas, originally from central Asia, entered India probably in the 2nd century CE. At its peak, their empire extended from central Asia to large parts of northern India. Their rule marked a period of extensive cultural intermixing and had a profound impact on the history of the Indian subcontinent.

When he was not busy with his military campaigns, Kaṇiṣhka encouraged art and culture, leading to the development of new artistic styles.



Fig. 6.22. Headless statue of King Kaṇiṣhka

LET'S EXPLORE

Carefully observe this massive statue (1.85 m high) and notice the clothing, weapon, and footwear. What does it tell us about this figure?

This famous 'headless' statue is of King Kaṇiṣhka, probably the most powerful ruler of the Kuṣhāṇa dynasty. The Brahmi inscription on the statue reads, '*mahārāja rājadhirāja devaputra kaṇiṣhka*', that is, 'The great king, king of kings, son of God, Kaṇiṣhka'.



LET'S EXPLORE

Observe the coins carefully. Who, besides the emperor, appears on the coin?



Fig. 6.23. Coins of Kaṇiṣhka

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On the first coin, Kāṇiṣhka is shown holding a spear, titled 'King of Kings', while the other side features Buddha with the inscription BOΔΔO (Buddha) in Greek script. On the second coin, an emperor appears on one side, and Śhiva with the bull Nandi on the other. Let's reflect on the following:

- Why would a powerful ruler feature Buddha and Śhiva on his coins? What does it say about his values and priorities?
- Can you find modern examples of such symbolic currency?

The Kuṣhāṇas held control over significant sections of the Silk Route (on the next page), and during their reign, trade grew, connecting India with other parts of Asia and the West.

Continuing the trend set under the Indo-Greek rulers, Kuṣhāṇa art and architecture, exemplified by the Gāndhāra and Mathurā schools of art, are celebrated for their fusion of Indian and Greek styles. The sculptures feature a variety of deities reflecting the peaceful co-existence of various schools of thought. This era saw the rise of representations of deities — like Sūrya or the sun god — which looked more similar to humans and the increase in the development of religious art, laying the groundwork for later temple architecture in the subcontinent.

The Gāndhāra style, which emerged in the western regions of Punjab, blended Greco-Roman elements with Indian features. Most sculptures and artefacts from this tradition were crafted in intricate detail from grey-black schist stone. In particular, sculptors produced many fine Buddha images with realistic anatomy and flowing robes.



Fig. 6.24. Head of a bodhisattva (or future Buddha) from the Gāndhāra School of Art. Note the fusion of Indian and Greek features.



THINK ABOUT IT

Do you know where Gāndhāra is? Does it remind you of a character from the epic Mahābhārata?

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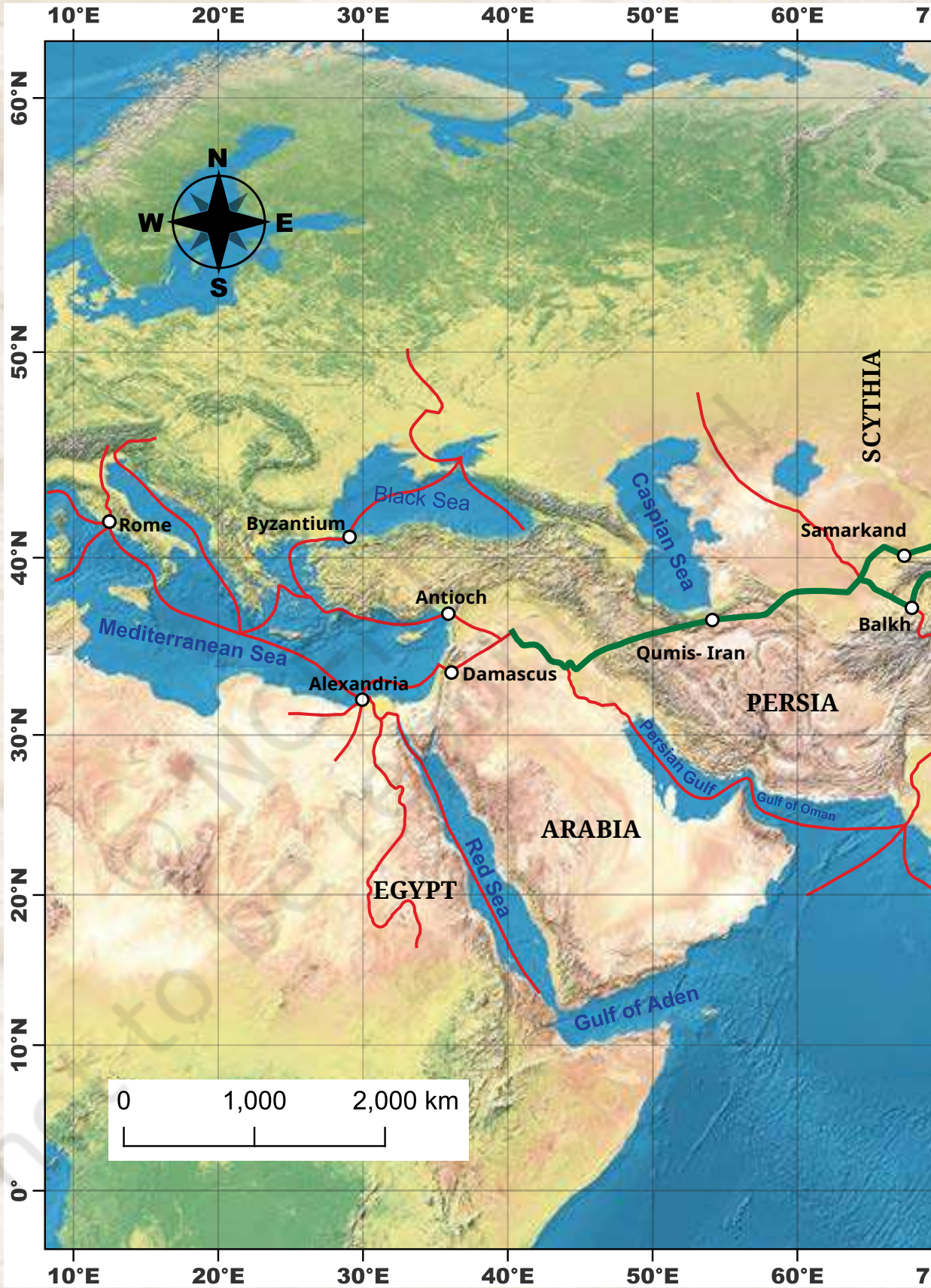
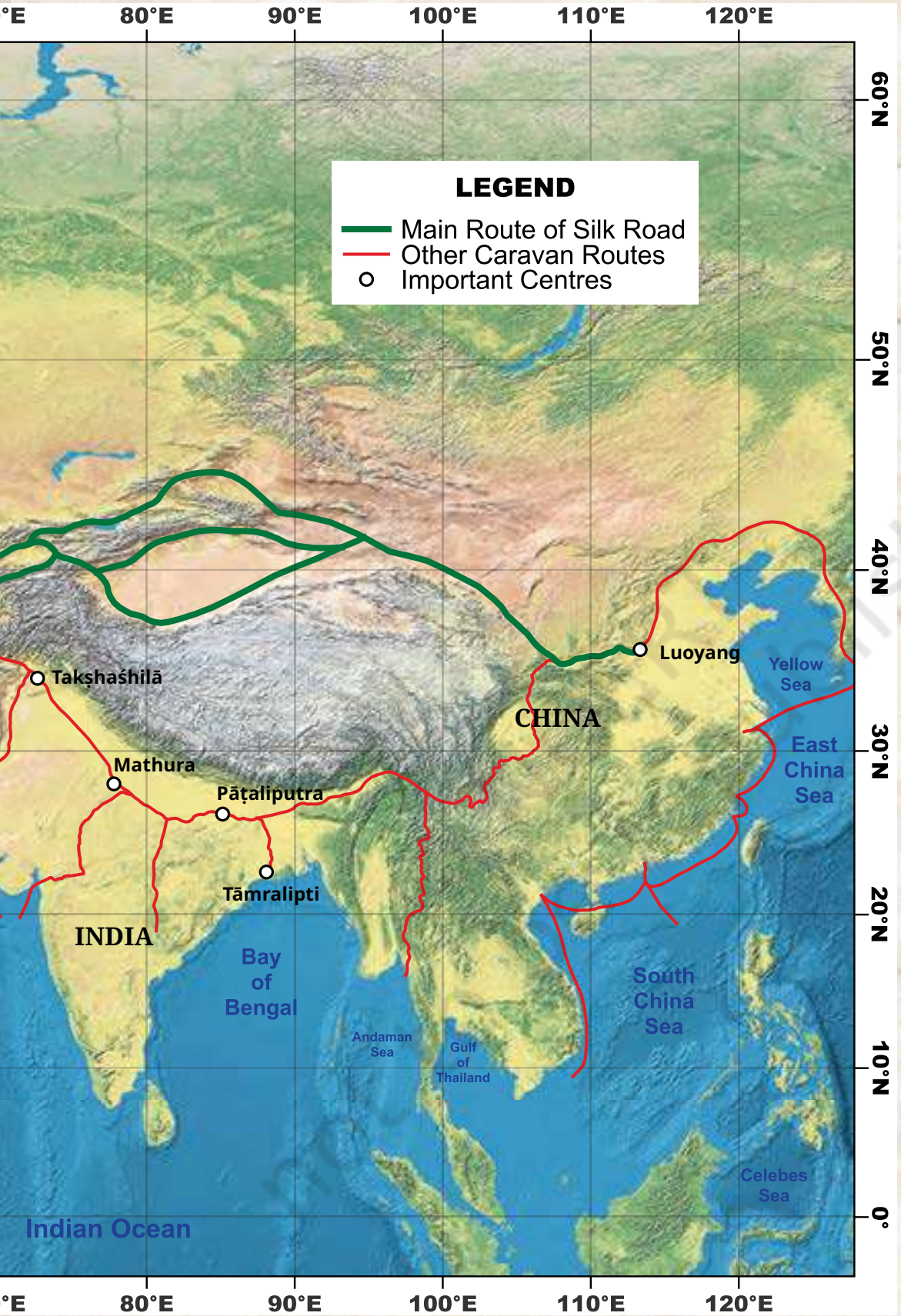


Fig. 6.25. Some of the trade routes of the ancient world. The network marked in green shows the Silk Route connecting China with the Mediterranean world and passing through central Asia, Persia, etc.

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The Mathurā style developed in the Mathura region of present-day Uttar Pradesh and is known for its distinct Indian style. Unlike the Gāndhāra style, it primarily used red sandstone for its sculptures and reflects less influence from Greco-Roman aesthetics. This art form is known for its depictions of Indian deities, including Kubera, Lakṣhmī, Śhiva, Buddha, *yakṣhas* and *yakṣhiṇīs* and generally produced fuller figures with smooth modelling.



Fig. 6.26. Kubera, God of 'wealth' from the Mathura School of Art. Did you miss the prominent moustache? The moustache is a distinguishing feature of some Indian sculptures.

LET'S EXPLORE

Now that you are familiar with the basic characteristics of the Mathurā and Gāndhāra styles of art, study the pictures of artefacts given in Fig. 6.27 on the right page and try to identify which school of art each artefact belongs to. Write your observations with justifications and discuss your answers with your classmates.

Despite the political conflicts and power struggles, the period saw remarkable cultural exchange and assimilation. This shared heritage is evident in art and architecture, where styles interacted, but with a dominance of Indian themes (especially Hindu and Buddhist ones). It was also the age when Sanskrit literature flourished, with, in particular, the composition of major Indian texts such as the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyana (refer to the chapter "Unity in Diversity, or 'Many in the One' " in your Grade 6 textbook).

Recognising these connections encourages us to view this 'Tapestry of the Past' not as confined to any one kingdom or ruler, but as a dynamic process that works through interaction and assimilation over time.

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Fig. 6.27.1. A scene of the death of Buddha. Fig. 6.27.2. Bodhisattva Maitreya. Fig. 6.27.3. Śhiva linga being worshipped by Kuṣhāna devotees. Fig. 6.27.4. A Nāga between two Nāgīs, with an inscription referring to the eighth year of Kaṇiṣhka's reign. Fig. 6.27.5. Kartikeya, the god of war, and Agni, the god of fire. Fig. 6.27.6. Standing Buddha.

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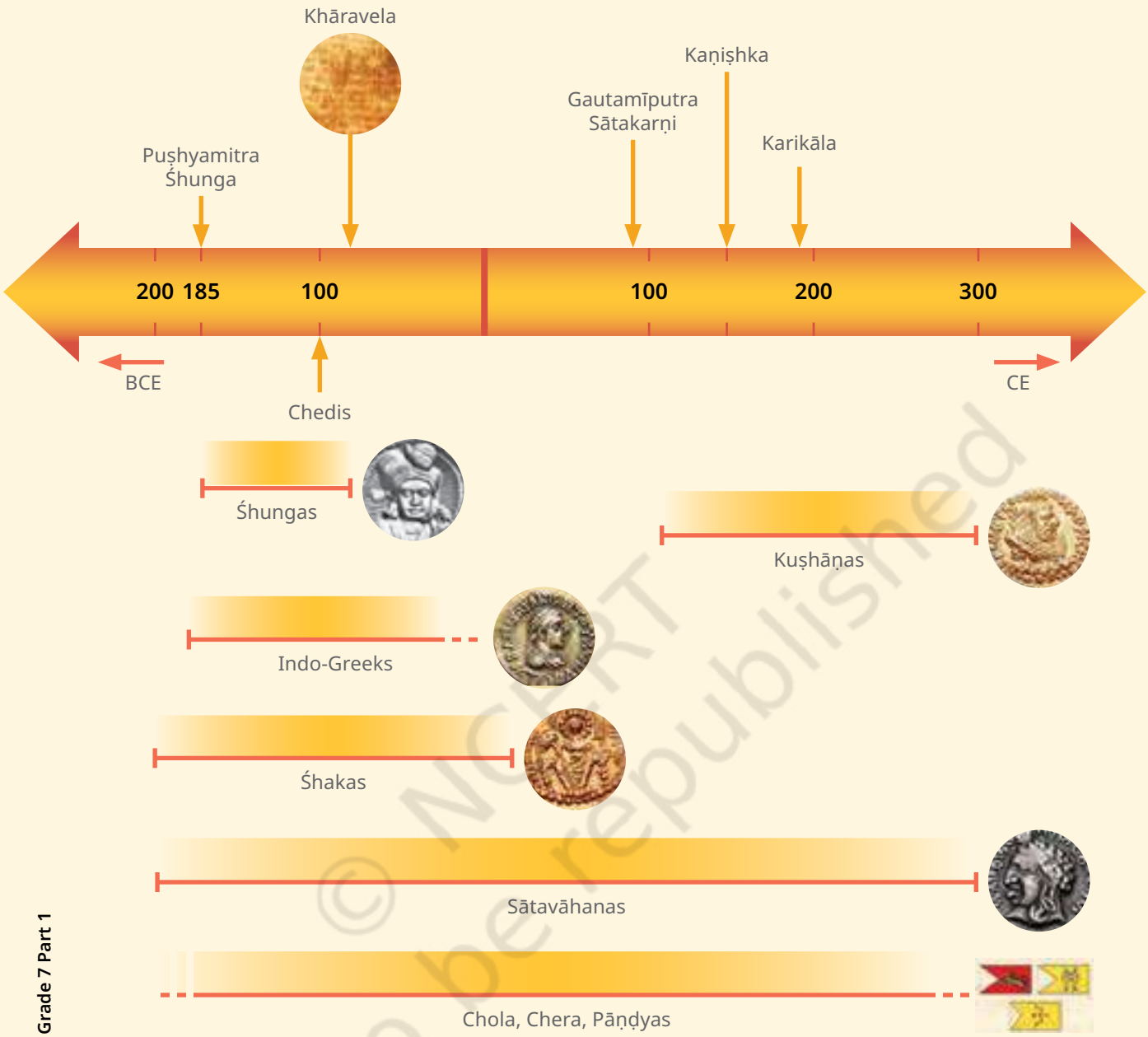


Fig. 6.28

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Before we move on ...

- The period after the disintegration of the Maurya empire was characterised by the emergence of many big and small kingdoms across the Subcontinent.
- The internal conflicts were coupled with foreign invasions, which together led to a period of reorganisation of political powers.

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- This period witnessed a dialogue of various cultures that absorbed each other's influence to create new styles of art, architecture, coinage, etc., with ultimately a dominance of Indian themes and flourishing Sanskrit literature.
- This time was also marked by remarkable developments in trade activities, both internal and external.

Questions and activities

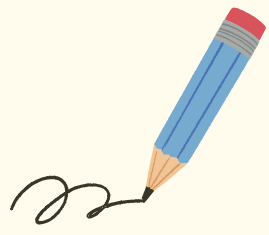
1. Why was the post-Maurya era also known as the era of reorganisation?
2. Write a note on the Sangam literature in 150 words.
3. Which rulers mentioned in this chapter included their mother's name in their title, and why did they do so?
4. Write a note of 250 words about one kingdom from this chapter that you find interesting. Explain why you chose it. After presenting your note in class, find out what kingdoms have been the most selected by your classmates.
5. Imagine you have the chance to create your own kingdom. What royal emblem would you choose, and why? What title would you take as the ruler? Write a note about your kingdom, including its values, rules and regulations, and some unique features.
6. You have read about the architectural developments of the post-Maurya era. Take an outline of the Indian subcontinent and mark the approximate locations of some of the ancient structures mentioned in this chapter.

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Noodles

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*‘Noodles’ is our abbreviation for ‘Notes and Doodles’!



CHAPTER 7

The Gupta Era: An Age of Tireless Creativity

Neither force nor mere diplomacy can eliminate evil; nor is righteousness upheld by flattery alone. It is wisdom and knowledge that truly strengthen a kingdom — not indulgence in luxuries.

— Kālidāsa in Raghuvanśham

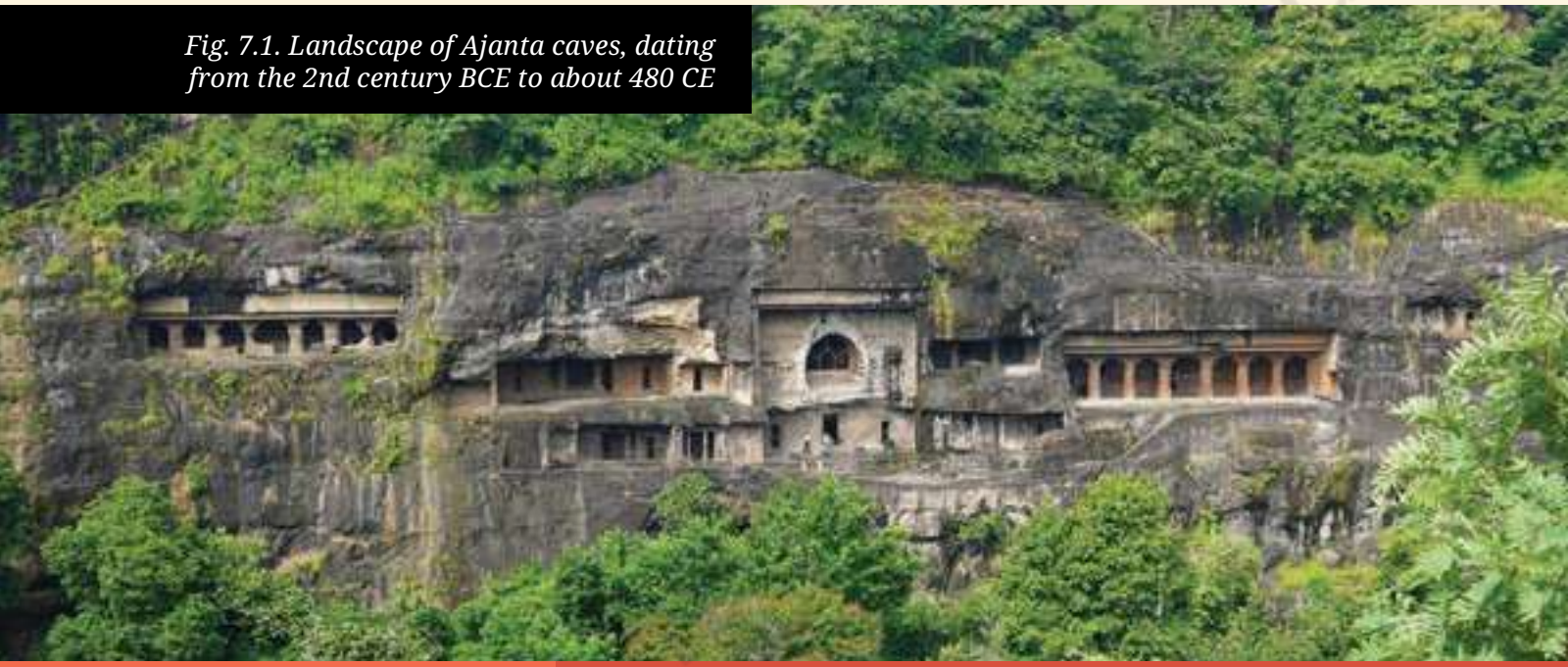


Fig. 7.1. Landscape of Ajanta caves, dating from the 2nd century BCE to about 480 CE

The Big Questions?

1. *Who were the Guptas? Why is the Gupta period sometimes called the 'classical age' in Indian history?*
2. *What was happening in the rest of the subcontinent at this time?*
3. *Who were some great figures of this period, and why do their stories matter today?*

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Dhruv and Bhavisha had just returned from their journey to the Pāṇḍya kingdom. They had seen the splendid markets, taken a short trip on a ship, and met some Roman traders buying pearls. Now they were itching to use Itihāsa again and jump a few centuries. "What would that be like?" they wondered. "Will the cities be the same? What about the people and society — would they have changed? What kind of governance would they have? Would there be new literature, new art?" They could not wait to find out and were soon whisked away to ...

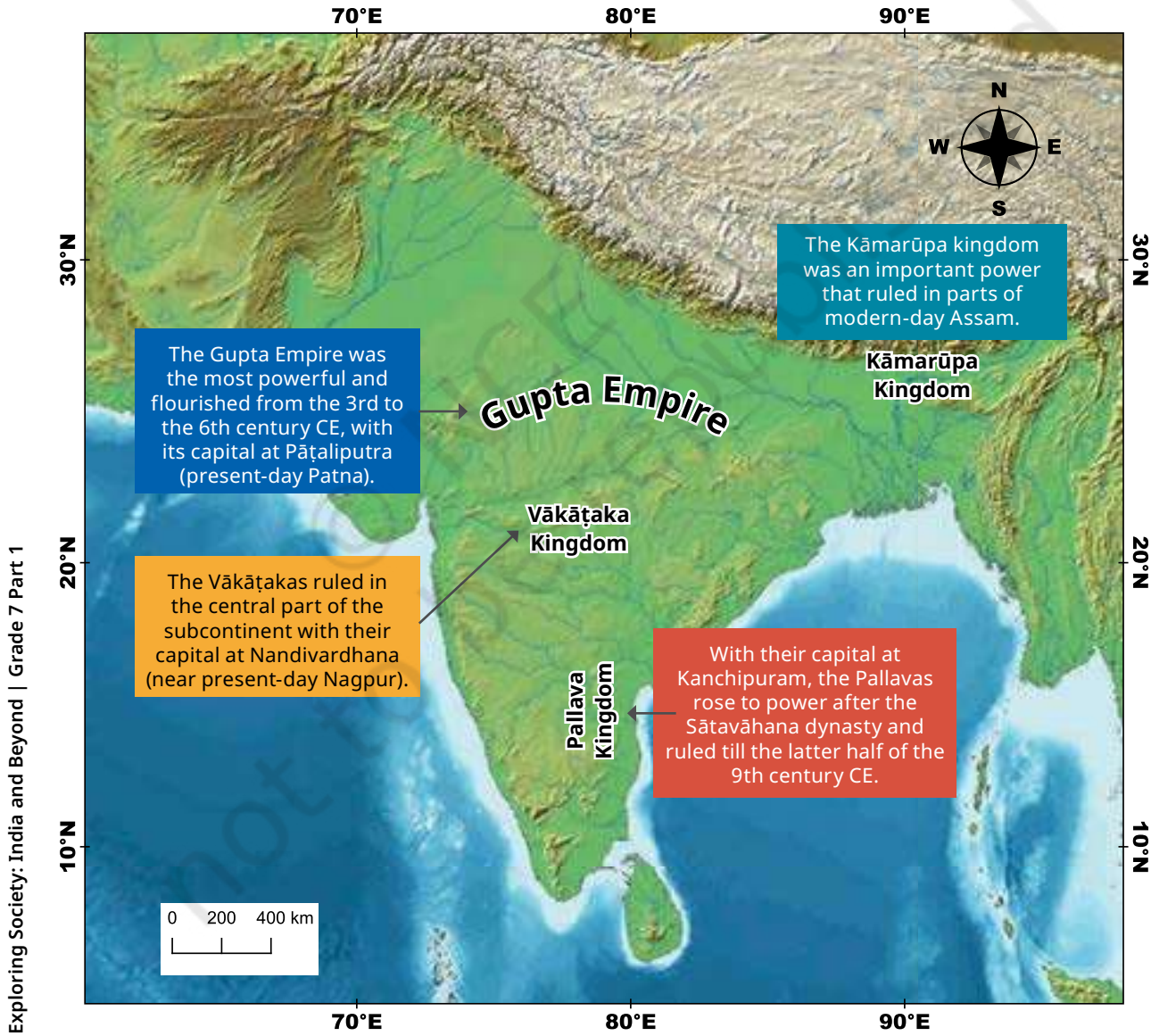


Fig. 7.2. Empires and kingdoms during the period from 3rd to 6th century CE.

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Bhavisha: *My head is spinning. There are so many kingdoms and empires. How am I ever going to remember all of this?*

Dhruv: *Do not worry, Bhavisha! Let us understand what is happening, and we'll remember it.*

Bhavisha: *Is there anything in this period that we can see back home?*

Dhruv: *Let us use our time machine and find out!*

Bhavisha activates 'Itihāsa', and they jump to Mehrauli (in Delhi), where the famous Iron Pillar of Delhi stands.

They overhear a tour guide nearby, who was explaining the significance of this pillar.



Fig. 7.3. Iron Pillar, Mehrauli, Delhi

Tour Guide: *This* ***Iron Pillar*** *of Delhi is over 1,600 years old and still stands tall without rusting. It is a testament to the advanced metallurgical skills of ancient India.*

Bhavisha: *1,600 years old and not rusting! Let us go and see it.*

Bhavisha: *Look! Is this the famous 'iron pillar'?*

Dhruv: *Oh wow! There is something written on it, but I cannot read it.*

Bhavisha: *I wonder who made this? And why? Let's hear what the guide uncle has to say about this.*

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Tour Guide: *The 6-tonne pillar was erected during the reign of Chandragupta II, a ruler of the Gupta dynasty. It was probably erected first in front of the Udayagiri caves (Madhya Pradesh) and brought to Delhi a few centuries later. It was dedicated to Viṣhṇu, and its inscriptions celebrate the king's achievements.*

Both: *That is so fascinating! We would love to learn more about this king and his empire.*

Let us begin this exciting journey into the history of the Gupta Empire!



DON'T MISS OUT

Picture leaving a bicycle out in the rain for just one year—it would soon show signs of rust. Yet this ancient pillar, standing under the open sky for centuries, remains unaltered. Scientists have tried to uncover its secret, and they believe it is because a unique thin layer, created by the special iron used and oxygen from the air, forms on the surface of the iron, protecting it from corrosion.

A New Power Emerges

By the 3rd century CE, the Kuṣhāṇa Empire, which spread over the north and northwest of the Subcontinent, started to weaken. New kingdoms emerged, setting the stage for a fresh period of consolidation, and the new actor on this stage was the Gupta dynasty.

There are various theories on the origin of the Guptas. However, it is widely believed that they emerged in a region near present-day Uttar Pradesh as regional rulers. Over time, they rose to prominence and established a powerful empire. The Gupta period is considered remarkable in Indian history and is marked by significant developments in many areas. The fields of art, architecture, literature and science flourished, particularly during the time of Chandragupta II, and that legacy continues even today.

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The inscription on the iron pillar in Delhi speaks of a king named 'Chandra', who has been identified with Chandragupta II (not to be confused with Chandragupta Maurya from the Maurya dynasty, whom we met earlier). Chandragupta II, also known as 'Vikramāditya', was one of the renowned rulers of the Gupta dynasty. He was a devotee of Viṣhṇu and his mount *(vāhana)* Garuḍa often appears on many inscriptions.



DON'T MISS OUT

Have you noticed the 'II' in Chandragupta II's name? Historians added this number because there was another **'Chandragupta'** before him—his grandfather! (This tradition of naming the first son after his grandfather is followed by some Indian families even today.) Chandragupta I, as he is referred to, played a crucial role in the early expansion of the Gupta Empire; he is remembered for his coins and strategic alliances, which helped him consolidate his power and lay the foundation for a strong empire.



Fig. 7.4. Gold coin featuring King Chandragupta I with his queen, Kumāradevī; on the reverse side, a seated goddess identified as Lakṣhmī

The warrior king

The *prayāga praśhasti,* a pillar inscription in Prayagraj, praises the achievements of Samudragupta, Chandragupta II's father. According to the author of the inscription—the court poet Harisena—the king's ambition was to be *'dharaṇi-bandha'* or to 'unify the Earth'. To this end, he fought many wars, defeating

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Fig. 7.5. An inscription by Harisena

kings, taking over their kingdoms and expanding his empire. Many defeated kings were reinstated and offered tribute to Samudragupta, while others, fearing his might, submitted without protest.

Harisena also wrote about how the king supported art, learning and trade, making his kingdom rich and successful. Samudragupta himself is portrayed as a veena player in one of the coins he minted (Fig. 7.6).

THINK ABOUT IT

Why do you think kings chose to proclaim their achievements in the form of inscriptions?



Fig. 7.6. A seated Samudragupta, playing the veena; on the reverse side, goddess Lakṣhmī

LET'S REMEMBER

Ambitious kings sometimes performed the *aśhvamedha yajña* to build mighty empires and leave a legacy for the future. Such a significant event was commemorated by minting special coins like the one shown in Fig 7.7.

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Fig. 7.7. This coin depicts the sacrificial horse of the aśhvamedha yajña; the reverse depicts the queen holding a chauri (fly whisk).

Some literary sources give us descriptive information about rulers, kingdoms and the people. The *Viṣhṇu Purāṇa,* for instance, specifies the key regions of the empire: "The Gupta dynasty will rule over Anugaṅga (the middle-Gangetic basin), Prayāga (present-day Prayagraj), Sāketa (Ayodhya), and Magadha (approximately Bihar) and all the surrounding regions." But at its peak, the Gupta Empire covered a larger area than this — most of present-day north and west India, along with parts of central and east India.

LET'S EXPLORE

In the Grade 6 chapter 'Timeline and Sources of History', we listed multiple sources that help us understand the past. Compile a list of the sources we have referred to so far in the chapter. What did we learn from each source?

Imagine what it would have entailed to move a whole army of soldiers, elephants, horses, cooks, and other support staff, as well as the supplies to feed them all. Clearly, the tributary kings must have been asked to provide for these.

LET'S EXPLORE

Take a political map of India and locate the present-day states and Union territories where the Guptas ruled (see Fig. 7.8). Mark these states on the map and count how many you found. Then, compare your findings with your friends to see if everyone got the same number or discovered something different!

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Fig. 7.8. The Gupta Empire's extent. Note that the Vākāṭakas were the allies of the Guptas. The Guptas claim to have conquered parts of the east coast, down to the Pallavas, whom they may have briefly subdued.

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A Traveller's Account of Indian Society in the Gupta Age

Chinese traveller Faxian (pronounced as Fa-Shi-Anne) visited India in the early 5th century CE. He set out on this long and difficult pilgrimage to visit sacred Buddhist sites, learn from renowned Indian scholars and collect manuscripts of Buddhist texts so he could take them back to China. Faxian travelled extensively across India, observing her culture, governance and society, and recorded his experiences and observations for the people of his homeland — and for us too — since his travelogue has survived to this day!

Below is an excerpt from his travelogue, where he records his observations of the society in the Gupta era.

The people are numerous and happy [...] they have no need to register households or attend to officials. [...] Those who farm royal land pay a portion of their grain. [...] The king's guards and attendants have salaries [...] The cities are the greatest in the Middle Kingdom [i.e. the Gangetic plains], and the inhabitants are rich, prosperous, and practice kindness and righteousness. Heads of Vaishya families [i.e. merchants or traders] establish houses for charity and medicines [...] the poor, orphans and the sick are cared for [...] doctors provide treatment, and the needy receive food and medicines. [...] The city has many wealthy Vaishya elders and foreign merchants, with beautiful homes [...] The lanes are kept in good order.

– A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms (AD 399–414) (Translated by J. Legge)

LET'S EXPLORE



Read the excerpt from Faxian given above and identify the key features of the society he describes. Write down your observations and compare your notes with your friends — you might be surprised to see how differently others interpret the same text!

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Outcastes: Someone who has been rejected from a social or cultural group; in this case, a category of people considered socially too low to be part of the varṇa system.

Excerpts from historical accounts like Faxian's are valuable sources, but they reflect only the writer's perspective and focus at one point in time and for a limited portion of the society they describe. Let us not, however, forget that elsewhere in his travelogue, Faxian also describes the harsh treatment of the *chaṇḍālas*, who were regarded as **outcastes** and lived outside the city limits.

Just as you may have perceived the excerpt from Faxian's travelogue differently from your friends, a group of historians may examine the same source and draw varied interpretations from it. Historians then look at more sources to corroborate their understanding. This reminds us of the need to assess multiple sources, perspectives and interpretations before drawing conclusions.

Glimpses of the Gupta Empire

Governance and administration

Let us observe the map in Fig. 7.8. You will notice that many kingdoms coexisted during the same period. Some of them may have been at war with each other in their ambition to expand their control. Recall what we saw earlier about Kauṭilya's ideas on ruling a kingdom. He advised rulers to form alliances *(mitra)* as one of the components of the *saptānga*.

New kings ... new titles

Inscriptions and coins provide valuable insights into the titles adopted by Gupta rulers, such as '*mahārājadhirāja*', 'samrāṭ', and '*chakravartin*'. These titles reflected their claim to supreme authority and emphasised their superiority over earlier rulers who used simpler titles like '*rājan*' and '*mahārāja*'.

The Gupta rulers used various strategies, including military conquests, diplomacy, and alliances, to expand and consolidate their vast empire. The last method included matrimonial alliances. A well-known example is that of Prabhāvatī Gupta,

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daughter of Chandragupta II, who was married to a prince of the Vākāṭaka kingdom—the Guptas' neighbours to the south. Tragically, the Vākāṭaka prince died early, making her the **regent ruler** of the kingdom. During her reign, she ensured that the ties between the Vākāṭakas and the Guptas remained strong. One of her inscriptions describes her as a 'mother of two kings', referring to her two sons who ascended the Vākāṭaka throne. As a devotee of Viṣhṇu like her father, Prabhāvatī is also associated with the construction of seven temples dedicated to this god and his avatars. Some of these temples are in Ramagiri (Ramtek hill) in present-day Maharashtra.

Regent Ruler: A regent temporarily governs a kingdom for a monarch unable to do so until they can.



Fig. 7.9. The Kevala Narasimha temple dedicated to Narasimha, one of the avatars of Viṣhṇu; according to some historians, this temple was constructed by Prabhāvatī Gupta's daughter in her memory



LET'S EXPLORE

Observe the painting of Prabhāvatī Gupta sitting in her court (Fig. 7.10). Take note of the details—her attire, posture, the people around her, and the setting of the court. What do these elements tell you about her life, role, and the time she lived in? Discuss your observations in groups and share your insights with the class.



Fig. 7.10. An artist's reimagination of Prabhāvatī Gupta sitting in her court

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The Gupta Empire had a well-organised system of administration. Instead of controlling everything from a central authority, they divided the empire into provinces and granted land to local rulers, priests and chieftains. These land grants were carefully inscribed on copper plates to keep accurate records — many of which have been discovered by archaeologists in recent times. This system helped ensure proper tax collection and allowed the Gupta rulers to govern efficiently while still giving local leaders some control over their regions.

Thriving trade

The primary source of revenue of the Gupta's was land tax. Other sources included fines, taxes on mines, irrigation, trade and crafts. This revenue was used for administration, maintaining the army, building temples and infrastructure, and supporting scholars and artists.

As we see once again, for such an empire to sustain itself, it had to promote a vibrant internal and external trade. In the Gupta era, India traded with the Mediterranean world, Southeast Asia and China, exporting textiles, spices, ivory and gemstones. The Indian Ocean trade network connected Indian ports to distant markets. One significant stop on the way to the Mediterranean markets was Socotra Island, strategically located in the Arabian Sea. Archaeological evidence, such as pottery, inscriptions in the Brahmi script, and designs such as a Buddhist *stūpa,* has established the presence of Indian traders there over several centuries, apart from traders from Egypt, Arabia, Rome and Greece. This small island carries evidence of the rich cultural exchanges that trade promoted in the Indian Ocean.

New Ideas and Wonders: The Classical Age

As we saw, Gupta rulers were devout followers of Viṣhṇu; this is often reflected in their coins and inscriptions. However, they also supported other traditions and schools of thought. They patronised Buddhist institutions, including the renowned Nālandā university and several other Buddhist *vihāras* (monastery). Their approach was inclusive and open. We will explore these institutions further in higher grades.

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Fig. 7.11. Remains of Nalanda University

Indeed, the prolonged period of peace and stability during the Gupta period promoted notable achievements in various fields, leading some historians to label this period the 'classical age' of India. It was also the time when knowledge from previous eras was consolidated and compiled into numerous texts. Sanskrit literature flourished, with Kālidāsa's works and many major Purāṇas. Āryabhaṭa and Varāhamihira recorded major advancements in mathematics and astronomy, while medical texts compiled and refined medical theories and practices. Metallurgy also progressed, as we saw with the rust-resistant Iron Pillar. This stability strengthened the economy, allowing the state to support scholars, artists, and scientists, leading to cultural and intellectual growth.

Chandragupta II kept himself surrounded by many learned men, poets and artists, and his patronage of such diverse talent enriched his court greatly.

Let us take a look at some of the remarkable figures of this period.



Fig. 7.12. Chandragupta II goes to war (an artist's imagination from the 1920s)

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Āryabhaṭa: He lived in Kusumapura (near present-day Patna), a famous centre of learning, around 500 CE and authored a short treatise of mathematics and astronomy called *Āryabhaṭīya*. He gave formulas to calculate the motions of the Sun, the Moon and the planets, and proposed that the Earth spins on its axis, which explains the alternation of day and night. He gave the length of a year as 365 days, 6 hours, 12 minutes, and 30 seconds, just a few minutes off from the modern value (365 days, 5 hours, 48 minutes, and 45 seconds). Āryabhaṭa also provided a fair estimate of the size of the Earth and a correct explanation for solar and lunar eclipses. His work became the foundation for further scientific advances in India and beyond. In mathematics, Āryabhaṭa described a number of techniques of calculation and equation-solving, some of which you learn at school without knowing that they were first formulated 1500 years ago!



Fig. 7.13

Varāhamihira: He was a mathematician, astronomer and astrologer from the same period. He lived in Ujjayinī, a city famous for its tradition of learning and scholarship. His encyclopedic work, *Bṛihat Samhitā,* covered a wide range of subjects from astronomy and astrology to weather forecasting, architecture, town planning and even farming. His ability to observe the world, apply logical reasoning, and combine it with traditional knowledge made him a pioneer in science.

LET'S EXPLORE



Let's join Bhavisha and Dhruv with their time machine in the time of the Guptas. You are getting an opportunity to meet Āryabhaṭa and Varāhamihira—what would you ask them? Divide the class into two groups and create a series of questions for an interview with them.



Fig. 7.14. The yakṣha's message to the clouds – a scene from Meghadūtam.

Kālidāsa: Little is known about Kālidāsa's life; legends suggest that he was once ridiculed by others, which motivated him to work hard and transform his life. He is renowned for his contributions to Sanskrit literature and exquisitely refined poetry. One of his celebrated compositions is *Meghadūtam*, or 'The Cloud Messenger'. It tells the story of a *yakṣha* (minor deity), who, after being banished from his home by his master, sends a message to his beloved through a passing cloud. Apart from the many emotions of love, the poem describes in great detail the landscapes and weather of north India on its journey to the beloved.

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DON'T MISS OUT

Codified: Arranged or written in an organised and systematic way.

Did you know that Āyurveda got **codified** during the Gupta period? This Indian traditional system of medicine has much older roots, going back several centuries BCE. Texts like the *Charaka Saṃhitā* and *Suśhruta Saṃhitā,* which laid the foundation for Ayurvedic practices still in use today, were compiled and given their final shape during the Gupta period. They deal with a wide range of topics—the cataloguing and diagnosing of diseases, their treatments, the importance of diet in maintaining good health, the preparation of medicines, and surgical techniques advanced for their time. Importantly, Āyurveda emphasises holistic healing and a deep connection between the mind, body, and nature.

The Quest for Beauty

The Gupta rulers created a supportive environment where creativity and craftsmanship thrived; some of the iconic works of history were produced during this time. Many key centres of art emerged during these times, including Sārnāth (near Varanasi in present-day Uttar Pradesh), known for its exquisite sculptures of the Buddha, and the awe-inspiring Ajanta caves (in present-day Maharashtra). The rock-cut caves and detailed carvings of deities at Udayagiri (Madhya Pradesh) are another example of this abundant artistic production. 'Gupta art', as it is sometimes called, set high standards of aesthetics and beauty that left a lasting impact. (See Figures 7.15 to 7.18)



LET'S EXPLORE

Take a close look at the samples of Gupta sculptures shown in Fig 7.15.1. and 7.15.2. By looking at the attributes, can you guess which deities are depicted here? Write your observations in the space provided and share your thoughts during the class discussion!

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The Decline of the Guptas

By the 6th century CE, the Gupta Empire began showing signs of decline as the later rulers faced challenges from external invasions. The fierce Hūṇa tribe from central Asia repeatedly attacked the empire, weakening its control over north India. At the same time, the rise of powerful regional rulers led to internal conflicts. However, was this truly the end, or the beginning of a period that marked a turning point in Indian history? We will explore this question in the next part of this book.

Meanwhile in the South and Northeast ...

Let us go back to the map in Fig. 7.8. While the Guptas ruled in the north, the Pallavas emerged as a powerful dynasty in the south, gradually consolidating their power in parts of present-day Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. Their origins are not clearly known, but they appear to have been a tributary power under the Sātavāhanas, whom we encountered in the previous chapter, and to have gained power as the Sātavāhanas declined.

The Pallavas were also great patrons of art and architecture. Most of them were devotees of Śhiva and are credited with constructing magnificent temples and rock-cut caves, some of which we will visit when we explore classical Indian architecture. The capital of the Pallavas, Kānchipuram (in present-day Tamil Nadu), often known as the 'city of a thousand temples', developed as one of the major centres of learning in the south. The establishment of *ghaṭikās* — centres of learning that emerged during the reign of the Sātavāhanas — fostered an environment for education and intellectual growth.

In the northeastern region, the Kāmarūpa kingdom, ruled by the Varman dynasty, extended over the Brahmaputra valley (broadly, present-day Assam) and northern parts of present-day Bengal and Bangladesh. An ancient name for the Brahmaputra valley of Assam is Prāgjyotiṣha, mentioned in the Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata; the latter text mentions Bhagadatta, king of

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Various aspects of Gupta art



Fig. 7.15.1 to 7.15.3. In the 3rd image, these terracotta sculptures from the Gupta period (Ahichchhatra, western Uttar Pradesh) depict India's sacred rivers, Ganga and Yamuna. Their vāhanas distinguish them: Ganga stands on a makara (a mythical creature akin to a crocodile), while Yamuna stands on a tortoise. Water flows over their heads, and the pot is another reminder of their manifestation as rivers.



Fig. 7.16. (Left) Deogarh (Uttar Pradesh), (Right) Viṣhṇu on Śheṣhnāg from Daśhāvatāra temple



Fig. 7.17. The renowned Ajanta Caves were carved out during this period with the support of the Guptas and Vākāṭakas. Left: An elaborate cave replicating a temple with a central stūpa from which a seated Buddha emerges (note the arched roof imitating wooden beams). Right: A painting of Bodhisattva Padmapāṇi.







Fig. 7.18.1. to 7.18.3. Udayagiri Caves and a Gupta-era temple near Sanchi are both located in Madhya Pradesh. Arjuna and Karṇa in battle — A sculpted depiction from the Mahābhārata

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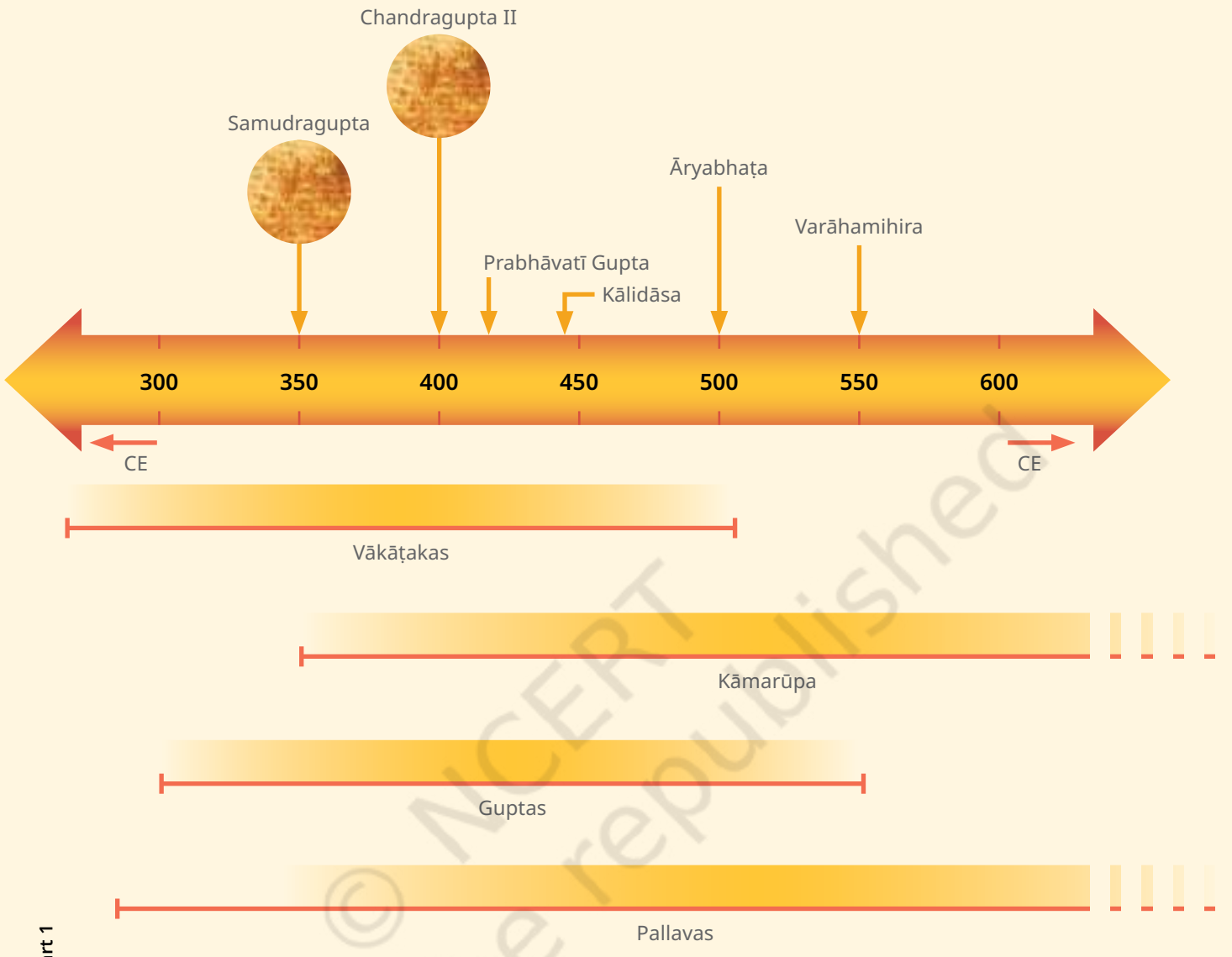


Fig. 7.19

Prāgjyotiṣha (modern-day Assam), as fighting on the side of the Kauravas in the Great War, and some historical rulers claimed him among their ancestors. Be that as it may, the Kāmarūpa kingdom was a prominent cultural and political centre; temples and monasteries flourished as hubs of learning.

Both the Pallavas and Kāmarūpa are mentioned in the *prayāga praśhasti* we saw earlier. During his southern campaigns, Samudragupta defeated a Pallava ruler but did not take over the region. Instead, he let the local kings, including the Pallavas,

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keep their thrones as long as they accepted his rule and paid tribute. This helped maintain peaceful relations. Under similar conditions, in the northeast, Samudragupta defeated the ruler of Kāmarūpa but did not take direct control. By now, we have seen this pattern recur quite a few times.

The Gupta period was a time of remarkable progress. Its influence stretched far beyond the empire, shaping art, science, literature, and governance for centuries. Advances in mathematics, astronomy, medicine and metallurgy, among other fields, laid the foundation for future scientific and technological growth, while beautiful temples and Sanskrit literature continue to inspire today. The Guptas created a stable and prosperous society, setting a model for future rulers. Their legacy is still alive in India's culture, traditions, and way of life, marking this era as one of the high points in Indian history.

Before we move on ...



- The Gupta kings consolidated their power through military campaigns, land grants and matrimonial alliances to ensure stability in the empire.
- The period saw remarkable contributions in the fields of art, literature, science and mathematics.
- Other than the Guptas, dynasties like Vākāṭakas, Pallavas, and Varmans ruled in their respective regions, making this period full of cultural and intellectual vibrancy.

Questions and activities

1. Imagine you receive a letter from someone living in the Gupta Empire. The letter starts like this: *"Greetings from Pāṭaliputra! Life here is vibrant and full of excitement. Just yesterday, I witnessed ..."* Complete the letter with a short paragraph (250–300 words) describing life in the Gupta Empire.

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2. Which Gupta ruler was also known as the 'Vikramāditya'?
3. "Periods of peace support the development of various aspects of sociocultural life, literature, and the development of science and technology.' Examine this statement in the light of the Gupta empire.
4. Recreate a scene from a Gupta ruler's court.
   Write a short script, assign roles like the king, ministers, and scholars, and enact a role play to bring the Gupta era to life!
5. Match the two columns:

Column A	Column B
(1) Kānchipuram	(a) Known for vibrant cave paintings that depict the Jātaka tales.
(2) Ujjayinī	(b) Famous for rock-cut caves featuring intricate carvings of Hindu deities, especially Viṣhṇu.
(3) Udayagiri	(c) Capital of the Guptas.
(4) Ajanta	(d) Known as 'a city of a thousand temples'.
(5) Pāṭaliputra	(e) A prominent centre of learning in ancient India.

6. Who were the Pallavas and where did they rule?
7. Organise an exploration trip with your teachers to a nearby historical site, museum, or heritage building. After the trip, write a detailed report describing your experience. Include key observations about the site's historical significance, the architecture, artefacts, and any interesting facts you learned during the visit. Reflect on how the trip enhanced your understanding of history.

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CHAPTER 3

Empires and Kingdoms: 6th to 10th Centuries

India never spoke her last word. In all things, she continues, survives and renews herself.

— Louis Renou and Jean Filliozat (French Indologists)



Fig. 3.1. The Shore Temple at Māmallapuram, built during the reign of Narasimhavarman II of the Pallava dynasty.

The Big Questions

1. *What major changes characterised this period?*
2. *How did the political, cultural, and religious developments shape India during this period?*
3. *What was the impact of foreign invasions and interactions on Indian society and polity during this period?*

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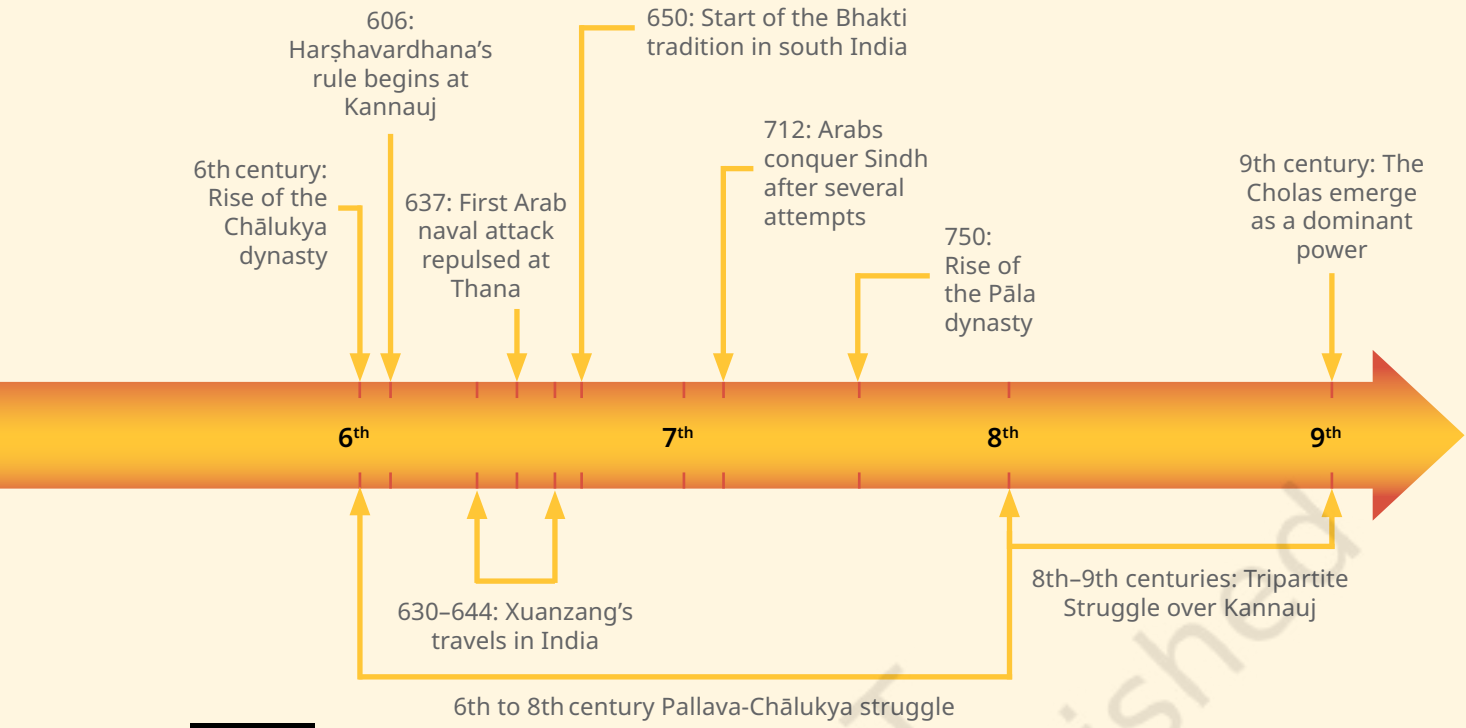


Fig. 3.2.

This chapter and the next together survey the scene in India from the end of the Gupta era about 600 CE to about 1200 CE. These six centuries together have received several names — 'post-classical', 'late classical' and 'early medieval' among others. We need not use any of those terms here, as long as we keep the broad chronology in mind. In Grade 8, we will explore the next centuries, leading up to the colonial era, dominated by British rule in India, and, ultimately, the struggle for freedom from the colonial rule, culminating in India's independence.

Imagine you are in north India some 1,500 years ago. The mighty Gupta Empire (see the chapter on the 'Gupta Era' in Part 1 of this textbook) has lost its dominance. You are a young traveller setting off on an adventure across the subcontinent. Your first stop is Kannauj, a city by River Ganga where a powerful king hosts poets and scholars. A few weeks later, you reach the Chālukya kingdom in the Deccan, where you see magnificent temples and lively cities. In the far south, the Pallavas are carving entire temples out of rock at Māmallapuram (also known as Mahabalipuram), while in Bengal, the Pālas are supporting great universities such as Vikramaśhilā. You don't see large empires in India now, but

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many strong kingdoms. Some call it a time of political rivalry and disorder, but as you travel, you see something different — a land buzzing with new ideas, art, and culture, different in each region, yet all part of one India.

Is this really the end of an age of powerful empires ... or the dawn of a new era? Let's step back in time and see. As you can see on the map (Fig. 3.3), the Guptas are gone, but the land is still dynamic and vibrant with activity. Several regional powers have emerged.

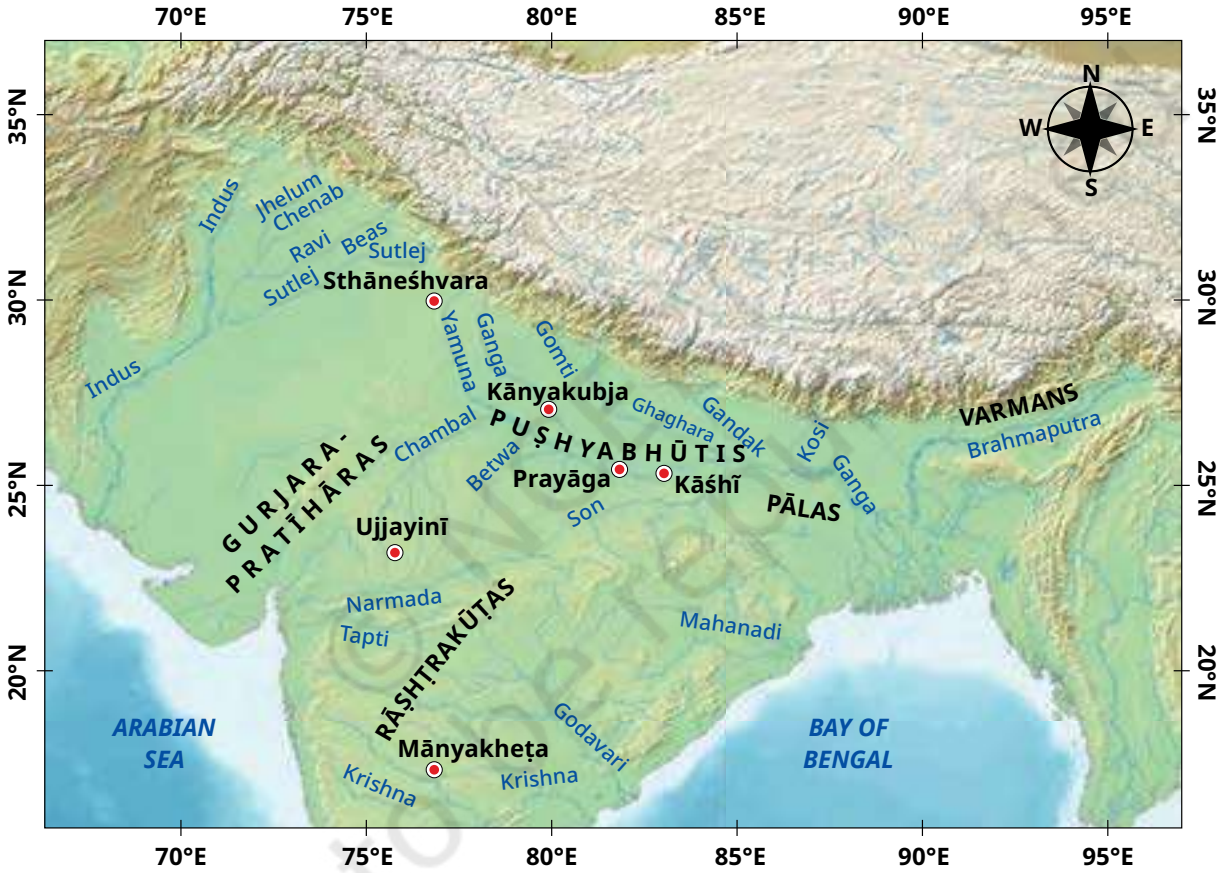


Fig. 3.3. A simplified map of a few dynasties in north and peninsular India from the 7th century onward.

The 'Great King of Kings'

As we look at northern India at this time, we find a remarkable ruler, **Harṣhavardhana**, ascending the throne in 606 CE at Kannauj. He belonged to the **Puṣhyabhūti** (or Vardhana) dynasty, whose earlier capital was Sthāneśhvara (present-day Thanesar in Haryana).

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LET'S EXPLORE

Do you recall where the capital of the earlier Maurya and Gupta empires was located?

How do you think this shift may have shaped the sub-continent's politics in the years to come?

Ruling from Kannauj (or Kanauj, anciently known as Kānyakubja, in present-day Uttar Pradesh), Harṣhavardhana expanded his empire over large parts of northern and eastern India, although its precise extent is not known with certainty.



Fig. 3.4. A coin depicting King Harṣha, and on the reverse side, a peacock fanning its tail.



Fig. 3.5. A detail of a copper plate inscription (found at Banskhera in Uttar Pradesh) in Nagari script, a precursor to Devanagari. It reads, 'svahasto mama mahārājādhirāja śhrī harṣhasya', that is, 'By my own hand, the great king of kings, Śhrī Harṣha'.



LET'S EXPLORE

If you know the Devanagari script, with the help of your teacher try to identify some of the letters in Harṣha's signature (Fig. 3.5).

Harṣha (as he is also known) was a fine poet and dramatist; he is assumed to be the author of three plays composed in classical Sanskrit, which weave love stories with courtly life, or themes of sacrifice and other high ethical values. While these are 'stories', historians use such literature to extract interesting details about the culture and society of those times — from systems of governance to social diversity, technologies, foods, and clothing. Harṣha also patronised scholars like Bāṇabhaṭṭa (also known

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as Bāṇa), who wrote *Kādambarī,* a beautiful literary work and one of the world's first novels. Bāṇa also composed a biography of Harṣha titled *Harṣhacharita.* Inscriptions depict Harṣha as a devotee of Śhiva; according to other sources, he was also deeply attached to Buddhism, while showing respect for all schools of thought and belief.



DON'T MISS OUT

The 7th-century novel *Kādambarī* has a very elaborate and complex plot. It tells of the love story between a prince from Ujjayinī, and Kādambarī, a celestial being. Their romance runs across different births, dreams, and divine worlds, with a story often told within another story. On the way, we get glimpses of courtly life, philosophy, nature and aesthetics. Bāṇa died before completing the novel; it was completed by his son, and is regarded as a masterpiece of classical Indian literature.

Apart from several inscriptions, an important historical source for the period is the travelogue kept by yet another Chinese pilgrim to India. Remember, in Part 1 of this textbook we met Faxian, who in the 5th century left a valuable account of the Gupta era. Now, two centuries later, Xuanzang (his name was earlier transcribed as Hsuan Tsang or Hiuen Tsang) set out on his journey to India and travelled around the subcontinent between 630 and 644. (We met him briefly in the chapter 'The Story of Indian Farming' in this textbook, and earlier in 'India, That Is Bharat' in Grade 6.) Just as Faxian, his motivation for undertaking such a long and difficult journey was to visit sacred Buddhist sites and learn doctrines from Indian teachers; he brought back to China more than 600 manuscripts of Buddhist texts in Sanskrit (carried by 20 horses!) and set about translating them into Chinese. He also left a meticulous account of his



Fig. 3.6. A statue of Xuanzang, carrying his travel pack, at the Longmen Caves of eastern China (a cave complex with many Buddhist statues and carvings)

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journey, in which he recorded important details about politics, diplomacy, culture and religion in the kingdoms he crossed. His travelogue is a major source of information for historians of this period.

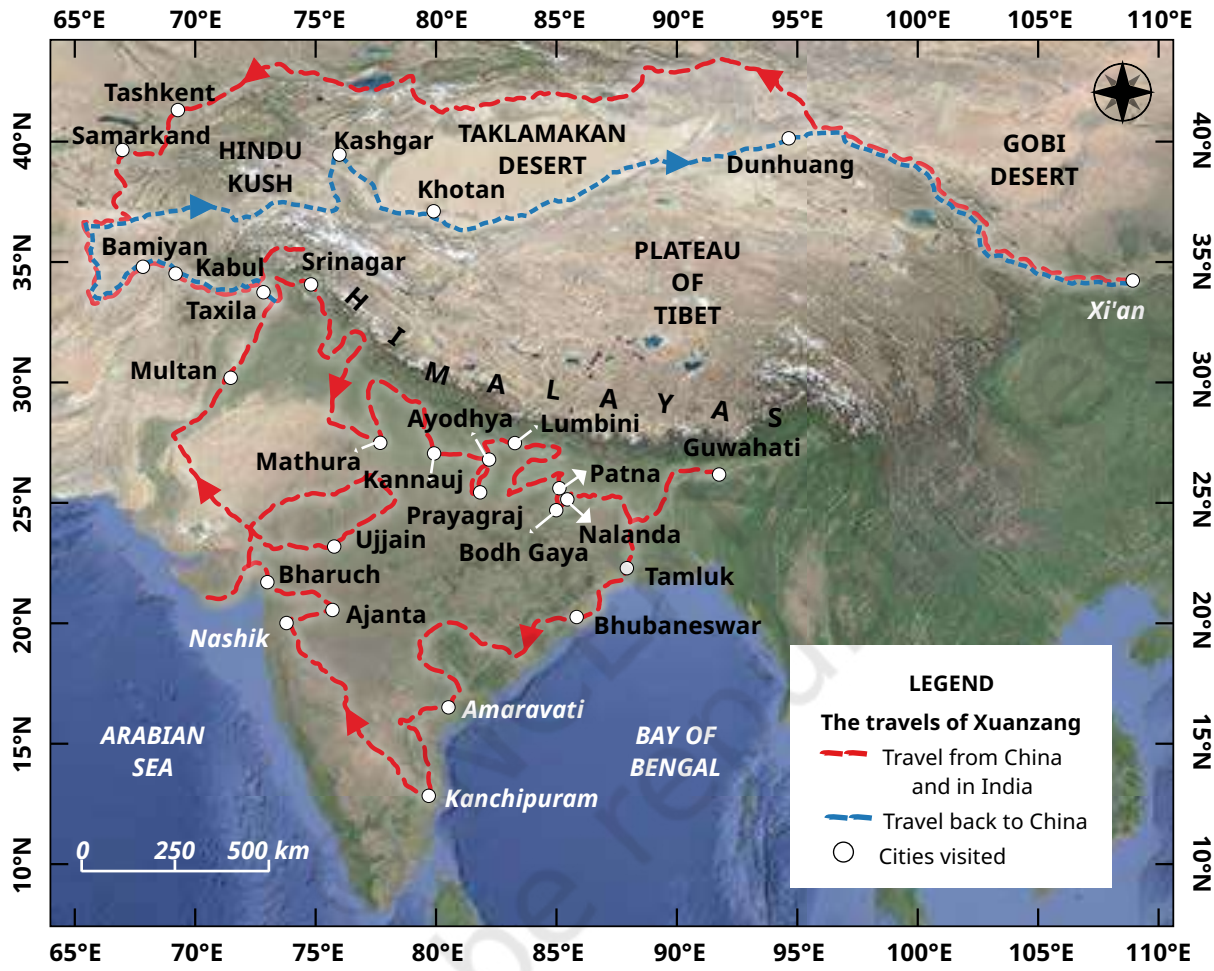


Fig. 3.7. Xuanzang's route from China to India and back. (In this map, we have used modern names for the cities Xuanzang passed through.)



LET'S EXPLORE

Looking at the map (Fig. 3.7), can you identify a few mountain passes or desert areas that Xuanzang had to cross while travelling between China and India?

Can you also identify a few important Buddhist centres of learning that Xuanzang visited in India? Do you know something of their significance?

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Harṣhavardhana welcomed this Chinese pilgrim to his court (apart from two more ambassadors from China). In Xuanzang's honour, he held an assembly at Kannauj, attended by kings and leaders of many religious sects. Xuanzang described Kannauj as a beautiful and prosperous city, and Harṣha as a just and energetic ruler who maintained a vast army and was often engaged in military campaigns. Every five years, he held an assembly at Prayāga (present-day Prayagraj, at the confluence of the Ganga and Yamuna rivers) where, after performing sacred rites, he gave away much wealth, offering it to Buddhists, Brahmins, and the poor.

THINK ABOUT IT

Does the above ceremony remind you of a similar event discussed in Part 1 of this textbook?

Harṣha attempted to extend his empire southward beyond the Narmada, but was held in check by **Pulakeśhin II** of the powerful Chālukya dynasty, whom we will meet soon. Harṣha also dreamed of uniting northern India, but achieved only mixed success. Although he formed an alliance with the **Varman dynasty** of **Kāmarūpa** (in today's Assam; their capital Prāgjyotiṣha was close to today's Guwahati), conflicts with neighbouring kingdoms continued.



Fig. 3.8. A terracotta seal (approximately 13 cm in radius) found at Nālandā, issued by King Bhāskaravarmana of the Varman dynasty, who was an ally of Harṣhavardhana.

A Tripartite Struggle for Kannauj

After Harṣha's death in 647, north India saw much political turmoil. Kannauj became the centre of a long, indecisive '**Tripartite** Struggle', as it is often called. The three warring parties were the **Pālas** from the east, the **Gurjara-Pratīhāras** from the west, and the **Rāṣhṭrakūṭas** from the Deccan

Tripartite: A situation that involves three distinct parties or players

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(see Fig. 3.3). During the 8th and 9th centuries, these three powers repeatedly warred against each other, with fluctuating outcomes and no lasting victor.



LET'S EXPLORE

Why was Kannauj so attractive to those powerful dynasties? Observe its location on the map (Fig. 3.3) and discuss in class.

The Pālas

After Harṣha's death, the Bengal region fell into disorder until, according to an inscription, the people chose Gopāla in 750 CE to restore stability; he was the first king of the **Pāla** dynasty, which soon ruled over much of eastern India. His successor, **Dharmapāla,** expanded the Pāla Empire over much of eastern and northern India. He became known as a great patron of Mahāyāna Buddhism (see Chapter 'India and Her Neighbours' in this textbook), founding major monasteries such as Vikramaśhilā (in present-day Bihar) and Somapura (in present-day Bangladesh). Besides, just like Harṣha, the Pālas continued to patronise Nālandā (see Chapter 7, 'The Gupta Era' in Part 1 of this textbook). Those large monasteries were, in effect, the universities of those times and attracted numerous students, sometimes from far away, even beyond India.



Fig. 3.9. Crowned Buddha, Bihar, Pāla Empire, 10th–11th centuries

The Pāla Empire flourished economically thanks not only to internal trade, but also through brisk maritime trade through its seaports on the east coast, which provided pathways to Southeast Asia (see 'India and Her Neighbours' for some details). Though the empire later declined, it left a lasting legacy of strong governance and learning in parts of eastern and northern India.

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THINK ABOUT IT

Some historians state that Dharmapāla was Buddhist; he certainly patronised Buddhist learning and institutions. But we should keep in mind that in ancient India, the concept of religion was more fluid than it is today, and except perhaps for monks and nuns, people could feel at ease with various belief systems and practise different modes of worship at the same time. Indeed, people often did not regard belief systems involving Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism as separate, but rather as branches of a common philosophical tree. Besides, rulers often took pride in patronising several schools of thought; we saw the case of the Guptas in Part 1 of this textbook, and Harṣha gives us one more example of such broad-mindedness. Similarly, several successors of Dharmapāla, though still patronising Buddhist institutions, were said to be devotees of Śhiva. The Rāṣhṭrakūṭas (p. 71) and other rulers will provide more examples of this.

A university with scholars as 'gatekeepers'

Dharmapāla founded Vikramaśhilā in the late 8th century on the banks of the Ganga. It remained a great centre of learning for more than four centuries. The university had six colleges, monasteries, temples, lecture halls, and a vast library. Nearly 3,000 scholars studied subjects such as grammar, logic, Hindu and Buddhist philosophy, learning and rituals. Admission was highly selective as each college had a *dvārapaṇḍita* ('scholar gatekeeper') who tested students before allowing them entry. Vikramaśhilā was especially known for its ties with Tibet; one of its famous teachers travelled to Tibet, translated Sanskrit works into Tibetan and played a major role in shaping Tibetan Buddhism (also called Vajrayāna Buddhism, see Chapter 'India and Her Neighbours' in this textbook).

Such important centres of learning — there were hundreds, if not thousands, spread across India — kept alive and enriched India's long-standing knowledge traditions.

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As we will see in the next chapter, Vikramaśhilā was plundered and destroyed by Bakhtiyār Khiljī in the 12th century.



Fig. 3.10. The cover of a manuscript from Vikramaśhilā, depicting five different aspects of the Buddha

The Gurjara-Pratīhāras

This dynasty, founded in the mid-8th century CE by Nāgabhaṭa I, probably originated from western India ('Gurjara' referred to a region between Gujarat and Rajasthan). As we will see later in this chapter, it gained fame for pushing back Arab invasions into northwest India. Their early capital was Bhillamāla (modern Bhinmal in western Rajasthan); it seems to have shifted later to Ujjayinī.

In the 9th century, the celebrated **Pratīhāra** ruler, King **Bhoja**, a devotee of Viṣhṇu, built an empire stretching from Punjab and Kathiawar (or Saurashtra) in the west to Kannauj in the east, controlling most of north India. Bhoja was also known as 'Mihira' (a name of the Sun) and Ādi Varāha (Varāha is an avatar of Viṣhṇu in the form of a boar, see Fig. 3.11), among other designations.



Fig. 3.11. A Gurjara-Pratīhāra silver coin (about 2 cm in diameter) depicting Varāha, an avatar of Viṣhṇu

However, a century later, the Gurjara-Pratīhāras suffered the destruction of Kannauj by Rāṣhṭrakūṭa rulers, which hastened the disintegration of their empire; it was finally eliminated in the early 11th century by the Ghaznavids, whom we will meet in the next chapter.

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Fig. 3.12. A view of the Kailaśhanātha temple (also commonly known as Kailash temple), carved out of the hillside at Ellora; the temple is not a construction but a gigantic sculpture.

The Rāṣhṭrakūṭas

In the mid-8th century, **Dantidurga** became the first independent **Rāṣhṭrakūṭa** ruler when he overthrew the Chālukyas in the Deccan (whom we will meet later in this chapter). The Rāṣhṭrakūṭas shifted their power centre to present-day Karnataka, with their capital at Mānyakheṭa (modern Malkheda) and were one of the most dominant powers for nearly two centuries, their empire spanning much of the subcontinent. Dantidurga's successors campaigned successfully in north India, briefly occupying Kannauj.

We should not imagine that the kings of such dynasties were constantly at war. In fact, they found time and resources to create wonders. The Rāṣhṭrakūṭa king Krishna I got the magnificent Kailaśhanātha temple, the largest rock-cut temple in India (Fig. 3.12), carved out of a hillside at Ellora (in present-day Maharashtra). The Rāṣhṭrakūṭas equally patronised Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain schools of thought, and encouraged learning and literature in Sanskrit, Prakrit, and Kannada.

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In the 9th century, another Rāṣhṭrakūṭa ruler, **Amoghavarṣha I,** took on the title 'Nṛipatunga' or 'peak of kings'. Despite frequent wars with neighbouring kingdoms, including those of the dynasties we surveyed above, he managed to ensure peace and prosperity in his empire — and stability, since his reign lasted for 64 years! Amoghavarṣha Nṛipatunga is sometimes called a 'Jain king' as he was strongly drawn to Jainism; however, he also patronised Hindu temples. He was a fine poet too, who composed works in Sanskrit and Kannada.

<< Fig. 3.13. Inscription of the Rāṣhṭrakūṭa emperor Amoghavarṣha Nṛipatunga in a village temple of Karnataka. It is written in old Kannada script.



DON'T MISS OUT

'Nrupatunga Road' in central Bengaluru, home to several government buildings and institutions, is named after Amoghavarṣha I.



THINK ABOUT IT

Al-Masūdī, a 10th-century Arab historian and traveller from Baghdad, gave high praise to a Rāṣhṭrakūṭa ruler: "His troops and elephants are innumerable. ... There is none among the rulers of Sindh and Hind who in his territory respects the Muslims [as he does]. In his kingdom, Islam is honoured and protected. And, for them, mosques and congregational mosques, which are always full, have been built for offering prayers five times."

What does this tell us about the Rāṣhṭrakūṭas?

While these three powerful dynasties — the Pālas, the Gurjara-Pratīhāras, and the Rāṣhṭrakūṭas — were involved in the tussle over Kannauj, that is, over central India and the Gangetic plains, other powers rose and fell in other parts of India. It is not possible to survey them all; let us briefly visit a few.

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Kashmir

Far to the north, in the mid-8th century, a new power was stirring in the Himalayan kingdom of Kāśhmīra — present-day Kashmir. Apart from inscriptions and coins, we learn about its successive rulers from Kalhaṇa, who authored *Rājatarangiṇī* — literally 'the River of Kings' (see the Box below). Among the many kings and a few queens whose rule Kalhaṇa describes, Lalitāditya Muktāpīda of the **Kārkoṭa** dynasty is seen as a firm ruler. After him, however, Kashmir's political scene experienced many internal conflicts and shifts of power, including some rulers seizing the throne by force. In the late 10th century, for instance, Queen Diddā consolidated her power through strategic alliances but also, according to Kalhaṇa, by ruthlessly eliminating rivals, including her own grandsons. She founded a few towns, built several temples, and restored many more.



DON'T MISS OUT

Kashmiri scholar and poet Kalhaṇa composed the epic poem *Rājatarangiṇī* in Sanskrit in the 12th century. In it, he narrated the history of Kashmir's ruling dynasties from its beginnings to his own time.

Kalhaṇa also spells out his approach to history in these words: "My effort is to give a connected account where the narratives of past events have become fragmentary in many respects. ... I have examined eleven earlier works composed by former scholars containing the chronicles of kings ... And by consulting inscriptions relating to temple consecrations, royal grants, laudatory records, and other written works, I have overcome many difficulties caused by errors."

Through all these depictions, Kalhaṇa's purpose was not merely to record history as he understood it, but also to highlight the rulers' ethical values — or lack of them, as the case may be — so as to draw moral lessons from history. He wrote, "Those who are intent on harassing their subjects perish with their families; on the other hand, fortune waits on even the descendants of those who reinstate order where there is chaos."

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LET'S EXPLORE

Form groups in your class to discuss the following questions, then compare the groups' answers.

- → What qualities does Kalhaṇa think a historian should have?
- → What do these lines reveal about his method of gathering information? In what ways does it resemble or differ from the way history is currently written?
- → Kalhaṇa also writes, "That noble-minded poet is alone worthy of praise whose words, like that of a judge, remain free from love or hatred in relating the facts of the past." What does he mean by 'free from love or hatred'? How would meeting this condition make a historian more reliable?



LET'S EXPLORE

- → According to tradition, Ādi Śhankarāchārya, the 8th-century scholar and teacher of the *advaita vedānta* school of philosophy, visited the hill shown in this sketch;



Fig. 3.14. A 19th-century sketch of the Shankaracharya Hill (also known as Takht-i-Sulaiman, anciently called Gopādri Hill) overlooking the Kashmir valley near Srinagar, with the Jhelum River meandering below and Himalayan peaks in the background.

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the stone temple at the top is known as Shankaracharya temple or Jyeshteshwara temple.

→ Śhankarāchārya taught that *brahman* is the ultimate reality or the pure consciousness, and that the world as we perceive it is *māyā* or illusion. He established four *maṭhas* (monasteries and centres of learning) at Badrinath, Puri, Dwarka, and Sringeri. Mark the location of these cities on a map; why do you think he chose four different corners of India rather than more central locations?

Despite Kashmir's mountainous geography, throughout history the kingdom remained well connected to the political and cultural developments elsewhere in India. During the period we consider here, Kashmir was a major centre for Sanskrit learning, philosophy, and the arts. A school of thought called Kashmir Śhaivism produced several great scholars, such as **Abhinavagupta**, whose works on philosophy, poetry, arts and aesthetics had a vast influence across India. Kashmir also served as a crucial bridge for Buddhist scholarship, with scholars, monks and texts traveling between Kashmir and other parts of northern India, Tibet and Central Asia. Kashmiri artisans, sculptors, and manuscript painters were in demand across north India and beyond. In short, the region's intellectual and artistic exchanges linked it closely with the cultural life of the entire subcontinent.



Fig. 3.15. Standing Śhiva, Kashmir, 8th century

The Deccan and Beyond

We mentioned the Deccan Plateau in a few other chapters. Together with the southernmost tip of the subcontinent, it was equally alive during this time, and we have already surveyed the Rāṣhṭrakūṭas. Do you remember Queen Prabhāvatī Gupta of the Vākāṭakas (Chapter 7 of Part 1 of this textbook)? Once that dynasty came to an end, several mighty kingdoms were locked in a contest for supremacy (Fig. 3.16).

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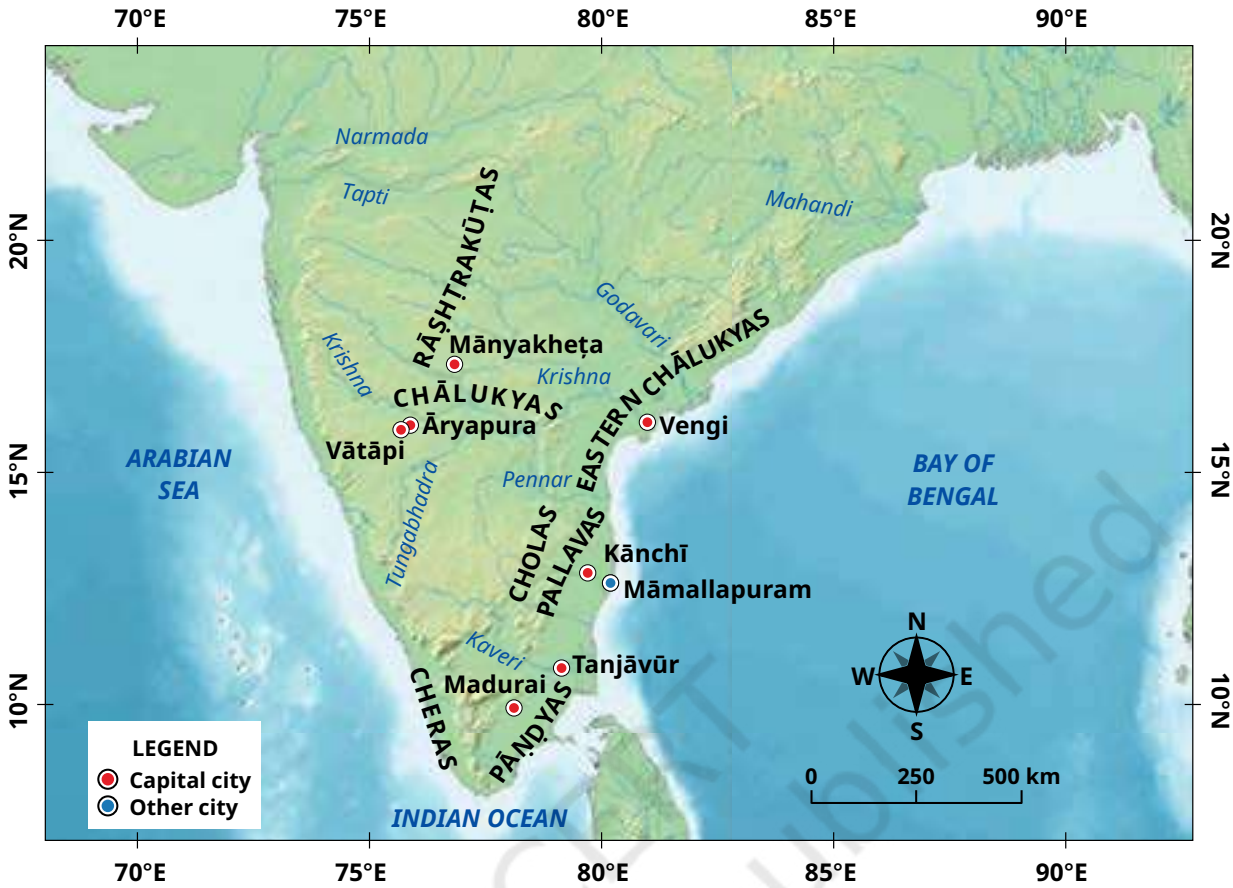


Fig. 3.16. A simplified map of the main kingdoms in the Deccan and southern India during this period.

The Chālukyas

In the mid-6th century CE, Pulakeśhin I founded the **Chālukya** dynasty. Earlier in this chapter, we met his grandson, Pulakeśhin II, who not only stood in the way of Harṣha's southward ambitions, but also considerably expanded the Chālukya kingdom. His capital was Vātāpi — present-day Badami in Karnataka, famous for its complex of magnificent Hindu and Jain cave temples.

A little further away, the earlier Chālukya capital, Āryapura (later known as 'Ayyavole', present-day Aihole), is home to over a hundred Hindu, Buddhist and Jain temples. One of them, a 7th-century Jain temple atop Meguti Hill, displays on its east wall a lengthy Sanskrit inscription in praise of the Chālukyas, especially King **Pulakeśhin II** (Fig. 3.17). Its author, the court poet Ravikīrti, records Pulakeśhin II's victories over Harṣha

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and several rival kingdoms in a highly poetical style. But this inscription is not free from exaggerations, as some of the 'facts' it presents are contradicted by other inscriptions! Let us note, however, that Xuanzang visited the Chālukya kingdom on his way to the South, and mentioned that Pulakeśhin II's "beneficent actions are felt over a great distance and his subjects obey him with perfect submission."



Fig. 3.17. The Meguti temple at Aihole (partly restored). The red arrow points to a stone slab bearing a long inscription in praise of the Chālukyas.

Still, there is no doubt that in the early 7th century the most of India was dominated by two great imperial powers — Harṣhavardhana north of the Vindhyas and Pulakeśhin II south of them. However, Pulakeśhin II eventually tasted defeat at the hands of the Pallavas of Kānchī. By the mid-8th century, the Rāṣhṭrakūṭas had replaced the Chālukyas in the Deccan, as we saw earlier. A later revival of the dynasty in the west, from the 10th century onward, is known as the **Western Chālukyas** of Kalyāṇī, their new capital (modern Basavakalyan in northern Karnataka). We will meet them again in the next chapter.

As the Chālukya empire of Badami declined, its eastern branch asserted independence and expanded its power in the eastern Deccan. They are known as the **Eastern Chālukyas** and ruled from Vengi in present-day Andhra Pradesh (see Fig. 4.10 in the next chapter). They often clashed with the Rāṣhṭrakūṭas,

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experiencing both victories and defeats, as well as occasional alliances. The Eastern Chālukyas promoted several Hindu and Jain sects, as well as Buddhist centres; Telugu and Kannada literature flourished under their rule.

The Pallavas

In the Grade 7 Part 1 textbook, we saw the emergence of the **Pallavas.** With its capital at Kānchī (or Kānchipura, present-day Kanchipuram in Tamil Nadu, Fig. 3.16), the dynasty reached its peak in the 7th century under Mahendravarman I and his son **Narasimhavarman I**. The latter was also known as 'Mamalla', which means 'wrestler' or 'warrior'; indeed, it was he who defeated Pulakeśhin II and went on to capture Badami. However, he retreated, keeping the Tungabhadra River as an unwritten boundary between the two powers. He also sent a naval expedition to Sri Lanka to help a Sinhalese prince recover his lost throne.

Kanchipuram was not only an important cultural centre but also an economic hub, with trade in goods such as spices, textiles (including silk), ivory and other luxury goods. The Pallavas developed trade relations not only with Sri Lanka but also with much of Southeast Asia via several seaports, in particular Māmallapuram (also known as Mahabalipuram, see Fig. 3.16), where ancient Chinese, Persian, and Roman coins were found during excavations.

We meet Xuanzang again in Kānchī, who speaks of the existence of 100 Buddhist monasteries with 10,000 priests (figures likely exaggerated) and also mentions 80 Hindu temples and the presence of many Jains. In his opinion, "the people are deeply attached to the principles of honesty and truth, and highly esteem learning."

The Pallavas created many temples and other structures (Fig. 3.1). At Māmallapuram, elaborate rock-cut caves and **monolithic** temples were carved in a distinctive style, depicting deities (Fig. 3.18) or illustrating scenes associated with the Mahābhārata. The Pallavas were patrons of Jain, Vaishnavite and Shaivite schools of thought. They promoted

Monolithic: Made of a single ('mono') stone or rock ('lithic').

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Fig. 3.18. A granite relief at Māmallapuram depicting goddess Durga about to slay the buffalo demon Mahiṣhāsura.

both Sanskrit and Tamil literature and hosted great poets such as Daṇḍin, who wrote elaborate Sanskrit poetry; Mahendravarman I himself was a fine poet who left a satirical Sanskrit play.

LET'S EXPLORE

Note this panel's (Fig. 3.18) highly dynamic three-dimensional composition, expressing Durga's confident assault on the demon.

- → Can you identify some of Durga's many weapons? And her *vāhana*?
- → What are the main differences between her attendants and the demon's attendants?
- → What does the demon's slanted posture and general attitude indicate?

The Pallavas ruled over much of northern Tamil Nadu and southern Andhra Pradesh until the late 9th century, when they were finally overthrown by the Chola king **Aditya I.**

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Fig. 3.19. A panel depicting warriors in a battle (Airavatesvara temple, Tamil Nadu).

Further South

Nearly a millennium before our period, the Pāṇḍya, Chola and Chera kingdoms were mentioned in an edict of Aśhoka as his southern neighbours; they also figured in the Sangam literature (the earliest collections of Tamil poetry), and we first mentioned them in Part 1 of this textbook (see 'The Age of Reorganisation', in particular Fig. 6.14). Then they seemed to disappear, eclipsed by other powers. Now they reemerge (Fig. 3.16), shaping the South's political and cultural life — and often at war with each other.

The **Pāṇḍyas** rose to power by the 6th century. Allied with the Chālukyas and the Pallavas, they controlled much of southern Tamil Nadu and, for brief periods, northern parts of Sri Lanka. Their coins and inscriptions attest to maritime trade with Southeast Asia via ports such as Korkai. Their capital was Madurai, a vibrant cultural centre. They built many temples, created rock-cut temples, and patronised poets; a copper plate mentions their translation of the Mahābhārata into Tamil (which unfortunately has not survived). In the 10th century, the mighty Cholas swept them aside, but they would re-emerge some three centuries later.

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Meanwhile, along the Kerala coast, the **Cheras**, also known as Chera Perumals, maintained their independence despite their neighbours' military power.

Then came the **Cholas,** reborn under Vijayālaya in the 9th century. From his new capital at Tanjāvūr (now spelt 'Thanjavur'), he laid the foundation for a strong and prosperous kingdom. His son **Aditya I** expanded it by defeat-ing the Pallavas, bringing most parts of present-day Tamil Nadu and parts of southern Andhra Pradesh under Chola control.

The Cholas ended up building one of the largest empires in south Indian history, known for its elaborate and efficient administration, its powerful navy, and grand temples. They patronised arts such as sculpture (Fig. 3.19 and 3.20) and architecture, and promoted Tamil as well as Sanskrit literatures; their inscriptions make use of both languages. The fertile Kāveri delta along with efficient irrigation techniques ensured a steady agricultural output and contributed to the prosperity of the empire's heartland. As Chola dominance in south India lasted until the 13th century, we will meet them again in the next chapter.



Fig. 3.20. An early Chola bronze sculpture of Naṭarāja or 'Lord of dance', an aspect of Śhiva symbolising the dance of creation and destruction of the universe.



DON'T MISS OUT

During this period, inscriptions began using both Sanskrit and regional languages simultaneously. In land grants, the ruler and his dynastic history were often praised in Sanskrit, while the operative details of the grant were recorded in the local language. Why do you think such inscriptions were written in two languages?

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Other Developments

We have so far placed more emphasis on the rise and decline of the leading political powers of this period. What happened to the society in the meantime?

Polity and administration

As we saw several times, the fall of large, unified empires gave way to smaller, decentralised kingdoms. Kings like the Chālukyas and Rāṣhṭrakūṭas ruled their core regions directly, but governed other regions through subordinate rulers called *sāmantas* — the equivalent of tributaries or vassals. These *sāmantas* were indispensable, as they led armies and managed local administration. Yet, their loyalty could be fragile, especially when they felt that the empire's central authority was weakening. Some, like the Rāṣhṭrakūṭas, once *sāmantas* under the Chālukyas, eventually grew powerful enough to overthrow their overlords.

Directly controlled territories were divided into provinces (*bhuktis* or *rāṣhṭras*), districts (*maṇḍalas*) and villages, with specific officials at every level. Villages, the lowest administrative units, were overseen by headmen, accountants, and local committees, and remained largely self-governed.



Fig. 3.21. A Chola inscription in an early Tamil script (Bṛihadīśhvara temple, Thanjavur)

By the 9th century, south India saw the rise of assemblies at several levels. Let us recall, for example, the elaborate 10th-century inscriptions of the Cholas at Uttaramerur (or Uthiramerur) detailing the selection process of members to the village *sabhā* (see Part 1 of this textbook, Chapter 'From the Rulers to the Ruled'). This showed the long continuity of democratic traditions in India, dating back 1,500 years to the *janapadas*.

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Trade, economy and urbanisation

During this period, the land grant system that had begun under the Guptas expanded greatly. Kings, chiefs, royal family members, and vassals gave land to individuals, communities, and religious establishments, creating a new class of landholders. Many of these holders did not till the land themselves, suggesting that powerful intermediaries often exploited peasants, as several texts and inscriptions allude to.

Many grants aimed to bring uncultivated land under cultivation, expanding agriculture and crop diversity. Classical texts on agricultural techniques (see 'The Story of Indian Farming' in this textbook) reflect this era's emphasis on farming. Many small-scale and some large state-supported irrigation works were undertaken. The Pallavas, for example, built numerous tanks in Tamil Nadu, many of which are still functional today. Many inscriptions record the sponsorship of a well, a pond, or a tank, thereby elevating the donor's social status. With better irrigation and agricultural growth, cash crops thrived, supporting agro-based crafts and industries.



Fig. 3.22. A 7th-century hero stone at Eduthanur, a village in Tamil Nadu. The inscription praises this local chief who, along with his loyal dog, fought cattle thieves, both of them losing their lives. (The chief's and even the dog's names are given in the inscription.)

Alongside agriculture, trade and markets flourished in regional trade centres. Small traders handled local trade, while ship-owning merchants conducted long-distance commerce. From the 8th century onward, India's west coast saw brisk shipping with ports in present-day Iran, Iraq, and Africa's east coast, while India's east coast connected with Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia and all the way to Chinese ports (see Fig. 2.2 earlier in this textbook). A similar activity prevailed on the east coast under the Cheras; a set

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of copper-plate inscriptions significantly refers to the presence of Christian, Muslim and Jewish traders from West Asia, showing again how India was a hub of international trade.

Overall, Indian society remained largely rural and agrarian during this period. Although some historians have suggested urban decline during this period, the evidence paints a different and more complex picture. In north India, most older cities remained occupied, while new ones emerged; Xuanzang noted the decline of Kauśhāmbī and Śhrāvastī, but described thriving cities like Sthāneśhvara, Kānyakubja, and Kāśhī. In south India, cities continued to flourish as political, economic, and religious hubs, with temples acting as centres of commerce and ports fuelling maritime trade.



LET'S REMEMBER

We briefly saw the rise of local merchant **guilds** or associations (see 'The Rise of Empires' in Part 1 of this textbook). They continued to play a significant role, comprising traders, artisans, and moneylenders, and supporting religious and charitable activities. Inscriptions detail their structure and functions. In south India, two major merchant guilds operated prominently: one was active in coastal and inland trade, while the other became the largest inter-regional merchant association.

Social life

During this period, Indian society grew more complex and hence cannot be reduced to a simple description. The traditional *jātis* (see 'New Beginnings: Cities and States' in Part 1 of this textbook) multiplied, with many new ones based on occupation or region. This created communities in which most people married within their group. Some local tribes, border populations, foreign migrants, and occupational or religious groups were absorbed into the *varṇa-jāti* system, while some communities (such as foreign traders) remained as outsiders.

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Much of the data on the *jātis* comes from texts, and some from inscriptions, but overall there are many gaps and unanswered questions. Moreover, the system varied widely across regions, showing that *varṇa* and *jāti* were flexible rather than rigid. For instance, several sources indicate that the Pālas and the Kākatīyas (whom we will meet in the next chapter), among other rulers, were originally Śhūdras (the *varṇa* of labourers, craftspeople, etc.), but in the course of time, they would have been regarded as Kṣhatriyas (the *varṇa* of rulers and warriors).

At the same time, terms like *aspṛiśhya* (literally, 'not to be touched') appeared in a few texts, pointing to discrimination against some communities regarded as 'impure'. This is confirmed by other sources, such as Xuanzang, who noted, "Butchers, fishers, dancers, executioners, and scavengers, and so on, have their abodes without the city. ... Their houses are surrounded by low walls, and form the suburbs."

Despite such divisions, different *varṇas* and *jātis* often functioned cooperatively, as they depended on each other's work and function, at least at the economic level. We will also see below the so-called 'Bhakti Movement', which cut across all strata of the society; several bhakti saints, for instance, were Śhūdras.



THINK ABOUT IT

How does a professional group transform into a *jāti?* Such a process was complex and could vary from region to region. Let us look at one example.

The Kāyasthas, historically known as scribes or clerks, were initially a professional group open to different *varṇas*. In the 10th century, they became a distinct *jāti*. In parts of Bengal, certain Brāhmaṇa surnames such as Vasu, Ghosha, Datta, and Dama, later came to be associated with Kāyasthas, indicating a fusion of Brāhmaṇa and non-Brāhmaṇa families. Over time, they married mainly within their group, forming the Kāyastha *jāti*.

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As regards the position of women, it would also vary widely from one region to another and from one social layer to another. It is however interesting to note that in his *Harṣhacharita*, Bāṇabhaṭṭa showed women participating in many economic and social activities, working in agriculture and crafts, and, in courts, serving as entertainers, musicians, storytellers, and attendants. Many inscriptions record women making offerings to temples or getting water structures constructed.



DON'T MISS OUT

During this period, several queens ascended to the throne. While most dynasties favoured male heirs (*yuvarājas*), some, like the Bhauma-Karas in present-day Odisha, saw multiple female rulers, the most notable being Tribhuvana Mahadevi I in the 9th century. She strengthened the dynasty, suppressed rebellions, demonstrated strong administrative skills, patronised Hindu and Buddhist institutions and temples, and issued land grants under the title 'Paramabhaṭṭārikā Mahārājādhirāja Tribhuvana Mahādevī', which means 'supreme sovereign empress, great queen of the three worlds'.

Cultural life

By now, we have seen several rulers patronising different schools of thought — Hindu, Buddhist or Jain — regardless of their own inclinations. Those religious traditions interacted in complex ways, sharing central concepts (such as dharma and karma), sacred spaces, artistic motifs and sometimes deities. They coexisted peacefully most of the time, despite occasional rivalries, as between Shaivites and Jainas in south India.

Around the 6th century, Tantric schools of thought emerged, emphasising rituals, meditation, mantras, and the worship of powerful deities, especially Shakti. Buddhism, partly influenced by Tantricism, thrived in eastern India, especially under the Pālas, thanks to its monastic universities that drew

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scholars from across Asia. But elsewhere, during this period, it declined as temple-based Hinduism and bhakti practices rose.

Supported by rulers and wealthy merchant communities, Jainism remained popular in western India and Karnataka. Monumental works from this period include the monolithic Bāhubalī at Shravanabelagola in Karnataka (Fig. 3.23) and the Jain cave temples at Ellora or Badami.

The Purāṇas, with their elaborate mythology and sacred geography (see 'How the Land Becomes Sacred' in Part 1 of this textbook), helped integrate local deities and regional myths into the broader pan-Indian cults, especially those of Śhiva, Viṣhṇu, Kṛiṣhṇa and various devīs. These traditions emphasised bhakti (personal devotion) over Vedic sacrifices and centred around temples, maṭhas, and pilgrimage sites.



Fig. 3.23. The 10th-century monolithic statue of Bāhubalī at Shravanabelagola (Karnataka) during a special ceremony in 2018; Bāhubalī is a revered Jain figure, depicted here in a meditation which lasted 12 years (notice the anthill behind him and the plants climbing around his legs and arms).

From the 6th century onward, these traditions crystallised into what has been called the 'Bhakti Movement'. Bhakti, as devotion addressed to a deity, did exist much earlier, but what took place now, rather than an organised movement, was a massive spread among all layers of society and across India. The initial spark came from the South, where two groups of devotees and poets produced devotional literature (in Tamil) which had an enormous impact: the 12 Ālvārs, devotees of Viṣhṇu (one of them, Āṇḍāḷ, was a woman); and the 63 Nāyanārs or Nāyanmārs, devotees of Śhiva (including three women, Fig. 3.24).

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Fig. 3.24. A statue of Kāraikāl Ammaiyār, one of the female Nāyanmār saints, who probably lived in the 6th century CE.

More bhakti saints followed in several other parts of India. They emerged from diverse social backgrounds and their poetry, composed mostly in regional languages, invoked a direct personal relationship with the divine that was open to everyone — cutting across gender and social divisions and reshaping Indian society and literature. Its impact is lingering to this day.

A galaxy of mathematicians and astronomers

The period we deal with in this chapter saw brilliant advances in science and technology. Let us look at mathematics and astronomy here, which contributed to India's renown in the ancient world.

Born in 598 CE in Bhillamāla (the first capital of the Gurjara-Pratīhāras, remember), **Brahmagupta** was an imposing figure, with remarkable achievements in mathematics and astronomy. In his major work, *Brahmasphutasiddhānta*, he introduced the rules of arithmetic operations with zero, negative numbers and fractions — the same that you now learn at school. He also pioneered new techniques for solving certain equations, establishing him as one of the founders of modern algebra. His works were translated into Persian and later Latin, contributing to the growth of mathematics in the Arab world and, later, Europe.

Other brilliant mathematicians and astronomers of this period included **Bhāskara I,** who did pioneering work in trigonometry and wrote a lengthy commentary on the *Āryabhaṭīya* and **Virahānka,** the first to establish the Virahānka-Fibonacci sequence (which you learned about in your Grade 7 Mathematics textbook). **Mahāvīra,** a Jain scholar (not to be confused with Mahāvīra, the great Jain teacher who lived over a millennium earlier), lived at the court of the Rāṣhṭrakūṭa king Amoghavarṣha Nṛipatunga and

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authored the first work of mathematics independent of astronomy. Except for him, many mathematicians of this period refined astronomical calculation techniques, particularly to predict the positions of the planets in the sky at any given time.

Many more scholars of those times could be mentioned. Together with their predecessors (see for instance Āryabhaṭa and Varāmihira in 'The Gupta Era' in Part 1 of this textbook) and their successors (see Bhāskarāchārya in the next chapter here), this constitutes an unrivalled knowledge tradition across centuries, motivated not only by a pure search for knowledge, but also by pragmatic objectives such as the preparation of reliable calendars or precise predictions of solar and lunar eclipses. As with art and literature, such a long tradition would not have been possible without royal patronage.

Foreign Invasions

For centuries, Indian rulers kept a close watch on the strategic northwestern frontier, yet the subcontinent faced many foreign invasions throughout its long history. In Part 1 of this textbook, we read about invasions by the Greeks, the Śhakas, and the Kuṣhāṇas. Let us now hear about the coming of the Hūṇas and of the Arabs.



Fig. 3.25. Twin vijayastambhas (victory pillars) of the Aulikara king Yaśhodharma at Mandsaur (only the lower portion of the pillar on the left remains standing). Inscriptions on the pillars commemorate his victory over a Hūṇa leader.

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The Hūṇas' challenge

We need to go back a little in time. The Huns were a nomadic people originating from Central Asia in the 4th century. With their horse-riding and archery skills and lightning-fast attacks, they were fierce conquerors and overcame much of Europe, until, a century later, their empire disintegrated. The **Hūṇas** mentioned in Indian literature are thought to have been a branch of the Huns. They played a part in weakening the mighty Gupta Empire, as we saw in Part 1 of this textbook, but could not affect India much at that time.

In the early 6th century, two Hūṇa leaders in succession pushed deep into the Ganga plains despite stiff resistance from several kings, until they were defeated by kings of the **Aulikara dynasty** whose capital was Daśhapura — modern-day Mandsaur in Madhya Pradesh (Fig. 3.25). These successive defeats effectively ended Hūṇa power in India.

By the 7th century, the Hūṇas had assimilated into the very fabric of Indian society; many served as soldiers, others took up roles in local administrations. One inscription, for instance, records a Hūṇa serving on a temple's administration council (*goṣhṭhika*)! They adopted Sanskrit and Prakrit for their inscriptions and used Gupta-style royal titles, coin designs, and religious symbols. Some of their coins, for instance, displayed the goddess Lakṣhmī and attributes of Viṣhṇu or Śhiva.



Fig. 3.26. (Left) A coin of the Hūṇa Toramāṇa, with his name 'Tora' in Brahmi script. (Right) A coin of the Gupta emperor Skandagupta.

LET'S EXPLORE

What details do you observe in these coins (Fig. 3.26)? Why do the coins of Toramāṇa and Skandagupta appear so similar? What conclusions can you draw?

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The Arabs arrive on India's shores

Within a few years of the death of Islam's founder, Muhammad, in 632 CE, the new religion had spread far into Asia and Africa. In 637, India's western coast witnessed naval raids by Muslim Arabs on Thānā (present-day Thane), Bhārukachchha (present-day Bharuch) and Debal (a port city in the delta of the Indus), though without securing lasting territorial control. The first attempts to conquer Afghan kingdoms were also unsuccessful, as they met with fierce resistance.

However, things changed when the governor of Iraq sent an army under the command of his nephew and son-in-law, **Muhammad bin Qasim**. These forces swept into Sindh. Debal fell first, where, according to the 9th-century historian Al-Balādhurī, bin Qasim "kept up the slaughter of the inhabitants for three days" and had a "great temple … housing **idols** destroyed". From there, bin Qasim moved eastward towards Aror (also Alor, present-day Rohri in Sindh), the capital of King Dāhar. According to the *Chachnāma* (a 13th-century Persian rendering of an older Arabic account), bin Qasim declared to Dāhar, "I consider it my bounden duty to carry on this religious war, in obedience to the orders of God who says in the Koran: 'Wage war against the **infidels**'…" In a fierce battle, Dāhar, riding atop an elephant, was killed by an arrow, following which his army was routed.

Idol: A worshipped image. Because orthodox sects of Judaism, Christianity and Islam condemn the worship of idols, we prefer to use the term 'image' or Indian words such as *mūrti* or *vigraha*.

Infidel: For medieval Islam, infidels were non-Muslims, especially Hindus, Buddhists or Jains.

LET'S EXPLORE



The *Chachnāma* records that when King Dāhar was killed, his widowed queen put up a brave resistance, and when the situation became hopeless, she immolated herself along with other ladies. Another queen ordered her treasure to be distributed among the brave soldiers and inspired them to stand against the invaders.

→ What does this suggest about the way the indigenous people responded to invasions?

→ Why do you think the queen chose to give away her treasure?

→ What does this reveal about the role of women in warfare?

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Within two years of Qasim's death, Indian chiefs rebelled and regained most of the conquered territory. The Arabs did not give up easily and soon pushed into Rājputāna and the central region of Mālwā, but their gains were short-lived. An inscription at Gwalior records how the Gurjara-Pratīhāra king Nāgabhaṭa I, whom we met earlier, "crushed the large army of the powerful **Mlechchha** king."

Mlechchha: This term, which originally referred to those who did not speak clearly or did not follow Vedic culture, came to refer to foreigners.

THINK ABOUT IT

Sulaiman, a 9th-century Arab merchant and traveller, makes this comment on a Gurjara-Pratīhāra ruler: "This king maintains numerous forces, and no other Indian prince has so fine a cavalry. He is unfriendly to the Arabs ... there is no greater foe of the Muhammadan faith than he. ... He has riches, and his camels and horses are numerous. ... There is no country in India safer from robbers." Why do you think the author calls the ruler a 'foe to the Muslim faith'?

The Arabs continued to be frustrated in their advances by the stubborn resistance of Indian rulers, who sometimes forged alliances to defeat them. Kashmir's King Lalitāditya Muktāpīda, whom we met earlier, defeated an Arab chief three times, according to the *Rājatarangiṇī*. The geographer al-Istakhri observed that after three centuries of unremitting effort, the Arab dominion in India was limited to just two petty states in Sindh and Punjab. Even there, they survived only by giving up iconoclasm and using native Hindus and Buddhists (collectively called 'Budds') for political purposes.

Overall, the Arab conquest of Sindh had a limited political and religious impact compared to their conquests in other regions where Islam often replaced local institutions and led to mass conversions. In Sindh, whether for strategic reasons or by compulsion, the Arabs changed their policy: Hindus and Buddhists were allowed to rebuild temples, continue their worship, and temple priests were allowed to keep their share of revenue.

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It is worth noting that long before the rise of Islam, India and Arabia were well connected through trade, with ships sailing back and forth with the monsoon winds — indeed, the word 'monsoon' is borrowed from the Arabic *mawsim* for 'season'. Ships carried not only spices and textiles but also ideas, languages, and stories across the Arabian Sea.

THINK ABOUT IT

The table lists common everyday words, highlighting their similar pronunciation across the three languages. By comparing these sounds, you can identify words that are closely related or share common roots in all three languages. With the help of your teacher, use this observation to complete the table.

Sanskrit	Arabic	English
	sandal	sandalwood
tāmbūla	*tanbūl*	
karpūra		camphor
pippalī	*filfil*	

DON'T MISS OUT

The most significant cultural interactions are perhaps in the field of science, since, especially in the 9th century, Sanskrit texts of mathematics, astronomy and medicine were translated into Arabic, notably in Baghdad. Among many other things, the Arabs adopted India's decimal numeral system with the zero, along with the Indian numerals. Their mathematicians acknowledged the Indian origin of this revolutionary numeral system, but once transmitted to Europe by the Arabs, these numerals became known as 'Arabic numerals'. Nowadays, several dictionaries add the term 'Hindu-Arabic numerals'. You will come across this important example of cultural transmission in your mathematics textbooks.

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Taking Stock

As we stated at the start, this chapter offers only a brief survey of the main figures and developments in this turbulent period. Numerous dynasties rose and fell, battling one another, but sometimes also in alliance with one another. A few of the more powerful kingdoms rose to the status of empires, but rarely managed to cover a large part of India or to last more than a couple of centuries.

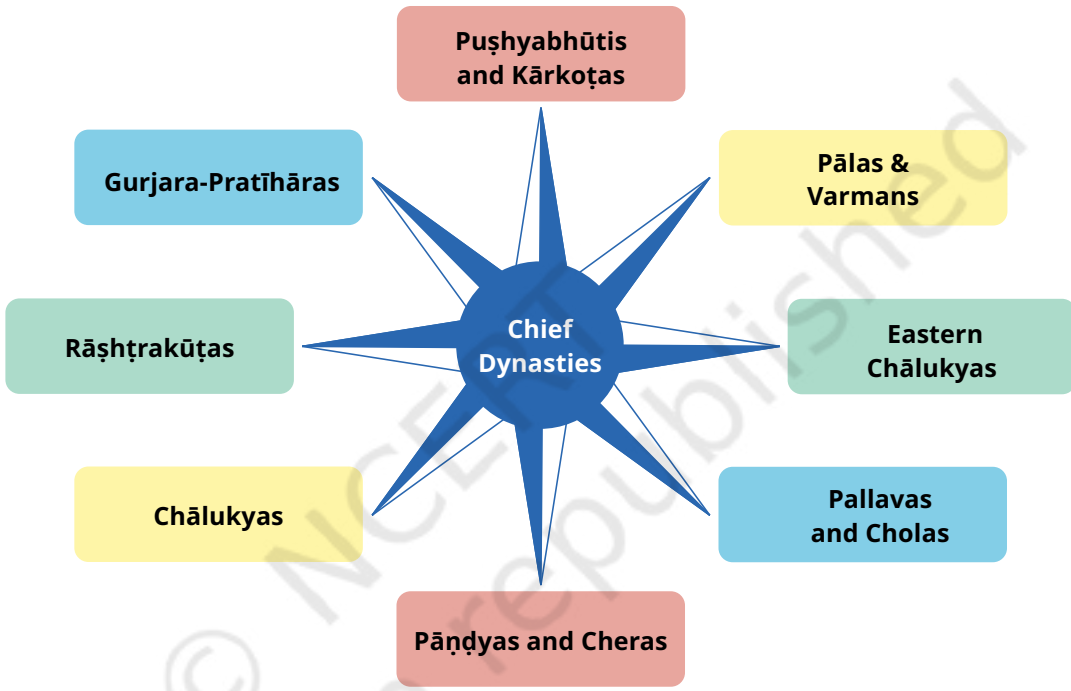


Fig. 3.27. A graphic representation of the chief dynasties covered in this chapter, with a very approximate indication of their geographical direction.

THINK ABOUT IT

We have met some 12 dynasties in this chapter. During the same period, many more existed in India: the Bhanjas, Chāpas (or Chāvaḍās), Guhilas, Kalachuris, Kadambas, Maitrakas, Maukharis, Saindhavas, Śhilāhāras, Somavaṃśhīs, Tomaras, Utpalas, Paramāras, Chāhamānas, Gangas, most of them with several branches. *You need not remember them* (except that we will meet the last three in the next chapter). The list is merely to give a sense of the depth and richness of our country's history.

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At the same time, this was a period of transformation and regional consolidation. Far from being a historical void, it witnessed the dynamic integration of new social and political groups, the flourishing of literature in Sanskrit and regional languages, and major advances in temple architecture and sculpture. New philosophical schools of thought and new religious practices spread, redefining and enriching the subcontinent's cultural and spiritual landscape, though on the same ancient foundations. Lastly, India showed resilience in the face of foreign invasions and a capacity for political renewal.

Before we move on ...



- The decline of the Gupta empire led to the rise of powerful regional kingdoms. No single power could maintain lasting supremacy, as rival states had comparable military strength, administrative systems, and strategic approaches.
- Foreign invaders who came to India often assimilated and owned her cultural traditions. However, with the advent of Islam, the situation changed. While Arab armies achieved military successes elsewhere, they struggled for a long time before making their first significant breach into the subcontinent.
- Regardless of their own inclination, rulers generally patronised Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism, promoting a vibrant cultural pluralism. The period saw the rise of the Bhakti tradition, which soon spread across India.
- This period saw remarkable achievements in language, literature, art, sciences and technologies.
- The multiplication of *jātis* made the society more complex, but the *varṇa-jāti* system remained flexible.
- Trade during this period connected local economies with distant markets, both in India and abroad, spurring urban growth, fostering cultural exchange, and integrating India into broader trade networks.

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Questions and activities

1. If you lived in Kannauj during the struggle between the Pālas, the Pratīhāras and the Rāṣhṭrakūṭas, how would it change your daily life and your estimate of the rulers? Write a letter on this to your friend living in Kanchipuram.
2. Emperors and kings during this period controlled only core regions and governed other regions through subordinate vassals. What would be the advantages and the challenges of such a system?
3. In what ways were the invasions of the Hūṇas and the Arabs different in their aims, methods, and impact on the Indian subcontinent? Prepare a write-up, discuss and present it in the class.
4. Imagine you are a common citizen watching the Prayāga assembly. How would you react to Harṣha giving away most of his wealth?
5. Forming groups, let each group choose one Ālvār and one Nāyanār and prepare a biography poster or booklet. Include their life stories and a sample poem or two (in translation).
6. You will notice that our maps show only ancient names for the kingdoms' capitals and main cities. Using a pencil, mark the modern names next to their original names. Refer the current map of India and try to locate those cities on it.
7. Match the ruler or the dynasty with the city.

(a) Rāṣhṭrakūṭas	(i) Kānchī
(b) Gurjara-Pratīhāras	(ii) Tanjāvūr
(c) Cholas	(iii) Mānyakheṭa
(d) Harṣhavardhana	(iv) Ujjayinī
(e) Pallavas	(v) Kānyakubja

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CHAPTER 4

Turning Tides: 11th and 12th Centuries

It is the same India which has withstood the shocks of centuries, of hundreds of foreign invasions, of hundreds of upheavals of manners and customs. It is the same land which stands firmer than any rock in the world, with its undying vigour, indestructible life. Its life is of the same nature as the soul, without beginning and without end, immortal; and we are the children of such a country.

— Swami Vivekananda



Fig. 4.1. A bas-relief depicting soldiers and elephants preparing for war (from Lakṣhmaṇa Temple, Khajuraho)

The Big Questions

1. *Why are the 11th and 12th centuries seen as a period of transition in Indian history?*
2. *Which new powers emerged during this period? What were the essential features of their economic, military and administrative systems?*
3. *What high accomplishments in art, architecture, literature, science, etc., do we come across during this period?*

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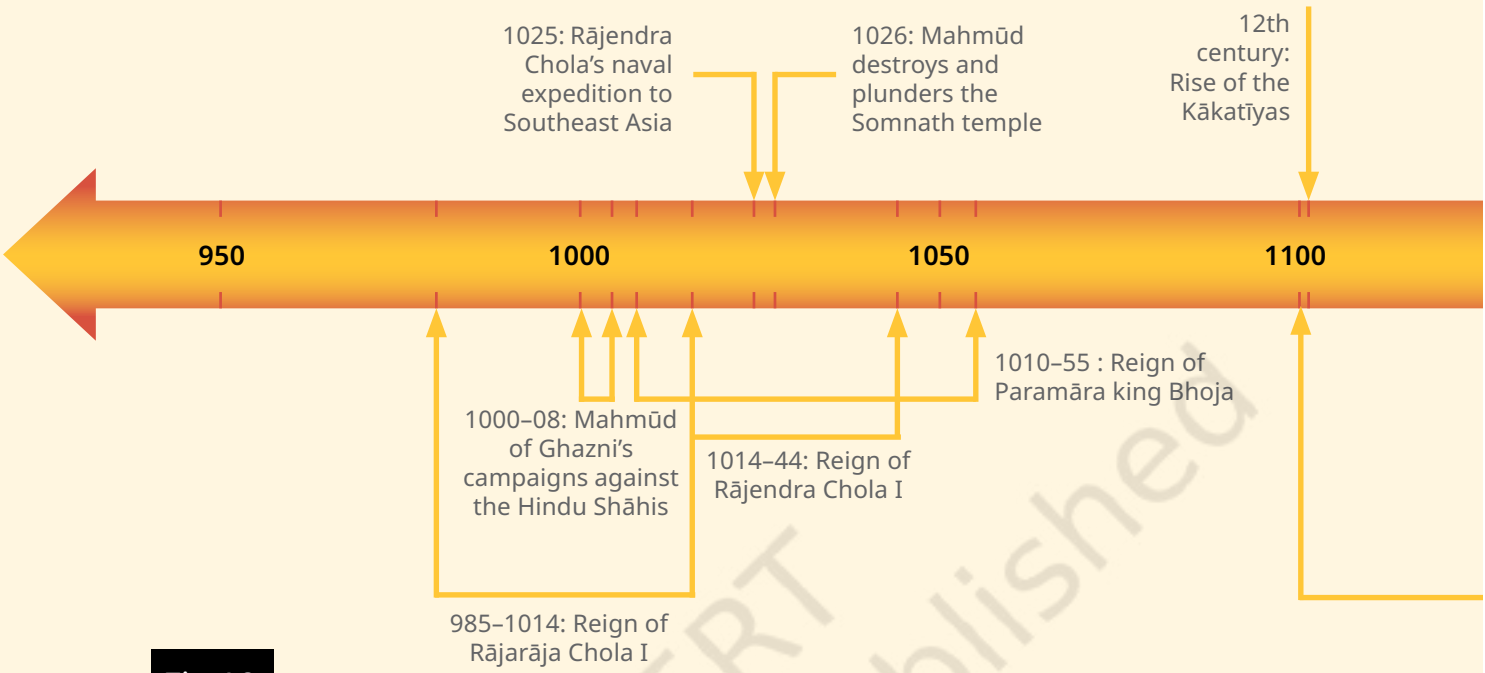


Fig. 4.2.

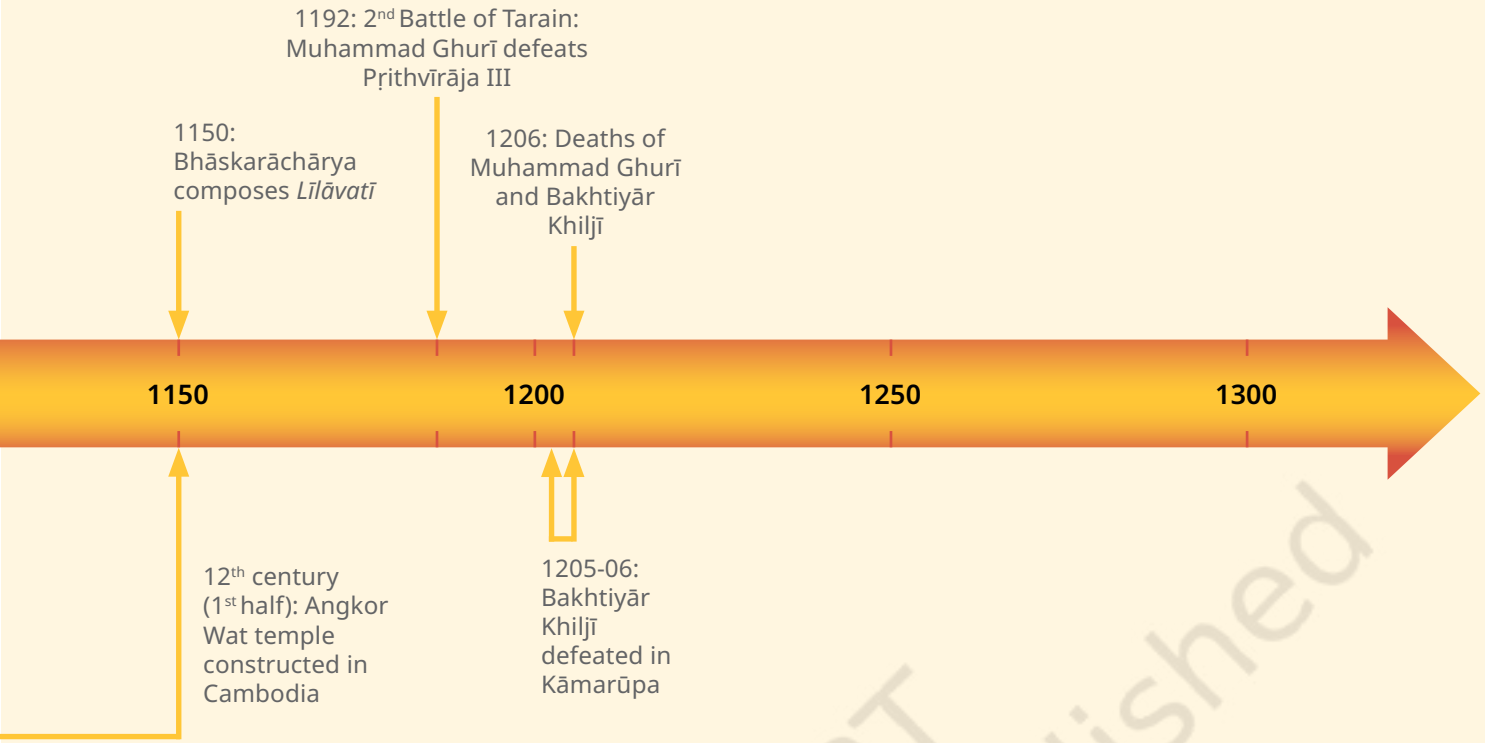
Turkic: Refers to peoples, languages, and cultures historically associated with a vast region stretching across Central Asia, all the way to Turkey and Siberia.

In the previous chapter, we saw the Arabs' repeated attempts to invade and dominate north India and how, in the end, those incursions had little overall impact on India. The 11th and 12th centuries tell a different story: invasions by **Turkic** powers penetrated much deeper into north India, despite stubborn resistance from native kingdoms.

We begin the chapter with an invasion and end the chapter with another, with a very brief account of the wars and destruction that came in their wake. However, many Indian rulers also flourished in this time period, successfully battling the invaders at times (when they were not battling each other), conducting naval expeditions, creating astonishing monuments or projecting India's influence abroad. Many poets, philosophers, saints and scientists belong to this period and their works continue to illuminate us even today.

In this chapter we will only explore a few of these important events, figures and accomplishments.

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THINK ABOUT IT

A word of caution: In Grade 8 you will read a 'Note on History's Darker Periods'. Briefly, it explains how history has recorded war, conquest and destruction more than peace, good governance or creativity, and how, the world over, historians have sometimes hesitated to draw attention to such darker periods. Our approach is that it is better to face them and analyse them so as to understand what made such developments possible and, hopefully, help avoid their recurrence in future. In addition, we should not forget that while past events cannot be erased or denied, it would be wrong to hold anyone responsible for them today.

The Ghaznavid Invasions

In the 9th and 10th centuries, several kingdoms confronted each other in present-day Afghanistan and northern Pakistan. Across those two regions and all the way to Punjab, there ruled a

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powerful dynasty known as **Hindu Shāhis**. With the help of several other Indian rulers, they resisted several attempted invasions. This resistance made a difference, since they controlled the Khyber Pass, one of the main mountain passes through the Hindu Kush range (see Fig. 4.3 and 4.4). In the course of India's history, many invaders used this pass to enter the Subcontinent; for at least 2,500 years, it was also a major trade route, connecting the Subcontinent to Central Asia and beyond, and the route Buddhist scholars and monks travelled.



LET'S EXPLORE

Observe the sketch of the Khyber Pass (Fig. 4.3). What kind of terrain does it depict?

→ What advantages would it offer to an army trying to reach the Indus plains? But also, what dangers?

→ Thinking of the caravans of traders that passed through the Khyber Pass for many centuries, let's ask the same questions about the advantages as well as dangers.



Fig. 4.3. The Khyber Pass, as painted by a British military officer in about 1847.

Ultimately, however, a Turkic power — the Ghaznavids — after defeating a rival Muslim kingdom, overran the Shāhis, ruled at

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the time by **Jayapāla**. As their name indicates, the Ghaznavids' capital was Ghazna, today's Ghazni in Afghanistan. In the first decade of the 11th century, their ruler Mahmūd (often referred to as **'Mahmūd of Ghazni'**) accomplished this final conquest, first defeating Jayapāla and, in 1008, overcoming Jayapāla's son **Ānandapāla** after a long battle, despite the support Ānandapāla received from several rulers from north India. The outcome of that battle, waged in northern Punjab, meant that Mahmūd now had easy access to the Indus plains and beyond.



THINK ABOUT IT

We will meet later in this chapter the Persian scholar al-Bīrūnī, who accompanied Mahmūd in some of his campaigns. He wrote in his memoirs on India, "The Hindu Shāhiya dynasty is now extinct, and of the whole house there is no longer the slightest remnant in existence. We must say that, in all their grandeur, they never slackened in the ardent desire of doing that which is good and right, that they were men of noble sentiment and noble bearing."

What conclusions can we draw from this remark by someone in Mahmūd's entourage?



DON'T MISS OUT

Mahmūd assumed the title of 'sultan', a word of Arabic origin which means 'authority' or 'power'; in the Muslim world, it came to refer to a sovereign ruler or king. In Grade 8, we will come across sultans who established their kingdoms or 'sultanates' in India, the dominant one being the Delhi Sultanate.

In all, Mahmūd conducted 17 campaigns in India; after each one, he would return to Ghazni with huge amounts of booty. Although he met with strong resistance (from the **Chandellas** of central India, among others) and was close to defeat on a few occasions, his large army's rapid marches and daring cavalry attacks, with archers on horseback, were ultimately decisive.

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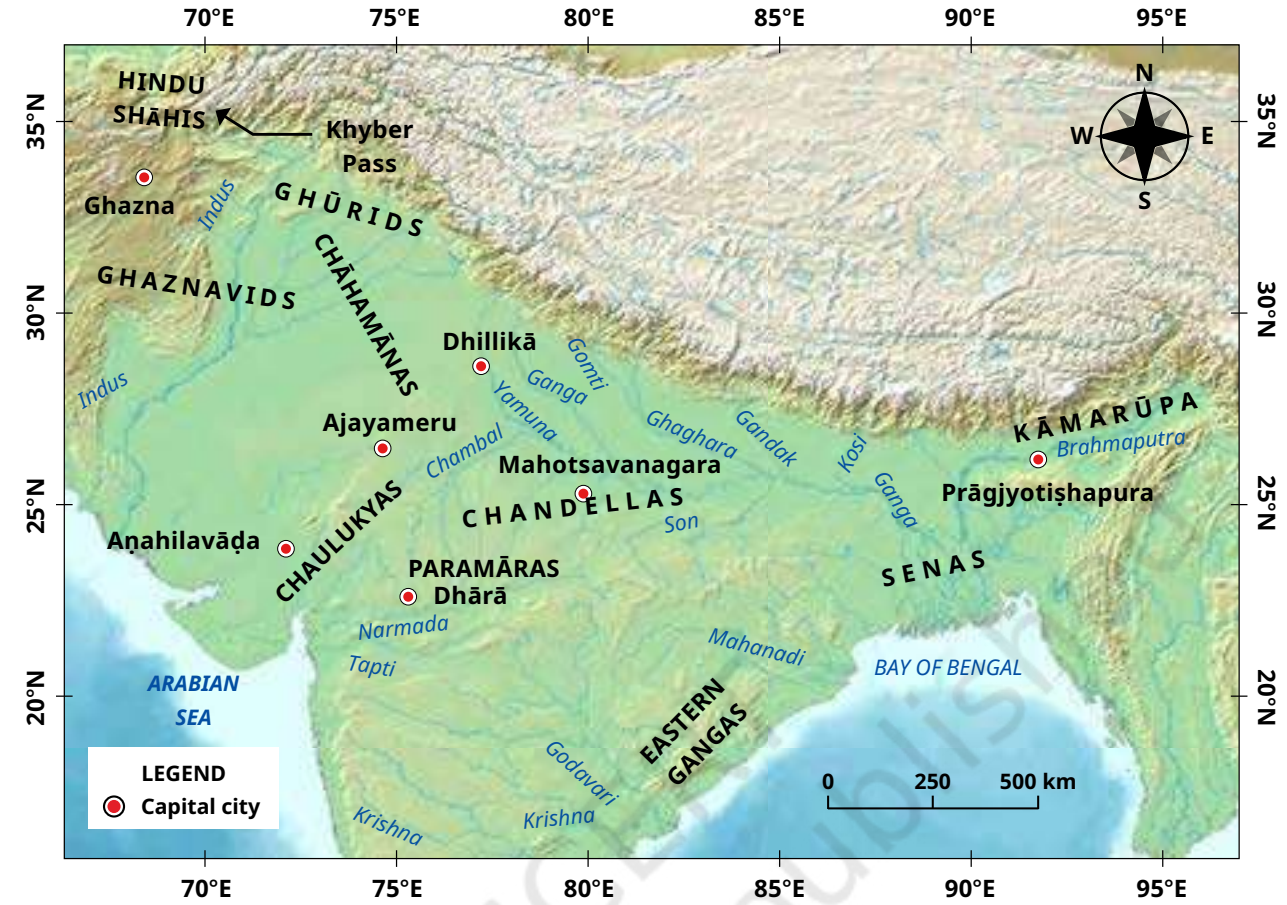


Fig. 4.4. A few dynasties in northern and central India in the 11th and 12th centuries

When Mahmūd reached Mathura (in present-day western Uttar Pradesh) in 1018, he found it to be a city of enormous wealth, with a magnificent temple overlooking the city. Mahmūd's court historian al-Utbi, who chronicled his campaigns, wrote that even "the pens of all writers and the pencils of all painters" would be unable to describe the temple's "beauty and decoration". Mahmūd destroyed it and plundered its treasure, then proceeded to Kannauj, where he took one of the last Pratihāra rulers by surprise, and looted and destroyed many temples. A few years later, another campaign took him to Gujarat and to Somnath (in present-day Saurashtra), which was then a bustling seaport. Despite strong resistance from the locals and severe losses to his army, after a few days of fighting Mahmūd gained the upper hand, destroyed the Somanātha Śhiva temple and looted its enormous treasures.

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Fig. 4.5. Ruins of a temple complex in today's Amb Shareef (northern Pakistan), built during the rule of the Hindu Shāhis

LET'S EXPLORE

In later centuries, the Somanātha temple was rebuilt and destroyed again several times; the existing temple was built in 1950 and inaugurated the next year by the then President of India, Rajendra Prasad. Why do you think it was decided to fund the construction entirely from public donations?

Mahmūd died in 1030 in Ghazni, at the age of 58. About this time, his nephew, Sālār Masūd, launched an attack on the Gangetic region. According to oral history and to a 17th-century Muslim chronicle, when he reached Bahraich (in modern-day Uttar Pradesh), the local ruler Suheldev (or Suhaldev) successfully resisted the attack and Sālār Masūd fell in the battle.

Mahmūd's campaigns involved not only destruction and plunder, but also the slaughter of tens of thousands of Indian civilians and the capture of numerous prisoners, including children, who were taken to be sold on slave markets of Central Asia. His biographers depict him as a powerful but cruel and ruthless general, keen not only to slaughter or enslave 'infidels' (that is, Hindus or Buddhists or Jains), but also to kill believers from rival sects of Islam.

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Al-Bīrūnī



Fig. 4.6. A 1973 postage stamp issued by the former Soviet Union in memory of al-Bīrūnī (Uzbekistan was then part of the Soviet Union).

Abū Rayḥān al-Bīrūnī, a Persian scholar from Khwārizm (in present-day Uzbekistan), was a mathematician, astronomer, geographer, historian and linguist all rolled into one. He travelled widely and wrote prolifically, both in Arabic and Persian, on nearly every branch of knowledge known in his time.

Around 1017, al-Bīrūnī accompanied Mahmūd of Ghazni on his campaign into India. He learned Sanskrit, read Indian texts and conversed with Indian scholars. The result was an encyclopaedic survey of Indian religion, philosophy, literature, geography, and sciences, in which he discussed Indian intellectual achievements as best he could, often comparing them with those of Greek and Islamic traditions. In mathematics and astronomy, al-Bīrūnī compiled what he could gather from the works of Āryabhaṭa, Varāhamihira and Brahmagupta, among others. In another work, he translated into Arabic Patanjali's *Yogasūtras*, a classic text on advanced concepts and techniques of yoga.

At the same time, al-Bīrūnī noted the impact of Mahmūd's military campaigns on India's scientific traditions: "Mahmūd utterly ruined the prosperity of the country, and performed there wonderful feats, by which the Hindus became like atoms of dust scattered in all directions. ... This is the reason, too, why Indian sciences have retired far away from those parts of the country conquered by us, and have fled to places which our hand cannot yet reach; to Kashmir, Varanasi, and other places."

Bhāskarāchārya

While the production and transmission of scientific knowledge did decline in north India a little later, they continued to flourish in other regions. Born in 1114, probably in present-day Maharashtra, Bhāskara II, better known as Bhāskarāchārya, was

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one of India's greatest mathematicians and astronomers. His family counted several scholars and astronomers. His most famous works (all in Sanskrit) are *Līlāvatī*, which uses lively riddles and problems to teach basic mathematics; *Bījaganita*, on more advanced algebra; and *Siddhāntaśhiromaṇi* ('Crown of Treatises on Mathematical Astronomy'), which deals with advanced astronomical calculations. Many later scholars wrote commentaries on those works, and several of them were translated into Persian during the Mughal period; as a result, his influence in India and beyond was long-lasting. It would take Europe a few centuries to rediscover some of Bhāskarāchārya's pioneering techniques.

In addition to his scientific knowledge, Bhāskarāchārya had a gift for poetry and used this talent to make his writings enjoyable to scholars and students alike. His works were full of examples, with clear explanations, demonstrations and proofs, making them favourite texts with students for centuries. Remember that you saw such examples in your Mathematics textbooks of Grade 7. Here is an example from *Līlāvatī* — see if you can find the solution!

> Of a herd of elephants, half and one-third of the half went into a cave, one-sixth and one-seventh of one-sixth were drinking water from a river. One-eighth and one-ninth of one-eighth were sporting in a pond full of lotuses. And the king of the elephants was leading three female elephants. Tell me, how many elephants were there in the herd?



Fig. 4.7. A 17th-century manuscript illustrating another problem from Līlāvatī, with a peacock perched on top of a pillar and a snake below.



Fig. 4.8. A painting depicting an Indian ruler brought to Mahmūd as a prisoner (manuscript of a 15th-century historical work in Persian)

As Mahmūd did not attempt to establish a permanent base in India beyond Punjab, historians have debated his motives for conducting such destructive campaigns; they have often suggested that plunder was the chief reason for his destruction of temples in India. It is true that the larger temples often held immense wealth, accumulated from the devotees' offerings over centuries, and would therefore be prime targets for plunder.

But it is also true that Mahmūd was keen to spread his version of Islam to non-Muslim parts of the world, as we find from contemporary evidence. Al-Utbi, for instance, noted, "Wherever he went, Mahmūd plundered and sacked the country until it was annihilated. He dug up and burnt down all its buildings, killed those infidels and carried away their children and cattle as booty. He mastered several other territories, and destroying their temples, their sacred buildings, built mosques instead, making the light of Islam visible." Let us also refer again to al-Bīrūnī, who, after explaining the origin of the śhivalinga worshipped

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at the Somnath temple, recorded, "The image was destroyed by the Prince Mahmūd. He ordered the upper part to be broken and the remainder to be transported to his residence, Ghazni. [A part of the image] lies before the door of the mosque of Ghazni, on which people rub their feet to clean them from dirt and wet."



Fig. 4.9. A coin issued from Lahore by Mahmūd, with one side in Arabic and the other in Sanskrit, praising Islam and Mahmūd as 'nṛipati' or king.

Eastern India

While north India bore the brunt of the Ghaznavid raids, during the 11th century the scene in eastern India was very different. After the decline of the Pālas, the **Sena dynasty** (Fig. 4.4) emerged as the dominant power over much of Bengal, with their capital at Nādīya (now the Nadia district, which shares a border with Bangladesh). Their relations with neighbouring Kāmarūpa (Assam) and Kalinga (more or less present-day Odisha) seem to have alternated between friendly and conflictual. While their predecessors, the Pālas, patronised Buddhist institutions, the Senas promoted Hindu thought and literature, hosting poets such as Jayadeva, author of the famous *Gītagovindam*, which tells the story of Kṛiṣhṇa and Rādhā.

Let us follow the coast southward, into Kalinga where we encounter the **Eastern Gangas** (Fig. 4.4), who had matrimonial alliances with the Cholas (whom we will meet soon), yet also clashed with them a few times, and with other neighbours as well. Nevertheless, by the end of the 12th century the Eastern Gangas emerged as one of the most stable powers of eastern India, with their kingdom extending 'from the Gangā to the Godāvarī,' as some of their inscriptions claim. This dynasty initiated the construction of the Jagannātha temple at Puri, and, in the mid-13th century, of the grand Sun temple at Konark.

Further South

Let us continue our journey southward. From the previous chapter, do you remember the **Western Chālukyas** (with their capital at Kalyāṇī or Kalyāṇa) and the **Eastern Chālukyas** (Fig. 4.10)? The

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former was a major power in the Deccan, its rule extending at some point to the Narmada River in the north. As the Eastern Chālukyas were gradually absorbed into the Chola sphere of influence through marriage alliances, their capital Vengi and the fertile region around it became the object of fierce wars between the Cholas and the Western Chālukyas. As a result, the Western Chālukyas faded away, while the Kākatīyas and the Hoysalas grew stronger, eventually replacing them. Let us now turn to them.

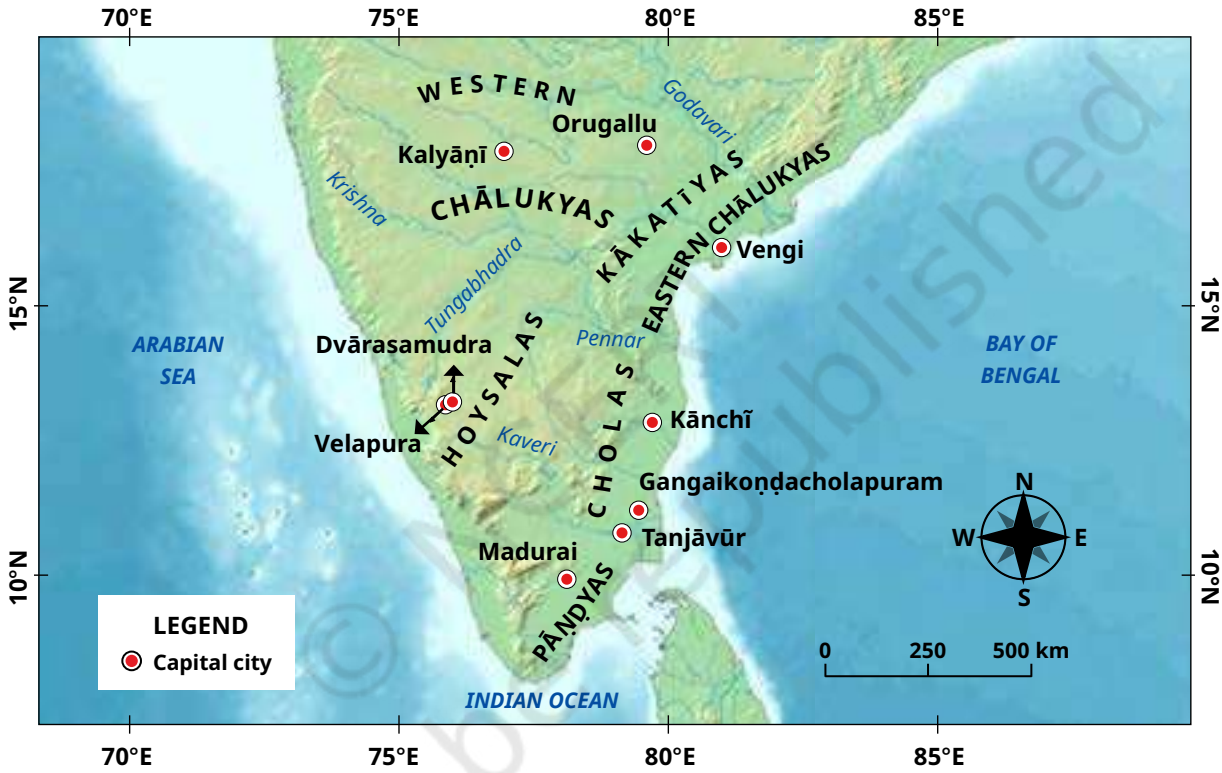


Fig. 4.10. A few dynasties of south India in the 11th and 12th centuries

The Kākatīyas

In 12th century, the **Kākatīyas** cemented their authority over much of present-day Telangana and Andhra Pradesh (Fig. 4.10), with their capital at Orugallu (today's Warangal), where they built a fort with impressive stone toraṇas or gateways (Fig. 4.11). While some of their kings composed works in Sanskrit, they also patronised Telugu literature; the Thousand Pillar temple at Hanamkonda is a fine example of their temple architecture.

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The Kākatīya rulers promoted a strong local administration based on village self-governance; they developed an efficient revenue system and an irrigation infrastructure that supported agricultural prosperity.



Fig. 4.11. A Toraṇa or gateway to the Warangal fort of Kākatīya period

The Hoysalas

The Hoysalas originated in southern Karnataka. There is an interesting legend behind the name. When their founder Sāla went to a Jain temple for worship, he found an ascetic meditating; as a tiger appeared on the scene, the ascetic said "Poy, Sāla" — which, in old Kannada language, means "strike, Sāla". Sāla promptly obeyed the ascetic and saved his life; in return, the ascetic blessed him with kingship. According to this legend mentioned in inscriptions (and depicted in several temples), the name 'Hoysala' is said to originate from the ascetic's command!

In our period, Velāpura (today's Belur) and Dvārasamudra (today's Halebidu) became the Hoysalas' capitals. Under King Viṣhṇuvardhana, they broke away from Chālukya overlordship, challenged the Cholas, and gradually extended their sway over most of present-day Karnataka. Their rule saw cultural and literary development in Kannada language, but their most visible legacy is their unique style of temple architecture, with intricately carved stone pillars, sculptures and panels. The temples at Belur and Halebidu are particularly famous, and are among three Hoysala temples recognised by the UNESCO as world heritage monuments.

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Fig. 4.12. A partial view of the Hoysala temple at Somanathapura (near Mysuru). Note the complexity of the entire design, the numerous elaborate statues, and the friezes at the bottom.

The Cholas, masters of the seas

The **Cholas**, whom we briefly met in the previous chapter, were a powerful and influential dynasty that rose to prominence in present-day Tamil Nadu, with Tanjāvūr (present-day Thanjavur), Gangaikoṇḍacholapuram, and Kānchī (present-day Kanchipuram) as their capital cities (Fig. 4.10).

From 985, **Rājarāja Chola** ruled for some three decades and conquered parts of present-day Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. His inscriptions record his conquest of 'islands of the sea', which most historians identify with the Maldives; and he conquered the northern part of Sri Lanka, including the kingdom of Anurādhapura. He built the Bṛihadīśhvara (also known as Rājarājeśhvaram, after Rājarāja) temple at Thanjavur, a masterpiece of architecture and engineering (we will visit it in Grade 8). And, although the Cholas were predominantly Shaivites, Rājarāja facilitated the construction of a Buddhist *vihāra* (monastery) at Nāgapaṭṭinam (then an important port of

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the Cholas) by the ruler of the Śhrīvijaya Empire across the Bay of Bengal (in parts of present-day Malaysia and Indonesia).

Rājarāja's son **Rājendra Chola I**, who also ruled for nearly 30 years, expanded the empire further, conquering parts of present-day Odisha and Bengal. He commemorated those victories with the title 'Gangaikoṇḍachola', that is, "the Chola who seized (or brought) Gangā" — a reference both to his campaigns in the North and to the sacredness attached to Gangā. Rājendra also expanded his father's conquest of northern Sri Lanka, which became an integral part of the Chola Empire for half a century or so, until the Sri Lankan king Vijayabāhu I managed to drive the Cholas out after several battles.



Fig. 4.13. Entrance to the temple built by Rājendra Chola at Gangaikoṇḍacholapuram. The temple commemorates his victory over north Indian rulers.

Rājendra I is celebrated for his successful naval expedition against the king of the Śhrīvijaya Empire. The conflict had its roots in the maritime trade with China: under the Cholas, trade relations with China thrived, as archaeological evidence and inscriptions confirm; Rājendra even sent a diplomatic mission to China. But one of the sea routes passed through the Strait of Malacca (a narrow strip of sea between Malaysia and the Indonesian island of Sumatra), which the Śhrīvijaya king controlled, and this created competition with the Cholas.

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Rājendra sent his navy, which defeated the Śhrīvijaya forces and captured their capital. However, he did not try to occupy the defeated empire; it was a punitive expedition, conducted with the support of many Indian merchant guilds, and it seems to have achieved its objectives.

DON'T MISS OUT

We should not conclude from Rājendra's expedition against the Śhrīvijaya Empire that the latter's relations with India were conflictual. On the contrary, there were deep cultural and generally peaceful relations between these two regions of Asia. For instance, a Śhrīvijaya ruler made donations to Nālandā and asked the Pāla king for land to create one more monastery there; the request was granted, as a copper-plate found at Nālandā recorded.

Similarly, with Sri Lanka: strong cultural links apart, Vijayabāhu I married a princess from Kalinga.

LET'S EXPLORE



Fig. 4.14. An ancient painting of Rājendra Chola with his guru (at the Bṛihadīśhvara temple)

In the painting Fig. 4.14, can you make out who is the king and who is the guru? What does the king's posture and general attitude express?

Back home, the Cholas engaged in large public works, such as roads to facilitate communications, tanks, wells and canals for irrigation, and artificial lakes. But their frequent and extensive conflicts with several neighbouring kingdoms, in particular the Western Chālukyas, the Pāṇḍyas and the rulers of Sri Lanka, drained their treasury and contributed to the decline of

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the empire. By the 13th century, the Chola empire had shrunk considerably and was finally absorbed by the Pāṇḍyas.

Back to the North

We now travel back to the north, as a second phase of foreign invasions was going to have a more lasting impact on India.

The Paramāras

The Paramāras were originally vassals of the Pratihāras and the Rāṣhṭrakūṭas; in the second half of the 10th century, they emerged as an independent power in Malwa (a region in present-day Madhya Pradesh), with Dhārā (present-day Dhar) as their capital. Their most famous king was **Bhoja**, who ruled from 1010 for almost half a century and led numerous campaigns, extending his kingdom from the Konkan region on the west coast to parts of Rajasthan; he was among the Indian rulers who sent their forces to assist the Hindu Shāhi rulers against Mahmūd of Ghazni.

After Bhoja's death in 1055, the Paramāras gradually declined, partly because of conflicts with neighbouring powers.

The scholar-king

Bhoja Paramāra should not be confused with King Bhoja of the Gurjara-Pratīhāra dynasty, whom we met in the previous chapter and who lived in the 9th century. Bhoja Paramāra was known for his efficient governance and public works. He is credited with founding of the town of Bhojpur and constructed a vast lake between Bhojpur and the city of Bhopal (whose name comes from 'Bhojpal' — the 'dam' or 'fort of Bhoja') by harnessing the waters of several rivers; it served both irrigation and water management purposes. Only a small portion of that lake,



Fig. 4.15. A modern statue of King Bhoja on the bank of the Bhojtal Lake in Bhopal

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called 'Bhojtal' remains near present-day Bhopal, while remains of earthen or stone embankments can still be seen further away. A local proverb (in Hindi) remembers the lake's original size by declaring, "If there is a lake, it is Bhopal's lake; all others are just ponds"!

Bhoja also built the impressive Bhojeshwar Temple, which remains an architectural marvel even though it was never completed.

Bhoja was a generous patron who supported scholars and promoted Sanskrit literature. Under his patronage, arts and sciences flourished, so that his capital became a renowned centre of learning that attracted scholars, poets, and artists from across India.

Bhoja himself was a noted scholar and a prolific author who wrote on a wide range of subjects. His works include *Samarāṅgaṇa Sūtradhāra* a long treatise on architecture, town planning, temple construction, sculpture and mechanical devices; treatises on governance and on Sanskrit poetics; a commentary on Patanjali's *Yogasūtras*; and texts of medicine, among other texts attributed to him.

His reputation as a wise and learned ruler became legendary, inspiring numerous stories and folk tales.

A turning point: the Ghūrids in India

As we saw, Mahmūd of Ghazni was the first notable invader of India in the period we are looking at. After him, his Ghaznavid Empire was under attack from several sides in Afghanistan and beyond, and soon disintegrated. The chiefs of Ghūr (present-day Ghor), a mountainous region in Afghanistan to the west of Ghazni, were earlier vassals of the Ghaznavids, but now seized the opportunity to take control of Ghazni and build up their power.

Their leader Muhammad, now the sultan of Ghūr (and often called '**Muhammad Ghūrī**' or 'Muhammad of Ghor'), soon brought parts of Punjab and Sindh under his rule. His attempts to expand into Gujarat failed, as he was defeated in 1178 by the Chaulukya king Mūlarāja II at the foot of Mount Abu. In another version of this battle, it was Queen Nāīkīdevī, Mūlarāja's mother,

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who led the victorious army on horseback, with her son in her lap. Merutunga, a Jain scholar from Gujarat, recorded the event in a semi-historical chronicle, but as he wrote over a century later, historians are divided as to whether the queen or her son should be credited for this victory; anyhow, sources do record Muhammad's defeat there.



DON'T MISS OUT

The **Chaulukya dynasty**, also known as the Solanki dynasty, which ruled parts of Gujarat and Rajasthan from the 10th to the 13th centuries, is distinct from the Chālukya dynasty of the Deccan, which we met in the previous chapter. Its capital was Aṇahilavāḍa, which is today's Patan. (They are also sometimes called 'Chālukyas of Gujarat'.)

Meantime, the **Chāhamānas**, also known as Chauhāns, were a powerful Rajput dynasty that arose in nearby Rajasthan and neighbouring regions. Its kings, apart from battling other Indian dynasties, often repelled invaders such as Mahmūd of Ghazni. In the 12th century, their conquests of Delhi, Haryana, parts of Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, apart from most of Rajasthan, established their empire, with its capital at Ajayameru (today's Ajmer).

Pṛithvīrāja III, often known today as Prithviraj Chauhan, waged many battles with neighbouring kings, such as those of Gujarat and Malwa. In 1191, he also defeated Muhammad Ghūrī at Tarain (modern-day Taraori in Haryana), but within a year, Muhammad returned with a larger army, and the two clashed again. In this Second Battle of Tarain, which witnessed fierce fighting, Muhammad defeated Pṛithvīrāja and executed him.

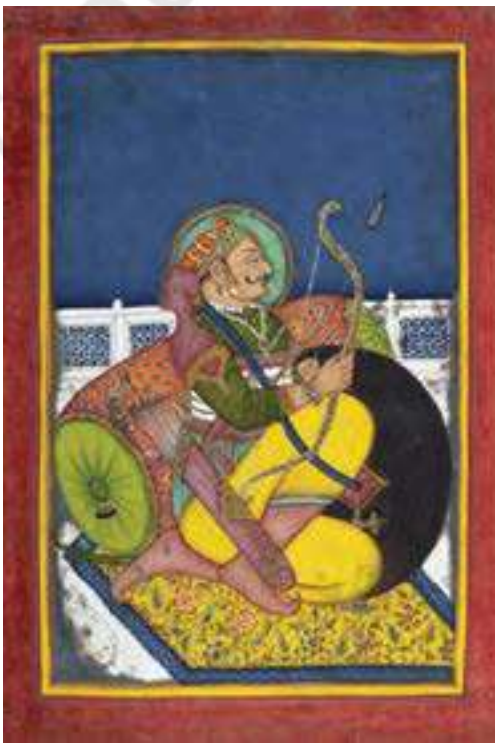


Fig. 4.16. A later portrait of Pṛithvīrāja III

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Muhammad Ghūrī went on to capture Delhi. Unlike Mahmūd, who merely plundered and withdrew, he sought territorial conquest. Though he returned to Ghazni, he left behind trusted military commanders to consolidate his gains — most notably his general Qutb-ud-din Aibak, who later founded the Delhi Sultanate (as we will see in Grade 8).



DON'T MISS OUT

Delhi was a flourishing city under the Chāhamānas. Their inscriptions refer to it as 'Dhillikā', which was later shortened to 'Dhilli' and ultimately evolved into 'Delhi'.

Aibak encountered much resistance in his campaigns in north India, but was able to expand the Ghūrids' territory. His army commander Bakhtiyār Khiljī (or Khaljī) conducted campaigns in eastern India from the end of the 12th century,



Fig. 4.17. A gold coin issued in the name of 'Muhammad ibn Sām' (Muhammad Ghūrī's formal name), depicting him as a conqueror on horseback.



Fig. 4.18. Also issued by Muhammad Ghūri, this coin depicts Goddess Lakṣhmī; this motif had been widely used on coins since the Kuṣhāṇas, which is probably why Muhammad decided to adopt it.

conquering Bihar and Bengal. On his way to Bengal, he destroyed large Buddhist monasteries and universities such as Nālandā and Vikramaśhilā, collecting huge booty and slaughtering large numbers of monks. There is a consensus among historians of Buddhism that this destruction of its large centres of learning precipitated the decline of Buddhism in India, although a few other factors may have also played a role.

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LET'S EXPLORE

Writing some 60 years after Bakhtiyār Khiljī's campaign through Bihar, the historian Minhaj al-Siraj Jūzjānī, recorded in his *Tabakāt-i-Nāsirī* how Bakhtiyar's forces captured a 'fortress' and "acquired great booty." He adds, "The greater number of the inhabitants of that place were Brāhmans, and all those Brāhmans had their heads shaven; and they were all slain. There were a great number of books there. ... It was found that the whole of that fortress and city was a college, and in [their] tongue, they call a college *bihār*."

→ Remembering the meaning of *vihāra* and noting that Nālandā was known in ancient inscriptions as 'Nālandā Mahāvihāra', can you find two more clues in the above passage to identify the 'fortress' near the Nālandā university? (*Hint: Who do you think these 'Brāhmans' actually were?)*

DON'T MISS OUT



Fig. 4.19. A partial view of Nālandā Mahāvihāra

Nālandā's famous library, spread over three multi-storey buildings, contained lakhs of manuscripts. The Chinese pilgrims Yijing and Xuanzang spent some time there, studying manuscripts and selecting many to take back to China. After Bakhtiyār Khiljī's attack, the library is said to have burned for months. Tibetan scholars, who were both teaching and studying there, fled back to Tibet with as many manuscripts as they could carry.

When Dharmasvāmin, a Tibetan monk, visited the site some three decades later, he found it half ruined. Yet, a 90-year-old teacher, Rāhula Śhrībhadra, was still instructing a class of about 70 students — perhaps Nalanda's last class ...

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As Bakhtiyār Khiljī pushed further east into Bengal around 1203–04, he caught the Sena ruler unaware at Nādīya, ending the Senas' control over much of Bengal. For reasons that are not too clear, he then decided to attempt an expedition into Tibet. However, on his way through Kāmarūpa in 1205, he was confronted by the local ruler's forces, who inflicted severe losses on his army. The local population is said to have destroyed food and fodder, in effect starving the invading army. Bakhtiyār escaped with only a handful of his men and returned to Bengal much weakened.

Muhammad Ghurī was killed in 1206; the same year, Bakhtiyār Khiljī was assassinated, apparently by his own men. Their territory in north India remained under the control of Muhammad's generals.

Governance, Trade and Cultural Life

We have seen much warfare in this period, which means that every powerful king needed to keep a sizable army. This involved considerable resources to employ the soldiers, supply them with weapons, maintain horses and elephants (and, in parts of north India, camels for transport of provisions). Powerful kingdoms therefore needed an efficient administration to collect tributes from vassals and taxes from the traders. The previous chapter described the main features of such administrations; there is no major change in this one, except with respect to Muhammad Ghūrī's system, which was more centralised and granted temporary land assignments to officers in return for revenue collection and military service. This would be further developed during the period of the Delhi Sultanate, as we will see in Grade 8.

Despite the political disturbances we have seen, India's trade with China and Southeast Asia kept growing during this period. Among other evidences, coins and pottery from those overseas regions have been found at many locations on India's west coast, which had many seaports as well as shipyards manufacturing seafaring ships. While there was a brisk trade within India and beyond, supported by a few powerful guilds, the mainstay of

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Fig. 4.20. Kandāriyā Mahādeva Temple, Khajuraho

the economy was ultimately agriculture — which remains true even today. The ancient texts often refer to agricultural produce, whether it is rice and barley in the Ganga plains and Bengal, saffron from Kashmir, spices from Kerala, ginger from Bengal, wheat from northwest India, and cotton from western India and the Deccan. Many rulers — we mentioned a few examples in the previous chapter and this one — took care of irrigation works, which could, to some extent, mitigate the vagaries of seasonal rains.

If the economy thrived, so did the arts, the literary production, science (as we saw with Bhāskarāchārya), religious life and other cultural aspects. In the previous chapter, we heard of Harṣha's Sanskrit compositions, and, in the present chapter, those of Bhoja the scholar-king. We should add here the Chālukya ruler Someśhvara III who, in the 12th century, authored *Mānasollāsa*, an encyclopaedia covering topics ranging from astronomy and architecture to music, medicine, cooking, and games — in effect, a comprehensive guide to royal life and governance, with some emphasis of the duties of kings towards their subjects. Many large temples were built in this period across India; apart from

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Fig. 4.21 & 4.22. Two huge modern statues: Rāmānujāchārya (left, in Hyderabad) and Basaveśhvara (right, in Basavakalyana)

those we saw earlier in this chapter, we should mention the Kandariya Mahādeva and the Lakṣhmaṇa temples, architectural marvels among dozens of temples constructed at Khajuraho by the Chandellas during these two centuries.

Several noteworthy thinkers appeared in these two centuries. Among them, **Rāmānujāchārya** of south India was a philosopher-saint who challenged the dominant philosophical school of his time, Ādi Śhankarāchārya's *advaita vedānta* (briefly described in the previous chapter). Rāmānuja developed the school of *viśhiṣhṭādvaita vedānt*a, which sees the world and individual souls as real, and emphasises bhakti and surrender to the divine as the path to liberation.

Basaveśhvara (also known as Basavaṇṇa, or Basava in short) was a royal minister at Kalyāṇī (modern Basavakalyana in Karnataka), who left his position to become a social and religious reformer. He founded the Lingāyat movement, which rejected caste distinctions and ritualism and, instead, taught personal devotion and dedicated work. Looking at the inner value of a person rather than his or her social rank, Basavaṇṇa promoted the equal spiritual potential of all men and women. His short poems in Kannada (known as *vachanas*) strikingly convey his spiritual and ethical vision as well as his firm devotion to his Lord.

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These two thinker-saints had a profound impact on the culture and society of south India in particular. Like other Bhakti saints elsewhere in the Subcontinent, they helped make spirituality more personal and accessible, breaking down some of the existing social barriers.

LET'S EXPLORE



In Kalyāṇī, Basavaṇṇa established an *Anubhava Maṇḍapa* (literally, 'pavilion of experience'), where men and women from every social, economic, religious or linguistic background, including saints and philosophers, could assemble to discuss all aspects of life, including moral values and religion.

- → Why, in your opinion, did Basava want people from all backgrounds to come together and exchange ideas?
- → If something like an *Anubhava Maṇḍapa* existed today, what important topics do you think people ought to discuss there?
- → What lessons can we draw from the *Anubhava Maṇḍapa* spirit to create a just and civil society today?

Taking Stock

Like every transitional period, this one saw both change and continuity.

The most visible change was the military campaigns by Turkic invaders and the start of foreign rule in parts of north India, which involved considerable plunder and destruction of temples, cities and centres of learning. This altered the power equations in a profound way. It also marked the spread of Islam as a new creed in India's religious landscape. At the same time, in the two centuries we focused on, large parts of northern India and all of south India remained outside the hold of the Turkic invaders. Neighbouring kingdoms often waged war against each other, though alliances were not uncommon; on a few occasions, native rulers even came together to form a coalition against a foreign invader.

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Fig. 4.23. The Angkor Wat temple in Cambodia



DON'T MISS OUT

The Angkor Wat temple in Cambodia (Fig. 4.23), constructed in the 12th century by the Khmer king Sūryavarman II, is the largest religious monument in the world. It was originally dedicated to Viṣhṇu, with inscriptions in Old Khmer and in Sanskrit, and enormous bas-reliefs depicting scenes from the Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata. The temple's five huge śhikharas or towers symbolise Mount Meru, the mountain at the centre of the cosmos in Hindu mythology. Architecturally, Angkor Wat shares many features with south Indian temples, though on a grander scale. Later in the 12th century, following a change of political power, the temple was gradually converted into a Buddhist one. This temple is one of numerous examples of how India's religious and aesthetic traditions profoundly influenced Southeast Asian cultures.

Despite disruptions in the north, internal and external trade continued and the merchant guilds survived and adapted.

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External trade was also a vehicle for the spread of Indian culture in Southeast Asia and China. Cultural traditions persisted in much of India, with new schools of thought and belief, and many literary and scientific compositions, not only in Sanskrit but also in regional languages.

The lesson of the period, if there is one, is therefore resilience in the face of conflict and the enduring power of knowledge, learning and creativity.

Before we move on ...



- The 11th and 12th centuries marked a turning point in Indian history (hence the chapter's title).
- In the 11th century, Mahmūd of Ghazni, after defeating the Hindu Shāhis, conducting many raids into north India, extracting much plunder, destroying temples and taking away prisoners. He however did not seek to establish his rule in India.
- In the 12th century, Muhammad Ghurī and his generals conquered Delhi and large parts of the Gangetic plains, all the way to Bengal, causing much destruction. Important centres of learning, in particular, were left in ruins.
- Still, large parts of northern India and all of south India remained outside the hold of the Turkic invaders. Powerful kingdoms often waged war against each other, though alliances were not uncommon.
- Internal and external trade, art and literature, and monumental architecture continued to thrive, and elements of Indian culture travelled abroad, especially to Southeast Asia and China.

Questions and activities

1. Why is the period under consideration in this chapter regarded as a major transition in Indian history? Give two examples each of change and continuity from this period.

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2. Observe Fig. 3.27 in the previous chapter and draw a similar 'star of dynasties' gathering all or most of the dynasties that appear in this chapter.
3. Taking a map of the Subcontinent, draw a geographical tour that covers all or most dynasties in this chapter (you may draw inspiration from some of the 'travels' the chapter's narration follows).
4. With the help of a map of India and Southeast Asia, can you calculate the approximate distance that Rājendra I's fleet of ships had to navigate to reach their objective?
5. Match these two pairs:

(a) Eastern Gangas	(i) Belur
(b) Chandellas	(ii) Bṛihadīśhvara temple
(c) Paramāras	(iii) Konark Sun temple
(d) Hoysalas	(iv) Kandāriyā Mahādeva temple
(e) Cholas	(v) Bhojeshwar temple

6. Working in groups, compare the dynasties in this chapter and in the preceding one; create a table to list the dynasties present in both, those that disappear from the preceding period, and those that appear in this chapter's period.
7. Using the chapter and any additional reading, prepare a short note explaining (1) why centres of learning like Nālandā were important; (2) how their destruction may have affected education and culture in India.
8. Why do you think Mahmūd of Ghazni carry out repeated raids from Afghanistan into India, while Muhammad Ghūrī sought territorial expansion into India and long-term control? Write a short note on how their motives shaped the outcomes of their campaigns.

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CHAPTER 2

Reshaping India's Political Map



Fig. 2.1. An aerial view of the Qutub Minar complex, Delhi

The Big Questions ?

1. *How did foreign invasions and the rise of new dynasties reshape India's political boundaries during this period?*
2. *How did Indian society respond to invasions? How did India's economy adapt during times of political instability?*
3. *What impact did this period have on the lives of the people?*

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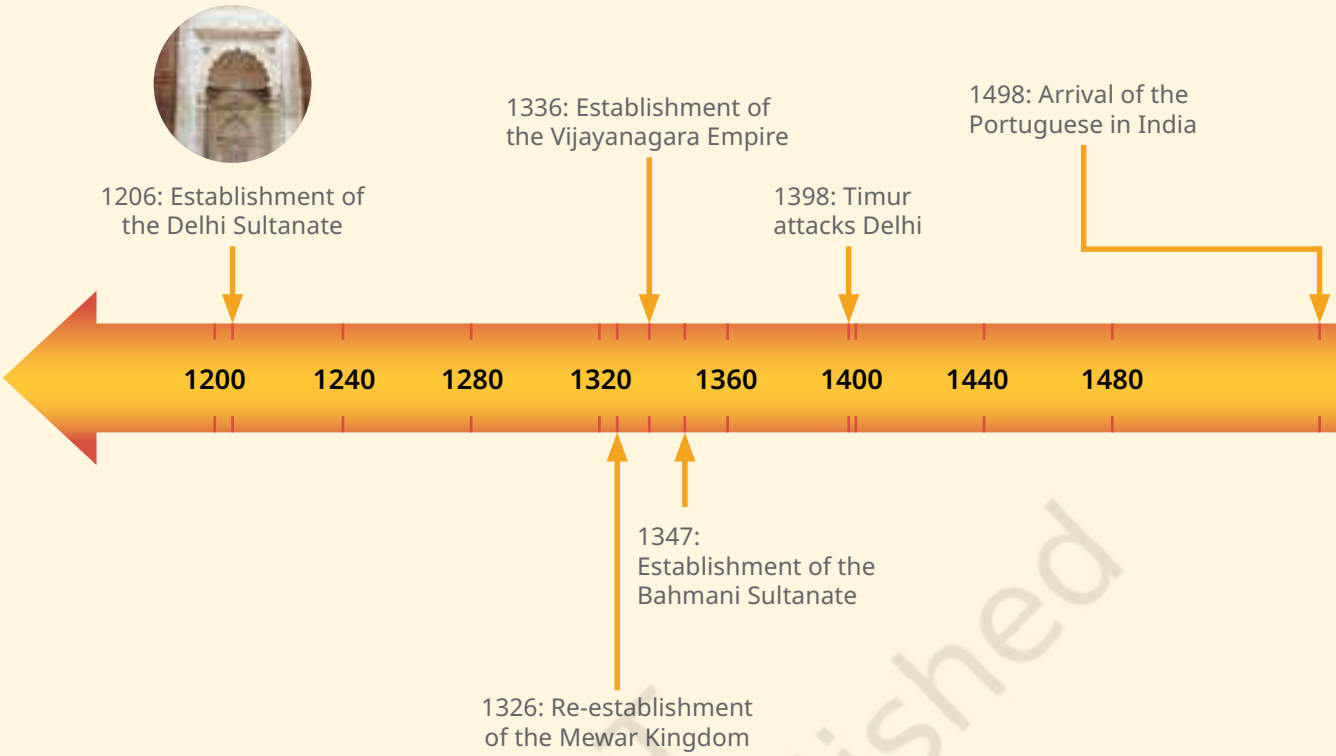
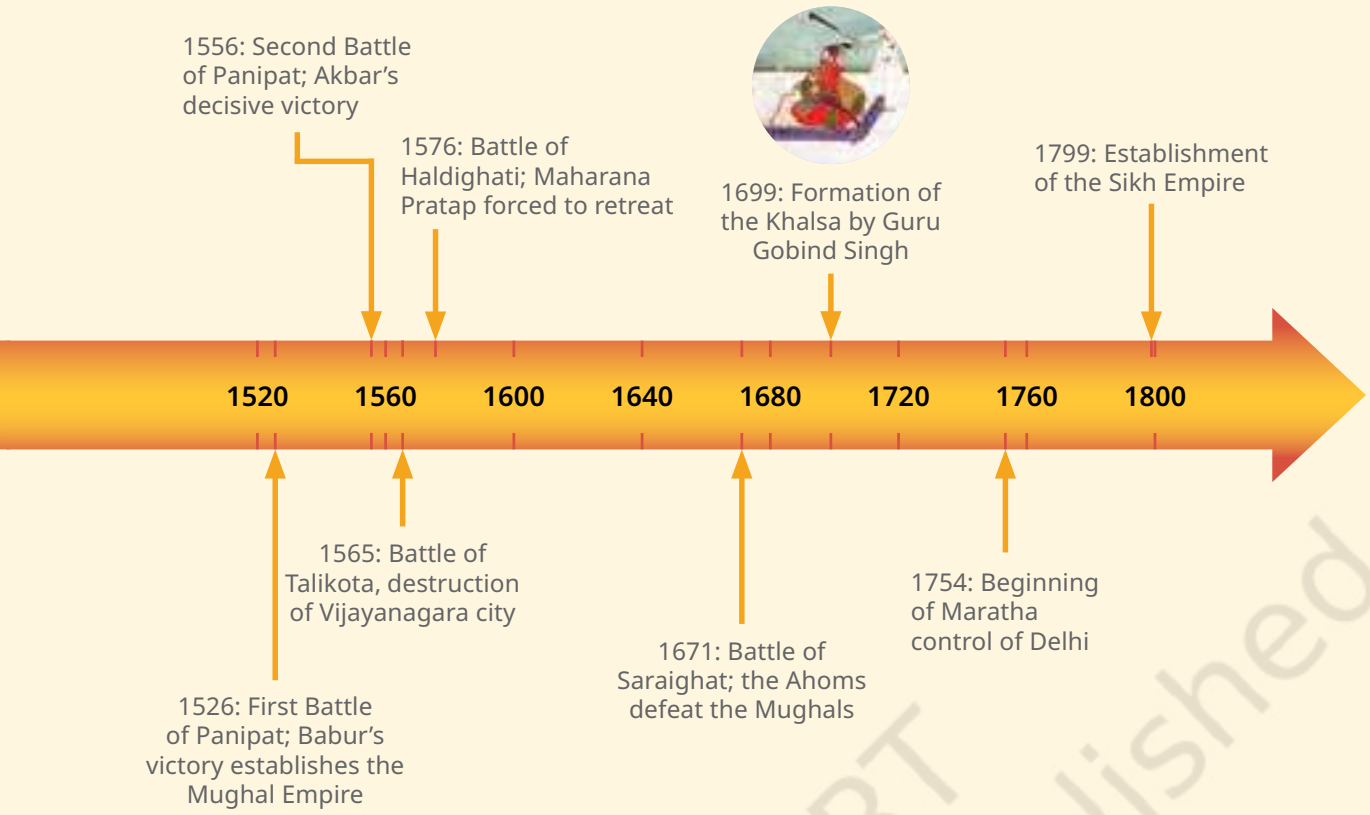


Fig. 2.2.

The period in this chapter and the next is often called the latter part of the '**medieval period**' of Indian history. The term 'medieval' (i.e., 'between two ages') was originally applied to European history, roughly from the fall of the Roman Empire (5th century CE) to the Renaissance (Europe's cultural revival in the 14th–16th centuries, nurtured by the rediscovery of Greek and Roman art and literature). It was once thought to mark a dark age before the development of modern science; but, of course, Europe's and India's histories are very different, so applying the same term 'medieval' to both is not ideal, and historians do not always agree on which period it covers in India. We will sometimes have to use the term 'medieval' but for us it simply means the period from the 11th to the 17th centuries.

In 'Tapestry of the Past' chapters, we have tried to keep as few dates as possible — only those that mark important reference points. You will find it helpful to keep revisiting the timelines in those chapters. Revisit the maps too, as they will help you visualise the geography that was traversed by armies, common people, traders, scholars or spiritual figures.

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Spellings, spellings ...

Because of difficulties in transcribing the Persian script in the Roman script, you will find some alternative spellings in parentheses here and there. For instance, 'Khalji' or 'Khilji' are the same. Similarly, we use here the now standard spelling of 'Mughal' spelling, but alternatives such as 'Mughul' or 'Moghul' are still sometimes used.

A new era in India's journey began in the early 11th century. Invasions from beyond the Hindu Kush mountains reshaped India's political map. No doubt, India had seen much warfare in earlier periods, but the spate of invasions by people from outside the Indian subcontinent during this period was unprecedented. Many of these invaders were Central Asian — **Turkic** or Afghan. They were drawn to India not only for her reputed riches and for territorial ambitions, but also often to spread, by force of violence if necessary, their own versions of their religion.

Let us now explore in this chapter the ever-changing landscape of India from the 13th century onward.

Turkic: Refers to peoples, languages, and cultures historically associated with a vast region stretching across Central Asia, all the way to Turkey and Siberia.

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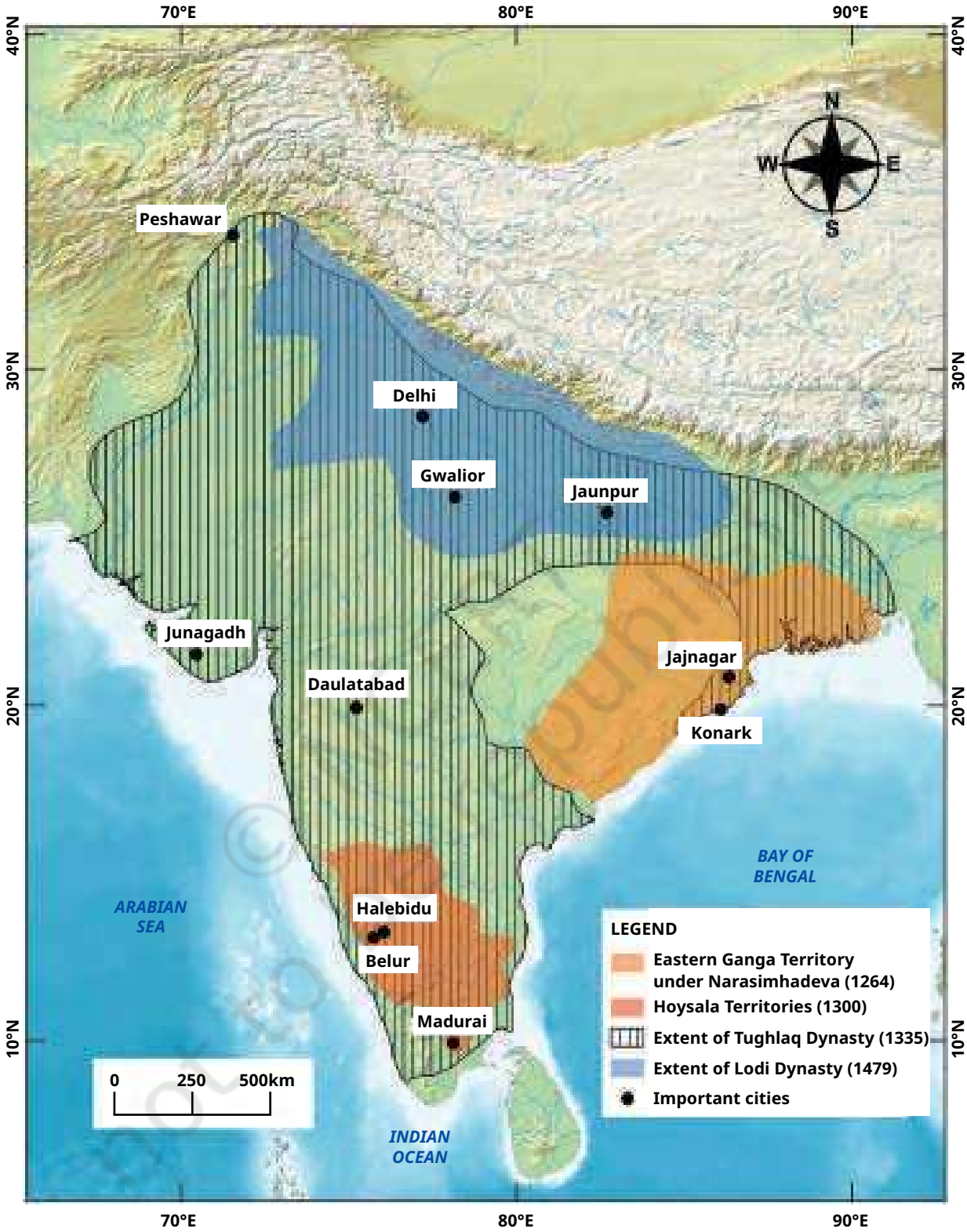


Fig. 2.3. A comparison of the territories under the Tughlaqs and the Lodis (13th to 15th centuries), and regional powers in the south and east.





Fig. 2.4. The Qutub Minar. Fig. 2.5. A section of the Quwwat-ul-Islam ('Might of Islam') mosque in Delhi's Qutub Minar complex; its construction began in Qutub-ud-din Aibak's time (early 13th century) and was completed by later sultans. An inscription states that materials from 27 destroyed Hindu and Jain temples were used in the construction, some of which can be seen here.

Rise and Fall of the Delhi Sultanate

We begin our journey here with the Delhi **Sultanate**, formed after the defeat in 1192 of King Prithviraj Chauhan, who ruled over parts of northwestern India. This Sultanate saw the rule of five successive foreign dynasties of Turkic–Afghan origin — the Mamluks (or 'Slave dynasty'), the Khiljis (or Khaljis), the Tughlaqs, the Sayyids, and the Lodis (or Lodhis). While certain parts of northern India came under the control of the Delhi Sultanate, neighbouring kingdoms, such as the Eastern Gangas in the east and the Hoysalas in the south resisted its advance (Fig. 2.3) and also emerged as thriving centres of art, culture, and administration. The city of Delhi also assumed a bigger role in the political landscape of northern India.

Sultanate: A territory ruled by a 'Sultan' — a title that some Muslim rulers adopted.

The Sultanate period was marked by political instability combined with efforts at territorial expansion. This resulted in military campaigns that raided villages and cities, and plundered

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Fig. 2.6. A coin minted by Ala-ud-din Khilji, which bears the inscription 'Sikander Sani' or 'the second Alexander' in Persian.

and destroyed temples and seats of learning. Successions (the appointments of new sultans) were often violent: almost two sultans out of three seized power by eliminating their predecessor, so that a sultan's average reign was hardly more than nine years!



LET'S EXPLORE

Looking at Fig. 2.6, why do you think Ala-ud-din Khilji called himself 'the second Alexander'?

At the turn of the 14th century, **Ala-ud-din Khilji** conducted military campaigns over large areas of north and central India, sacking and plundering many cities; at the same time, he also repelled several invasions by Mongol forces, who were trying to add India to the vast Mongol Empire (it covered most of Asia at the time).

His slave-general Malik Kafur expanded the Sultanate's reach southward, conquering several kingdoms on the way; their plundered wealth helped finance the Sultanate's enormous military apparatus. He also attacked a number of Hindu centres such as Srirangam, Madurai, Chidambaram, and possibly Rameswaram.

LET'S EXPLORE



What kind of resources do you think were needed to maintain an army and wage war in those days? Discuss in groups the various types of expenditure involved, from weapons or food for soldiers to animals used in warfare, road construction, etc.

A few decades later, **Muhammad bin Tughlaq** (or 'Tughluq') ruled Delhi and expanded the Delhi Sultanate's territories further. For the first time since the Mauryan Empire, most of

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the Subcontinent was now under one ruler. Although this dominance was significant, it proved to be short-lived. Muhammad bin Tughlaq had ambitious schemes, but they were often poorly executed. One such was moving his capital from Delhi to Daulatabad (then called 'Devagiri', near present-day Sambhaji Nagar); perhaps he thought its more central location would offer better control of the empire. The people were forced to travel over 1,000 km, and a few years later, as his plan misfired, he shifted the capital back to Delhi; both transfers resulted in great loss of life according to some sources. Another instance was the introduction of 'token currency', where cheap copper coins were declared to be tokens and have the value of silver or gold coins — although this was a progressive idea (most of our currency today is actually 'token'), at the time this created confusion in the trade and encouraged people to counterfeit copper coins, all of which caused the economy to decline.



Fig. 2.7. A 19th-century painting depicting Muhammad bin Tughlaq in his court

The sultans and their court elite lived in luxurious palaces, enjoying elaborate clothing, jewelled ornaments and fine food. This wealth was largely derived from plunder from their military campaigns, taxes levied on common people and conquered regions, and engagement in slave trade (as enslaved people

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provided free labour or were sent away to distant Central Asia to be sold). But plunder, in turn, affected trade networks and agricultural production. This period also witnessed numerous attacks on sacred or revered images in Buddhist, Jain and Hindu temples; such destruction was motivated not just by plunder but also by **iconoclasm**.

Iconoclasm: The rejection or destruction of icons or religious images considered idolatrous.



THINK ABOUT IT

Why do we use the term 'image' rather than common terms like 'idol' or 'icon'? The latter two terms are considered pejorative in the context of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, whose orthodox sects condemn 'idolatry' or the worship of 'idols' or 'icons'.

India's classical texts used words like *mūrti, vigraha, pratimā, rūpa,* etc., to designate images, often statues, used for worship in temples or homes. In English, 'image' is a neutral term.

Some of the sultans also imposed the *jizya*, a tax on non-Muslim subjects to grant them protection and exemption from military service. In practice, depending on the ruler, this discriminatory tax would be a source of economic burden and public humiliation, and formed a financial and social incentive for subjects to convert to Islam. At the end of the 14th century, Timur, a brutal Turkic–Mongol conqueror from central Asia, invaded northwest India and launched a devastating attack on Delhi, then a thriving city. As he wrote in his memoirs, his two-fold objective was to wage "war with the **infidels** and to gain something by plundering the wealth of the infidels." Large numbers were killed or enslaved, and the city was left in ruins. Timur soon withdrew from India with huge plunder, leaving chaos behind. In the aftermath, the Lodis emerged and established the last dynasty of the Delhi Sultanate. By then, however, its territory had shrunk considerably in the face of increasing resistance from other states and kingdoms from within India (see Fig. 2.3).

Infidel: Literally, someone who does not share the faith (of a given religion). For medieval Christianity, infidels were Muslims or Pagans; for medieval Islam, infidels were Christians or, in the context of India, Hindus, Buddhists or Jains.

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Resistance to the Delhi Sultanate

Throughout its rule, the Delhi Sultanate faced resistance from many quarters. While many kingdoms fell into its net, it failed to subdue the **Eastern Ganga kingdom** (see Fig. 2.3) of Kalinga, which included present-day Odisha and parts of Bengal and Andhra Pradesh. One of its rulers in the mid-13th century, Narasimhadeva I (also spelt Narasingha Deva I), was noted for the military strength and cultural brilliance he brought to the kingdom. Apart from repelling multiple inroads of the Sultanate, he defeated the Delhi Sultanate's governor of Bengal. Partly to commemorate these victories, he built the famed Sūrya temple at Konark (present-day Odisha).



Fig. 2.8. A statue depicting Narasimhadeva I seated on his throne, surrounded by attendants and musicians.

THINK ABOUT IT

During the time of the Tughlaqs, the Musunuri Nayakas, Telugu chieftains, rallied over 75 more chieftains of the region, formed a confederacy that defeated smaller provinces, formed a confederacy that defeated the Delhi Sultanate forces, and expelled Muhammad bin Tughlaq's army from Warangal (present-day Telangana) around 1330–1336. Do you think it would have been an easy task to bring together 75 leaders in those days?

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Fig. 2.9 The Hoysalas built magnificent temples, for instance those of Belur (this picture) and Halebidu.

We mentioned earlier Ala-ud-din's push to the South, attracted by its renowned wealth. At the time, the **Hoysalas** ruled parts of southern India (mostly present-day Karnataka, see Fig. 2.3) and fended off several attacks from the Delhi Sultanate, remaining the only independent kingdom in the south. However, weakened by these attacks and internal conflicts, the Hoysala kingdom declined and, in the mid-14th century, was absorbed into the Vijayanagara Empire further south (see below).



DON'T MISS OUT

The sculpture in Fig. 2.9 narrates the story behind the Hoysalas' emblem. Kannada folklore recounts the story of Sala, a young man who fought a lion to save his guru, giving the dynasty its name — 'Hoy (strike)! Sala'.

The Delhi Sultanate also faced rebellions from the emergence of several independent regional Sultanates. The **Bahmani Sultanate**, for instance, rose in the mid-14th century and controlled much of the Deccan for a while. Powerful Sultanates also emerged in Gujarat, Bengal and other regions, leading to a complex interplay of alliances — and frequent wars. Parts of Rajasthan also remained beyond the reach of the Delhi Sultanate; in the 15th century, it faced stiff resistance from **Rana Kumbha**, the ruler of the Mewar kingdom, who also successfully repelled invasions from these later sultanates.

Rana: A title often used for Rajput kings

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Fig. 2.10. A view of the Kumbhalgarh Fort in the Aravalli hills



DON'T MISS OUT

Kumbhalgarh Fort (Fig. 2.10) was built by Rana Kumbha in the 15th century in the Aravalli hills and served as a stronghold for the rulers of Mewar, a prominent Rajput kingdom (in the central and southern parts of today's Rajasthan). Surrounded by forests and steep slopes, it is famous for its massive 36-kilometre-long wall, one of the longest continuous walls in the world.

LET'S EXPLORE

Why do you think such locations were chosen for many of the medieval forts? Discuss pros and cons. *(Hint: think of issues of strategy, security, vulnerability, etc.)*



The Vijayanagara Empire

While the Delhi Sultanate grew politically more unstable, a new centre of power emerged in the south. In the 14th century, two brothers, Harihara and Bukka Raya, who had initially served as governors under Muhammad bin Tughlaq, eventually rejected Delhi's authority, and established an independent kingdom that became a significant force in southern India and grew into the Vijayanagara Empire.

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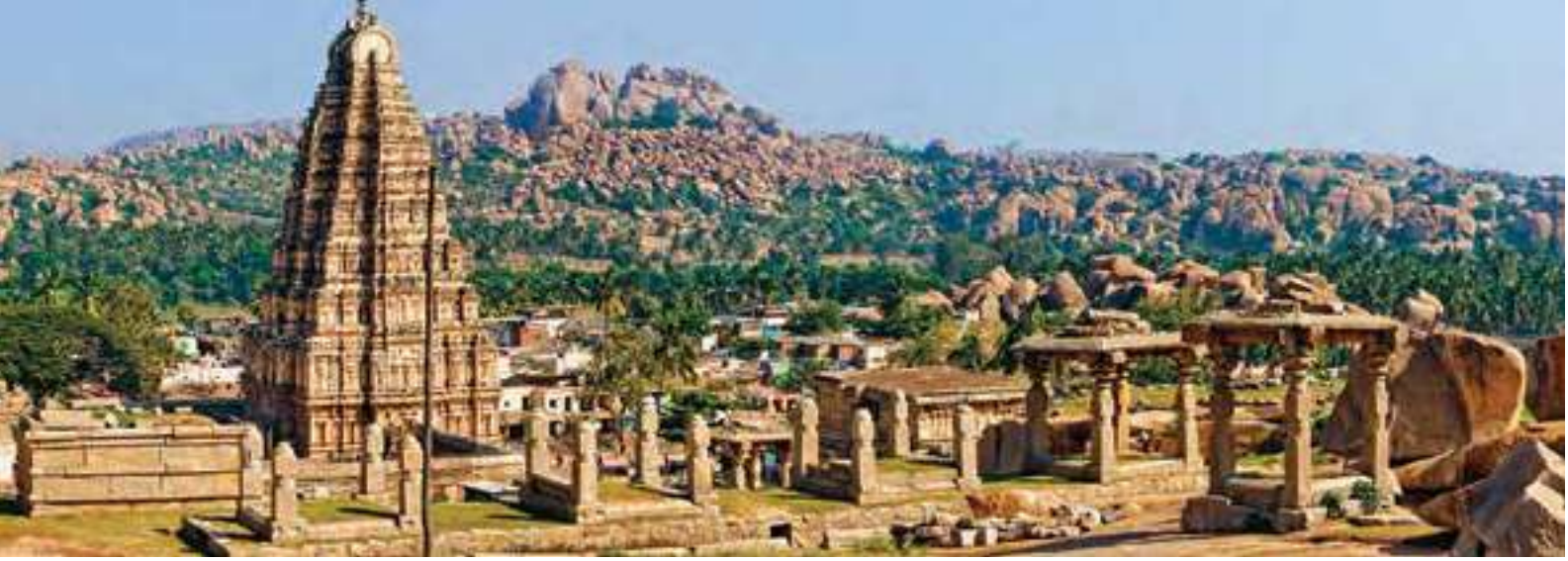


Fig. 2.11. A section of the ruins of Vijayanagara city (present-day Hampi). The large building is the Virūpākṣha temple.



DON'T MISS OUT

According to popular folklore, Harihara and Bukka witnessed a remarkable sight at Hampi (in present-day Karnataka) — a hare turning around and chasing a pack of hounds, symbolising unexpected strength and courage. When they recounted this incident to their guru, Vidyaranya, he interpreted it as a symbol of resilience and bravery, and advised them to establish their capital at that very spot.

To the north of the Vijayanagara Empire (see Fig. 2.12), the Bahmani Sultanate was a major rival; it eventually fragmented into five independent states called the 'Deccan Sultanates' — Bijapur, Golconda, Berar, Ahmednagar, and Bidar — each ruled by former governors or *tarafdars* who declared autonomy. The Vijayanagara rulers battled with the first two, as well as with the Gajapati rulers of Odisha in the east.



THINK ABOUT IT

Have you noticed the term *pati* in titles like 'Gajapati'? *Pati* means 'lord' or 'master' and was commonly used by many ruling dynasties of this period to signify power and stature. The Vijayanagara kings were called 'Narapati', the Bahmani Sultanate rulers 'Ashwapati', and the Maratha rulers 'Chhatrapati' — each title reflecting different aspects of kingship and power. Can you guess what these three terms might mean?

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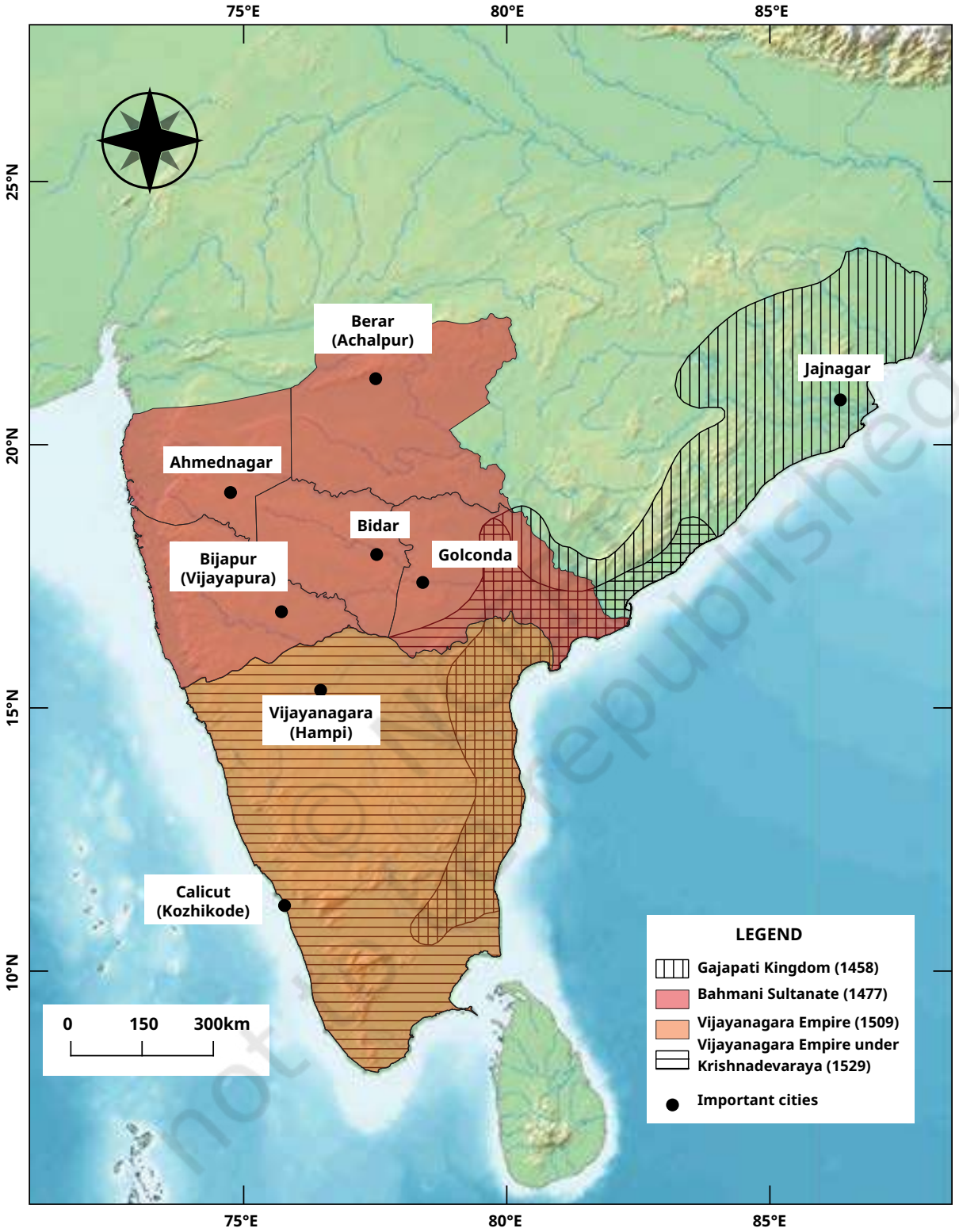


Fig. 2.12. Kingdoms in the Deccan and the Vijayanagara Empire

Tapestry of the Past
2 – Reshaping India's Political Map

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Krishnadevaraya

In the 16th century, the Vijayanagara Empire reached its peak under its celebrated ruler, **Krishnadevaraya**, who expanded and secured the empire's dominance over the Deccan. Under his rule, the empire achieved both military power and cultural renaissance. He patronised poets and scholars in Sanskrit, Telugu and Kannada; he himself composed an epic poem in Telugu, *Āmuktamālyada*, on the story of the Tamil poet-saint Āṇḍāl; one section of the work is a *Rājanīti* ('royal policy') where he expounded his ideas of good governance. Krishnadevaraya provided grants to many temples, including Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh and the Vitthala temple in his own capital Vijayanagara, which displayed many grand temples, palaces and other buildings.



Fig. 2.13. The mahāmandapa (great hall) of the Vitthala temple; note the grandeur and intricacy of the architecture, in particular the finely sculpted monolithic pillars; when struck, their smaller columns give out different musical notes — hence their name 'musical pillars'!

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DON'T MISS OUT

Foreign travellers visited Vijayanagara for trade. Portuguese travellers, in particular, were very well treated, as they came to sell horses and the king did not want them to go and sell those precious horses to enemy kingdoms!

One of them, Domingo Paes, left a long and detailed record of his stay in the Vijayanagara capital. An excerpt: "This city ... seemed to me as large as Rome, and very beautiful to the sight; there are many groves of trees within it, in the gardens of the houses, and many conduits of water which flow into the midst of it, and in places there are lakes... The people in this city are countless in number... This is the best provided city in the world... The streets and markets are full of laden oxen ... you could find in great abundance everything that you wanted."



Fig. 2.14. A panel from the Vitthala temple

LET'S EXPLORE

In Fig. 2.14, what elements do you observe? What do they tell you about life then? *(Hint: observe the weapons, the animals, the activities.)*

After winning many wars against his neighbours, Krishnadevaraya died of illness in 1529. In 1565, the Deccan Sultanates formed a coalition and defeated the Vijayanagara forces led by Ramaraya, Krishnadevaraya's son-in-law, at the Battle of Talikota. The city was sacked over several months; houses, shops, buildings, palaces and most of its temples were destroyed, and much of its civilian population massacred; it was left in ruins. After this, the empire got fragmented into smaller regions ruled by Nayakas, who were former military governors; the empire came to an end in the mid-17th century.



The Mughals

While the Delhi Sultanate weakened, **Babur**, a Turkic–Mongol ruler and military strategist who, having been thrown out of Samarkand (modern-day Uzbekistan), turned his sights to India. A descendant of Timur, Babur defeated Ibrahim Lodi at Panipat in 1526, which will later be called the 'First Battle of Panipat'; it relied heavily on gunpowder, field artillery, and matchlock guns, which had recently been introduced in warfare in India. That defeat put a final end to the Delhi Sultanate and laid the foundation of the **Mughal Empire**, as Babur assumed control of the Delhi throne.

Fig. 2.15. The battle of Panipat as depicted in a copy of the Baburnama. Note the use of cannons.

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Babur and India

Babur left a candid autobiography of great historical value, *Baburnama* ('Babur's Memoirs'). In it, he comes out as cultured and intellectually curious, with a keen appreciation for architecture, poetry, animals (birds in particular, many of which he lists in some detail) and flora (fruit trees especially). But he was also a brutal and ruthless conqueror, slaughtering entire populations of cities, enslaving women and children, and taking pride in erecting 'towers of skulls' made from the slaughtered people of plundered cities.

Babur was nostalgic about Central Asia and found India to be a 'country of few charms'; at the same time, he acknowledged, "Hindustan is a large country and has masses of gold and silver. ... Through the rainy season, the air is remarkably fine, not to be surpassed for healthiness and charm. ... There are countless artisans and workmen of every sort in Hindustan." Perhaps for the last reasons, especially India's wealth, he decided to stay and build his empire in India rather than return to Central Asia.



THINK ABOUT IT

What strikes you in Babur's impressions of India? Discuss in groups.

After Babur's death in 1530, his son **Humayun** struggled to hold the empire together. Taking advantage of this, Sher Shah Suri, a powerful Afghan leader, established the Sur Empire over large parts of north India and introduced many lasting reforms; the empire was short-lived, however, as Humayun soon reconquered the lost ground.

Before this happened, **Himu** (or Hemu), a skilled military commander and chief minister ('wazir') under one of the last Suri rulers, captured Delhi and ruled it briefly under the royal name of Hemchandra Vikramaditya. Though enjoying some military successes, he was injured on the battlefield (the Second Battle of Panipat) when confronted by Babur's grandson, **Akbar**. Captured, Himu was brought to Akbar, who had him beheaded. Akbar soon reclaimed Delhi for the Mughals.

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Akbar

Declared emperor at the age of 13 upon his father Humayun's accidental death, Akbar set out to bring the entire Subcontinent under Mughal control; his reign was a blend of brutality and tolerance, shaped by ambition and strategy.

In early conquests, following many of his predecessors' examples, he showed no mercy at the fort Chittor (or Chittorgarh, in Rajasthan), which he besieged for more than five months in the face of determined resistance from the Rajput soldiers. They inflicted heavy losses on the Mughal army, but, the fort finally breached, died fighting in large numbers, while hundreds of women committed *jauhar* (see box). Akbar ordered the massacre of some 30,000 civilians, and the surviving women and children were enslaved. Akbar was 25 at the time, and he sent a message of victory which read, "We have succeeded in occupying a number of forts and towns belonging to the infidels and have established Islam there. With the help of our bloodthirsty sword, we have erased the signs of infidelity from their minds and have destroyed temples in those places and also all over Hindustan."

What is jauhar?

When invading Turkic or Mughal armies conquered a territory, they often took the women as slaves or abused them. There are historical examples of Rajput women jumping into mass fires to avoid being captured and enslaved; this *jauhar* was considered a heroic act of final resistance and a means of preserving one's honour. Thus, when Akbar finally broke into the Chittorgarh Fort, hundreds of Rajput women, led by their queens and noblewomen, committed *jauhar*.

Akbar followed his predecessors in this thought of his: "A monarch should be ever intent on conquest, otherwise his enemies rise in arms against him." As his empire grew (Fig. 2.16), he increasingly used political strategies to stabilise it; he entered into marriage alliances with princesses of neighbouring kingdoms, welcomed Rajput and regional leaders into his court, abolished the *jizya*, and promoted the doctrine of *sulh-i-kul* — literally, 'peace with all' or tolerance of all faiths. Through interfaith dialogues, appointment

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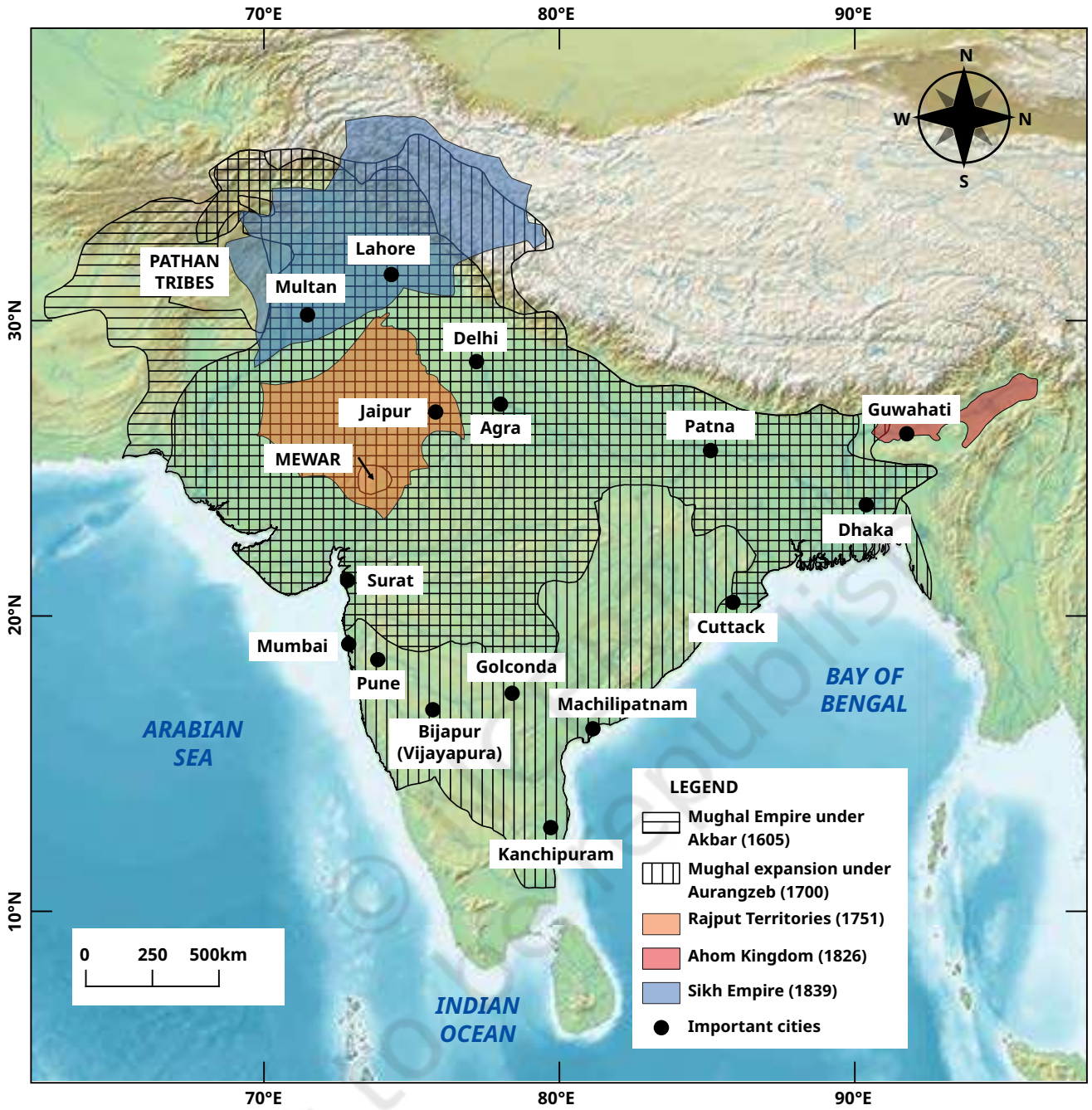


Fig. 2.16. The Mughals and the rise of regional powers at different periods.

of Hindu officials in high positions and other bold reforms, Akbar expanded and stabilised his empire, even gaining the support of many Rajput rulers. His court historian and biographer Abul Fazl recorded him as stating, "Formerly I persecuted men into conformity with my faith and deemed it Islam.



As I grew in knowledge, I was overwhelmed with shame. Not being a Muslim myself, it was unmeet [i.e., inappropriate] to force others to become such. What constancy is to be expected from proselytes [i.e., converted people] on compulsion?"

His long reign lasted almost 50 years (1556 to his death in 1605); while its middle period was relatively peaceful, the final 15 years involved fresh military campaigns in Kashmir, Sindh, the Deccan, and Afghanistan.

Fig. 2.17. Painting showing Akbar in his court receiving scholars, including two Jesuits (dressed in black).

THINK ABOUT IT

Why do you think Akbar employed different strategies to expand his empire, while the earlier rulers of Delhi relied mostly on military might?

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LET'S EXPLORE

Compare the maps in Figs. 2.3, 2.12 and 2.16. What differences do you notice? What is the 'reshaping' that has occurred?



Fig. 2.18. The five-storied 'Panch Mahal' at Fatehpur Sikri, a city built by Akbar near present-day Agra

Despite being illiterate, Akbar became keen to explore Persian and Indian texts, and showed great interest in classical Indian thought and often invited scholars to his court (Fig. 2.17). He established a 'house of translation' at Fatehpur Sikri where he had major Sanskrit texts translated into Persian, including the *Mahābhārata* (*Razmnama* in Persian, or the 'Book of War'), the *Rāmāyaṇa* (with 176 beautiful miniature paintings), the *Bhagavad Gītā*, and the *Pañchatantra*.

Akbar's son **Jahangir** shared with his father a love for art and architecture and tried to expand the empire into the Deccan. His son **Shah Jahan** fought several rebellions and is best remembered

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as the builder of the Taj Mahal at Agra. The Taj Mahal is even today recognised as one of the great architectural marvels of the world. This period formed the peak of an immense flowering of art and architecture, which included the building of Humayun's tomb in Delhi and the Red Forts in Delhi and Agra. Other classical arts and music of India also flourished during this period, as also remarkable works of calligraphy and miniature painting.

Fig. 2.19. A miniature painting illustrating the Persian translation of the Rāmāyaṇa and depicting the well-known episode of Rāma chasing the golden deer.

Aurangzeb

We mentioned earlier the frequent violent successions during the Sultanate period; this was repeated during the succession of Shah Jahan, who fell ill in 1657. He wished the throne to go to **Dara Shikoh**, his eldest son, but Dara's younger brother

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Aurangzeb defeated him in a series of battles and eventually executed him, presenting his severed head to their father. Aurangzeb also removed his two other brothers — he had one arrested and executed, and drove the second into exile. To prevent further challenge to his rule, Aurangzeb imprisoned his father Shah Jahan in the Agra Fort, where he remained until his death. Aurangzeb crowned himself emperor in 1658 and named himself 'Alamgir' or 'conqueror of the world'; he ruled for almost 49 years.

THINK ABOUT IT

We saw above that Delhi sultans' average reign lasted about nine years. This figure becomes 27 years in the case of Mughal emperors up to Aurangzeb; and 16 years if we consider all Mughal rulers, up to the end of the empire in the 19th century. What do you make of these numbers of years of reign?

Aurangzeb, skilled in military matters, conducted many campaigns, conquering parts of the South in particular. Under his reign the Mughal empire reached its greatest expansion (see Fig. 2.16), though constantly faced with significant rebellions, some of which we will turn to in the next section. Aurangzeb had to spend the last 25 years of his life fighting war after war in the Deccan. Maintaining large armies for those campaigns depleted the empire's treasury and put a great strain on the administration; indeed, this is often considered one of key factors in the rapid decline of Mughal power after Aurangzeb's death in 1707.

Aurangzeb, who belonged to Islam's Sunni sect, was deeply religious; he led an austere life, and, unlike Akbar, observed all religious rituals and occasions. He gradually banned practices he regarded as un-Islamic, such as music and dance in his court, and reimposed the *jizya* tax on non-Muslims as well as a pilgrimage tax on Hindus travelling to their sacred places (both of which had been abolished by Akbar).

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Fig. 2.20. Aurangzeb in court, holding a hawk, with one of his sons standing in front of him (17th-century painting).

Some scholars argue that Aurangzeb's motives were primarily political, that is, to establish and strengthen his empire's dominance; they also give examples of grants and assurances of protection he gave to some temples. While politics did play a part in his decisions, Aurangzeb's own farmans (or firmans, i.e., edicts) make his personal religious motive clear too. In 1669, for instance, he ordered governors of all provinces "to demolish schools and temples of the infidels and put down their teachings and religious practices." Temples at Banaras (present-day Varanasi), Mathura, Somnath, among many others, were destroyed, as well as Jain temples and Sikh gurudwaras. This aspect of Aurangzeb was also visible in his persecution of Muslims of other sects, including Sufis, and of Zoroastrians (the religion of Parsis in India, originally from Persia).

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LET'S EXPLORE



In his last letters to two of his sons, Aurangzeb wrote, "I came alone and am going away alone. I know not who I am and what I have been doing. ... I have not done well for the country and the people, and of the future there is no hope. I was helpless [in life] and I am departing helpless." What do these words tell us about Aurangzeb? How do you feel about them?

THINK ABOUT IT

Some of the invaders and rulers mentioned above committed terrible deeds and atrocities. Many more could have been mentioned. As the 'Note on History's Darker Chapters' on page 20 makes clear, we must keep in mind that this is about people in the past, not people of today. We need to know the facts of the past, and the victims of these atrocities deserve our respect and remembrance. But it is important to keep in mind that we, today, bear no responsibility for actions of individuals hundreds of years ago.

Resistance to the Mughals

Let us survey some of the major rebellions that ended up eroding the Mughal power (keeping the special case of the Marathas for the next chapter).

Over the centuries, many peasant communities rebelled against harsh exploitation. One such case, in the 17th century, involves the **Jat peasantry** (in present-day western Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and eastern Rajasthan), who managed to kill an oppressive officer of the Mughal administration. In a subsequent battle, 20,000 men confronted the Mughal army and fought valiantly, but their Jat leader was killed and the rebellion suppressed.

Many tribal groups — the **Bhils**, the **Gonds**, the **Santhals**, the **Kochs**, for instance — also fought back against attempts to annex their territory or impose taxes on them. While some of these groups were subdued or gradually integrated into the

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Delhi Sultanate or the Mughal Empire, others — especially those inhabiting forested, hilly, or remote regions — managed to maintain some degree of independence.



Fig. 2.21. An artist's impression of Rani Durgavati.

Rani Durgavati is remembered as a valiant queen of the Garha kingdom (one of the Gond kingdoms in central India). From all accounts, she ruled wisely and made her kingdom prosperous. She kept an army of 20,000 soldiers and 1,000 elephants, with which she repelled several attempted invasions. When a general sent by Akbar attacked her kingdom in 1564, despite being outnumbered and outmatched in weaponry, she led her troops and fought bravely. Wounded, she took her own life on the battlefield to avoid capture. She was only 40. Her sacrifice became a symbol of regional pride and resistance, and she is still revered as a heroic figure in Indian history.

Surge of the Rajputs

Because of their location in northwest India and the proud traditions they inherited from earlier dynasties (such as the Pratiharas, who had resisted the Arab invasions of Sindh a few centuries earlier), the **Rajputs** were often battling the invading forces from beyond the Subcontinent. They had rebuilt their kingdoms after the Khiljis' conquest, two major clans emerged in this process, in the Mewar and Marwar regions. Inspirational stories of their heroic deeds are still told today, in particular through popular ballads. Among the valorous rulers those clans produced, we met Rana Kumbha earlier. **Rana Sanga** (early 16th

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Fig. 2.23. An artist's impression of the Battle of Haldighati (from Udaipur palace)

century) unified several Rajput clans, won many battles against sultans, ultimately meeting defeat against Babur at the Battle of Khanwa.

Although he inherited a wounded kingdom from his predecessors, Mewar's ruler **Maharana Pratap** refused to accept Mughal suzerainty and became the face of Rajput resistance. A confrontation took place at the Haldighati pass in the Aravallis in 1576 (Fig. 2.23), and although the Mughal army had the upper hand, Maharana Pratap escaped and pursued for years **guerrilla warfare** against the Mughals from the Aravalli hills, living in harsh conditions but firm on his independence. It is noteworthy that Maharana Pratap received strong support from the Bhils, who not only joined his troops as archers but also contributed their knowledge of the terrain; their service (on other occasions too) earned them a respected place in Mewar's military tradition, as the Mewar emblem shows (Fig. 2.22).

Guerrilla warfare: A style of fighting where small groups with knowledge of the terrain carry out surprise attacks and ambushes to defeat bigger armies.



Fig. 2.22. The Mewar emblem, with a Bhil warrior on the left

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While some Rajput states eventually allied with the Mughals — through diplomacy and marriage alliances — some, especially Mewar, did not accept Mughal dominance. During Aurangzeb's reign, several Rajput nobles rebelled, including Durga Das Rathore of Marwar, who fought to protect the independence of Jodhpur. Mughal authority thus remained limited in Rajasthan.

The Ahoms

In the 13th century, the Ahom ethnic group migrated from present-day Myanmar to the Brahmaputra Valley and formed the Ahom kingdom there.

During both the Sultanate and the Mughal periods, the Ahom rulers offered stiff resistance to attempts at expansion into the Northeast. Their unique *paik* system called on every able-bodied man to provide service to the state through labour or military duty in exchange for land rights. This allowed the rulers to create public infrastructure and maintain a large standing force without a permanent army.

Over time, the Ahoms assimilated the local culture, promoted agriculture, encouraged diverse faiths, and contributed to the rich traditions of Assam.

LET'S EXPLORE



Discuss in class how the *paik* system affected the daily lives of the people in the Ahom kingdom, both in terms of challenges and benefits, and helped the king manage both the army and the economy.

In the 17th century, when Aurangzeb sent Mughal forces, briefly capturing the Ahom capital Garhgaon, the Ahoms used their knowledge of the terrain — dense forests, hills and rivers — and persistent guerrilla tactics to repulse the attack, although the latter had more men and a larger fleet of river boats. Notably, in the Battle of Saraighat (1671), fought on the Brahmaputra River near present-day Guwahati, the Ahom military commander Lachit Borphukan and his 10,000 men defeated a Mughal force

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of 30,000 soldiers. Ultimately, the Ahom were able to preserve their independence.



DON'T MISS OUT

Ram Singh, the general of the Mughal army, praised the Ahom warriors in these terms: "Every Assamese soldier is expert in rowing boats, in shooting arrows, in digging trenches, and in wielding guns and cannons. I have not seen such specimens of versatility in any other part of India."

LET'S EXPLORE

How did the Ahoms use the rivers, hills and forests of Assam to their advantage? Can you think of ways in which the geography helped them build defences and fight wars?





Fig. 2.24. A plaque commemorating the Battle of Saraighat, with an Ahom boat in the foreground (Saraighat War Memorial Park).



Fig. 2.25. Statues depicting Ahom warriors during the Battle of Saraighat.

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The Rise of the Sikhs

In 15th century Punjab, **Guru Nanak** spread the message of equality, compassion, and the oneness of God (*Ik Onkār*); his followers came to be known as Sikhs. Although Sikhism began purely as a spiritual movement, the later Sikh Gurus had to respond to the growing intolerance and persecution under some Mughal rulers. When Emperor Jahangir found out that Guru Arjan had supported his rebellious son, he had **Guru Arjan** tortured to death. This prompted Guru Arjan's son and successor, **Guru Hargobind**, to introduce martial training and form a Sikh army, which fought several battles against the Mughal forces.



DON'T MISS OUT

In the context of this chapter, 'Punjab' refers to the vast region now split across India and Pakistan.

The Sikhs' sacred text, **Guru Granth Sahib**, was first compiled by Guru Arjan; Guru Tegh Bahadur's hymns were added later. It stresses that there is one God for all (who "established the earth as a home for *Dharma*") and enjoins Sikhs to practise truthfulness, compassion, humility and self-control, among other values. An example: "Truth is high but higher still is truthful living."

In 1675, a group of Kashmiri Pandits approached **Guru Tegh Bahadur** seeking protection from religious persecution. The Guru decided to stand with them and court martyrdom; arrested, Aurangzeb ordered him to convert to Islam. Despite torture, and despite witnessing three of his disciples being tortured to death, the Guru refused; on Aurangzeb's orders, he was publicly beheaded in Chandni Chowk, Delhi. In response, his son **Guru Gobind Singh** — the 10th and last Guru — established the **Khalsa** — a martial brotherhood committed to justice, equality and defence of the faith, which frequently clashed with the Mughal forces, at great cost of life.

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Fig. 2.26. Miniature painting of Guru Gobind Singh



DON'T MISS OUT

Do you know what the Gurudwara Sis Ganj Sahib in Chandni Chowk — the famous shopping area in Delhi — signifies? In Sikhism, a gurudwara is a place of worship. This one marks the site where Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Sikh Guru, was beheaded by Aurangzeb in 1675. This historic Gurdwara is uniquely honoured by the Sikh Regiment, which has saluted it before the President in the Republic Day parade each year since 1979. It stands as a powerful symbol of faith and sacrifice in Indian history.

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THINK ABOUT IT

- → Why do you think Guru Tegh Bahadur endured torture rather than convert? Why did he think his sacrifice would make a difference?
- → What values did the Sikh Gurus and the Khalsa embody?
- → How are they relevant in today's world?

As the Mughal Empire declined, especially under the onslaughts of the Marathas (see next chapter), several Sikh confederacies emerged in the Punjab region; they were ultimately unified through the efforts of **Maharaja Ranjit Singh** at the turn of the 19th century. Maharaja Ranjit Singh's military acumen, diplomatic skill and religious tolerance allowed him to establish a strong, centralised Sikh Empire which spanned much of the

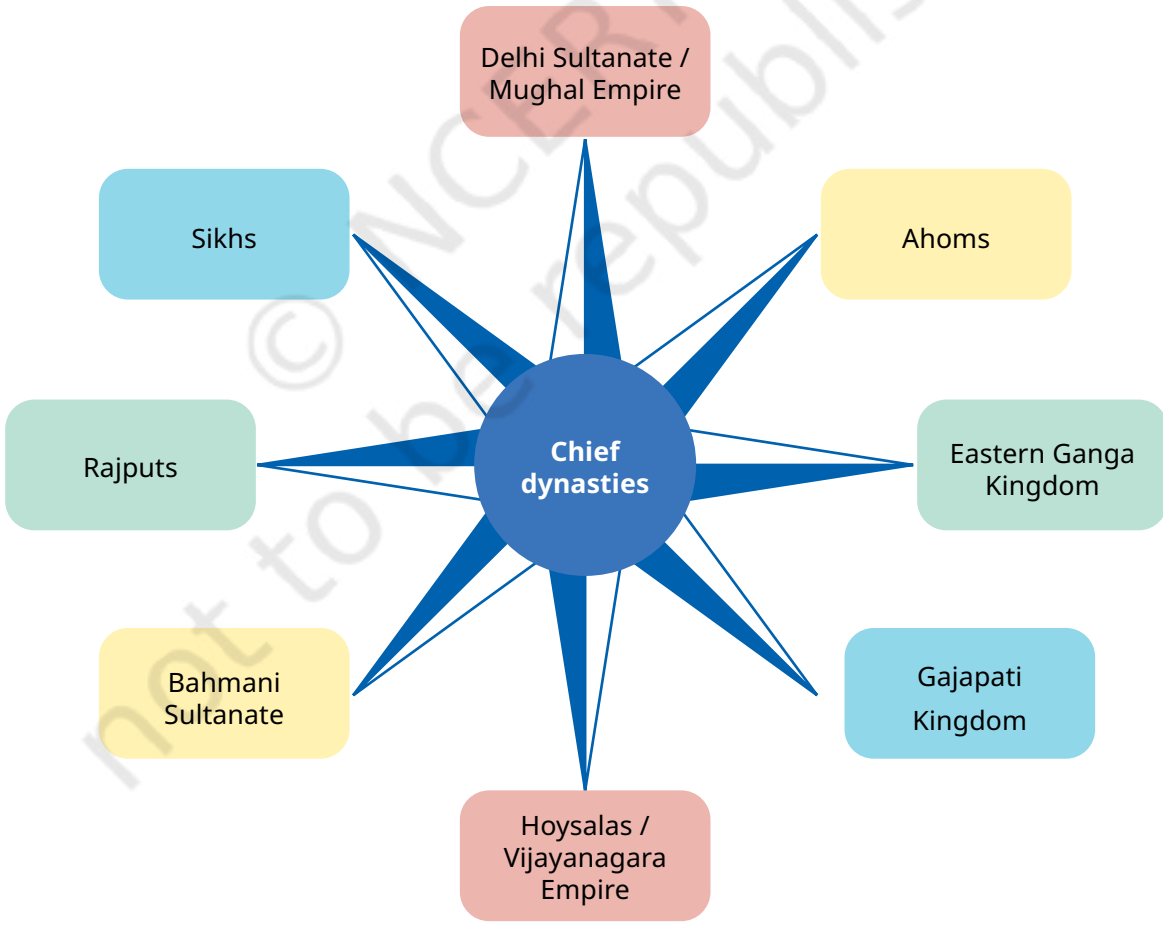


Fig. 2.27. This graphic sums up the chief dynasties involved in this chapter, with a rough indication of their geographical locations.

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Northwest, including parts of Kashmir. Till the mid-19th century, this empire resisted both Mughal remnants and later British expansion.

Administering India

Administration under the Delhi Sultanate

The Delhi Sultanate introduced a political system centred on the sultan, who possessed absolute authority as the political and military head, and whose duties, according to contemporary chronicles, included "defending the territories of Islam against possible aggression," "collecting fees and taxes" and "keeping in touch with public affairs and the condition of the people by personal contact." The sultan was however assisted by a council of ministers who were in charge of the various departments of the Sultanate.

One instrument of the administration was the *iqta* system, in which territories were assigned to nobles (*iqtadars*) to collect taxes which, minus expenses, were supposed to go to the Sultan's treasury; they were needed, in particular, to maintain the army. The system created a network of local administrators loyal to the central authority, but their posts were not hereditary. While taxes were levied on trade at every stage, the burden fell most heavily on the peasantry, and some contemporary accounts report considerable cruelty in extracting revenue from the land.

The Mughal administrative framework

Aiming at greater control and efficiency, Akbar reorganised his administrative machinery. The *Diwan* took care of the finances, while the *Mir Bakhshi* looked after military matters and the *Khan-i-Saman* was in charge of public works, trade, industry and agriculture, besides the royal household. The *Sadr* was responsible for justice, religious and educational matters. Such ministers were assigned to each of the empire's twelve provinces (*subahs*), which were further subdivided, with effective checks and balances enforced between the government officials. At the village level, traditional structures of self-governance continued more or less undisturbed.

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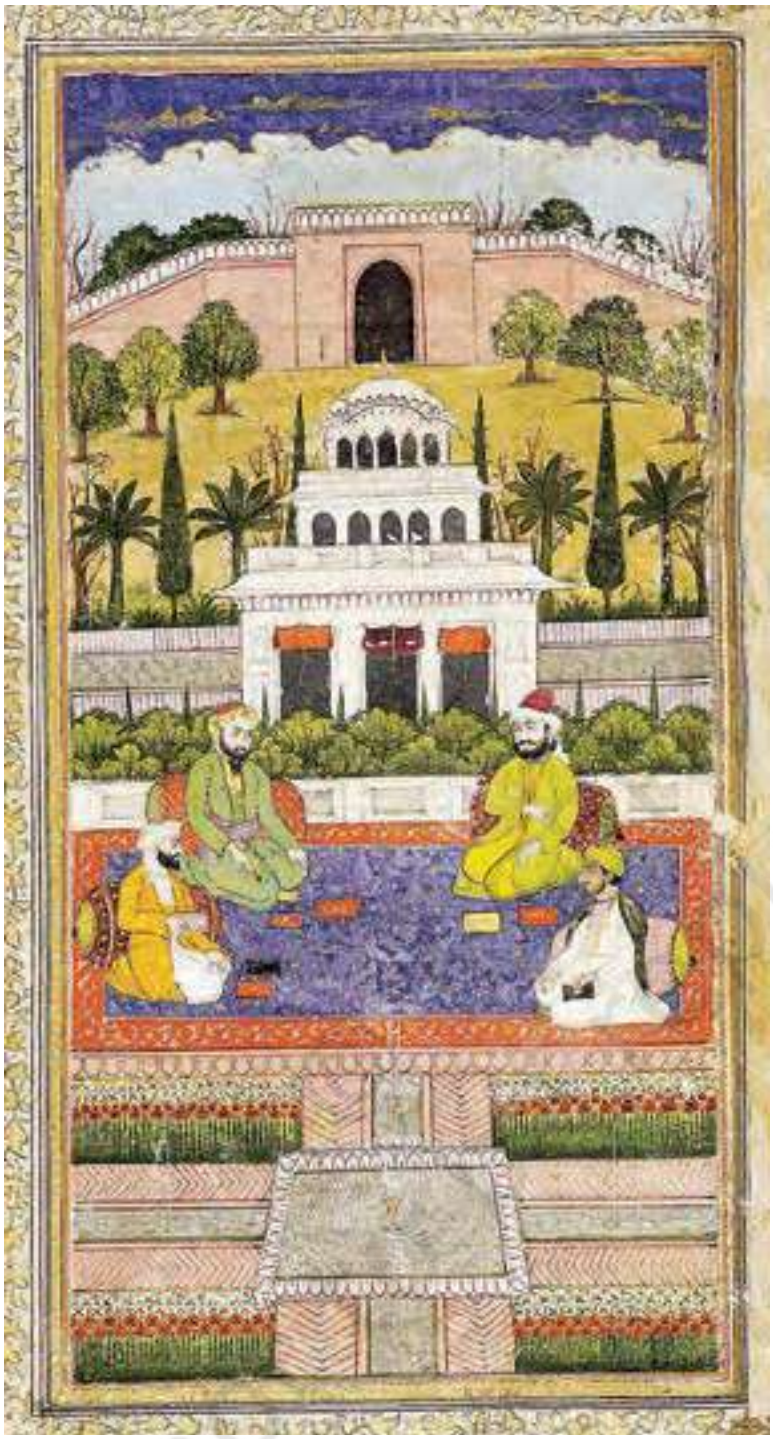


Fig. 2.28. Manuscript painting of Abul Fazl, seated on a terrace with his completed chronicles before him

Akbar also instituted the *mansabdari* system. As Abul Fazl recorded in his *Ain-i-Akbari*, which describes Akbar's administration, *mansabdars* (officers) according to their *mansab* (rank) were expected to maintain a precise number of elephants, horses, camels as well as troops for the state. This made it possible to assemble an army at a short notice without having to maintain a permanent centralised army. Regular inspections were carried out to ensure compliance. Mansabdars were generally paid by being assigned land (*jagirs*) and were therefore also known as *jagirdars*.

Despite Akbar's growing tolerance for different faiths, non-Muslims were kept in a minority in the higher echelons of the administration; for instance, the total percentage of non-Muslim officials in his administration rarely exceeded one-third of the total and was often much less. Even among Muslim officials, those of foreign origin were generally favoured over those of Indian origin.

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Todar Mal, Akbar's finance minister, introduced an efficient revenue system. He made detailed surveys for crop yields and prices, and determined prices for each crop on the basis of that information. He also initiated a systematic survey of the land in the entire empire which boosted revenue collection and strengthened the state apparatus.

We will see a different kind of administration, that of the Marathas, in the next chapter.

People's Lives

Despite shifting political powers between the 13th and 17th centuries, India witnessed vibrant economic activity, thanks to its agrarian foundations, thriving artisanal industries, community-based and temple-based economies, and extensive trade networks. Building on decentralised economic and social systems — such as *śhreṇis* (guilds), *jātis* (professionally defined communities), and systems for credit — the Subcontinent remained one of the wealthiest regions in the world.

The Sultanate period saw some progress in infrastructural works, especially roads in north India, bridges, a few canals and other irrigation works, apart from the creation of new cities, all of which expanded considerably during the Mughal period. Coins in several metals and denominations were introduced as currency. The Mughals will use a different system, with a *rupaya* of silver and a *dam* of copper.



Fig. 2.29. A Persian wheel used to draw water from wells or tanks to irrigate fields.

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Fig. 2.30. A Vijayanagara land grant, inscribed on a copper plate, the equivalent of modern-day property deeds.

Agriculture was the mainstay of the Indian economy; we have already seen how rulers relied on agrarian revenue to maintain their administration and military, typically extracting land revenue at one-fifth of the produce, though some of the sultans raised it as high as one-half. The expansion of irrigation systems increased agricultural productivity, allowing for the production of multiple crops, including both food (rice, wheat, barley, pulses, sugarcane, spices, etc.) and non-food items (cotton, which fed a thriving textile production, silk, wool, dyes, timber, jute, etc.). Let us note that agriculture output varied from region to region and period to period; the peasantry suffered several severe famines in this period, with relief depending upon the particular ruler's benevolence.

Apart from textiles, craftspeople made a wide range of products, from weapons to utensils to ornaments and jewellery items. Ship-building, essential to river and overseas trade, developed considerably in those centuries. Indian goods were exported through coastal and riverside towns such as Calicut, Mangalore, Surat, Masulipatnam or Hooghly. India imported much less than it exported; import products included silk, horses, metals, and all kinds of luxury goods. Merchants from Arabia, Persia (now Iran), and Central Asia settled in Indian ports, contributing to the bustling trade activity.

The *hundi* system also enabled merchants to transfer funds across political boundaries without physically transporting currency, making them less vulnerable to plunder. Trader communities, such as the Marwaris, became adept at operating across different political regimes, developing parallel systems of credit and trust that functioned independently of official structures.



DON'T MISS OUT

A *hundi* was a written instruction to make payment to an individual. It could be carried across political borders and enabled financial transactions without the need to carry currency — a precursor to modern banking. These systems worked across trade networks without the participation of the ruling classes.

Temples as centres of economic activity

Many temples were more than centres for worship, learning, social interaction or performing arts. They also created ecosystems with bustling markets; ruling classes donated land and wealth (*dāna*) to temple deities, held in trust by temple managers who developed community infrastructure (irrigation systems, tanks, etc.) and pilgrim accommodations (*dharmaśhālās* and *chhatrams*). Temples provided merchants with credit and funded internal as well as maritime trade.

While early periods saw prosperity, the late 1600s witnessed economic stress. Peasants were often left with a small share of their produce after taxes and payments to intermediary parties. This caused many to lose their land and become bonded labourers.

Historians suggest that craftspeople and labourers, too, often faced harsh economic conditions. India was still a land of abundance, as testified by many Arab and European travellers, but the wealth was largely concentrated in the hands of the rulers, courtiers, high officials and the merchant class. Frequent warfare, in addition, caused forced displacement of population.

At the level of the common people, there were instances of clashes, especially over sacred sites that had been desecrated or destroyed under the rulers' sanction. But by and large, people of different faiths and communities lived peacefully side by side, economically dependent on each other.

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Even as most rulers across India patronised the arts, communities, too, strove to maintain or revive their traditions, many of which adapted to changing circumstances. Among those cultural traditions, a fair degree of interaction resulted in the creation of a shared heritage.

Through it all, India endured, economically prosperous on the whole but often politically unstable. During this period of frequent reshaping of the political map, India faced serious challenges, but survived. It is a tale not only of hardship but also of resilience — through the sword when the occasion demanded, but also through fresh creation in art, literature, spirituality, and timeless values.



Before we move on ...

- This period witnessed many foreign invasions led by Turkic, Afghan, and Mughal forces, which caused widespread destruction, the fall of old dynasties, and the rise and fall of kingdoms and empires. Continuous warfare, alliances and conquests reshaped India's political boundaries.
- The period had many instances of religious intolerance. Buddhists, Jains, Hindus, Sikhs, Zoroastrians, and tribals suffered severe persecution at times, though some rulers were more broad-minded than others.
- Agriculture and trade expanded, enhancing India's wealth and connectivity with the wider world. Yet the economic condition of the common subjects generally remained harsh.
- Indian society showed adaptability and resilience in rebuilding towns, cities, temples, and other aspects of the economy. At the same time, it found ways to preserve cultural traditions and blend indigenous and foreign elements to create new cultural expressions. Many forms of art and culture, including architecture, music and painting, flourished.

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Questions and activities

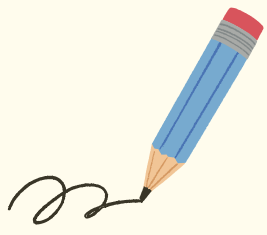
1. Compare the political strategies of the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughals. What similarities and differences existed between them?
2. Why did kingdoms like the Vijayanagara Empire and the Ahom Kingdom manage to resist conquest for a longer time compared to others? What geographical, military, and social factors contributed to their success?
3. Imagine you are a scholar in the court of Akbar or Krishnadevaraya. Write a letter to a friend describing the politics, trade, culture, and society you are witnessing.
4. How come Akbar, a ruthless conqueror in his young days, grew tolerant and benevolent after some years? What could have led to such a change?
5. What might have happened if the Vijayanagara Empire had won the Battle of Talikota? Imagine and describe how it could have changed the political and cultural history of south India.
6. Many values promoted by early Sikhism, including equality, *seva*, and justice, remain relevant today. Select one of these values and discuss how it remains relevant in contemporary society.
7. Imagine you are a trader in a port city (Surat, Calicut or Hooghly). Describe the scenes you see as regards goods, people you trade with, movement of ships, etc.

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Noodles

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*'Noodles' is our abbreviation for 'Notes and Doodles'!



CHAPTER 3

The Rise of the Marathas

Among the merchants, the hat-wearers like the Portuguese, the English, the Dutch, the French and the Danes also conduct trade. But they are not like other merchants.... They are fully intent on entering this land, increasing their territory and propagating their religion. They are obstinate people, and Navy and gunpowder are their chief weapons. Their traffic should be controlled, and they shouldn't be allowed to build strong buildings.

— Ramachandrapant Amatya, Ādnyāpatra (1715)



Fig. 3.1. Raigad Fort, Maharashtra, with the grand entrance to the palace where Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj was crowned in 1674, marking the formal beginning of the Maratha Empire.

The Big Questions?

1. *Who were the Marathas? How did they manage to become the largest pan-Indian power before the British took over?*
2. *What were some features of their governance?*
3. *What impact did the Maratha Empire leave in Indian history?*

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1630: Birth of Chhatrapati Shivaji

1657: Founding of the Maratha navy

1674: Chhatrapati Shivaji's coronation at Raigad

1680: Death of Chhatrapati Shivaji

1630 | 1660 | 1680 | 1690 | 1720

1646: Beginning of Chhatrapati Shivaji's rule

1666: Imprisonment at, and escape from, Agra

1677: *Dakṣhiṇa digvijaya* (conquest of the South)

1682–1707: Mughal-Maratha wars

Fig. 3.2.

Literary history: The historical development of writings in prose or poetry in a particular language.

Who are the Marathas?

The Marathas are a group of people native to the Deccan plateau, more specifically present-day Maharashtra. They are identified with the language they speak — Marathi — which has had a rich and continuous **literary history** since the 12th century. In this chapter, we will see them rise as a powerful political entity that will alter the course of India's history.

During the 13th century, most of Maharashtra was ruled by the Yadava dynasty with Devagiri (present-day Daulatabad) as its capital. In the early

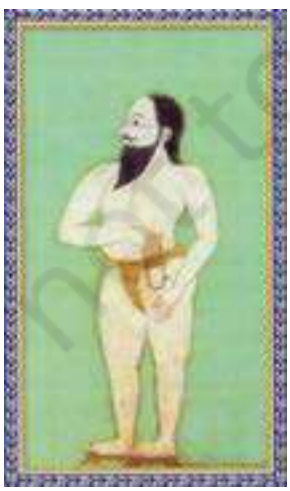
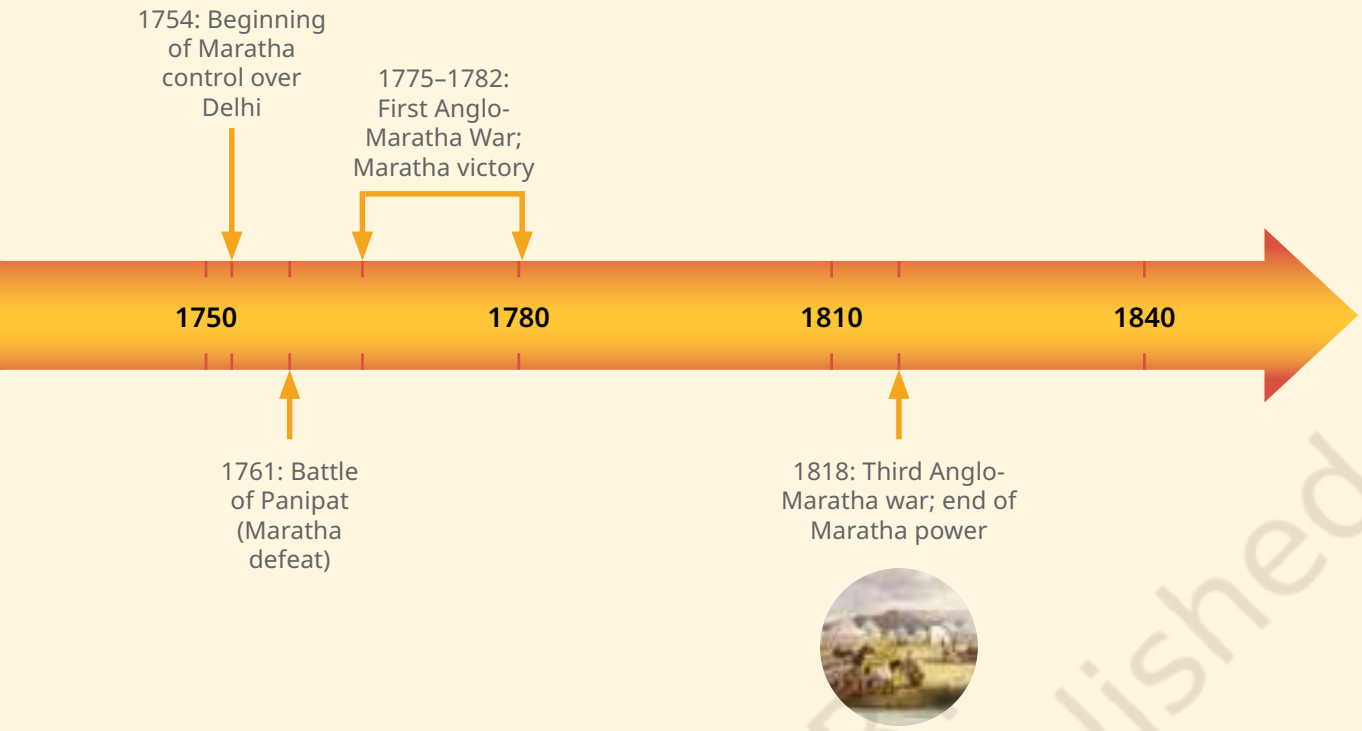


Fig. 3.3. Sant Ramdas



Fig. 3.4. Postal stamp showing Sant Tukaram

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14th century, the Yadava dynasty was overcome by the Khilji Sultanate from Delhi.

Amidst such political changes, the cultural traditions continued, particularly those related to bhakti (devotion to the divine or a particular deity). Between the 7th and the 17th centuries, for spiritual upliftment, saints and seekers from several parts of India preferred the path of bhakti to merely external ritualism. These saints, coming from diverse sections of society, composed devotional songs and poetry in the languages of the masses, which allowed their messages to travel far and wide.

LET'S EXPLORE



Have you ever heard the term 'bhakti'? What does it mean to you? Choose a bhakti saint from any part of India and learn about their life, their teachings, and the message they shared. You can also find one of their poems or ***bhajans*** and share it with your classmates.

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In Maharashtra, many saints like Dnyaneshwar, Namdev, Tukaram, Ramdas, etc., gained popularity at this time. They helped translate important texts like the *Upaniṣhads* and the *Bhagavad Gītā* into Marathi, making their philosophy accessible to the people. Some also focused on social organisation and political awareness, similar to the Sikh gurus. As a result, the society acquired a solid cultural foundation, which later helped the Marathas to organise themselves into a political power.

By the 17th century, some Maratha chiefs made early attempts at establishing sovereignty, but they proved unsuccessful — until Chhatrapati Shivaji rose to power and brought the Marathas together. But who was Chhatrapati Shivaji?

***Jāgīr*:** A *jāgīr* was a piece of land given by a king or ruler to someone (usually a noble or soldier) as a reward for their service. The person who got the *jāgīr* could collect taxes from the land and use the money to take care of their needs or help the king when needed.

Foundation of Maratha Power and the Rise of Chhatrapati Shivaji

In 1630, Chhatrapati Shivaji was born in the Bhonsle clan to Shahji and Jijabai. At the time, Shahji served the Deccan sultanates and was often away from his family. Meanwhile, in his ***jāgīr*** at Pune, Chhatrapati Shivaji grew up under the watchful eyes of Jijabai and some trusted officials, receiving values and a good education. At this time, the Pune region was deeply affected by constant infighting between the Deccan sultans whom the Marathas served, which caused much hardship for the common people.



Fig. 3.5. A painting of Chhatrapati Shivaji made in the 1680s (British Museum)

When he was just 16, Chhatrapati Shivaji launched military campaigns, first consolidating his hold over the Pune region by capturing neglected and unoccupied forts and strengthening their defences. His vision of a sovereign kingdom or '*Swarājya*' grew over the years, extending to political, economic and cultural aspects, which we will explore in this chapter.

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Fig. 3.6. The Sindhudurg Fort near the Maharashtra-Goa border is one of the several naval fortifications built by the Marathas.

Chhatrapati Shivaji's kingdom soon expanded to India's west coast, and to secure access to the resources of coastal regions, he felt the need to establish a navy. This was a truly revolutionary step at the time. By comparison, the Bijapur Sultanate (ruled by the Adil Shahi dynasty), maintained merchant ships but did not possess a full-time naval force which could protect the coast; even the Mughal Empire's use of a navy was very limited. Thus, the Maratha Navy was born, whose exploits became legendary.

To protect his people from powerful enemies, Chhatrapati Shivaji had recourse to the tactic of guerrilla warfare, which uses small groups of people in a focused way, with speed, surprise, and knowledge of the terrain to defeat bigger armies. His successes soon invited the wrath of the Bijapur Sultanate, which sent the veteran general Afzal Khan to confront him. Chhatrapati Shivaji and his advisers managed to convince Afzal Khan to meet him for a one-on-one meeting at the foot of the Pratapgad fort amid thick forests. There, Chhatrapati Shivaji killed Afzal Khan, and the Marathas, hidden in the mountains, routed the Khan's army with guerrilla attacks.

THINK ABOUT IT

If you could time-travel and meet Chhatrapati Shivaji, what three questions would you ask him and why?

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DON'T MISS OUT

The *wāgh nakh* is a small weapon shaped like a tiger's claw, which Chhatrapati Shivaji used to kill Afzal Khan in close combat.



Fig. 3.7. Wāgh nakh or the 'tiger's claw'.



LET'S EXPLORE

Try to find out more about guerrilla warfare. Which other countries in the world adopted this method? What geographical advantages did they utilise for this? Discuss your findings in groups.

Surgical strike: A military attack intended to damage only a specific target, with no or minimal damage to other people or infrastructure.

Soon afterwards, the Mughal nobleman Shaista Khan invaded Chhatrapati Shivaji's territories with a big army for three years. Finally, with only a few soldiers, Chhatrapati Shivaji raided Shaista Khan's camp at night. The Khan barely escaped from the raid, losing a few fingers, and promptly left Maharashtra. This daring raid resembles the modern-day **surgical strike**.

As a retaliatory action for the three-year-long wave of attacks, Chhatrapati Shivaji sacked Surat, a wealthy port city of the Mughal Empire (in present-day Gujarat). There, he obtained enormous treasure worth almost one crore of rupees, an extremely large sum for the time. However, he was careful not to attack religious places and even spared the house of Mohandas Parekh, a charitable man. He sacked Surat again after a few years. These events became so famous that they appeared in the London Gazette, an English newspaper of the time, which conveyed how Chhatrapati Shivaji wrote to all European diplomatic agents in Surat, demanding 'immediate presents of money', failing which he would 'return and ruin that city'.

The sacking of Surat was a great insult to the might and prestige of the Mughal Empire. Therefore, Aurangzeb sent Jai Singh, a distinguished Rajput general, to defeat Chhatrapati Shivaji. Against him, Chhatrapati Shivaji had to concede defeat at Purandar Fort (near Pune) and enter into a treaty. He had to give up a sizeable part of his kingdom, and his son Sambhaji had to enter Mughal service.

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Chhatrapati Shivaji was persuaded by Jai Singh to visit the Mughal court at Agra, where he was made to stand before Aurangzeb, and a Mughal general whom he had defeated earlier. Incensed at this insult, Chhatrapati Shivaji stormed out of the court, following which Aurangzeb put him under house arrest. To escape this, Chhatrapati Shivaji devised a strategy — he started distributing gifts to holy men and Mughal generals. The gifts often contained fruits and sweets, packed in big baskets. The guards initially checked them, but soon stopped doing so; expecting this, Chhatrapati Shivaji and his son Sambhaji hid themselves in the baskets and made their escape. Aurangzeb could never capture Chhatrapati Shivaji again.



Fig. 3.8. A court scene with Chhatrapati Shivaji on his throne receiving visitors (panel in Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Park, Mumbai)

A few years later, in 1674, Chhatrapati Shivaji was coronated with full Vedic rites at the strong mountain fortress of Raigad. His formal title after the coronation was 'Shri Raja Shiva Chhatrapati', and like some past rulers, he started his own era, the *Rājyābhiṣheka shaka*.

After this, Chhatrapati Shivaji embarked upon a conquest of the South, also referred to as the *dakṣhiṇa-digvijaya*, which included the important and then ill-defended region of present-day northern Tamil Nadu and parts of Karnataka (see map in Fig. 3.9). This southern extension later gave the Marathas great strategic depth against the Mughal invasion.

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DON'T MISS OUT

While in the South, Chhatrapati Shivaji forbade the Dutch from trading slaves. At the time, most Europeans were capturing and selling Indians as slaves and encountered no opposition from Indian powers, until Chhatrapati Shivaji intervened. His stance on this abuse showed his deep concern for his subjects.

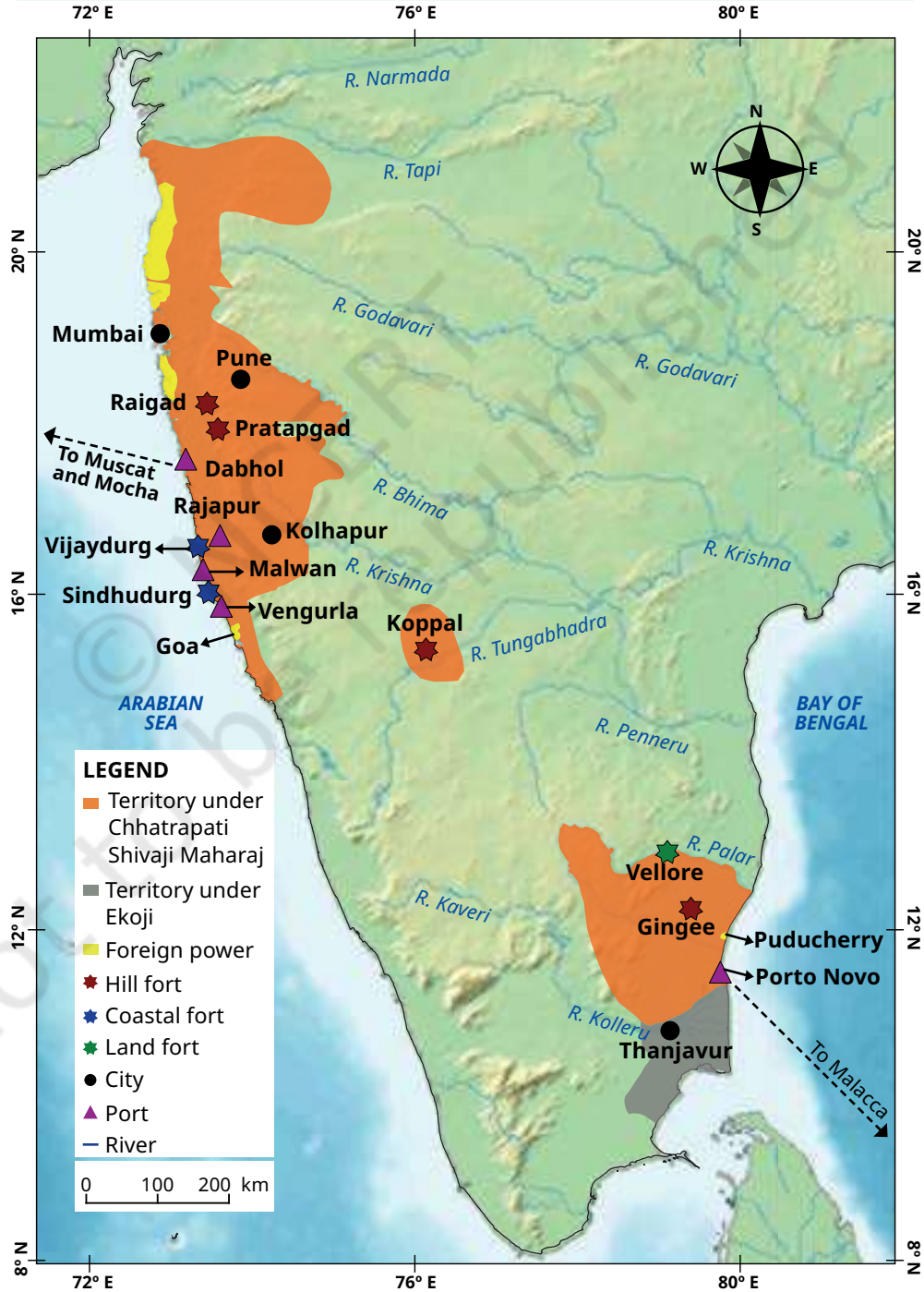


Fig. 3.9. Chhatrapati Shivaji's Kingdom about 1680 (Ekoji's role is explained later in the chapter).

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A fever claimed Chhatrapati Shivaji's life when he was fifty. He was a master strategist and a true visionary, and within his lifetime, his exploits had become legendary across India and beyond. The Europeans compared him with ancient generals like Alexander, and the Bundela prince Chhatrasal was so inspired by Chhatrapati Shivaji's struggle against the Mughals that he managed to create an independent kingdom of Bundelkhand (divided between present-day Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh). The famous Hindi poet Bhushan specifically came to Maharashtra to meet Chhatrapati Shivaji and composed poems in his praise, some of which remain famous to this day.

LET'S EXPLORE

Pick an event from Chhatrapati Shivaji's life and, with your classmates, stage it as a play.



THE MARATHAS AFTER CHHATRAPATI SHIVAJI

Chhatrapati Shivaji had two sons — Sambhaji and Rajaram. After Chhatrapati Shivaji's death, Sambhaji became the Chhatrapati. The Marathas were then the only obstacle to total Mughal control of the Deccan. Aurangzeb invaded the Deccan and conquered the Bijapur (or Adil Shahi) and Golconda (or Qutb Shahi) Sultanates. He then captured Sambhaji and, after torturing him brutally, executed him. After this, he captured Raigad, the Maratha capital.

After Sambhaji, Rajaram became the Chhatrapati and fled to Gingee (in present-day Tamil Nadu). The Mughal-Maratha conflict thus spread to south India. The Marathas staunchly defended their fortresses and often had the upper hand over the Mughals in battles and skirmishes. Aurangzeb was thus unable to leave the Deccan and died without having succeeded in subduing the Marathas, who emerged as a strong contender to the Mughals. No longer on the defensive, the Marathas led by Tarabai, Rajaram's queen, made large-scale inroads into Mughal territories, eventually conquering large parts of India.

During this rapid expansion, the Marathas themselves underwent a structural transformation. The centralised state

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Fig. 3.10. Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj (Sambhaji's son), seated right and sporting a falcon, in counsel with Nanasaheb Peshwa

from Chhatrapati Shivaji's time gave way to a more decentralised structure, still nominally centred around the Chhatrapati, but with the chiefs wielding more power. In particular, the Peshwa (a Persian term for 'prime minister') wielded great influence, even over the Chhatrapati himself. In particular, Peshwa Bajirao I and his son Nanasaheb Peshwa were instrumental in the pan-Indian expansion of the Marathas.

The Marathas brought large parts of India under their control and generally ruled them well. But with the regional chiefs acquiring more power and autonomy, this also resulted in occasional indiscipline and abuse, in stark contrast with Chhatrapati Shivaji's values. You may study about Marathas campaign in detail in the higher classes.

In their northward expansion, the Marathas briefly controlled the areas of Lahore, Attock and even Peshawar (in modern-day Pakistan). They fought with the Afghans, and despite suffering a disastrous defeat at Panipat in 1761, they quickly recovered during the time of Peshwa Madhavrao I. Under the leadership of Mahadji Shinde (also known as Mahadji Scindia), they went on to recapture Delhi in 1771, which remained under their control till the British captured it three decades later.

In the latter half of the 18th century, the chief rivals of the British in India were the Marathas. Three Anglo–Maratha wars (as they are called) were fought between 1775 and 1818. Owing to the Marathas' increased internal disunity and the superior organisational and technological abilities of the British, they succeeded in ending the Maratha power. In effect, the British took India from the Marathas more than from the Mughals or any other power.

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DON'T MISS OUT

Did you know that Nana Phadnavis, a powerful official under the Peshwas, is credited with organising the first pan-Indian anti-British alliance? He even united with old adversaries like Hyder Ali of Mysore and the Nizam of Hyderabad in this endeavour.



Fig. 3.11. A mural of a British officer surrendering before Nana Phadnavis and Mahadji Shinde after the first Anglo-Maratha war.

Maratha Administration

Civilian administration

Chhatrapati Shivaji instituted a relatively centralised administration for his kingdom. He abolished the hereditary posts (generally practised under the Sultans or the Mughals) and land assignments and paid a salary to every government official out of the state treasury. Many officials were periodically transferred as well, ensuring that they would not have enough power to dictate terms to the king.

Chhatrapati Shivaji also gave pensions to widows of soldiers who died in battles, even offering military posts to their sons, thus demonstrating his care for the soldiers and their families.



Fig. 3.12. Chhatrapati Shivaji minted gold and copper coins in his own name, signifying his sovereignty. The use of the Devanagari script was also an assertion of his cultural identity.

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THINK ABOUT IT

Chhatrapati Shivaji issued strict instructions to his officials not to mistreat the subjects or to forcefully grab even a blade of grass from them. In one of the letters issued to his officials, Chhatrapati Shivaji says:

"Wood from big trees like teak is required for the Navy. If needed, secure permission for cutting the trees from the forest and then proceed. Other trees like the mango and jackfruit are also useful, but do not touch them. Because such trees take many years to mature, and the people look after them like their children. If you cut them, will their sorrow ever end? If you accomplish something by oppressing others, it perishes soon, along with the oppressor. There is harm in the absence of such trees as well. Therefore, do not use force in any circumstances."

Based on Chhatrapati Shivaji's letter, what can you tell about his values as a ruler?

Chhatrapati Shivaji also had an *aṣhṭa pradhāna manḍala*, or council of eight ministers (Fig. 3.13), to assist him with administration.

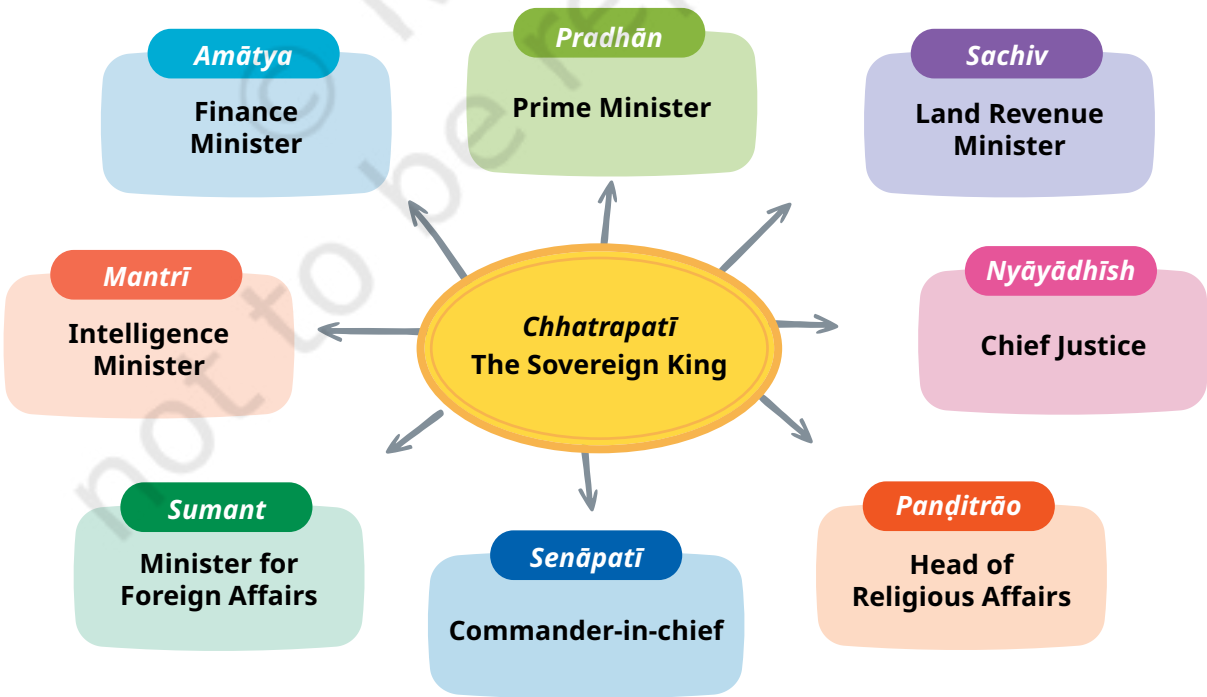


Fig. 3.13.

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The Marathas often levied taxes called *chauth* (25 per cent) and *sardeshmukhi* (an additional 10 per cent to *chauth*) from provinces that were not directly under them, including places in the Deccan and north India. In return, the Marathas protected those provinces and did not intervene in their internal administration. The Mughals also approved of this arrangement through various treaties, and over time, some of these provinces became a part of the Maratha Empire.



DON'T MISS OUT

In the 18th century, the Marathas often adopted the Mughal style of coinage owing to its popularity, but added their own cultural symbols to it. For instance, this rare Maratha coin known as the 'Gaṇapatī-Pantapradhān rupee', minted in the early 19th century by the Patwardhans (generals under the Peshwa), features inscriptions in two scripts — Devanagari and Persian. One side is an invocation to Gaṇapati *(*Gaṇeśha*)* while the other declares loyalty to the Peshwa (often referred to as 'Pantapradhān' in Marathi).



Fig. 3.14.

Military administration

The Maratha armed forces were divided into three parts — infantry, cavalry and navy. The cavalry was made up of two types of soldiers — the *bārgīrs*, whose horses and equipment were paid for by the state, and the *shiledārs*, whose horses and equipment were paid for by the soldiers themselves. In the 18th century, the Marathas also noticed the superiority of European-style disciplined troops and artillery, and they tried to raise and recruit such troops. In particular, Mahadji Shinde had a large European-style army.

Swords and lances were the preferred weapons of the Marathas (Fig. 3.15). However, they also used guns in sizable numbers. Rockets were used in military campaigns from the days of Chhatrapati Shivaji himself, and by 1770, metal tube rockets were also being used.

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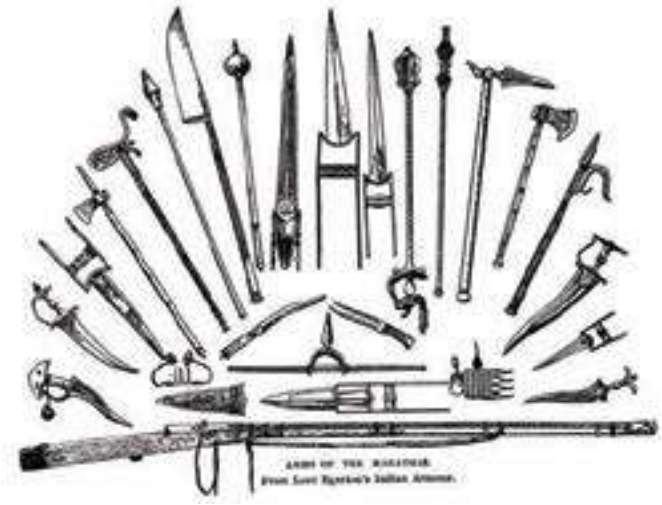


Fig. 3.15. Some of the weapons used by the Marathas.

As we saw earlier, forts were initially the mainstay of Maratha power. Chhatrapati Shivaji controlled and built a considerable number of forts, as they were essential to strategically control important routes and shelter the army when engaging in guerrilla warfare.

Ramachandrapant Amatya, the finance minister of Chhatrapati Shivaji, in his work *Ādnyāpatra* ('The Royal Edict') explains,

> "Forts are the core of the state. In their absence, the land gets devastated in the face of an invasion. Therefore, all the former kings secured the country by building forts. This kingdom (Maratha kingdom) was created by the late great master [Chhatrapati Shivaji] from forts alone ... A great enemy like Aurangzeb invaded [this kingdom], conquered great empires like Bijapur and Bhaganagar [... but] it was due to forts that the [Maratha] state survived despite decades of onslaught."

Maritime supremacy

As we saw, Chhatrapati Shivaji created a navy to secure the west coast. In the 18th century, Kanhoji Angre guided the Marathas to victory in many naval battles, thanks to a clever use of geography and battle tactics, despite the Maratha ships not being as technologically advanced as the European ones.

At the time, the main strength of Europeans in India was their navies. They forced Indians to purchase their naval trade passes (*cartaz* in Portuguese) at a price; any ship without a pass was confiscated. The Marathas challenged this practice and started demanding passes from the Europeans themselves — who showed their frustration by labelling Kanhoji Angre a 'pirate'!

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Fig. 3.16. Maratha ships attacking English ships



DON'T MISS OUT

In 1665, four ships from Chhatrapati Shivaji's fleet reached Muscat, the capital of Oman. The ruler there captured them and arrested the men onboard. He also prepared a few ships to attack Chhatrapati Shivaji's coastal possessions. But, on hearing that Chhatrapati Shivaji's Navy contained more than a hundred ships, he retreated inside the harbour with his ships.

Judicial system

The Marathas had an efficient judicial system, remarkable for its moderation in using capital punishment (the death penalty). The *panchāyat* (not to be confused with the current-day Panchayat, a governmental body) was a local gathering of officials and prominent men, and the main body that delivered justice. An appeal could be made to a Maratha chief in case of an unsatisfactory verdict. Additionally, in various prominent

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towns such as Pune, Indore, etc., the *kotwāl* or the police was also deployed to ensure law and order within the city.

Trade networks

Chhatrapati Shivaji encouraged trade and actively participated in maritime foreign trade himself. He and his officials had their own ships, which they regularly sent to ports as far away as Mocha in Yemen, Muscat in Oman, and Malacca in Malaysia. Some of these ships carried cargo like gold, textiles, etc.

Roads were constructed and maintained. In places such as Odisha in the 18th century, a network of ferries was maintained for riverine transport. Bridges were built over rivers and small streams.



Fig. 3.17. Chhatrapati Shivaji's seal

Cultural Revival

The Marathas contributed substantially to India's cultural developments. Chhatrapati Shivaji's vision of *Swarājya* is evident in his seal, which carried a Sanskrit inscription, a notable departure from the prevalent Persian seals — "This seal (i.e. authority) of Chhatrapati Shivaji, the son of Shahji, waxing like the new moon, revered by the world, reigns for the welfare (of the people)."

Chhatrapati Shivaji also commissioned a treatise called *Rājya-Vyavahāra-Koṣha* with the aim of promoting the Marathi language; it provided Sanskrit equivalents for the prevalent Persian words used in diplomatic exchanges, as a result of which, the percentage of foreign loanwords in Maratha diplomacy decreased considerably. Chhatrapati Shivaji was a devout Hindu who respected other religions while upholding his own. His saffron-coloured flag was adopted by all Marathas. He rebuilt desecrated temples, promoted Sanskrit and Marathi literature, religious institutions, and traditional arts.

But perhaps he contributed most to the revival of ancient Indian culture and values by giving people a demonstration that mighty kingdoms and empires could be defeated, and the Marathas could maintain, expand and administer an empire of their own.

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The mighty Maratha women



Fig. 3.18. Tarabai in battle (painting by M.V. Dhurandhar)

Tarabai was a fearless Maratha warrior queen who ruled in the early 18th century after the death of her husband Rajaram. Realising that with the presence of Aurangzeb and the Mughal army in the Deccan, north India was unprotected, she organised large Maratha armies and sent them to invade Mughal territories in the north. In that sense, she was the architect of the northward Maratha expansion. Her sense of military strategy and her tenacity outsmarted the Mughal Empire and preserved Maratha independence during a critical period.

Ahilyabai Holkar was a scion of the Holkar dynasty, one of the chief families instrumental for the Maratha expansion in north India; during the 18th century, this dynasty ruled a kingdom of considerable extent in central India, around present-day Indore. Even after losing her husband and son, she bravely governed the state for thirty years, administering it wisely while caring for the common people. Ahilyabai was a devout person who built and restored hundreds of temples, ghats, wells, and roads throughout India, from Kedarnath in the north to Rameswaram in the south.



Fig. 3.19. A postage stamp commemorating Ahilyabai Holkar

Most famously, she rebuilt the Kashi Vishwanath temple in Varanasi that had been destroyed by Aurangzeb and the Somnath temple in Gujarat that had been destroyed by Mahmud of Ghazni. Ahilyabai Holkar is also credited with promoting the Maheshwar weaving industry in Madhya Pradesh, revitalising traditional handloom crafts that continue to thrive today.

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DON'T MISS OUT

The Moḍī script (a cursive form of Devanagari) was the main script used by Marathas for their correspondence.

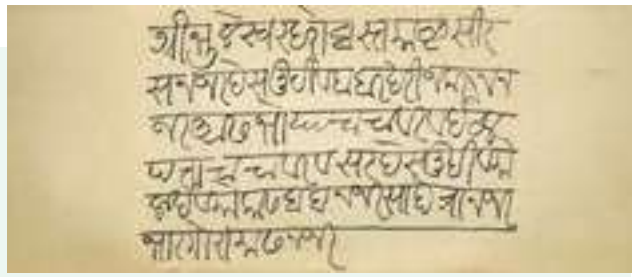


Fig. 3.20. A sample of Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj's handwriting in the Moḍī script

Chhatrapati Shivaji's example continued to inspire his successors. For instance, the Bhonsles of Nagpur emerged as the enthusiastic supporters of local culture and tradition, and the worship of Lord Jagannath at Puri (in Odisha), which was often interrupted during the Mughal rule, was revived with the support of the Marathas. But perhaps the most impressive contribution came from a few remarkable Maratha women. Let us hear about two of them (see Page 77).

In focus: Thanjavur



Fig. 3.21. A traditional Thanjavur style painting, featuring delicate gold foil work that lends it a rich, radiant appearance; this style flourished under the patronage of the Marathas

Let us turn southward to witness another example of cultural contribution. Ekoji, the half-brother of Chhatrapati Shivaji, conquered the Thanjavur region (in present-day Tamil Nadu) in the late 17th century, marking the beginning of Maratha rule in the area. The Thanjavur Marathas especially helped create a syncretic culture that was rich and full of innovation. They were great patrons of the arts, and many of the rulers themselves were poets and dramatists.

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LET'S EXPLORE



Have you heard of the dance form 'Bharatnatyam'? Did you know that this dance form has a deep connection with the Marathas? Can you find out what this connection was?

Of all the Thanjavur Maratha rulers, the contributions of Serfoji II are the most notable. He was well-versed in many Indian and European languages and wrote a Marathi play named *Devendra Kuravanji,* where he describes world geography in detail as was known at the time. Serfoji patronised many talented musicians, and it was during his time that modern Carnatic music took shape, as did the early stages of the famous classical dance form of Bharatanatyam.



Fig. 3.22. Marathi inscription on a wall of the Brihadishwara temple wall recording the history of the Bhonsle family.

Serfoji was quite interested in medicine and established the Dhanwantari Mahal, a centre of medicine that offered free treatment of diseases using both Indian and Western medicine. He also started a printing press, the first such example in India by a native ruler. He got the history of the Bhonsle family inscribed on the walls of the Brihadishwara temple at Thanjavur, which is one of the largest single inscriptions in India, a record for posterity.

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The cultural environment of Thanjavur was multilingual, with a mix of many influences. The local Tamil culture, the Telugu culture of the former rulers, and the current rulers' Marathi culture interacted with each other freely.

The Maratha legacy

The Maratha rule challenged Mughal dominance and established the largest Indian empire before the British took over the Subcontinent, controlling much of central and northern India. They set up a new way of governing with an efficient administration, and also revived the local Hindu traditions without religious discrimination. Their brave fight against oppressive rule and foreign power was driven by the fiery ideal of *Swarājya*. Later it inspired many Indians to believe they could govern themselves, planting the early seeds for India's freedom movement.



Before we move on ...

- Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj founded the Maratha kingdom in the 17th century. Its decades-long resistance to Mughal power, and the experience gained from this, helped in its pan-Indian expansion in the 18th century.
- The British captured India effectively from the Marathas more than from any other Indian power.
- Forts were the core of Maratha state; the Marathas controlled hundreds of forts, thus strategically strengthening their control over the region.
- Their formidable navy resisted European naval supremacy for quite some time despite lack of access to the latest technology of the time.
- The Marathas inspired a new cultural confidence amongst Indians in various regions, thus contributing to the cultural revival and innovation.

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Questions and activities

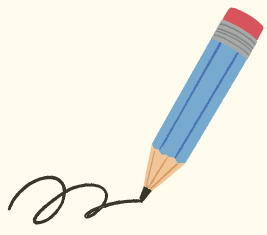
1. Analyse how geography (particularly mountains and coastlines) guided Maratha military strategy and state formation.
2. Imagine you are creating a short biography of a Maratha leader for younger students. Choose one personality (Kanhoji Angre, Bajirao I, Mahadji Shinde, Ahilyabai Holkar or Tarabai) and write 3–4 paragraphs highlighting what makes them inspirational. Include at least one challenge they overcame.
3. If you could visit one Maratha fort today (such as Raigad, Sindhudurg, Gingee, or Pratapgad), which would you choose and why? Research its history, architecture, and strategic importance. Present your findings as a digital presentation or a poster in class.
4. The chapter states, "The British took India from the Marathas more than from the Mughals or any other power." What do you think this means? What evidence from the chapter supports this idea?
5. Compare how Chhatrapati Shivaji and later Marathas treated religious places and people of different faiths. What evidence from the chapter shows their approach to religious diversity?
6. The chapter describes how forts were 'the core of the state' for Marathas. Why were they so important? How did they help the Marathas survive against larger enemies?
7. You have been appointed as the chief designer for Maratha coins. Design a coin that represents Maratha achievements and values. Explain the symbols you chose.
8. After this introduction to the Maratha period, what do you think was their most important contribution to Indian history? Write a paragraph supporting your opinion with examples from the chapter. Then share and discuss your ideas with classmates.

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Noodles

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*'Noodles' is our abbreviation for 'Notes and Doodles'!



CHAPTER 4

The Colonial Era in India

Nearly two centuries ago the early Britons in Bengal and the sister Presidencies regarded the land and the people as fair game for plunder. ... Under the later Britons, as administrators ... the plunder is proceeding far more outrageously today than at any preceding period. ... Modern England has been made great by Indian wealth, ... wealth always taken by the might and skill of the stronger.

— William Digby (1901)



Fig. 4.1. A painting entitled 'The East offering its riches to Britannia', by a Greek painter, Spiridione Roma, 1778. (The painting is discussed later in the chapter.)

The Big Questions

1. *What is colonialism?*
2. *What drew European powers to India?*
3. *What was India's economic and geopolitical standing before and during the colonial period?*
4. *How did the British colonial domination of India impact the country?*

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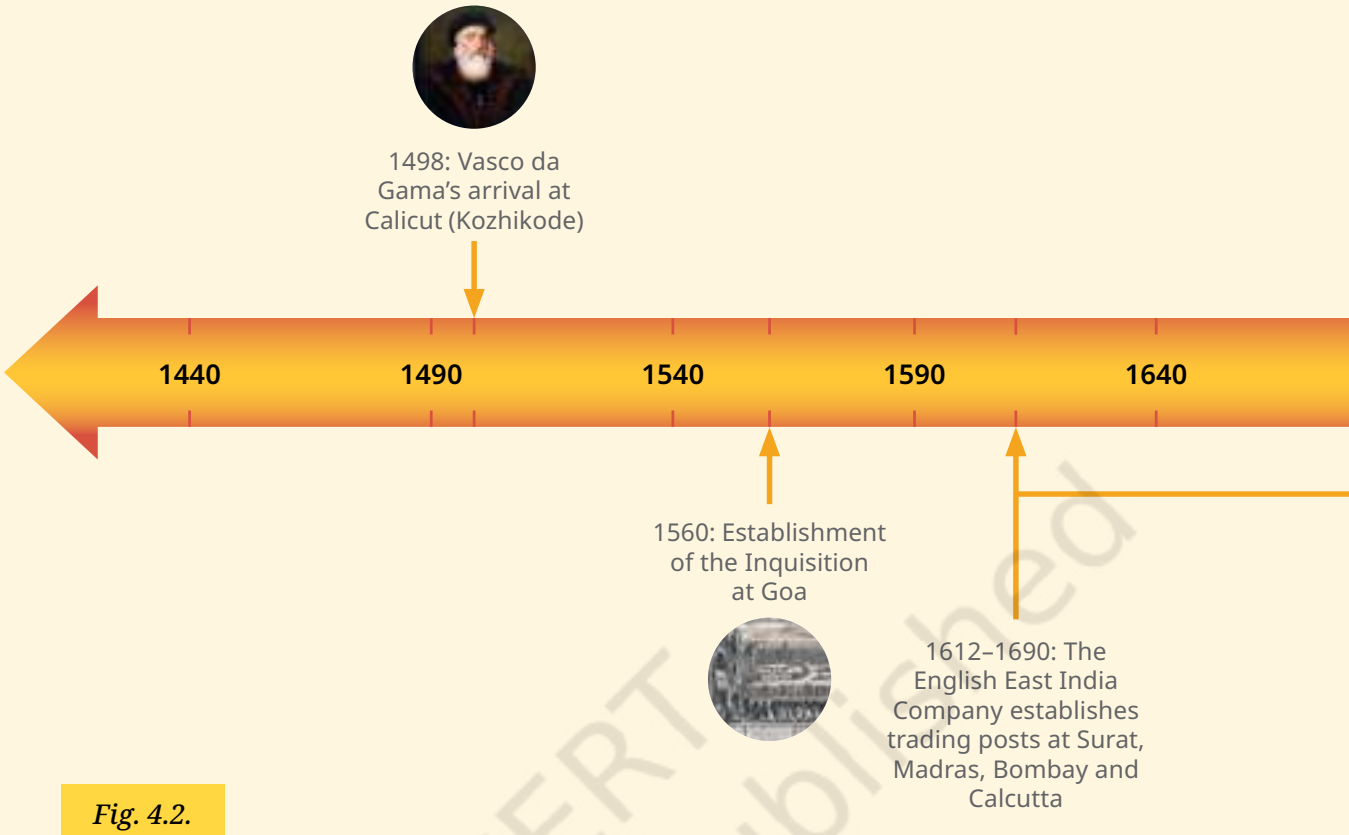


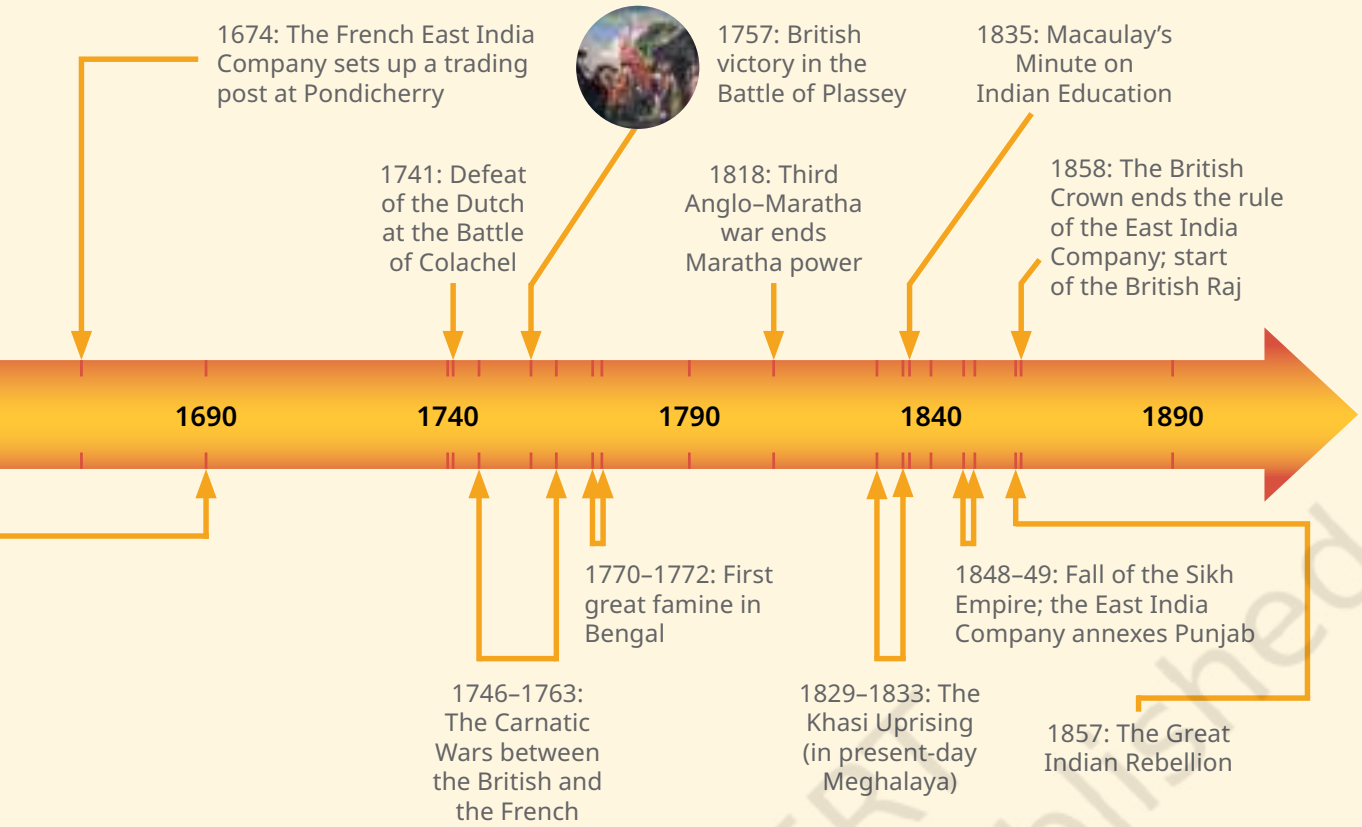
Fig. 4.2.

In the previous chapter, we saw the Marathas considerably weaken the Mughal Empire, before they themselves succumbed to the British forces early in the 19th century. And yet, military campaigns were only one factor in India becoming the 'jewel in the Crown' of the British Empire — indeed, the empire's largest colony.

The Age of Colonialism

Before we get there, we must step back a little in time and consider the phenomenon of colonialism. Its usual definition is the practice where one country takes control of another region, establishing settlements there, and imposing its political, economic, and cultural systems. This is not a recent occurrence: colonialism can be traced to the time of the great empires in the 1st millennium BCE; in the 1st millennium CE, the spread of Christianity and Islam also involved the colonisation of the territories converted to the new faiths.

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But the 'Age of Colonialism' usually refers to Europe's expansion from the 15th century onward, which, within a few centuries, extended to large parts of the world. As you will discover in higher grades, European powers — in particular, Spain, Portugal, Britain, France, and Netherlands — established colonies across Africa, Asia, the Americas, Australia and many Pacific islands, after conquering large parts of those regions of the world. Often, the conquests were achieved through military campaigns that involved the massacre or **enslavement** of native populations.

Enslavement: Turning someone into a slave.

What impelled those nations to undertake such campaigns? Political competition between European powers created a race for territorial expansion and global influence. Territorial expansion had obvious economic advantages: access to new natural resources, new markets and new trade routes — and, often, plunder, as we will see. Converting indigenous populations to Christianity was another powerful motivation. A lesser one, but significant nonetheless, was scientific inquiry — the

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Demonise: To falsely portray an individual or a group of people in a very negative light.

desire to explore unknown lands so as to accumulate knowledge of the planet's geography and natural history.

While colonisers often claimed they had the 'civilising mission' of bringing 'progress' to the colonised peoples, who were often **demonised** as 'savage', 'primitive' or 'barbaric', the reality was very different: loss of independence, exploitation of resources



Fig. 4.3. A cartoon depicting a British business magnate straddling Africa while he holds a telegraph wire (Edward Linley Sambourne in Punch magazine, London, 1892).

by the colonisers, the destruction of traditional ways of life, and the imposition of foreign cultural values. It is true that the colonial age brought the world together, saw a rapid growth of economies and technologies, but the benefits were mostly for the colonisers; many historical studies have documented the immense hardships that the colonised people had to endure.

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LET'S EXPLORE

What do you think the cartoon (Fig. 4.3) is trying to express? (Keep in mind that the telegraph, which permitted instant communications for the first time, was then a recent invention.) Analyse different elements of the drawing.



In many of the colonised regions, resistance built up against the colonisers. The phenomenon of colonialism declined in the mid-20th century, especially after World War II; many factors contributed to rapid worldwide decolonisation, with most colonised countries attaining independence. Here, however, we will focus on the special case of India.

Europeans in India

India traded with the Greeks and the Romans over two millennia ago. Indian goods — spices, cotton, ivory, gems, sandalwood, teakwood, wootz steel, among other commodities — were highly sought after in the Mediterranean world. Until the 16th century CE, when European powers began sailing to the Indian Subcontinent, India was a vibrant economic and cultural powerhouse. Historical estimates (by economist Angus Maddison, in particular) suggest that India contributed at least one-fourth of the world **GDP** during this whole period, making it one of the two largest economies globally alongside China (whose contribution was of the same order). It is remarkable that from the 16th century onward, many European travellers to India described her as 'flourishing' and noted her manufacturing capabilities, diverse agricultural output, and extensive internal as well as external trading networks. However, this economic prosperity also made India an attractive target for European colonial ambitions.

Let us survey Europe's first colonial powers in India.

The Portuguese: commerce and atrocities

The Portuguese explorer and navigator Vasco da Gama's arrival at Kappad (near Kozhikode in Kerala) in May 1498 paved the way for the beginning of European colonisation in India.

GDP: Abbreviation of 'gross domestic product', a measure of the value of goods and services a country (or the world, in this case) produces in one year.

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A few centuries ago, the port town of Ullal (in present-day southern Karnataka) was an important trading point controlled by Rani Abbakka I. In the latter half of the 16th century, the Portuguese repeatedly attempted to take it over, but Rani Abbakka I formed strategic alliances with neighbouring kingdoms and thwarted their attempts. She was eventually captured and died fighting in prison. Her successor Rani Abbakka II is reported to have created fireballs out of coconut shells and set several ships of the Portuguese navy on fire. Their inspirational stories are remembered even today through the Yakṣhagāna, a traditional form of dance-drama.

Though he was well received, his aggressive ways failed to establish friendly relations with the local rulers. During his second voyage four years later, he seized, tortured and killed Indian merchants, and bombarded Calicut from the sea. The Portuguese captured strategic ports, including Goa (in 1510), which became the capital of their colony in India, as well as several trading posts along the Malabar and Coromandel coasts.

The Portuguese implemented a system known as *cartaz* (pass), requiring all ships in the Arabian Sea to purchase Portuguese permits for navigation. Ships without these permits were seized. This naval dominance allowed them to monopolise the spice trade between India and Europe for nearly a century.

Alongside commercial exploitation, the Portuguese presence in western India was characterised by religious persecution. In Goa, they established the **Inquisition** in 1560, which severely persecuted Hindus, Muslims, Jews, and Christian converts suspected of practising their original faith. Such

Inquisition: A tribunal set up by the Roman Catholic Church to judge heretics (i.e. Christians suspected of holding opinions contrary to the Church's doctrine). Over some 600 years, across Europe many thousands of supposed heretics were tortured and executed.



Fig. 4.4. A plaque in Kozhikode marking Vasco da Gama's arrival in 1498

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persecution was accompanied by forced conversions and the destruction of many Hindu temples, among other forms of abuse of the native population. (The Goa Inquisition was only abolished in 1812.)

The Dutch: commerce and competition

The Dutch arrived in India in the early 17th century and, unlike the Portuguese, focused primarily on commercial dominance, particularly in the spice trade. They established a Dutch East India Company, with trading posts in various parts of India, including, on the west coast, Surat, Bharuch, Cochin (Kochi), and on the east coast Nagapattinam and Masulipatnam (present-day Machilipatnam). Their most significant presence was in the Malabar region of Kerala, where they displaced the Portuguese from several trading centres.



Fig. 4.5. A depiction of the surrender of Dutch forces to King Marthanda Varma of Travancore after the Battle of Colachel, 1741 CE (Padmanabhapuram Palace).

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The Dutch presence in India was ultimately limited; it declined significantly after their defeat at the Battle of Colachel in 1741, where the forces of Travancore under King Marthanda Varma decisively defeated the Dutch both on land and at sea (the Travancore kingdom was in the southern part of present-day Kerala). This battle was a rare instance of an Asian power successfully repelling a European colonial force.

The French: colonial ambitions

The French entered India later, establishing their first trading post at Surat in 1668 and subsequently at Pondicherry (present-day Puducherry) in 1674, where they established their East India Company (*Compagnie des Indes Orientales*) and developed ambitious plans to establish a French empire in India.

Dupleix, who served as Governor-General of French India from 1742 to 1754, pioneered several colonial strategies that would later be adopted by the British. In particular, he trained Indian soldiers in European military techniques, creating disciplined infantry soldiers known as *sepoys*. Dupleix also developed the strategy of indirect rule through puppet Indian rulers, who were installed through interventions in local succession disputes.

The French colonial ambitions in India were ultimately checked during the Carnatic Wars (1746–1763), a series of conflicts between Britain and France. Despite initial successes under Dupleix, who captured Madras (present-day Chennai) in 1746, the French ultimately lost ground to the British and their colony was reduced to Pondicherry and a few smaller enclaves.

Like the Dutch, and unlike the Portuguese, the French colonial powers did not much intervene in Indians' social and religious life. A rare exception was the destruction in 1748 of Pondicherry's large Vedapurishwaran temple, ordered by Dupleix on the persistent request of Pondicherry's Jesuit priests and Dupleix's own wife, with a view to asserting the dominance of Christianity. Generally, however, the French had to be content with a modest amount of trade with India.

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Fig. 4.6. A 1764 plan of Pondicherry showing the city enclosed in fortifications and grid planning. The large structure facing the sea (at the bottom) was the fort. (The top of the plan points to the west.)

Enter the British

Britain dominated the Indian subcontinent for nearly two centuries. How did this happen? Many books have dissected the methods of the British rulers; we will not attempt to tell a complete story, but will focus on the main aspects of their colonial presence in India.

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From traders to rulers

The British conquest of India is one of history's most remarkable examples of how a trading company could transform into an imperial power. Unlike classic conquests, the British takeover of India was gradual, calculated, and often disguised as commercial enterprise rather than military invasion.

The English East India Company was established as a trading company and was granted a royal charter by Queen Elizabeth I, which gave it special powers — to raise a private army, for instance. Nevertheless, its agents initially kept up a pretence of being mere traders, which allowed them, in the 17th century, to establish footholds along India's coast with minimal resistance: Surat, Madras, Bombay and Calcutta among the first. Local rulers did not mind these trading posts, as they generally welcomed foreign trade (which, let us recall, was a longstanding practice in India). These modest beginnings concealed the Company's long-term ambitions.



LET'S EXPLORE

Before you read further, have a good look at the painting on the first page of this chapter. It was specially ordered for the London headquarters of the East India Company and is over three metres long. Observe every aspect of it — the people in it, the objects, the symbols and the attitudes. Form groups of four or five students and let each group present its conclusions as regards the messages the painting conveys.

(You will find our answers a few pages down, when we return to the painting, but avoid looking at them right now!)

The strategy of 'divide and rule'

While maintaining an appearance of traders, the Company's agents cultivated political relationships with local rulers, offering military support to some against their rivals, thus inserting themselves into Indian political conflicts and emerging as power brokers rather than foreign invaders. They would also

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play on rivalries between regional rulers or succession disputes within ruling houses, so as to benefit from these conflicts — the 'divide and rule' policy. The British were equally skilled at exploiting existing divisions within Indian society: they identified and often encouraged tensions between religious communities, for instance.



Fig. 4.7. Clive leading the East India Company's troops at Plassey, 1757 (painting by William Heath, 1821)

The Battle of Plassey (1757) exemplifies this approach. When tensions arose between Siraj-ud-daulah, the Nawab of Bengal, and the East India Company officials led by Robert Clive, the latter identified disgruntled elements within the Nawab's court. Clive hatched a conspiracy with Mir Jafar, the Nawab's military commander, promising to install him as the new Nawab in exchange for his betrayal. The battle took place at Palashi (Plassey as the British spelt it), some 150 kilometres north of present-day Kolkata. Some French forces assisted the Nawab, but Mir Jafar's forces — constituting the majority of the Nawab's army — stood aside, ensuring a British victory despite their smaller number. Even today, 'Mir Jafar' in India remains a synonym for 'traitor'!

By positioning themselves as a kingmaker, the East India Company gradually established control over increasingly large territories. In the 19th century, it went a step further and introduced the infamous **Doctrine of Lapse**, according to which any princely state would be annexed if its ruler died

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without a natural male heir. This deliberately disregarded the Hindu tradition of adoption, which was a legitimate means of succession in Indian royal houses.



DON'T MISS OUT

In the Indian context, a princely state was a region that remained under the rule of an Indian prince, maharaja or nawab, but which had accepted British protection and guidance in exchange for maintaining internal autonomy. There were hundreds of them, from large ones (such as Hyderabad, Mysore, Travancore or Jammu & Kashmir) to smaller ones. At the time of India's Independence, there were over 500 princely states, covering about 40 per cent of the Subcontinent.

The Doctrine of Lapse led to the annexation of numerous states, contributing to the expansion of the territorial control of the British. This created much resentment in sections of Indian society and contributed to the 1857 Rebellion (to which we return below).

Another stratagem (known as '**subsidiary alliance**') was to install a British 'Resident' in the courts of Indian rulers to protect them against internal or external threats; in exchange, they would have to maintain British troops at their own expense and conduct foreign relations only through the British. While appearing to preserve the sovereignty of princely states, the system effectively transferred real power to the British while burdening Indian rulers with the costs of their own subjugation!

The ruler of Hyderabad was among the first to enter such an alliance in 1798; several others soon followed. These so-called alliances allowed the British to control vast territories without the administrative costs of direct rule, creating what was called 'an empire on the cheap'. Once a state entered the system, exiting it was virtually impossible, as any attempt to break free would face overwhelming British military response.

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From Paradise to Hell?

Devastating famines

A few years after its victory at Plassey, the East India Company secured the right to collect revenue in Bengal, Bihar, and Odisha — some of India's richest regions. Clive described Bengal in particular as 'the **paradise** of the earth'. The Company's agents extracted maximum revenue while investing minimally in governance or development, with devastating consequences for the population.

Paradise: In a religious context, heaven. Here, an ideal, wealthy or perfectly happy place.

In 1770–1772, coming on top of two years of crop failure, the harsh revenue collection targets imposed by the East India Company in Bengal — requiring farmers to pay a high rate of cash taxes on the produce of their lands, regardless of harvest conditions — caused a catastrophic famine which killed nearly one-third of its population or an estimated 10 million people. In fact, the Company maintained harsh revenue collection targets, even increasing the land tax during the famine. Such cruelty was denounced later not only by Indian personalities but by some British officials and public intellectuals (such as William Digby whom we quoted at the start of this chapter). For instance, a century later, W.W. Hunter, an official, wrote:

> "While the country every year became a total waste, the English government constantly demanded an increased land-tax. ... All through the stifling summer of 1770 the people went on dying. The husbandmen [farmers] sold their cattle; they sold their implements of agriculture; they devoured their seed-grain; they sold their sons and daughters, till at length no buyer of children could be found; they ate the leaves of trees and the grass of the field. ... Day and night a torrent of famished and disease-stricken wretches poured into the great cities."

Such tragic famines were going to recur throughout the British rule in India. During the Great Famine of 1876–1878, for instance, up to 8 million Indians perished, mostly in the Deccan plateau.

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Fig. 4.8. Grain bags on Madras beach, ready for export, while people were dying of hunger in large numbers.

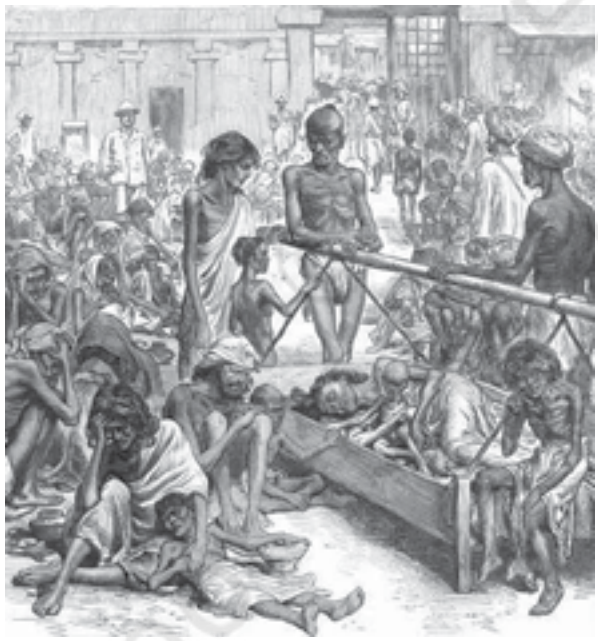


Fig. 4.9. People waiting for famine relief in Bangalore (today Bengaluru) during the 1877 famine (Illustrated London News)

Disregarding the severity of the crisis, some Indian traders would hold on to their stocks in the hope of price rise, causing an artificial scarcity, and the British administration continued to export grain to Britain — about one million tonnes of rice alone per year during the three years of the famine (Fig. 4.8).

Apart from the factors mentioned above, the British economic policy of 'free market', which left prices of commodities free to fluctuate, contributed to the severity of the famines. Thus Lord Lytton, Viceroy of India during the 1876–1878 famine, issued an order that "there is to be no interference of any kind on the part of the Government with the object of reducing the price of food." At the same time, in 1876, at

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the height of the Great Famine, Lytton organised an extravagant durbar in Delhi which involved 'a week-long feast for 68,000 officials, satraps and maharajas'.

Precise numbers of severe famines during the entire British rule vary from a dozen to over 20. According to several Famine Commissions and other reports, it has been estimated that the total number of human victims ('human' since millions of cattle and other animals also died) is anywhere between 50 and 100 million — nearly the number of deaths caused by World War II.

The British administration did open famine relief camps in some cities (Fig. 4.9), but far too few and with inadequate supplies. Some officials argued that famine relief should be deliberately kept very low; the Famine Commission of 1878–80, for example, stated: "The doctrine that in time of famine the poor are entitled to demand relief ... would probably lead to the doctrine that they are entitled to such relief at all times."

We should note that famines in India had occurred throughout history, caused by droughts, floods, military campaigns and other factors, but never on such a scale. During the colonial era, India, especially rural India, sank into deep poverty and never recovered.

The drain of India's wealth

As we saw earlier, economic exploitation of India formed the foundation of British colonial policy. In 1895, the U.S. historian and political scientist Brooks Adams noted:

> "Very soon after [the Battle of] Plassey, the Bengal plunder began to arrive in London, and the effect appears to have been instantaneous, for all authorities agree that the 'industrial revolution' ... began with the year 1760. ... Possibly since the world began no investment has ever yielded the profit reaped from the Indian plunder."

In other words, according to Adams, the Industrial Revolution in Britain, which required much investment, was made possible at least partly by the 'stolen wealth from India' (this phrase is by the U.S. historian Will Durant).

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Taking his cue from scholars such as Adams and Digby, Dadabhai Naoroji, a respected political figure, authored in 1901 *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India*, in which he compiled from British reports the wealth estimated to have been drained out of India. About the same time, Romesh Chunder Dutt, a historian, did a similar exercise in his *Economic History of India*. All these studies showed that the colonisers had extracted many billions of pounds from India. A more recent estimate (by Utsa Patnaik) for the period 1765 to 1938 comes to 45 trillion U.S. dollars (in today's value), or about 13 times Britain's GDP in 2023! This was extracted not just through taxes, but by charging Indians for the colonial power's expenditures on building the railways, the telegraph network, and even on wars!

Had this wealth remained invested in India, it would have been a very different country when it attained Independence.

House of Commons is the name for the elected lower house of the bicameral parliament of the United Kingdom. Dadabhai Naoroji was the first Indian to be elected to the British House of Commons.



LET'S EXPLORE

Why do you think Dadabhai Naoroji means by 'un-British rule in India'? (*Hint: he was an MP in the* **House of Commons** *in 1892.*)

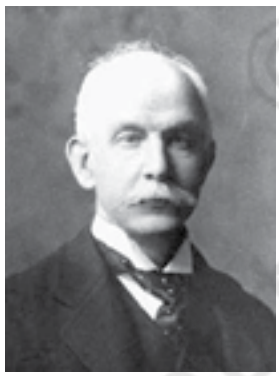


Fig. 4.10. Brooks Adams



Fig. 4.11. William Digby



Fig. 4.12. Dadabhai Naoroji



Fig. 4.13. R.C. Dutt



THINK ABOUT IT

Let us return to this painting (Fig. 4.14), but now with some clues to its symbolism. Note how Britannia (a symbolic

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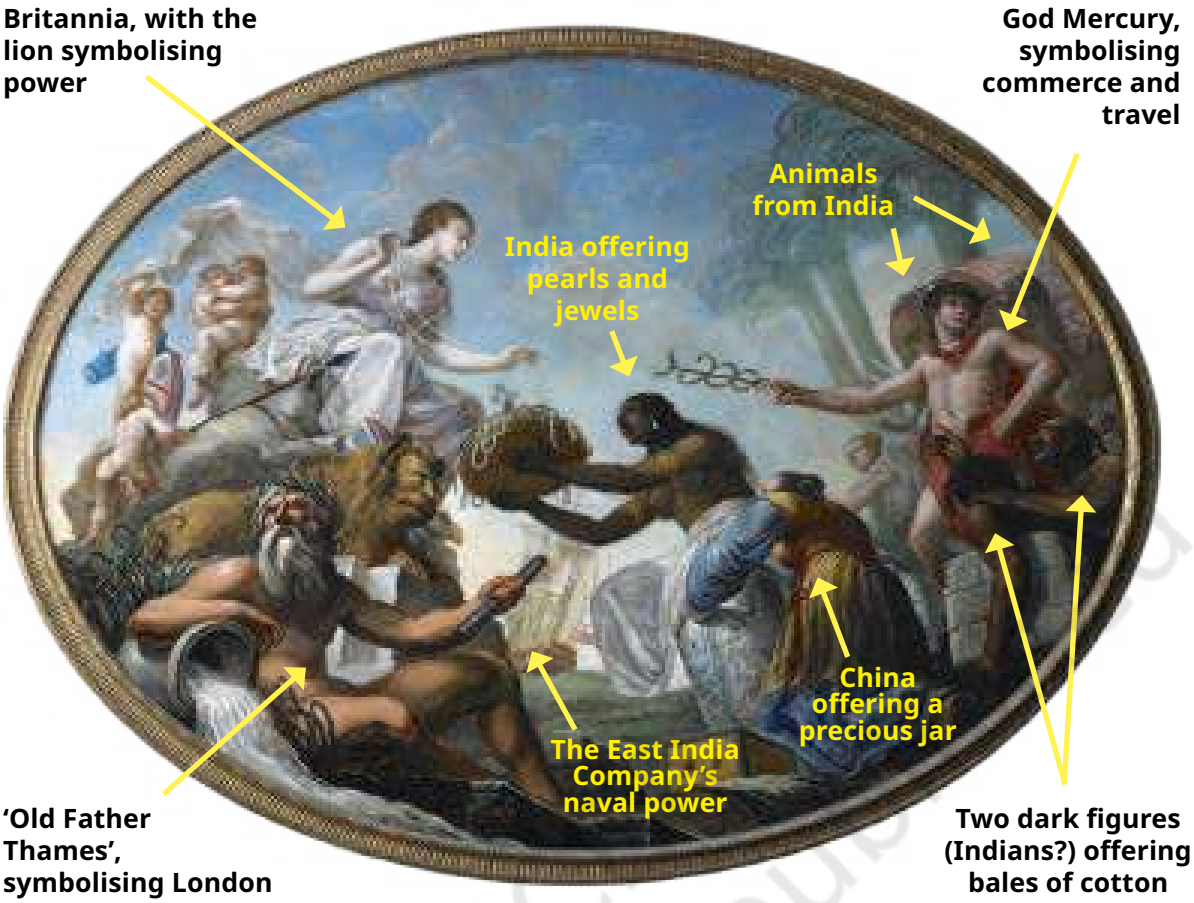


Fig. 4.14. 'The East offering its riches to Britannia' — making sense of the painting's symbolism

figure for Britain) sits higher than the colonies, pointing to her superior power; contrast with the lower position and bent posture of the colonies. Did they really 'offer' their wealth? Or did Britain seize it by force or ruse? Note also the Indians' dark complexion (in contrast with that of Britannia), reflecting the belief in the superiority of white people over the dark-skinned 'natives'.

Changing Landscapes

The expanding colonial rule impacted nearly every aspect of Indian life, as the rulers were convinced that India should be reshaped according to their 'superior' conceptions. Let us briefly look at a few of those impacts.

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Decline of India's indigenous industries

Embossed: With a design stamped on the cloth in such a way that it stands out in relief.

Before the 18th century, India was renowned for its manufacturing capabilities, particularly in textiles — cotton, silk, wool, jute, hemp and coir being the chief ones. Indian cotton textiles, in particular, with rich and intricate designs, bright colours, and textures ranging from ultra-thin muslins to richly **embossed** fabrics were in high demand in many parts of the world.

LET'S EXPLORE



Do you understand all the terms used above to list and describe Indian textiles? If not, form groups of four or five and try to find out more, then compare your findings with the help of your teacher.

British policy imposed heavy duties on Indian textiles imported into Britain while forcing India to accept British manufactured goods with minimal tariffs. Moreover, Britain now controlled most of the sea trade as well as exchange rates, so Indian traders found it difficult to export as earlier. The result was the ruin of Indian textile industry. In the 19th century, India's textile exports fell sharply, while Britain's imports into India grew even more sharply. Communities of skilled artisans who had practised their craft for generations were reduced to poverty and forced to return to subsistence agriculture on increasingly overtaxed land. As William Bentinck, then Governor-General of India, observed in 1834, "The bones of the cotton weavers are bleaching the plains of India."

Similar scenarios unfolded for India's manufactures of iron, steel, paper and other goods. India's share of the world GDP kept declining throughout the colonial rule, reaching hardly 5 per cent at the time of Independence. In less than two centuries, one of the richest lands of the world had become one of the poorest.

Dismantling traditional governance structures

Before British colonisation, India possessed well-organised systems of local self-governance. Village councils managed

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community affairs, resolved disputes, and organised public works such as irrigation, roads, etc. Regional kingdoms maintained complex administrative structures that had evolved over centuries to address local needs and conditions. Charles Metcalfe, an acting Governor-General in the 1830s, described the system and its efficiency in this important statement:

> "The village communities are little republics, having nearly everything they want within themselves. They seem to last where nothing else lasts. Dynasty after dynasty tumbles down; revolution succeeds to revolution; but the village community remains the same. ... This union of the village communities, each one forming a separate little state in itself, has contributed more than any other cause to the preservation of the people of India."

The British systematically dismantled these indigenous governance systems, replacing them with a centralised bureaucracy designed primarily to facilitate tax collection and maintain order, rather than promote public welfare. This transformation destroyed centuries-old mechanisms of community decision-making.

The introduction of British codes of law disregarded customary laws and practices that had governed Indian communities for generations. While presented as modernisation, this imposition of a foreign system unsuited to India alienated ordinary Indians from the judicial system, creating courts that were expensive, time-consuming, and conducted in a foreign language.

Transforming Indian education: creating 'brown Englishmen'

Education became a powerful tool for the creation of a class of Indians who would serve British interests. In earlier centuries, India had diverse educational traditions — *pāṭhaśhālās, madrasās, vihāras*, and many forms of apprenticeship learning. These institutions transmitted not only practical knowledge but also cultural values and traditions. Even in the early 19th century,

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British reports reported hundreds of thousands of village schools across India (for instance, 100,000 to 150,000 of them in Bengal and Bihar up to 1830!) "where young natives are taught reading, writing and arithmetic, upon a system so economical, ... and at the same time so simple and effectual..."

Orientalist: A largely obsolete term to designate a scholar of the 'Orient', that is, regions from West Asia to the Far East. In India, Orientalists (now called 'Indologists') were often scholars of Sanskrit, Pali, Persian and other languages.

A sharp turning point in India's educational history was marked by the notorious 1835 '**Minute on Indian Education**' of British historian and politician, Thomas B. Macaulay. In it, although he admitted that he had "no knowledge of either Sanskrit or Arabic," he expressed his conviction that European knowledge was vastly superior to India's: "I have never found one among them [**Orientalists**] who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia." Indians, therefore needed British education, whose objective would be to create a class of Indians who would be "Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect."

Although a few prominent British Orientalists argued that Indian students should be left to study in their own languages, Macaulay's policy gained the upper hand and India's traditional schools slowly disappeared, while English became a language of prestige associated with the colonial masters, resulting in lasting divisions in Indian society between English-educated elites and the masses.

The new education system served multiple colonial objectives. It created a pool of Indian clerks and minor officials who could staff the lower ranks of the colonial administration at a fraction of the cost of British personnel. It also sidelined traditional sources of knowledge and authority, creating generations of Indians disconnected from their own cultural heritage.



THINK ABOUT IT

What exactly did Macaulay mean when he wrote that "a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia"? And why should he want to make Indians "English in taste, in

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opinions, in morals, and in intellect"? How does this relate to the 'civilising mission' mentioned at the start of the chapter? Ask your teacher to guide a class debate on these questions.

Reshaping economic structures to serve imperial needs

The British transformed India's economy from a self-sufficient agricultural system supplemented by craft and manufacture production into a supplier of raw materials for British industry and a market forced to buy British goods. Without going into the technical details of this economic transformation, let us take the example of the construction of India's vast railway network, often cited as a colonial blessing. While the railways did bring people closer together and integrated India's internal market, it was designed primarily to move raw materials from the interior to ports for export and to distribute British manufactured goods throughout India. Railway routes largely ignored existing trade



Fig. 4.15. A steam locomotive of the Madras Railway (one of the companies operating the rail network in British India) in 1860

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patterns to serve colonial economic interests. Another purpose was to move armies quickly from their cantonments if they had to fight a distant rebellion or war.

Besides, the construction of India's railways was not a gift from the colonial rulers to India. Most of it was paid for by Indian tax revenue, which means that Indian funded infrastructure that primarily served British strategic and commercial interests, instead of being focused on serving the people's needs. The same can be said of the telegraph network.

Even the administrative costs of colonialism were borne by Indian subjects. The colonial administrative apparatus, military installations, and the lavish lifestyles of British officials in India were all financed by Indian taxation. In short, Indians funded their own subjugation.

Early Resistance Movements: Challenging Colonial Authority

India was such an enormous source of wealth, natural and human resources for the British that they nicknamed her 'the jewel in the crown of the British Empire'. And they asserted that India would forever remain part of the British Empire, "on which the sun never sets."



THINK ABOUT IT

What is meant by "the sun never sets on the British Empire"? Do you think this was a correct statement?

However, almost from the beginning of the British conquest of India, resistance movements manifested to try and repel this self-imposed 'guest'. We will briefly survey a few such movements, but before we do so, let us have a good look at the map of the British Indian Empire (Fig. 4.16). The red and pink territories are those directly under British administration, while the yellow ones are the princely states we discussed earlier. (The black lines stand for the railway lines.)

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Fig. 4.16. A map of the British Indian Empire in 1909

LET'S EXPLORE

Examine the map. What are the main differences with the map of today's India, in terms both of borders and of names?



The 'Sannyasi-Fakir rebellion'

One of the earliest organised resistance movements, often called the 'the Sannyasi (or Sannyasi-Fakir) Rebellion', began in Bengal after the terrible famine of 1770. Groups of sannyasis (Hindu ascetics) and fakirs (Muslim ascetics), who

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traditionally travelled freely for pilgrimage and charity, found their movements restricted by the British East India Company policies, especially by the new land and taxation policies. The precise motivations of the sannyasis and fakirs have been debated, but over the next three decades they attacked British treasuries and tax collectors. The British called them 'bandits', executed some of them and used their superior forces to eventually defeat them. This rebellion later inspired the Bengali writer Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's novel *Anandamath* (1882); it contained the song 'Vande Mātaram', which would inspire Indians during the struggle for freedom in the early 20th century and, after Independence, became India's national song.

Tribal uprisings

India's tribal communities faced unique threats as the British expanded into forests and hills, disrupting their traditional way of life. The British described tribals as 'primitive', restricted their access to forests and forest produce, sometimes acquiring tribal land or turning it into private property, imposing cash taxes, catching tribals in debt traps, replacing traditional tribal councils with the British legal system and encouraging missionaries to 'civilise' and convert tribals to Christianity. Besides, a colonial law categorised hundreds of tribal communities as 'criminal tribes', causing them to be unjustly harassed for decades.

Some of the above abuse led some tribes to rise in rebellion against the colonial power. Among the first such events, the **Kol Uprising** (1831–1832) in Chota Nagpur (in present-day Jharkhand) started when the British introduced land policies that favoured outsiders over the original tribal inhabitants. The Kol tribes (which included the Mundas and Oraons, among others) temporarily established their control over significant territory before being defeated by the British forces. The **Santhal Rebellion** of 1855–1856, a widespread uprising of the Santhal people across parts of present-day Jharkhand, Bihar and West Bengal, was led by two brothers, Sidhu and Kanhu Murmu, and rebelled against moneylenders and landlords who were taking away their ancestral lands with British support. The Santhals

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declared their own government and vowed to 'fight to the last drop of blood'. The British response was brutal; after some initial losses, they burned entire villages and killed thousands of Santhals, including, eventually, the rebel leaders. However, the daring Santhal rebellion inspired other tribal communities to resist colonial rule.

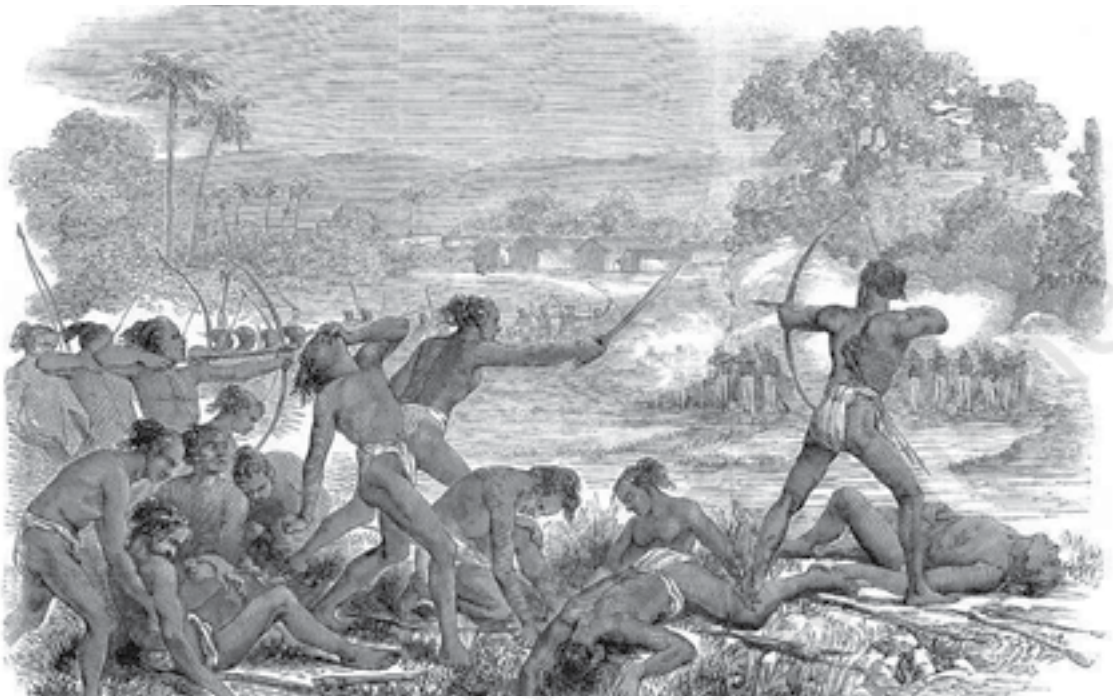


Fig. 4.17. An 1856 sketch in the Illustrated London News depicting an unequal confrontation between Santhal rebels and gun-wielding sepoys

LET'S EXPLORE

Note how the Santhals are depicted in the 1856 sketch (Fig. 4.17) drawn from an artist's imagination: observe their complexion, dress, weapons and draw your conclusions as regards the image this depiction would create in the popular mind in Britain.

Peasant uprisings against economic exploitation

Even without famines, peasants suffered under the unfair British revenue collections, often losing their lands to moneylenders or new landlords. The **Indigo Revolt** (1859–1862)

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illustrates this exploitation. European planters forced peasants in the northern parts of Bengal to abandon food crops and, instead, grow indigo plants, as the indigo dye was then in great demand in Europe. From planters to traders, everyone earned huge profits — except the peasants, who were so poorly paid that they got trapped in debt slavery. When they refused to grow indigo, they faced imprisonment, torture, and destruction of their property. Their uprising was directed mostly at the planters, who retaliated by hiring mercenaries to attack the peasants. Their cause was supported by educated Bengalis and the Bengali press; the British authorities were eventually forced to restrict some of the worst abuses.



LET'S EXPLORE

Indigo is a natural deep blue pigment used in dyeing. Can you think of other natural substances that have been traditionally used in India to dye cloth?

There are several more notable examples of uprisings across the Subcontinent, which, along with the other aspects of the British rule that we saw earlier, built up to the largest uprising of the 19th century. Let us turn to it.

The Great Rebellion of 1857

The British called it the 'Sepoy Mutiny'. 'Sepoys', let us recall, were the Indian soldiers enrolled in the East India company's British Army; its officers, of course, were almost all British. After India's Independence, historians rejected the term 'Sepoy Mutiny', proposing a few others instead; following many scholars, we will call the event the 'Great Rebellion of 1857'. But what exactly happened?

Mutiny: In this context, mutiny refers to a rebellion by soldiers, or sailors in the case of a navy, against their officers.



LET'S EXPLORE

Why do you think was the term 'Sepoy Mutiny' rejected after Indian Independence? Write one paragraph explaining your reasons.

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Fig. 4.18. Imaginary depiction of the sepoys' rebellion at Meerut (Illustrated London News, 1857)

Even earlier, there were several signs of severe discontent among the sepoys, beginning with the so-called 'Vellore Mutiny' of 1806, which erupted when the British introduced new uniform regulations that violated the religious practices of both Hindu and Muslim sepoys. For example, they were forbidden from wearing religious marks on their foreheads and were required to shave their beards. The sepoys seized the Vellore fort (in present-day Tamil Nadu) and killed many British officers and troops; the British however crushed the revolt, killing or executing hundreds of sepoys.

We should also keep in mind that most sepoys were from agricultural families, which had been suffering great hardship owing to the British policies on land revenue. After decades of increasing frustration, in 1857 rumours spread across northern and central India that rifle cartridges were greased with cow and pig fat, offending the Hindu and Muslim sepoys' religious sensibilities. At Barrackpore (in present-day West Bengal), the sepoy Mangal Pandey attacked British officers. His execution spread further discontent among the sepoys. In Meerut (in

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present-day Uttar Pradesh), some of them killed their British officers and marched to nearby Delhi, where they proclaimed the elderly but politically powerless Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar as their leader (his 'empire' was limited to a small area in Delhi). The military decisions were, however, taken by the commanders. The revolt quickly spread across northern and central India, with sepoys capturing key cities like Kanpur, Lucknow and Jhansi. At Kanpur, rebel forces under Nana Saheb initially agreed to give safe passage to British civilians, but then massacred over 200 men, women and children for reasons that are still debated.

The British response was systematic and extremely brutal, beginning with the recapture of Delhi in September 1857, where the British forces conducted house-to-house massacres. At Kanpur, they conducted mass executions designed to strike terror in the population. In a long punitive campaign they burned villages and destroyed crops, causing countless deaths — vastly more than those inflicted by the rebels.

According to some historians, the Great Rebellion failed because the sepoys lacked a unified command and a consistent strategy, despite some heroic leaders.

The uprising failed, but it marked a turning point, especially in sowing a seed for the idea that foreign domination was unacceptable. The seed would grow early in the 20th century into a full-fledged struggle for freedom, though with different methods. Meantime, in 1858, the British Crown took direct control of India from the East India Company, initiating the period of the British Raj. British policies shifted from aggressive territorial expansion to consolidation of control. The Indian Army was reorganised so as to prevent unified resistance in the future.

The Legacy of European Colonialism in India

The European (mostly British) conquest and rule of India was not a 'civilising mission' — India's own civilisation was much older than Europe's. It was a process of subjugation and

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Two heroines

Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi fought bravely to save her kingdom from British annexation; assisted by the Maratha Tatia (or Tantia) Tope, Nana Saheb's military adviser, Rani Lakshmibai managed to escape a besieged Jhansi and to conquer the Gwalior fort, seizing the treasury and the arsenal. She was killed on 18 June 1858 on the battlefield. The British army officer who commanded the attack on Jhansi noted that the Rani was "remarkable for her beauty, cleverness, perseverance [and] generosity to her subordinates. These qualities, combined with her rank, rendered her most dangerous of all the rebel leaders. ... [She was the] best and bravest of the rebels." Tatia Tope continued fighting until early 1859 but was betrayed and handed over to the British, who hanged him.



Fig. 4.19. A miniature portrait of Rani Lakshmibai (1853 or earlier)



Fig. 4.20. Detail of a portrait of Begum Hazrat Mahal in the 1850s

Begum Hazrat Mahal of Awadh (north-central portion of Uttar Pradesh) also resisted the British-led resistance after her kingdom was annexed and joined the rebels during the 1857 uprising, leading the defence of Lucknow when the British attempted to recapture the city. She rejected British offers of safe passage if she surrendered and ultimately had to take refuge in nearby Nepal. In November 1858, Queen Victoria issued a proclamation marking the end of the East India Company's rule in India; she promised non-interference in religious matters and greater inclusion of Indians in the administration. Begum Hazrat Mahal issued a counter-proclamation, warning Indians not to trust such assurances, as "it is the unvarying custom of the English never to forgive a fault be it great or small."

exploitation executed systematically, with brutal repression if necessary. Except for a small Indian elite who accepted British rule as inevitable, the Indians suffered the fate of many of the world's colonised populations: abuse, exploitation, violence and uprooting.

At the same time, the colonial rule had some largely unintended consequences. It opened (or re-opened) India to the world and the world to India. The British (and the French to a much smaller extent) were systematic in documenting every aspect of their conquest, from its geography (they conducted meticulous surveys of the Subcontinent). They created impressive lists of all ethnic groups, although the lists were flawed because of the unscientific but prevalent notions of 'race' (as genetics has shown, 'races' do not exist). They also documented India's monuments, studying their art and architecture, restoring some of the ruined ones, and initiating the discipline of archaeology. But in the process, they (and other colonial powers) stole thousands of statues, paintings, jewels, manuscripts and other cultural artefacts from India and sent them to European museums or private collections. While this represented a profound cultural loss and violation of India's heritage, it also promoted some appreciation of Indian art in the European public. Such massive theft took place over much of the colonised world; today, there are ongoing debates and efforts to repatriate some of these cultural treasures to their countries of origin.

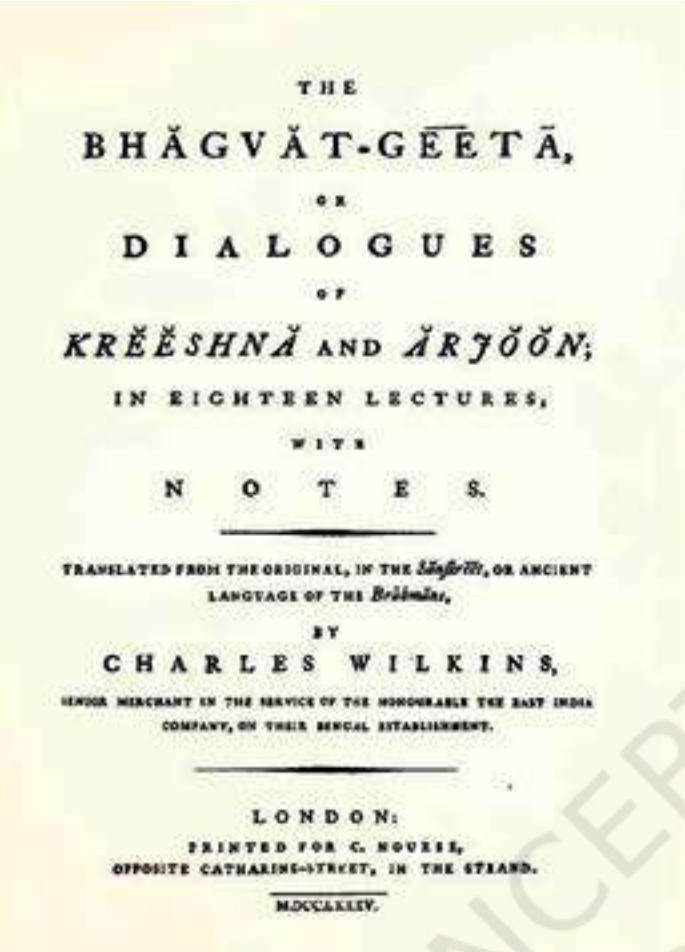


LET'S EXPLORE

- → In the sentence "It opened (or re-opened) India to the world and the world to India", why do you think we added 're-opened'?
- → Some argue that stolen cultural heritage has been better preserved abroad than it would have been in India. What is your view on its repatriation? Discuss in groups.

Finally, although British scholars were not the first Europeans to master the Sanskrit language, they started publishing some of the

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THE

BHĂGVĂT-GĒĒTĀ,

OR

DIALOGUES

OF

KRĔĔSHNĂ AND ĂRJŎŎN;

IN EIGHTEEN LECTURES,

WITH

NOTES.

TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL, IN THE *Sănscrĭt*, OR ANCIENT LANGUAGE OF THE *Brāhmăns*,

BY

CHARLES WILKINS,

SENIOR MERCHANT IN THE SERVICE OF THE HONOURABLE THE EAST INDIA COMPANY, ON THEIR BENGAL ESTABLISHMENT.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR C. NOURSE,

OPPOSITE CATHARINE-STREET, IN THE STRAND.

M.DCC.LXXXV.

Fig. 4.21. The title page of the first English translation (in 1785) of a Sanskrit text: 'The Bhagavad Gītā or Dialogues of Kṛiṣhṇa and Arjuna' (using modern spelling). The translator was Charles Wilkins.

first translations of Sanskrit texts into a European language; the French, the Germans and others soon followed. The motivations were mixed: some scholars were genuine students or admirers of India's ancient culture, while others were convinced that by studying Indian languages and texts, it would be easier to demonstrate the superiority of Christianity.

The spread of Sanskrit studies and texts in Europe (followed later by other Indian languages) was like the 'discovery of a new continent', in the words of the German philosopher Georg Hegel. Indian texts had a great impact on European philosophers, writers, poets, artists, and sometimes statesmen; this influence extended to the United States of America in the 19th century. This is a reminder that although political domination may flow in one direction, cultural influence sometimes flows in the opposite direction.



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Before we move on ...

- The Portuguese, the Dutch, the French and the British were attracted to India primarily because of her great wealth. They fought among themselves for dominance of the Subcontinent, with the British gaining the upper hand.
- The British ruthless taxation policy inflicted great misery on the people, causing severe famines in particular and millions of deaths. The deliberate deindustrialization of India devastated her once-thriving manufacturing sector.
- Gradually, the British imposed their administrative structures, legal systems and educational institutions to ensure total colonial control over the Indian society.
- The Portuguese focused on religious conversion and cultural transformation in Goa created long-lasting social divisions. The French policy of assimilation created a small elite of culturally French Indians in Pondicherry.
- Several uprisings took place from the late 18th century onward, with the Great Rebellion of 1857 threatening the colonial rule for a while. Most of these uprisings were brutally repressed.
- In the 19th century, India's classical culture (in particular through translated Sanskrit texts) flowed back to the West, creating a lasting influence.

Questions and activities

1. What is colonialism? Give three different definitions based on the chapter or on your knowledge.
2. Colonial rulers often claimed that their mission was to 'civilise' the people they ruled. Based on the evidence in this chapter, do you think this was true in the case of India? Why or why not?
3. How was the British approach to colonising India different from earlier European powers like the Portuguese or the French?

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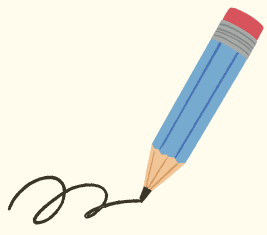
4. “Indians funded their own subjugation.” What does this mean in the context of British infrastructure projects in India like the railway and telegraph networks?
5. What does the phrase ‘divide and rule’ mean? Give examples of how this was used by the British in India?
6. Choose one area of Indian life, such as agriculture, education, trade, or village life. How was it affected by colonial rule? Can you find any signs of those changes still with us today? Express your ideas through a short essay, a poem, a drawing, or a painting.
7. Imagine you are a reporter in 1857. Write a brief news report on Rani Lakshmibai’s resistance at Jhansi. Include a timeline or storyboard showing how the rebellion began, spread, and ended, highlighting key events and leaders.
8. Imagine an alternate history where India was never colonised by European powers. Write a short story of about 300 words exploring how India might have developed on its own path.
9. Role-play: Enact a historical discussion between a British official and an Indian personality like Dadabhai Naoroji on the British colonial rule in India.
10. Explore a local resistance movement (tribal, peasant, or princely) from your state or region during the colonial period. Prepare a report or poster describing:
    - What was the specific trigger, if any?
    - Who led the movement?
    - What were their demands?
    - How did the British respond?
    - How is this event remembered today (e.g., local festivals, songs, monuments)?

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Noodles

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*'Noodles' is our abbreviation for 'Notes and Doodles'!



CHAPTER 2

India's Long Road to Independence

Our ideal is that of Swaraj or absolute autonomy free from foreign control. We claim the right of every nation to live its own life by its own energies according to its own nature and ideals. We reject the claim of aliens to force upon us a civilisation inferior to our own or to keep us out of our inheritance on the untenable ground of a superior fitness.

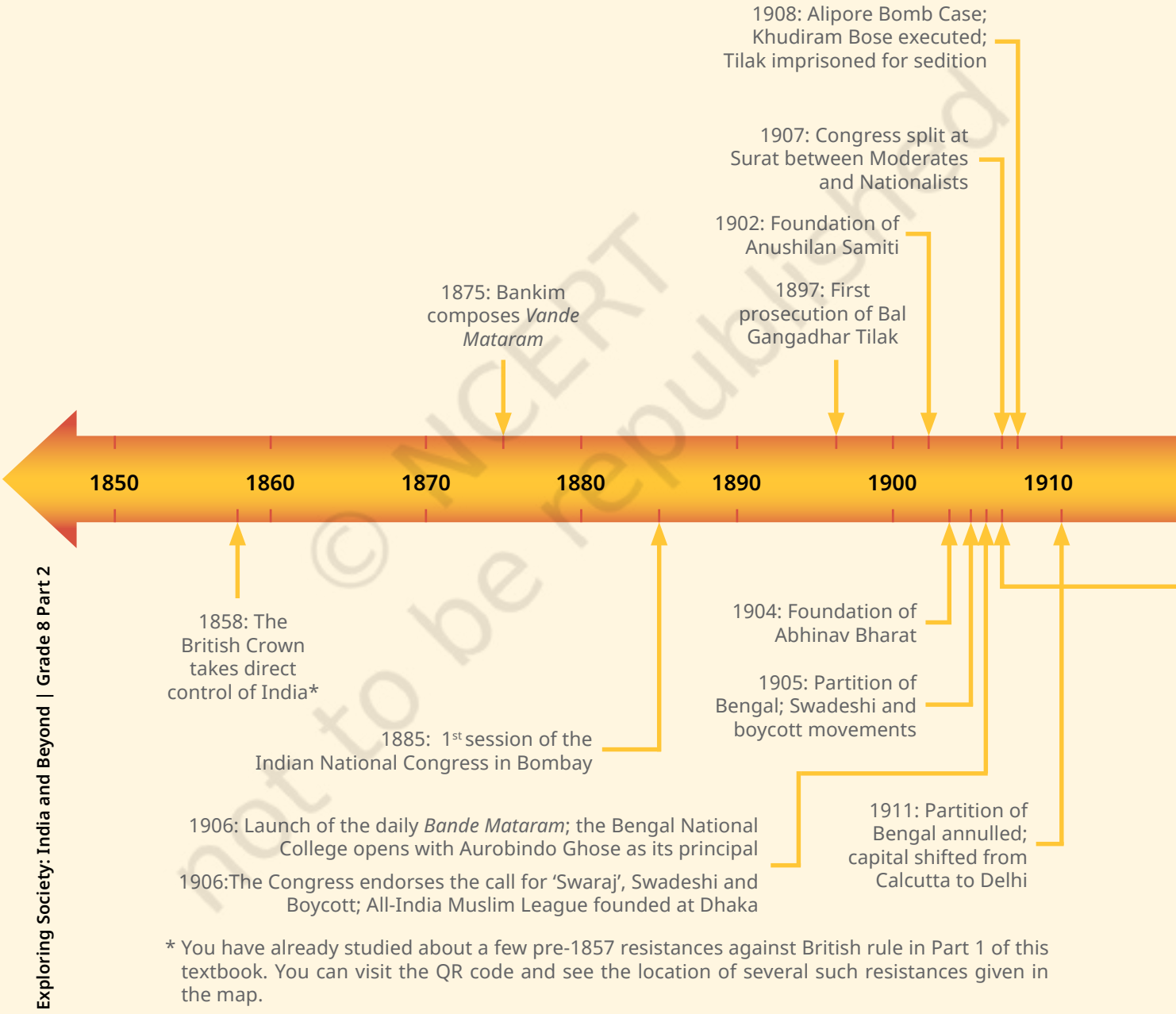
— Sri Aurobindo (1909)

Fig. 2.1. A procession of women in Bombay during the 1942 Quit India Movement.



The Big Questions?

1. *How did a land of diverse geographies, languages and religions come together to challenge and finally end nearly two centuries of British rule?*

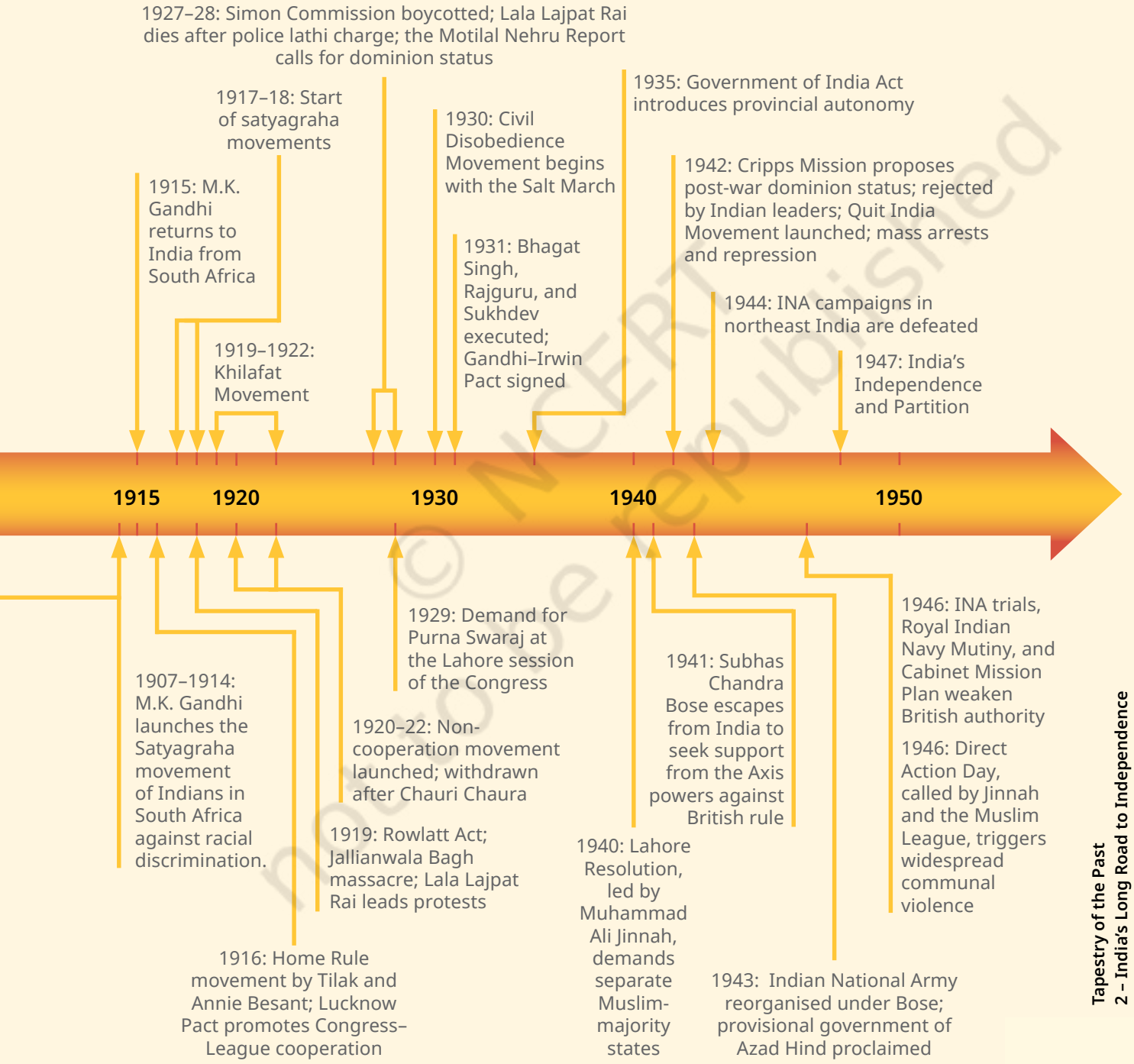


* You have already studied about a few pre-1857 resistances against British rule in Part 1 of this textbook. You can visit the QR code and see the location of several such resistances given in the map.

Fig. 2.2.

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2. *What were the main developments and who were some important figures in India's struggle for freedom?*
3. *What issues did the leading freedom fighters agree or disagree upon?*



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Imagine a land where people spoke hundreds of different languages, had different faiths, and followed many different customs — yet, together, these people challenged the most powerful empire in the world. Such is the story of India's long road to freedom: a story not just of battles and protests, but of ideas, dreams, and the courage to imagine a new nation.

This chapter is a brief account of India's long road to independence. The full story would take many books to tell, with countless events — attempted reforms, repressive actions, meetings, speeches, protests, uprisings, tales of heroic deeds — and millions of Indians who endured hardship and suffering for this cause, often at the cost of their lives. Indeed, years ago, the Indian Council of Historical Research published a five-volume *Dictionary of Martyrs* listing some 14,000 heroes and heroines of India's struggle for freedom. We cannot possibly mention even a fraction of them here! Behind the few you will encounter stand many more, from every part of India, and we hope you will get to discover some of them either in further studies or in your life explorations. Let us make it clear, therefore, that freedom fighters not mentioned here are no less important than the few who illustrate our story.

Martyr: A person who is killed or tortured for his or her beliefs

We should also keep in mind that although all those who fought for India's freedom shared the same objective, they often differed in the ways to achieve it. Historians have studied those different approaches and schools of thought among the freedom fighters; we will only highlight a few of those debates.



LET'S EXPLORE

Talk to your grandparents or elderly family members and find out what they remember or heard about India's freedom struggle. Note which leaders or methods people supported. Discuss in class how, despite sharing the same goal of freedom, people followed different paths.

A Royal Proclamation

In Part 1 of this textbook, we witnessed the tragic events of the Great Uprising of 1857. The next year, the British Crown under

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Queen Victoria took direct control of India from the East India Company. The territories of British India were now governed in the Queen's name by the Secretary of State for India (based in London) and the Viceroy — the Queen's representative, based in India and also known as 'Governor General'.



LET'S REMEMBER

Let's go back to the map of the British Indian Empire in Part 1 of this textbook (Fig. 4.16). Observe the different colours; recall that the red and pink territories are those directly under British administration, while the yellow ones are the princely states.

In 1858, too, a 'royal proclamation' was issued in Victoria's name, promising to respect 'the rights, dignity and honour of native Princes', which means that some 560 Indian princes would continue to rule their own states, but under British supremacy, or 'paramountcy' as it was called. The proclamation also assured the 'natives of our Indian territories' that they would be taken care of just like 'all our other subjects' and that there would be no attempt to impose Christianity on any of them.

Such promises intended to convey the message that the colonial masters would now prefer to rule in peace than through military force. But, of course, none of those assurances were respected in practice. The princely states remained closely monitored. In almost all of them, the colonial powers posted a 'Resident' or 'Political Agent', who very often interfered in the government and administration of the princely states, reducing their supposed autonomy to a symbolic one. Christian missionary activity continued with indirect state support (through concessions of urban land, for instance) and, often, with open encouragement from British high officials.

The economic exploitation of India, which we saw in Part 1 of this textbook, continued; heavy land taxes resulted in several severe famines and widespread discontent, particularly among peasants and tribals. Local industries could not compete with cheap British-manufactured goods flooding the markets.

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As regards India's 'native subjects', they were always treated as inferior to the British, as they were regarded as belonging to 'inferior races', with the white race asserting that it was destined to dominate the world. For example, those employed in the army, civil services or universities would have a lesser pay than British employees in the same posts; most juries in courts would have a majority of British members and would be lenient towards crimes committed by Europeans against 'natives'; in clubs, trains, specific areas of cities and some public spaces, Indians would not be allowed to mix with Europeans. In 1878, an 'Arms Act' was passed, which prohibited Indians from keeping arms, but allowed the British to do so. The same year, a 'Vernacular Press Act' was passed, which regulated and censored the Indian-language press. And so on.

Reform Movements

While British rule brought sweeping changes to governance and set off intense debates within Indian society, members of India's elite often looked up to Europe as a model to 'modernise' India. Indian reformers also took note of European models while challenging the widespread lack of formal education or social practices such as child marriage, the degraded status of widows or caste-based discrimination.



Fig. 2.3. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay

The table on the facing page provides a glimpse of a few reformers and their movements. There were many more across India.

Other Influences

Before we move to the political front, let us pause to examine two different examples of cultural currents that would play a part in the rise of nationalist feelings.

In the 1860s, **Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay** (or Chatterjee) was a sub-magistrate in a district of Bengal. He met with success through popular novels in Bengali, which dealt with themes of

Reform movement	Founder / leader	Year & place	Key ideas and contributions
Brahmo Samaj (earlier Brahmo Sabha)	**Raja Ram Mohan Roy**	1828, Calcutta	Opposed child marriage and caste discrimination. Supported widow rights and girls' education. Promoted a monotheistic interpretation of Hinduism. Favoured English education. Later weakened due to internal disagreements.
Arya Samaj	**Swami Dayananda Saraswati**	1875, Bombay	Emphasised return to the Vedas, rational thinking, equality and self-reliance. Opposed ritualism and birth-based caste. Supported women's education and widow remarriage. Inspired many later freedom fighters in north India.
Shuddhi Movement	**Arya Samaj leaders**	Late 19th century	Aimed to reconvert people who had left Hinduism. Encouraged social pride, debates, and education.
Other reformers	**Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Syed Ahmed Khan, Jyotirao and Savitribai Phule**	19th century	Promoted modern education, especially for girls and marginalised groups. Challenged caste-based discrimination and gender inequality. Opened schools and supported social reform.



Fig. 2.4. Postage stamps honouring Raja Rammohun Roy, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, Syed Ahmad Khan, Jyotirao Phule, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar

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romance and Indian history. They were among the first any Indian language. In 1882, he published *Anandamath*, a novel set amid the Sannyasi Rebellion (remember the chapter 'The Colonial Era in India') and the 1770 famine that devastated Bengal. In the novel, sannyasis worshipped the motherland as the divine mother and, in a key scene, recited the poem, *Bande Mataram*, which became a rallying cry and a mantra during the 1905 awakening. It also invoked spiritual and cultural pride from India's past for the cause of freedom, as we will see below.



DON'T MISS OUT

Though the novel *Anandamath* was published in 1882, the poem *Bande Mataram* was composed earlier, in 1875. Its title is a Bengali version of the Sanskrit '*Vande Mātaram*', literally 'Praise to the Mother' or 'I bow to the Motherland'. (Note that there is no letter '*va*' in Bengali, only '*ba*'.)

Rabindranath Tagore set the poem to music and sang it at the 1896 Congress Session in Calcutta. In 1950, the Constituent Assembly adopted it as India's National Song.



LET'S EXPLORE

Below are the first two stanzas of the song. Can you make out some of their meaning?

Vande mātaram!
sujalām suphalām malayajaśhītalām
śhasyaśhyāmalām, mātaram!
Vande mātaram!

Śubhrajyotsnām pulakitayāminīm
phullakusumita drumadalaśhobhinīm
suhāsinīm sumadhura bhāṣhiṇīm
sukhadām varadām, mātaram!
Vande mātaram!



Fig. 2.5. A 1976 postage stamp with the lyrics of national song, 'Vande Mātaram'.

Born in 1863, Narendranath Datta studied Western literature, history and philosophy, as well as ancient Indian texts and

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classical Indian music. He also practised several sports. At the age of 18, he met Sri Ramakrishna and ultimately became a prominent disciple of his under the name of **Swami Vivekananda**. He travelled widely across India and, in 1893, his powerful speech in defence of India's civilisation and culture made a strong impression at Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago. He wrote and lectured extensively in America, Europe and India on spirituality, education, and national regeneration. He also founded the Ramakrishna Mission, which aimed to combine spiritual practice with social service.



Fig. 2.6. Swami Vivekananda

Swami Vivekananda did not involve himself in political action; instead, he exhorted Indians to discover their inner strength and overcome fear, weakness, and self-doubt. His call to "Arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is reached" urged self-confidence and action. He encouraged the cultivation of science (he once advised Jamsetji Tata to create a research institute, which eventually became the Indian Institute of Science). At the same time, he rejected blind imitation of the West and encouraged Indians to go back to the ancient roots of Indian spirituality: "... Out of the past is built the future. Look back, therefore, as far as you can, drink deep of the eternal fountains that are behind, and after that, look forward, march forward, and make India brighter, greater, much higher than she ever was." His short life of 39 years had a profound impact, and many freedom fighters drew inspiration from him. His birthday (12 January) is observed in India as National Youth Day.

LET'S EXPLORE

How are the values expressed by Swami Vivekananda above relevant in the 21st century? Can some of them help you achieve your goals? Share your thoughts with your classmates.



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The Rise of the Indian National Congress

About the same time, another movement was quietly growing on the political front.



Fig. 2.7. Allan Octavian Hume

As unrest continued in several parts of India, regional attempts to form associations of citizens met with limited success. Though a British officer, Allan Octavian Hume had become critical of the colonial policies, pointing to them as the cause of poverty in India; this did not go down well with the authorities. Ultimately, he resigned in 1882 and worked to bring together a group of like-minded Indians. 1885 saw the launch of the **Indian National Congress** with its first session in Bombay. Along with Hume, Dadabhai Naoroji, then a prominent advocate (whom we met in the chapter 'The Colonial Era in India'), Womesh Chunder Bonnerjee, who was elected as the first president, played leading roles. Seventy-two delegates from diverse regions and religions attended, mostly drawn from Anglicised upper classes of society.

The Indian National Congress (often referred to as just 'Congress') began as a forum that expressed its full faith in the 'providential character' of British rule in India and its 'unswerving allegiance to the British Crown'. It held yearly sessions in different cities, passing resolutions that called for a dialogue with the colonial powers. The Congress reasoned that if it could obtain a greater Indian participation in governance, protection of civil rights, and some social and economic reforms, the growing discontent among the Indian 'subjects' would subside. As it happened, the colonial government largely ignored the Congress's resolutions, granting only minor concessions and denying Indians any meaningful participation in governance.

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Growing Discontent

As a result, discontent kept growing in the post-1857 period. We will only mention a few examples here.

In the 1860s and early 1870s, **Baba Ram Singh** took up and amplified in Punjab the socio-religious and political movement known as the **Kuka Movement**, also called the **Namdhari Movement**. 'Namdhari' means "those who uphold the name of God," reflecting the movement's emphasis on spiritual discipline and moral purity. Its followers were called Kukas because of the high-pitched chants (called *kūks*) that they emitted during their devotional prayers.



Fig. 2.8. A 19th-century painting of a Namdhari or Kuka Sikh

The movement worked to improve Sikh society by putting a stop to female infanticide and child marriage, and promoting simplified marriage rituals to end the dowry system. Long before this became a national strategy, the Kukas challenged British rule by rejecting foreign goods, wore simple hand-spun white clothes, and established their own independent postal system and private courts to avoid British institutions.

The Kukas also strongly opposed cow slaughter, which was conducted in slaughterhouses sanctioned or established by the colonial government, sometimes deliberately close to gurdwaras. In 1872, tensions peaked after a group of Kukas attacked some of these slaughterhouses. The British response was brutal: 65 Kukas were executed without trial, many by being tied to the mouths of cannons and blown away. Baba Ram Singh was arrested and exiled to Burma, where he passed away in captivity, never to return home. Despite this suppression, the Kuka Movement left a legacy of courage and self-reliance and remains a forerunner of the later mass boycott movements.

In western Maharashtra, a severe famine was followed by an outbreak of bubonic plague (an infectious and often fatal disease) in 1896. The authorities' harsh measures to control the epidemic



Fig. 2.9. Bal Gangadhar Tilak

were resented. The following year, the three **Chapekar brothers** shot dead the British Plague Commissioner of Poona (present-day Pune) and a British military officer; they were betrayed, arrested and hanged.

Bal Gangadhar Tilak, a founding member of the Indian National Congress found its leaders too moderate and wrote strongly against the colonial oppression in his Marathi newspaper, *Kesari*. A powerful orator, he turned the traditional Ganesh Chaturthi (festival celebrating the Lord Gaṇeśha) and the Shivaji festival into popular events, using religious and patriotic symbols to send message that people needed to be awaken, stand up and resist the oppression. However, Tilak was charged with having published **seditious** articles which incited violence; although there was no evidence, he was sentenced to 18 months' rigorous imprisonment. A national hero, he came to be known as 'Lokmanya' or 'revered by the people'. He interpreted and translated the Bhagavad Gita to Marathi later published in English bearing the title *The Gita Rahasya*.

Seditious: Promoting sedition or rebellion against the authority of a state or monarch

About that time, a few secret societies and revolutionary groups were formed in western India; Tilak was very likely in touch with some of them. In Bengal, the **Anushilan Samiti** was set up in 1902, with centres in numerous towns and villages to provide intellectual, moral and physical training to young men. **Aurobindo Ghose**, then residing in Baroda (presently Vadodara), tried to coordinate its action with the help of his brother, Barindra Kumar Ghose (also known as Barin Ghose). Tilak was also very closely associated with V.D. Savarkar's Abhinav Bharat.

Let us travel to eastern India. **Birsa Munda,** from the Munda tribe (in the Chota Nagpur region of present-day Jharkhand, then under the Bengal Presidency) emerged as a fearless leader who galvanised tribal resistance against British exploitation, oppressive landlords and inroads by Christian missionaries.

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Asserting that he would restore tribal faith, rights and dignity, Birsa became a prophet of tribal revival.

In 1899–1900, Birsa led a widespread uprising known as 'Ulgulaan' or the Great Tumult, mobilising tribal communities to reject colonial authority and reclaim their land. The police and some churches were attacked, prompting repression by the authorities and the brutal killing of many Mundas during an armed confrontation. Arrested in early 1900, Birsa died in jail four months later, at the age of 24. But his impact on many tribal communities of eastern India lived long and he remains a revered figure today.



Fig. 2.10. Birsa Munda after his arrest in 1900

The 1905 Partition of Bengal and National Awakening

In the first years of the 20th century, George Curzon, the then viceroy of India, floated a plan to partition the Bengal presidency. India's largest presidency, it extended in those days to regions now in Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha and Assam. The official motive was to put in place a more efficient administration; in reality, it was a faithful application of the colonial master's 'divide and rule' policy — in this case, a division between Bengal's largely Muslim eastern part and largely Hindu western part. The move was widely opposed.

Despite strong objections, Curzon announced the partition of Bengal in 1905. The move provoked widespread outrage, with leaders such as Rabindranath Tagore, Surendranath Banerjee, Bipin Chandra Pal, and Ashwini Kumar Dutt uniting people across communities to resist what they saw as a deliberate attack on their identity and solidarity, since, by and large, Hindus and Muslims had coexisted peacefully in Bengal.

The partition had two visible results. One, as expected, was a sharpened division between the two communities: most Muslim leaders ended up defending the partition, perhaps attracted by Curzon's promises for development in East Bengal and more administrative posts in the administration for Muslims.

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The second outcome was not part of the colonial calculations. Public meetings, processions and protest rallies multiplied in Calcutta, often joined by students; patriotic songs such as *Vande Mataram* were sung in street processions, prompting the authorities to ban its public singing. People also tied *rakhis* on each other's wrists as a symbol of unity, especially between Hindus and Muslims, to counter the British division. Such protests soon spread beyond Bengal.

At the same time, two programmes of mass actions emerged — **Swadeshi** ('of one's own country') and **boycott**. These two movements encouraged people to boycott foreign-made goods and promote Indian-made products, thereby strengthening India's own industries and reducing economic dependence on British goods, especially textiles. Bonfires of foreign goods — piles of foreign cloth, foreign sugar, etc. — were lit in the streets. Wearing clothes made of fabrics spun and woven in India became a symbol of self-reliance and national pride.

The Boycott movement went further, targeting British institutions as well, including government schools, colleges, and courts. The impact was, however, limited, as India's own institutions were not ready enough to offer a transition.



DON'T MISS OUT

The idea of Swadeshi was not exactly new; from the late 19th century, a few Indian leaders promoted self-reliance. In 1886, the industrialist **Jamsetji Tata** established the Swadeshi Mills in Bombay, which became a model of textile production. Several Swadeshi-minded Indian businessmen started the Punjab National Bank in Lahore in 1895, solely with Indian capital; the Punjabi Nationalist leader, **Lala Lajpat Rai**, was one of its founding figures and early directors. In 1901, the great Indian chemist **Prafulla Chandra Ray** founded the Bengal Chemicals and Pharmaceuticals Ltd. There are many more examples, all of them motivated by the desire to break the British monopoly in every area of the Indian economy.

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Fig. 2.11. The so-called 'Lal-Bal-Pal' trio of early Indian Nationalism: Lala Lajpat Rai, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal

The Nationalist Agenda

In 1906, **Bipin Chandra Pal**, a prominent nationalist leader from Bengal, a man of great learning and inspiring eloquence, launched the English daily *Bande Mataram*; Aurobindo Ghose joined him and soon took charge of the publication. *Bande Mataram* spread the idea of India's freedom day by day. Here is an example (from an article of 4th September 1906):

> "We objected so strongly to this measure [Bengal's Partition, because] it was professedly wanted by the Government to create a Mahomedan province with Dacca as its capital, and the evident object of it was to sow discord between the Hindus and the Mahomedans in a Province that had never known it in the whole history of the present British connection. ... This agitation is not an agitation merely against Partition ... The attainment of absolute national autonomy—it is this alone that will settle down this movement."

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Bande Mataram.

A Daily Organ of Indian Nationalism.

Swadeshi PAPER of India.

Our Policy:- INDIA FOR Indians.

Fig. 2.12. The front page of an issue of the Bande Mataram daily.



LET'S EXPLORE

- Why do you think the *Bande Mataram* daily avoided using the word 'independence'?
- Comment on the phrase 'absolute national autonomy' in the above quotation from a *Bande Mataram* article.
- Looking at the two boxes on either side of the daily's title in Fig. 2.12, what do you observe?



Fig. 2.13. The logo of the National Council of Education launched in 1906.

The bold stand this newspaper took had a far-reaching impact. To counter the denationalising effects of English education, it added National Education to Swadeshi and boycott, and spelt out a 'doctrine of passive resistance' to resist the colonial power.

Earlier the same year, a few leading citizens joined hands to create a National Council of Education and launch the Bengal National College, which was intended to provide a genuinely Indian education. None of the modern disciplines were missing, but

rootedness in Indian thoughts and values was a major focus. Aurobindo Ghose was asked to be the Bengal National College's first principal and steer the new institution. (It was integrated in the Jadavpur University after independence.)

This Nationalist programme got a boost in December 1906, when the Congress session at Calcutta, with Dadabhai Naoroji as president, declared Swaraj (literally, 'self-rule'), Swadeshi, Boycott and National Education to be the Congress's objective. 'Swaraj', however, was not defined — it was understood to have a range of meanings, from self-rule within the British Empire to full independence.

India as the 'Mother'

A theme often present in the speeches and writings of many Nationalists was that of 'Mother India' or 'Bharat Mata'. Partly inspired by Bankim's *Anandamath*, they saw India as a divine motherland. In 1905, at the time of Bengal's partition, the poet Abanindranath Tagore produced a painting of 'Bharat Mata'. In Madras presidency (presently Chennai), the fiery poet and freedom fighter **Subramania Bharati** not only translated *Bande Mataram* into Tamil but also composed many poems calling on the Mother India to rise. In Punjab, Lala Lajpat Rai started a publication with the title *Vande Mataram*.





Fig. 2.14. 'Bharat Mata', a painting by Abanindranath Tagore (L)
Fig. 2.15. Front cover of Subramania Bharati's magazine, 'Vijaya', portraying Mother India (R)



LET'S EXPLORE

→ In what ways are these two representations of Mother India similar or different?

→ What details can you discern in the front cover of Subramania Bharati's *Vijaya*?

The All-India Muslim League

In the aftermath of the Swadeshi Movement, the ideal of India's liberation from the colonial yoke was steadily spreading. However, in December 1906, several prominent leaders of the Muslim community founded the **All-India Muslim League** in Dhaka with an objective of defending Muslim political interests in British India. Their concerns had been growing since the formation of the Congress, which they distrusted, as they feared that Muslims would not be adequately represented in the largely Hindu-dominated Congress. Syed Ahmad Khan, about whom we have read earlier, had campaigned against the Congress and founded the 'All India Muhammadan Educational Conference' as an alternative political platform for Muslims (1886). The Congress tried to address these concerns, however without much success.

While the All-India Muslim League aimed to protect Muslim political rights, it initially represented a limited segment of the Muslim population, primarily the elite. As we saw earlier, quite a few Muslims initially opposed the partition of Bengal. A few decades later, this division would contribute to the emergence of the Two-Nation Idea.

The 1907 Surat Split

The British authorities were understandably alarmed by the Congress's resolution at the Calcutta session, especially its call for 'Swaraj', and exerted pressure on some of the moderate Congress leaders. As a result, the next session, at Surat (Gujarat) in December 1907, witnessed efforts by these Moderates, as they were now called, to step back from the Calcutta resolutions and return to the old requests for minor administrative concessions

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and a gradual shift to self-government within the British Empire. Among them were Dadabhai Naoroji, **Gopal Krishna Gokhale** (an educationist and founder of the Servants of India Society), **Pherozeshah Mehta** (a prominent Bombay lawyer), **Surendranath Banerjee** (a journalist and political leader), and Rashbehari Ghosh (a Calcutta lawyer).

As Tilak was prevented from speaking, chaos descended on the session. The Nationalist camp, led by Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai (who was known as the 'Lion of Punjab' because of his forceful speeches and writings) and Aurobindo Ghose, had to move out and conduct their own separate session.



DON'T MISS OUT

In the first decade of the 20th century, the Moderates and the British authorities labelled those who called for nothing less than India's independence, 'Extremists' or 'Radicals'. On the other hand, this group called themselves simply 'Nationalists', as they saw nothing 'extreme' or 'radical' in the objective of an independent Indian nation.



Fig. 2.16. The Nationalists' separate session after the Surat split, with Tilak (standing) addressing the gathering and Aurobindo Ghose (seated at the table) presiding.

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The Revolutionaries

From the late 19th century onward, more and more newspapers and magazines, both in English and in Indian languages, questioned colonial policies and exposed injustices. We have mentioned *Kesari* and *Bande Mataram*. More moderate newspapers included Dadabhai Naoroji's *Voice of India* and Surendranath Banerjee's *The Bengalee*. And far more radical was *Yugantar* ('New Era'), a Bengali newspaper which preached open revolt and a violent overthrow of British rule; the paper was run by a group of revolutionaries led by Barindra and associated with the Anushilan Samiti. There were several other publications which were suppressed and shut down across India.

Late April 1908, two young members of this group, Khudiram Bose and Prafulla Chaki, tried to assassinate a British judge, Douglas Kingsford, who had been handing down particularly severe sentences to Swadeshi activists, including flogging and long imprisonment. Khudiram and Prafulla threw bombs at a carriage they thought was carrying Kingsford, but it was two British ladies who fell victim to the blast. While Prafulla shot himself before he could be caught, Khudiram, just 18 years old, was captured, put on trial and hanged a few months later. According to reports, he was calm and smiling in his last moments. He was now a national hero, and when his funeral procession went through Calcutta, crowds kept throwing flowers on his body.

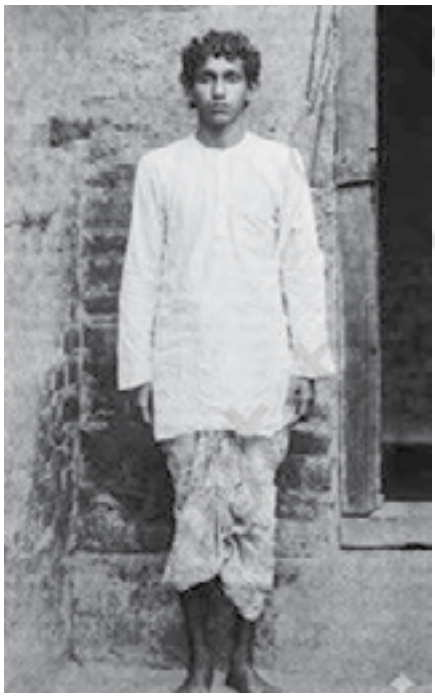


Fig. 2.17. Khudiram Bose, after his arrest

A few days after the failed attempt, Aurobindo Ghose, his brother Barindra and many more revolutionaries were arrested and imprisoned at Alipore jail, then a suburb of Calcutta. The colonial powers were now confident of silencing Aurobindo, whom they regarded as "the most dangerous man we have to deal with at present". The Alipore Bomb trial, as it has been called, went on for a year, with Aurobindo ably defended by a friend and collaborator, **Chittaranjan Das**. The whole country eagerly followed press reports

of the arguments put forth by the prosecution and the defence. In the end, Aurobindo was acquitted, Barindra and another revolutionary were sentenced to death (commuted on appeal to life imprisonment in the Cellular Jail in the Andaman Island, but released a decade later), most others to long jail terms, and a few acquitted.

The authorities now clamped down on the Nationalist press (*Bande Mataram*, for instance, was suppressed while the Alipore trial went on). They jailed several Nationalist leaders, including Tilak, who was prosecuted for sedition because of his articles in *Kesari*. The trial, in which **Muhammad Ali Jinnah** (whom we will meet again soon) was Tilak's lawyer, was rushed and unfair — Tilak was sentenced to be jailed in Mandalay (in Myanmar) for six years. (In another sedition case, in 1916, Jinnah's defence of Tilak will be successful.)



DON'T MISS OUT

Freedom Struggle in the North-East

The Northeast India had contributed in the freedom struggle of India at different points of time. Some of the movements were prior to 1857 such as the Khasi Revolt (1829–1833) led by Tirot Sing in Meghalaya and the Singpho Rebellion (1830s–1840s), a tribal revolt against British rule in the eastern part of Assam to name a few. Maniram Dewan and Piyali Baruah were publicly hanged by the British during the 1857 rebellion in Assam. Later in the 1942 Quit India Movement a number of martyrs such as Kanak Lata Baruah and Kushal Konwar laid down their lives. Similarly, in Manipur Rani Gaidinliu started fighting against the British since the age of 13. She urged the people not to pay taxes and also not to work for colonial masters.

LET'S EXPLORE



You may explore further and find out more about the freedom struggle in the North-East and known and lesser-known freedom fighters from this area.

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Fig. 2.18. An artist's rendering of the attack on Viceroy Hardinge, published in 1913 in a French daily.



LET'S EXPLORE

When the judge asked Tilak if he had anything to say after being sentenced, Tilak replied, "There are higher powers that rule the destinies of men and nations; and I think, it may be the will of Providence that the cause I represent may be benefited more by my suffering than by my pen and tongue."

What message do you think he was trying to convey?

On another occasion, Tilak famously declared, "Swaraj is my birthright and I shall have it." What does this reveal about Tilak's character?

DON'T MISS OUT

In 1910, receiving news of his impending arrest and possible deportation, Aurobindo Ghose went to Chandernagore (present-day Chandannagar), then a French settlement north of Calcutta, and from there proceeded to Pondicherry (today Puducherry), France's main settlement in India at the time, where he dedicated himself to his philosophy of spiritual evolution and 'integral yoga', writing many books and no longer taking part in political activities. He became known as 'Sri Aurobindo'.

Owing to the continuing popular sentiment against the partition of Bengal, the colonial government finally decided to withdraw it in 1911. But the damage had been done.

Meantime, violent attacks on British officials continued. To mention a few, in 1909, bombs were thrown at the Viceroy Minto's carriage in Ahmedabad during a procession, but missed their target. The same year, **Anant Kanhere**, **Krishnaji Karve** and **Vinayak Deshpande**, members of Maharashtra's **Abhinav Bharat** secret society, founded by the revolutionary **V. D. Savarkar**, shot dead a district magistrate at a theatre in Nashik; they were caught and hanged soon afterwards (Anant Kanhere was just 18). In 1911, **Vanchinathan** shot dead a district collector at a railway station near Tirunelveli in Tamil Nadu; the collector had suppressed the Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company founded by the Nationalist **V.O. Chidambaram Pillai**, which led to his unfair prosecution and imprisonment. And in 1912, as the Viceroy, Charles Hardinge, made his ceremonial entry into British India's new capital, Delhi, riding on an elephant, a bomb was thrown at him; while an umbrella bearer was killed, Hardinge suffered injuries, but survived; his wife was unhurt.

In 1914–15, the **Ghadar Movement** was a daring attempt by Indian revolutionaries to trigger a pan-Indian mutiny within the British Indian Army during World War I (1914–1918). Behind the movement was the Ghadar Party, founded by Indian migrants in North America, including **Lala Hardayal** and **Sohan Singh Bhakna**; many of them returned to India to take part in the rebellion. In India, **Rash Behari Bose**, Sachindra Nath Sanyal

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(also known as **Sachin Sanyal**), **Kartar Singh Sarabha**, among others, tried to get the army infiltrated. However, the British intelligence network uncovered the plot, leading to widespread arrests, imprisonments in the Cellular Jail, and the execution of several leaders, including Kartar Singh (at the age of 19) and **Vishnu Ganesh Pingle**. While the mutiny failed, it laid the groundwork for future revolutionary efforts.



Fig. 2.19. Rash Behari Bose, Kartar Singh Sarabha, Bagha Jatin, Sachin Sanyal (L to R)



DON'T MISS OUT

The **Cellular Jail** in the Andaman Islands was a huge colonial prison used by the British to exile and isolate revolutionaries, far from the mainland. Known as '**Kala Pani**' ('Black Water'), it was designed specifically for solitary confinement and used to break the spirit of freedom fighters. Prisoners faced horrific conditions, including extreme physical



Fig. 2.20. In the Cellular Jail, prisoners condemned to death were kept in this separate cell before being hanged.

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labour—such as extracting oil by hand—and brutal punishment for the slightest disobedience. A few revolutionaries who were imprisoned there, such as Barindra Ghose or V.D. Savarkar, left vivid descriptions of forced labour and ill-treatment of the prisoners. Many of them died and some lost their sanity. Those who tried to escape were hanged. The jail became a symbol of ultimate sacrifice in India's struggle for freedom.

Rash Behari Bose managed to escape from India and reach Japan where, years later, he would lay the foundation of the Indian National Army (we will see it in action under Subhas Chandra Bose).

Jatin Mukherjee, nicknamed **Bagha Jatin** ('Bagha' means 'tiger', as Jatin once wrestled with a tiger with his bare hands), a leader of the Anushilan Samiti, collaborated with Rash Behari Bose in such plans. One of them, the so-called 'German Plot', consisted in organising the reception of a massive shipment of German arms and ammunition, which were due to come by ship.

These weapons were intended to start an armed insurrection while the British were occupied with World War I. Bagha Jatin organised the reception of the weapons, but the authorities got to know of the plan, forcing him and his companions to hide in the jungles of Balasore (in present-day Odisha), close to where the German weapons were supposed to land. On 9 September 1915, the revolutionaries were surrounded by a large contingent of British police and fought a 75-minute gunbattle from behind an anthill. A few were killed; severely wounded, Jatin passed away the next day. Those captured alive were soon hanged.

Such attacks, which invariably met with strong popular approval, rattled the colonial government, but, at the same time, hardened its resolve to rule with an iron hand.

Home Rule Movement and the Lucknow Pact

When Tilak was released from jail in 1914, his health had deteriorated, and the strongly militant atmosphere of the previous decade had faded away. He nevertheless set himself three tasks: to reconcile and reunite the two factions of the

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Congress; to promote Hindu–Muslim cooperation; and to work towards the ideal of home rule.

The first task was achieved in 1916 at the Lucknow session of the Congress. A step towards the second objective was taken at the same session, where an agreement (the so-called 'Lucknow Pact') was reached between the Indian National Congress and the All-India Muslim League. Under the pact, the Congress accepted separate electorates for Muslims for elections to the provincial and central legislative councils, which had been set up decades earlier by the colonial government, but with very limited powers.

The same year, together with Annie Besant, an Irish philosopher, reformer and political activist who became a passionate supporter of Indian self-government, Tilak launched the Home Rule Movement, which called for self-government for India within the British Empire—it was no longer the full independence that the earlier Nationalists had demanded, but a measure of real internal autonomy which was perceived to be a practical first step. The British government, however, was not ready to concede even this demand. The struggle for freedom was thus poised to enter a new phase of mass political mobilisation.

Gandhi and the Non-Cooperation Movement

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born in Porbandar, Gujarat, in 1869. After finishing high school, he travelled to London to study law, then to South Africa, where he personally experienced racial discrimination against 'coloured' people and witnessed the hardships faced by the Indian community. This led him to conceive his method of 'satyagraha' ('insistence on truth'), based on passive resistance, nonviolence (or ahimsa) and acceptance of suffering in the quest for truth. All the while, Gandhi also kept abreast of developments in India.

Gandhi, who was by then addressed as 'Mahatma', returned to India in 1915 and, at Gopal Krishna Gokhale's advice, joined the Indian National Congress. Three years later, he applied his method of satyagraha to local grievances across India, such as

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those of indigo farmers in Bihar who were ruthlessly exploited (visit chapter 'The Colonial Era in India'), mill workers in Ahmedabad facing extremely low wages, and impoverished peasants in Kheda (Gujarat), from whom British officials demanded excessive land revenue. **Vallabhbhai Patel** led the Bardoli movement (1928) for peasant rights. It was one of the most successful grassroots movements in the freedom struggle. This led Mahatma Gandhi to bestow on him the title of 'Sardar'. And thus, he came to be known as Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel.

The Non-Cooperation Movement

However, as the world celebrated the end of World War I (1914–1918), it brought no freedom to Indians. During the war, the colonial government supported the British war effort by exporting food to feed soldiers, causing food shortages in India; massive defence expenditures also drove up commodity prices. Besides, new laws imposed in 1919, the Rowlatt Act, enabled the police to detain anyone without trial; all forms of their civil liberties were effectively curtailed.



Fig. 2.21. Mahatma Gandhi spinning khadi

Gandhi launched a nationwide protest against the Rowlatt Act, conducting a day of prayer and fasting and urging Hindus and Muslims to unite in satyagraha. He promoted Swadeshi goods as a 'religious duty', and encouraged non-violent resistance through the boycott of foreign goods, schools, and courts — thus began the Non-Cooperation Movement, with Gandhi promising Swaraj within a year if people adhered strictly to nonviolence.

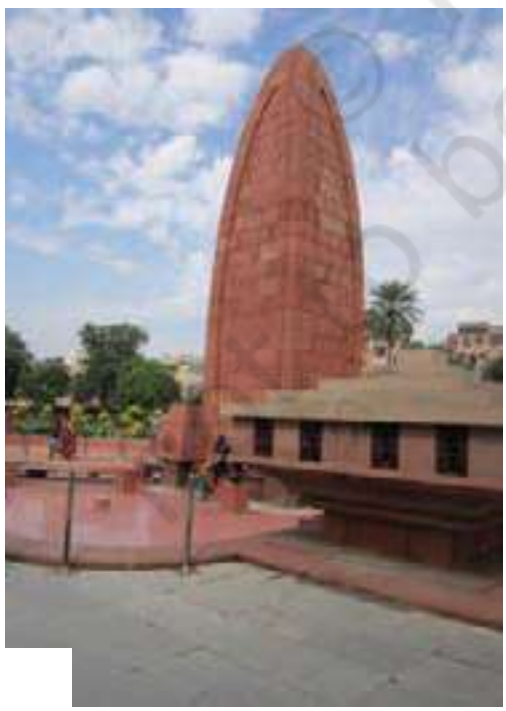
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With Tilak's death in August 1920, Gandhi became the undisputed mass leader of the Indian National Congress, which formally launched the Non-Cooperation Movement at its Nagpur session in December the same year. Many leaders, including Vallabhbhai Patel, expressed their support. Soon, the movement drew mass participation across India.

THINK ABOUT IT

Fig. 2.21 captures Mahatma Gandhi spinning khadi, that is, hand-spun, hand-woven yarn. (Cloth made of such yarn is called khadi cloth.) This was not just about making clothes; it was also a powerful symbol of Swadeshi, or self-reliance, a way to provide work for millions of impoverished villagers, and a direct challenge to British textile imports. It aimed to unite people economically and symbolically against foreign rule.

The Jallianwala Bagh Massacre and its Aftermath



. 2.22. The Martyrs' Memorial in Jallianwala Bagh

On April 13, 1919, the peaceful garden of Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar became the site of a tragedy that would shake India to its core. Thousands of men, women, and children had gathered, some to celebrate the festival of Baisakhi, others to peacefully protest the arrest of local leaders and the repressive Rowlatt Act. Without warning, Brigadier-General Dyer and his troops sealed the main exit and opened fire on the unarmed crowd. For about ten minutes, 1,650 rounds of ammunition rained down, with the troops deliberately aiming at the thickest parts of the crowd and even at those trying to flee through other exits. Many were shot, some were trampled in the panic, and yet others leapt into a well to avoid the bullets.

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Official British counts admitted to nearly 400 dead and over 1,200 wounded, but Indian estimates placed the death toll at over 1,000. The massacre sent shockwaves across the country, permanently scarring public trust in the British government and uniting Indians of all backgrounds in their resolve to attain freedom. Dyer, who became known as the 'Butcher of Amritsar', proudly defended his action before a British-dominated inquiry committee, which condemned it, though without recommending any penal action. Following a general outcry, Dyer was ultimately removed from India. Up to this day, despite many requests, the British government has not apologised for this atrocity, only describing it as a 'deeply shameful event in British history'.

LET'S EXPLORE



Rabindranath Tagore sent a strong letter of protest to the then Viceroy. "The accounts of the insults and sufferings by our brothers in Punjab," wrote Tagore, "have trickled through the gagged silence, reaching every corner of India, and the universal agony of indignation roused in the hearts of our people has been ignored by our rulers—possibly congratulating themselves for what they imagine as salutary lessons." In the same letter, Tagore returned the knighthood he had received from the British.

What does Tagore mean when he assumes that the colonial rulers 'congratulated themselves' after the Jallianwala Bagh massacre?

Punjab's then lieutenant governor, O'Dwyer, who had ruthlessly suppressed people's rights during his tenure, defended Dyer's action. Two decades after the massacre, Udham Singh, an Indian revolutionary and member of the Ghadar Party, tracked O'Dwyer in London and shot him dead. **Udham Singh** was arrested and hanged; during his trial, he asserted the legitimacy of his action.

The Khilafat Movement and its Aftermath

For some six centuries, the vast Turkish-led Ottoman Empire had spanned much of southeast Europe, western Asia, and north Africa. The empire's head, or 'sultan', ruling from Constantinople

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Fig. 2.23. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad

(present-day Istanbul in Turkey) also served as the 'Caliph' (or 'Khalifa'), that is, the politico-religious leader of the Muslim world. At the end of World War I (1914–1918), the Ottoman Empire was dismembered; the position of the Caliph was now shaky.

In India, Muslim leaders such as Muhammad Ali and Shaukat Ali, also known as the **Ali brothers**, and **Maulana Abul Kalam Azad** launched in 1919 the **Khilafat Movement**, which called for the Caliph's religious authority to be preserved. Gandhi saw there an opportunity to unite Hindus and Muslims against British rule and to bring Muslims into the nationalist fold. In 1920, an alliance was forged between Khilafat leaders and the Congress, with Gandhi and Khilafat leaders promising to fight together for both Khilafat and Swaraj. The movement merged with Gandhi's Non-Cooperation Movement and initially succeeded in increasing Muslim participation in the national movement and mobilising large numbers of Hindus for the Khilafat cause.

The movement also faced criticism on the ground. Some members of the Congress felt that the status of the Caliph in Turkey was of no concern to India and bringing this issue into the Non-Cooperation Movement was undesirable. A few Muslim leaders, such as Syed Ahmad Khan, were skeptical about the Khilafat Movement as it appeared to tie the loyalty of Indian Muslims to a religious power in faraway Turkey — 'territorial loyalty', as they called it. Jinnah, in fact, left the Congress at its 1920 session, after warning against mixing up the independence movement with religious elements.

In February 1922, at Chauri Chaura, a town in present-day Uttar Pradesh, protesters killed policemen by setting a station on fire. Viewing this as 'inhuman conduct', Gandhi abruptly called off the Non-Cooperation Movement, a decision which many in the Congress, including Motilal Nehru, Jawaharlal Nehru, Chittaranjan Das, and Subhas Chandra Bose disapproved of. Motilal Nehru and Chittaranjan Das created the

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Swaraj Party, which attempted a different strategy; owing to Das's death in 1925, it was short-lived.

As regards the Khilafat Movement, it died a natural death when Mustafa Kemal abolished the Turkish sultanate in 1922 and the Caliphate itself in 1924. Historians have debated the movement's aftermath. While temporarily uniting Hindus and Muslims, it also reinforced the sense of separateness among Indian Muslims and encouraged more radical Muslim leaders to come up with fresh demands. In fact, subsequent years saw quite a few Hindu-Muslim riots in several parts of the country.

Protests, Repression and Revenge

The British government was not blind to the growing popular discontent. It knew that if crores of Indians revolted, there was little it would be able to do. It kept trying to come up with reforms that would appear to be substantial concessions, yet without crossing a certain line towards home rule, much less independence. For instance, in 1927, the **Simon Commission** came to India to study constitutional reform, but without a single Indian member. Rallies and marches followed, with the slogan 'Simon Go Back!' echoing through city streets and black flags being waved as a sign of resistance.

In Lahore in October 1928, **Lala Lajpat Rai** led a nonviolent march which the police brutally lathi-charged (i.e., attacked with sticks). Badly injured, he managed to address a meeting the same evening, in which he declared, "The Government which attacks its own innocent subjects has no claim to be called a civilised government. Bear in mind, such a government does not survive long. I declare that the blows struck at me will be the last nails in the coffin of the British rule in India." Weakened by his injuries, Lala Lajpat Rai passed away two weeks later, which further inflamed national sentiment.



Fig. 2.24. A postage stamp honouring Lala Lajpat Rai

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The Simon Commission laid bare once again the refusal of the British to genuinely consult Indians about their own future, strengthening calls for complete self-rule.

More revolutionary actions

In disagreement with Gandhi's path of non-violence and its slow pace that was seen as not putting sufficient pressure on the colonial rulers, many freedom fighters believed that the use of force was a legitimate means to achieve independence.

The **Hindustan Republican Association** (HRA) was inspired by the Ghadar Movement's earlier attempts. To fund their revolutionary activities, a group, led by **Ram Prasad Bismil**, **Ashfaqulla Khan** and **Chandrashekhar Azad**, robbed a train that carried government money (the so-called 'Kakori Train Robbery', Kakori being a village near Lucknow). This action provoked a massive crackdown from the authorities, leading to the execution of Bismil, Khan and several others, all of whom turned into popular heroes at their trial.

The HRA reorganised itself as the **Hindustan Socialist Republican Association** (HSRA). Its leaders, Chandrashekar Azad and **Bhagat Singh**, were keen to avenge Lala Lajpat Rai's death. In December 1928, targeting a British police officer who had ordered the lathi charge on Lala Lajpat Rai, they assassinated a younger officer by mistake.



Fig. 2.25. Bhagat Singh, Ashfaqulla Khan, Chandrashekar Azad (L to R)

A year later, Bhagat Singh and an associate dropped two low-intensity bombs in Delhi's Central Legislative Assembly; there were no victims, as the intention was only 'to make the deaf hear'. They also dropped pamphlets and shouted slogans calling for revolution and justice. Arrested and tried for the earlier assassination of a British officer, he went on a long hunger strike to protest against unjust treatment of Indian prisoners. Despite several appeals for clemency, Bhagat Singh and his associates Sukhdev Thapar and Shivaram Rajguru were hanged in 1931. They were 22 to 23 years old.

Bhagat Singh became a symbol of the resistance against the colonial oppressor. As Subhas Chandra Bose put it, just four days after the execution, "Bhagat Singh was a symbol of the spirit of revolt which has taken possession of the country from one end to the other. That spirit is unconquerable, and the flame which that spirit has lit up will not die."

There were many more such revolutionaries including women. Even schoolgirls took up arms against the British at this stage. In Comilla (in present-day Bangladesh), for example, **Suniti Chowdhury** and **Shanti Ghosh**, two students, assassinated a District Magistrate in 1931. A few months later, **Bina Das**, a student at Calcutta University, made a daring attempt on the life of the Governor of Bengal, during a convocation ceremony, but narrowly missed him; arrested, she stated in her confession that she wanted to free her country from the "perpetual subjection to infinite shame and endless suffering" caused by the British occupation. (She was sentenced to nine years of rigorous imprisonment.)



Fig. 2.26. Bina Das

Purna Swaraj and Civil Disobedience

In 1928, as a reaction to the Simon Commission, a report drafted under the chairmanship of Motilal Nehru had called for India to be given 'Dominion status' — a status somewhat akin to the earlier 'Home Rule', that is, with total internal autonomy;

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Britain would still control India's military and foreign policy, and the British king or queen would still be the official head of state. At the time, Canada, Australia, and several other former colonies of the British Empire had the status of dominions. Now, with growing popular anger and the realisation that Britain was not ready to grant India such a status, the younger Congress leaders, such as Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose, felt it was time for a more radical demand — '**Purna Swaraj**' or complete independence. This was not a completely new demand. Nationalist faction of the Congress had voiced it two decades earlier, and Aurobindo had raised a similar demand in 1908. Maulana Hasrat Mohani, a member of both the Congress and the All-India Muslim League, had called for it in 1921. A similar demand for Swaraj was expressed by V.D. Savarkar in 1925.

The resolution demanding Purna Swaraj was passed in December 1929 at the Lahore session of the Congress. Here is an extract from it:

> We believe that it is the inalienable right of the Indian people, as of any other people, to have freedom and to enjoy the fruits of their toil and have the necessities of life, so that they may have full opportunities of growth. We believe also that if any government deprives a people of these rights and oppresses them the people have a further right to alter it or to abolish it. The British government in India has not only deprived the Indian people of their freedom but has based itself on the exploitation of the masses, and has ruined India economically, politically, culturally, and spiritually. We believe, therefore, that India must sever the British connection and attain Purna Swaraj or complete independence.

To implement the demand for Purna Swaraj, Mahatma Gandhi launched the **Civil Disobedience Movement**. It began with the **Salt March** in March-April 1930, when Gandhi led a 380-km march to Dandi, a coastal village in southern Gujarat (which is why the march is also known as 'Dandi March'), where Gandhi symbolically collected some salt.

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LET'S EXPLORE

Form groups to analyse, compare and discuss the various elements or demands contained in the above resolution.



Fig. 2.27. The Lahore session of the Congress in progress (with Jawaharlal Nehru standing on the dais).



Fig. 2.28. A view of the Salt or Dandi March led by Mahatma Gandhi.

Since the colonial government held a monopoly on salt production and charged a high tax for it, Gandhi saw the breaking of the colonial salt law as an appropriate symbol in the fight against colonial rule.

Thousands were soon arrested, including Gandhi, but the Civil Disobedience Movement spread far and wide, with salt marches in other parts of the country, the boycott of foreign cloth, and the refusal to pay taxes. Large numbers of women broke the salt law, took part in processions and in the picketing of liquor shops and shops selling foreign cloth. A British report noted that 'thousands of women, many being of good family and high educational attainments, suddenly emerged from the seclusion of their homes, and, in some instances, actually from purdah (screen, veil), in order to join Congress demonstrations…"

One of them, **Sarojini Naidu,** a noted poet and powerful orator, was the first Indian woman president of the Congress in 1925.



Fig. 2.29. Sarojini Naidu with Mahatma Gandhi during the Dandi March

She was a strong advocate of women's rights — voting rights in particular — and actively participated in many protests, as a result of which she was arrested and imprisoned several times.

Repression and arrests followed the Salt March, and more atrocities: Peshawar, a city of the North-West Frontier Province (in present-day northern Pakistan), witnessed the Qissa Khwani Bazaar massacre on April 23, 1930, when British troops fired on a crowd peacefully protesting the arrest of their leader, **Abdul Ghaffar Khan**, who was committed to nonviolent methods. Even as the British used armoured cars and opened fire, killing hundreds, two platoons of the Royal Garhwal Rifles

(British Indian Army soldiers) led by Chandra Singh Garhwali refused to fire on the unarmed crowd, choosing jail over hurting their fellow Indians.



Fig. 2.30. Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan with Mahatma Gandhi (1947)

The Gandhi-Irwin Pact

Keen to appease the growing protests, in 1931, Viceroy Irwin made an agreement with Gandhi: the government released political prisoners who had not been involved in violence and allowed a limited private manufacture of salt. In return, the Congress suspended civil disobedience and agreed to participate in a **Round Table Conference** in London. The pact marked the first formal negotiation between the British government and the Congress as equals, but the Round Table Conference failed to produce a breakthrough.

The pact was criticised by younger Congress leaders as it did not guarantee Purna Swaraj. Gandhi tried to resume the Civil Disobedience Movement, but the British responded with massive arrests, and public enthusiasm was now missing. Gandhi withdrew the movement in 1934, after



Fig. 2.31. The Round Table Conference in 1931. Gandhi is seated next to the chairman; Ambedkar is fourth from the left in the foreground.

which the Congress turned to constitutional methods, seeking substantial concessions through complex negotiations. In 1935, the British conceded some degree of provincial autonomy. The reform allowed for elected governments at the provincial level, although the colonial powers retained much control, including foreign affairs, defence, and internal security. The British-appointed governors could also indefinitely take over provincial administration.

During that time, Gandhi focused more on social reforms, specifically his campaign against untouchability, i.e. the discrimination suffered by those rejected by the caste system — earlier called 'Untouchables' or, in the official terminology, 'Depressed Classes'; the Indian Constitution refers to them as 'Scheduled Castes'. While the social reformer **B.R. Ambedkar**, who had himself suffered such discrimination, shared this goal, he believed that keeping separate electorates for the Depressed Classes was the only way to ensure their political voice. Gandhi, on the other hand, feared this would permanently divide Hindu society and began a 'fast unto death' in protest. A compromise was reached in the so-called 'Poona Pact', which, instead of separate electorates, increased the number of reserved seats for the Depressed Classes in the legislatures.

The Idea of Separate Nations

Muslims generally kept away from the Civil Disobedience Movement. When **Muhammad Iqbal**, a philosopher and poet of Urdu, presided over the 1930 All-India Muslim League session in Allahabad (present-day Prayagraj), he proposed a separate territory for Muslims in northwestern India, which would enable Muslims to preserve their culture and religious identity within a larger Indian federation. While this was not yet the precise idea of Pakistan (the word was coined a few years later), this intensified the debate about separateness.

While nearly all Congress leaders, including Muslim leaders such as Maulana Azad and Abdul Ghaffar Khan, opposed the Two-Nation idea, insisting that Hindus and Muslims could live together and sort out their differences, Jinnah endorsed the idea of Pakistan.

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A few Hindu organisations, such as the Hindu Mahasabha under V.D. Savarkar, saw Hindus and Muslims as two distinct nations living side by side. Though without explicitly asking for a partition between the two.

World War II and the Indian National Army

As Europe plunged into another devastating war in 1939, which soon engulfed most countries of the world, India found herself pulled into it without being consulted. World War II put an enormous strain on India. More than 2.5 million Indian soldiers joined the war, forming the largest volunteer army in history. According to official figures, at least 87,000 of these troops lost their lives in the field. At home, everyday life became harder — the war caused shortages of food and goods, high taxes, and, because much Indian grain was sent abroad to the war front on the orders of Winston Churchill, then prime minister of the United Kingdom, a horrific famine struck Bengal in 1943, with millions perishing.

While support for the British was initially widespread, many Indians began to feel that they were making huge sacrifices for a war that was not their own, yet their own freedom continued to be denied.

Subhas Chandra Bose, once a Congress leader, broke away from Gandhi's policies of nonviolence, convinced that freedom would come only through armed struggle. Since raising an army in India was unrealistic, Bose decided to seek help from Britain's enemies during World War II. Escaping house arrest in India in early 1941, he travelled through Afghanistan and Russia to reach Germany, where he spent almost two years and sought support from the anti-British forces.



Fig. 2.32. Subhas Chandra Bose

Having decided that he stood a better chance with Japan (Germany's ally against Britain and most European nations), he travelled

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to Indonesia, Japan, and finally Singapore in 1943, where he formed the **Indian National Army** (INA) from Indian prisoners of war and volunteers, and declared the formation of the **Azad Hind** ('free India') **government**. As Japan expanded the war into Southeast Asia, the INA fought alongside the Japanese army in Burma and northeastern India, particularly Manipur and Nagaland. They were militarily defeated, and the INA failed to establish a base in India. While many in India admired Bose's courageous defiance, others criticised his alliance with Nazi Germany and Japan.

The Quit India Movement

In the thick of World War II, Churchill, under pressure to seek India's support, sent Stafford Cripps to India with an offer. The '**Cripps Mission**' of 1942 promised to grant India dominion status once the war was over, but with a provision that provinces could opt out of the post-war India, if they so wished. A few Congress leaders, like **C. Rajagopalachari**, favoured acceptance for tactical reasons, but most leaders, including Gandhi, found



Fig. 2.33. Atrocities committed on common people during the Quit India movement, August 1942

the assurances contained in the proposal insufficient and ended up rejecting it.

In August 1942, Mahatma Gandhi launched the **Quit India Movement** with a simple call to Indians: "Do or Die." The demand was clear — the British must leave India at once. Even though virtually the entire leadership of the Congress was arrested, the popular movement continued, and mass protests and rallies erupted nationwide with 'Quit India' banners. Workers went on strike, students left schools, people attacked government buildings and uprooted telegraph poles. Leaders like Ram Manohar Lohia and Jayaprakash Narayan were instumental in keeping the underground movement going. The protest reached such a scale that Viceroy Linlithgow called it "by far the most serious rebellion since 1857". Although it was brutally suppressed, with many deaths and numerous arrests across India, it sent a strong message to the British that they could no longer rule India without Indian consent.

DON'T MISS OUT

Aruna Asaf Ali, who had earlier taken part in many protests and suffered solitary confinement as a result, played an important role in the Quit India Movement. When senior Congress leaders were arrested, she hoisted the national flag at the Gowalia Tank Maidan in Bombay, becoming a powerful symbol of resistance. She then went underground for nearly four years, evading capture despite being declared a dangerous outlaw with a bounty on her head. During this period, she edited underground bulletins and helped coordinate secret resistance activities against British rule. She later supported the Royal Indian Navy mutiny of February 1946.



Fig. 2.34. A postage stamp honouring Aruna Asaf Ali

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Kanaklata Barua, a teenage independence activist from Assam, became a prominent martyr of the Quit India Movement in 1942. At just 17 years old, she was shot and killed by British police while leading a procession to hoist the Indian national flag at the local police station in Gohpur. Known as 'Birangana' ('heroic woman'), she is honoured as one of the youngest icons of India's struggle for freedom.



THINK ABOUT IT

During the Non-Cooperation Movement of 1920–22, some 40,000 participants were jailed for various terms. The Salt Satyagraha of 1930 saw over 60,000 people jailed and a large number brutalised by the police. The Civil Disobedience Movement during 1931–34 saw another 40,000 freedom fighters jailed. During the Quit India Movement of 1942–45, over 100,000 freedom fighters were imprisoned and nearly 10,000 killed during the brutal repression of the movement.

You need not remember these figures. However, conduct a class discussion about their significance in terms of the huge collective sacrifice suffered by the Indian people.

Partition, Turmoil, and Independence

World War II ended in 1945 with a decisive victory of the Allies (in particular the U.S.A., the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union and China) over the 'Axis' (Germany, Italy and Japan). Many European powers realised they could no longer hold on to their colonies; an era of decolonisation began. Britain, exhausted by the war, finally sought a transition towards India's independence.

Besides, January 1946 witnessed a **mutiny in the Royal Indian Air Force** involving many thousands of personnel. The next month, a mutiny started in the **Royal Indian Navy** in Bombay, when naval ratings (sailors) rebelled against ill-treatment, and quickly spread across India. While the rebellion was eventually called off, it sent a strong signal to the British that they could no longer rely on the Indian military to maintain their empire.

Finally, the **Cabinet Mission** of 1946 sought to plan a peaceful transfer of power, dividing India into three groups of provinces,

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each of which had complete autonomy except in matters of defence, foreign affairs and communication. Complex talks followed, but deep divisions between the Congress and the Muslim League led to a deadlock.

'Direct Action'

In particular, the demand for a separate Muslim state grew intense. Jinnah, leader of the Muslim League, openly declared a break from constitutional methods and called for 'Direct Action Day' on August 16, 1946, urging Muslims to demonstrate for the cause of Pakistan. He stated, "We will either have a divided India or a destroyed India." A wave of brutal communal violence submerged Calcutta — often encouraged by provocative speeches and pamphlets — leading to thousands of deaths as Muslim mobs attacked Hindus, who then retaliated. Thousands more were displaced. The violence created a deep sense of fear, making peaceful coexistence seemingly impossible and partition unavoidable.

To manage the transition from British rule, an **Interim Government** led by Jawaharlal Nehru took charge in September 1946, but tensions remained high. Behind the scenes, hurried negotiations and mounting pressures pushed the British to make a quick exit.

The Partition of India

The British had for decades encouraged Hindu Muslim differences to grow. The partition of India resulted from disagreements between the two communities or rather small sections. The partition plan was widely opposed even by the Indian National Congress. There was no national consensus. Whether it was the only way forward is an issue that has been debated ever since.

In July 1947, Mountbatten, British India's last Viceroy, who had recently come to India with a mandate to chart a path to the transfer of power, chose Cyril Radcliffe, a British lawyer unfamiliar with India, and gave him just five weeks to draw new borders—resulting in the **Radcliffe Line**, which split Punjab and Bengal almost overnight. This boundary created two countries: a Hindu-majority India and a Muslim-majority Pakistan, which

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included West Pakistan (now Pakistan) and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh, independent since 1971). Millions suddenly found themselves on the 'wrong' side of these lines, with their homes, friends, and sacred places now across international borders.

The partition in August 1947 unleashed unprecedented chaos, leading to the migration of millions and to widespread violence. This tragedy was fuelled not only by deep mistrust between communities, but also by a rushed and poorly planned boundary line and a total breakdown of law and order. Horrific massacres erupted, with organised gangs, rumours, and a desire to 'cleanse' new territories of minorities driving much of the bloodshed. Women were especially targeted, facing abductions and assaults.

Gandhi lamented, "The attitude of violence we have secretly harboured comes back on us, and we fly at each other's throats when the question of distribution of power arises... Now that the yoke of subjection is lifted, all the forces of evil have come to the surface." The legacy of Partition still shapes relations and memories across the subcontinent today.

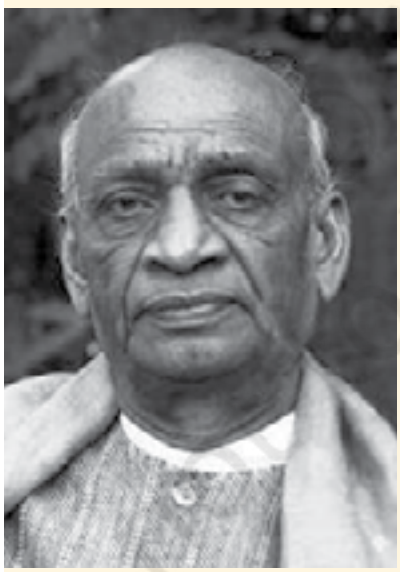


Fig. 2.35. Vallabhbhai Patel

Remember that India had over 560 Princely States that were not directly ruled by the colonial power. When the British announced their departure, these states were given the option to join either India or Pakistan; they were also technically free to remain independent. This was a classic colonial step to destroy the integrity of India. Sardar Patel had always believed that states were an integral part of India, which has evolved over ages. Both before and after Independence, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel used a mix of persuasion and firmness to integrate these states. While most joined peacefully, he used military action as a last resort for the few that refused or delayed merger. Patel's efforts ensured that modern India became a geographically unified nation. Thus, he came to be known as the 'Iron Man of India'.



Fig. 2.36. A special train carrying refugees at Ambala Station during the Partition. Such trains were so crowded that hundreds had to travel on the roof.

With independence on August 15, 1947, India finally awoke to freedom at midnight. Yet the joy was shadowed by sorrow, as Partition brought violence and displacement on an unprecedented scale. A new government, led by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Governor-General Mountbatten, took charge of the new nation and also began the daunting task of building democratic institutions. The Indian Army, still largely structured under British command with Indian officers gradually stepping into leadership, symbolised both continuity and transition in the new republic. Independence thus came as both a triumph of hope and the beginning of an immense responsibility to heal, rebuild, and realise the promise of self-rule for millions.

Historians have debated the causes for Britain's exit from India. The earlier view was that it was mostly thanks to Gandhi, his doctrine of nonviolence, and the Congress's policies. This view has given way to a recognition that multiple other factors were also at work — the popular uprisings, the numerous attempts by revolutionaries, the mutinies in the Royal Indian Air Force

and the Royal Indian Navy. Also, Britain's diminished status after World War II, and the worldwide trend towards decolonisation — the age of empires was over, at least in that form.

THINK ABOUT IT



As we said at the beginning, this chapter can only mention very few of those who fought for India's liberation from colonial rule. Many more names would have deserved a mention. For instance, Acchamma Cherian, Achyutrao Patwardhan, Agarkar, Alluri Sitarama Raju, Anjana Devi Chaudhury, B.S. Moonje, Bhai Parmanand, Bhikaiji Cama, Bhogesvari Phukanani, C.F. Andrews, Dhondo Karve, Ganesh Srikrishna Khaparde, Ganjan Singh Korku, Gopinath Bordoloi, Gopalrao Deshmukh, Govind Giri, Harohalli Srinivasaiah Doreswamy, Jatindra Nath Das, Jayaprakash Narayan, Kanneganti Hanumanthu, Kasturba Gandhi, Kushal Konwar, Kuttimalu Amma, Lakshman Nayak, Lakshmi Sahgal, M.N. Roy (Manabendra Nath), Madan Lal Dhingra, Matangini Hazra, Mirabehn (Madeleine Slade), Pandit Kanshi Ram, Pingali Venkayya, Pritilata Waddedar, Rajendra Prasad, Govind Ballabh Pant, Sridev Suman, Baji Rout, Mahaveer Tyagi, H.N. Bahuguna, Rani Gaidinliu, Sardar Ajit Singh, Seth Govind Das, Shivram Rajguru, Sister Nivedita, Surya Sen, Tara Rani Srivastava, Thiruppur Kumaran, Usha Mehta, Umaji Naik, Umakant Prasad Sinha, Vasudeo Balwant Phadke, V. Ramaswamy Aiyangar, V.V.S. Aiyar.

You need not memorise this list. However, see if you can add any other name to the list. Besides, the support and sacrifice made by the women belonging to the families of the freedom fighters also needs to be acknowledged with gratitude.

From 1857 to 1947 — for 90 long years — generations of Indians fought, suffered and sacrificed themselves for this objective. From revolutionaries to farmers, every act of defiance of the colonial rule contributed to weaving the tapestry of independence. Though history records only a few names (and our chapter so very few of those), India's freedom was a hard-won, collective victory. The question now confronting all was — What sort of nation will free India build?

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Before we move on ...



- India's struggle for independence from colonial rule was long, complex, with ups and downs and immense suffering and sacrifice.
- There were multiple approaches to this objective: Moderates, who aspired to a degree of autonomy for India within the British Empire, and hoped that gradual reforms would suffice; Nationalists, who worked towards independence and worked for mass awakening through the methods of Swaraj, Swadeshi and boycott; revolutionaries, who believed that violent acts would unsettle the colonial powers and lead to an armed uprising; Gandhi's nonviolence and method of satyagraha and mass mobilisation; and a few more.
- The movement unified the subcontinent, but could not resolve the political Hindu-Muslim question, as some Muslim leaders (not all of them) insisted on separateness between the two religious groups.
- The journey to freedom left a complex legacy of both triumph and tragedy. While 1947 brought the joy of independence, the Partition, with its widespread violence and displacement, left a deep scar.

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Questions and activities

The following are suggested activities to choose from.

- **True or False.** Find out whether the following statements are true or false:
  1. Right from its inception, the Indian National Congress called for India's independence.
  2. Bal Gangadhar Tilak turned a Shivaji festival into a popular event.
  3. The Ghadar Movement of 1914–15 aimed to start a mutiny within the British Indian Army while British troops were busy with World War I.

4. Vallabhbhai Patel earned the title 'Sardar' for his leadership during the Satyagraha agitation in Gujarat.
5. The Kakori train robbery of 1925 was carried out to fund the activities of the Hindustan Republican Association.
6. The 'Do or Die' call was given by Mahatma Gandhi during the Non-Cooperation Movement in 1920.
7. B.R. Ambedkar and Gandhi were in total agreement regarding the issue of 'separate electorates' for Dalits.
8. Sir Stafford Cripps was sent to India in 1942 because Winston Churchill supported immediate independence for India.
9. Subhas Chandra Bose raised an army during his stay in Germany.
10. The Radcliffe Line, which divided India and Pakistan, was announced a few weeks before Independence Day.

- **Who Am I?** Can you identify these figures?
  1. Known as the 'Lion of Punjab', I was severely injured during a brutal lathi charge while protesting against the Simon Commission.
  2. I famously declared, 'Swaraj is my birthright, and I shall have it!' I used the *Kesari* newspaper and festivals like Ganesh Chaturthi to unite people against British rule.
  3. I was a leader of the Nationalist faction of the Congress. In the daily *Bande Mataram*, I wrote on the need for India to attain absolute autonomy.
  4. I earned my nickname 'Bagha' after wrestling a tiger with my bare hands. I was a revolutionary leader who died in a gunfight at while waiting for a shipment of German arms to start an uprising.
  5. I organised the daring attempt to throw a bomb at the Viceroy in 1912. I later escaped to Japan, where I spent years working to organise a movement from there.

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6. I was martyred at a young age after an attempt on the life of a British judge.
7. I was martyred at a young age after throwing non-lethal bombs in Delhi's Central Legislative Assembly.
8. I turned the freedom struggle into a mass movement through the principles of ahimsa and satyagraha, leading campaigns such as the Dandi March.
9. I sought help from the Axis powers during World War II to organise the Indian National Army.
10. A British lawyer, I was given just five weeks to draw the boundary line that would partition the Indian subcontinent into two separate nations.

- What kinds of sacrifices are needed to achieve freedom? Think about the lives of Indian soldiers during wars, families suffering during famines, leaders and ordinary people who were arrested, and countless others who lost their homes and safety while participating in protests. If you were living during India's freedom struggle, would you have chosen to participate in it? What comforts, opportunities, or personal goals might you have been willing to give up for a cause you strongly believed in?
- What values does Tilak's statement, "Swaraj is my birthright and I shall have it," reflect? Can these values be meaningful for young people today?
- How did peasants, workers, tribals, and students contribute to the national movement in ways different from political leaders?
- Discuss in class this extract from Nehru's speech on 15 August 1947:

  "Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially. At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom. A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance…"

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What is meant by “redeem our pledge”? How would you define the ‘soul of a nation’?

- Imagine you are a freedom fighter.
  a) Explain the method you support to achieve freedom.
  b) Discuss with your classmates any other method they would support. Be respectful in your debate.
  c) What does this debate teach us about unity and disagreement?
- Write a news report based on an important event in the Freedom Movement (Swadeshi, boycott, satyagraha, Non-Cooperation, Quit India, or Partition).
  a) Write a headline.
  b) Include one interview or public reaction.
  c) Explain why this event was important.
- Imagine you are part of a team creating a small museum exhibition on India’s freedom struggle for students of your age.
  a) Choose a title for your exhibit.
  b) Select three objects (for example: a letter, a photograph, a newspaper, a prison diary — you can add to these examples) and explain what each object represents.
  c) Write a short note on what visitors should learn or feel after seeing this exhibit.
- As a class activity, write and stage a small play or skit based on the Freedom Movement.
- India achieved freedom after great sacrifice. What responsibilities do citizens have today to protect and strengthen this freedom? Write 5 to 10 lines.

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Chapter 4

Early Humans and Beginning of Civilisation



The Big Questions

1. *How did humans live on Earth before the beginning of civilisation?*
2. *How did humans communicate before writing was invented?*
3. *How is archaeology helpful in understanding our past?*
4. *How did early civilisations interact with each other?*

In previous grades, we have studied the history of various kingdoms and empires, and also learned about the Sindhu–Sarasvatī civilisation. However, the history of humanity goes back much further. In this chapter, we will explore who our earliest ancestors were, when and where they evolved, what kinds of food they ate, how they lived, and how they became what we are today.

The period before the development of writing is understood mainly through archaeological evidence, as written languages emerged at different times in different parts of the world.

One of the earliest known writing systems is associated with the Sindhu–Sarasvatī, also known as the Indus Valley Civilisation or the Harappan Civilisation. Writings and engravings found on objects such as seals and pottery, indicate that the Harappans used a pictographic script for writing. However, it has not yet been deciphered. As a result, we still do not understand the Harappan script, also referred to as *Sindhu lipi.*

Other early writing systems include the cuneiform script of the Sumerians in Mesopotamia and the hieroglyphic script of ancient Egypt, both of which flourished around the same time as the Harappan Civilisation. Unlike the Harappan script, these scripts have been deciphered and mark the beginning of the historical period, about 5000 years ago. You will learn more about them later in the chapter.

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LET'S EXPLORE



Fig. 4.1: Harappan script on a seal

You have studied about the Harappan script in your previous grades. Observe this seal carefully and discuss why the script has not yet been deciphered. Also, find out what efforts have been made to decipher it. You can use your textbook, consult your teacher, or refer to online sources.

From about 400 BCE, a script known as *Brahmi* was used in parts of southern India and in the Ganga Valley (northern India). It was later formalised by the Emperor Aśhoka (3rd century BCE) and contemporary Iron Age people all over southern India. You will learn more about the journey of scripts in higher grades.



Fig. 4.2. Brahmi inscription on a railing around the stupa at Sanchi, Madhya Pradesh

The Invention of Writing: Before and After

	Before	After
Human History	More than 99 per cent of human history falls under this period (from about 3 million years ago to 5000 years ago).	Less than 1 per cent of human history falls under this period, the last 5000 years, including the present.
Main Source for Reconstruction	Tools, implements, and other material objects made by humans (artefacts) are the major sources for reconstructing people's ways of living.	Both material remains and written documents are sources for reconstructing the lives of people and society.
Lives of the People	It is generally difficult to understand the thoughts and ideas of people.	Literature (written documents) provides information about names; events; and social, political, and cultural life.
Measurement of Time	Measurement of time is approximate, that is, dating events and cultures is only approximate.	Dating of cultures and events becomes relatively accurate because written documents mention specific dates of events such as coronation, wars, etc.

Fig. 4.3

Why Should We Study Early Human History?

The study of early human history helps us understand the long process of humankind's biological and cultural evolution in relation to changes in climate and the environment.

Biological evolution refers to the gradual physical and genetic changes through which our early ancestors, known as *australopithecines* (*australis* means southern and *pithecus* is primates), evolved into modern human beings, called *Homo sapiens*.

Cultural evolution explains how humans adapted to their surroundings during the Quaternary Period (the last 26 lakh years, including the present). To survive the changing climatic and

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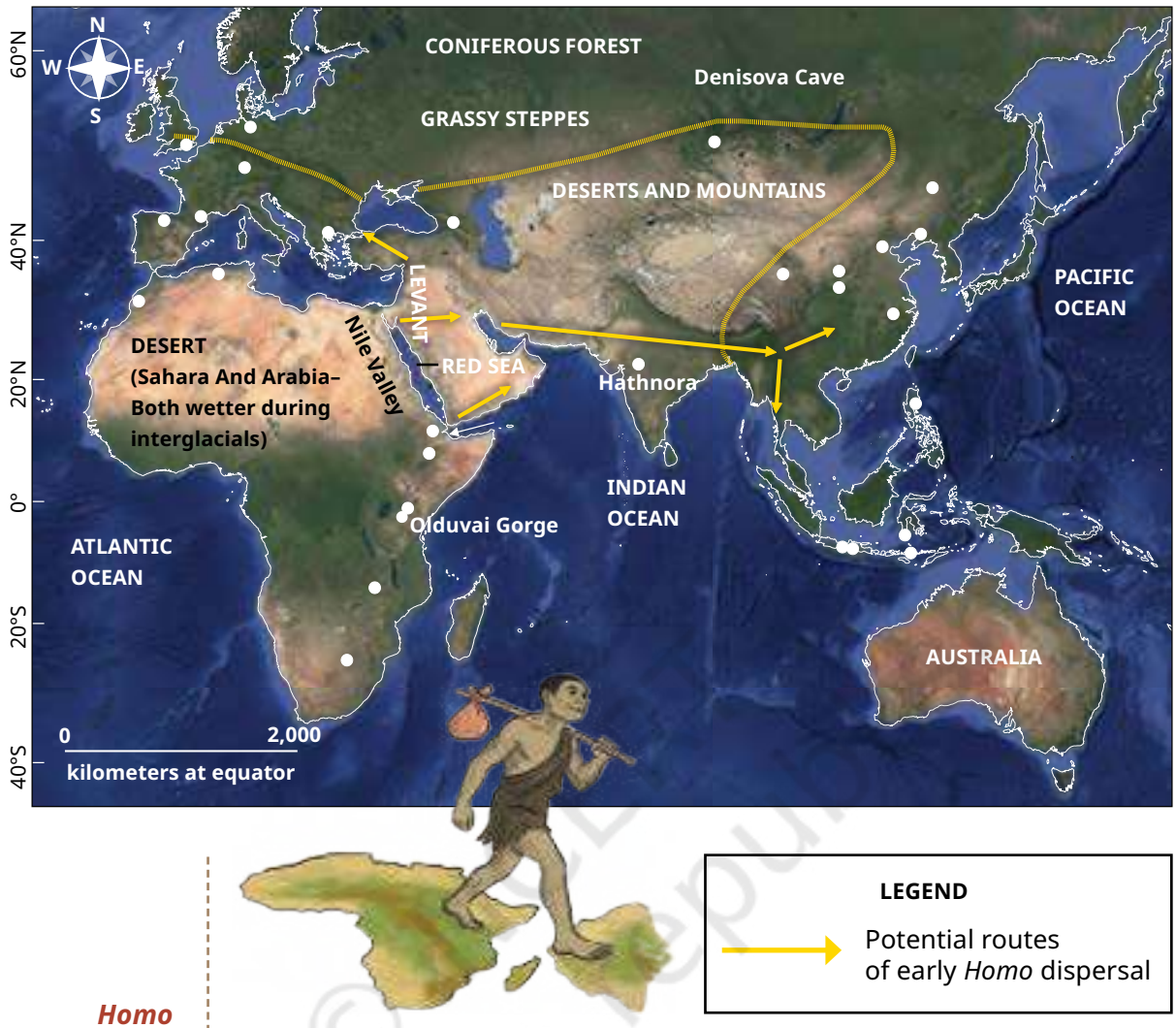


Fig. 4.4. Early dispersal of Homo erectus out of Africa (around 2 million years ago)

Homo erectus: *Homo erectus* refers to an upright or bipedal human ancestor.

Hominin: Hominins are a group that includes modern humans and our early human-like ancestors.

environmental conditions, humans developed tools, techniques, and other forms of technology to make use of natural resources.

Over time, human ways of life changed from hunting and gathering to agriculture and food production. The ability to produce surplus food and material goods laid the foundation for the emergence of civilisation.

It is generally agreed that our earliest ancestors evolved and lived in Africa and began to move out of the continent around 2 million years ago. ***Homo erectus,*** an early human ancestor with stone tools, such as hand axes and cleavers, was the first **hominin** to exit Africa. These tools have been found in other parts of Asia and Europe, indicating their origin in Africa and their dispersion beyond the continent between 2 and 0.5 million years ago. Another major wave of movement out of Africa took place around 125,000 years ago. This

exit was associated with the early *Homo sapiens*, ourselves (modern humans), who also evolved in Africa around 300,000 years ago and are now spread all over the earth.

THINK ABOUT IT

Why do you think early humans left Africa to migrate to other regions?



How do we know about our ancestors?

Archaeologists explore early human sites to uncover clues such as tools, bones, and other objects left behind by our early ancestors. Each clue helps them build a picture of how people lived long ago.

To better understand these clues, archaeologists also experiment by making and using similar tools. This helps them learn how early humans created, used, and depended on these objects in their daily lives.



Fig. 4.5. An archaeological excavation in process

Who Were Our Human Ancestors?

The earliest human settlements were found in Africa, Asia, and Europe, and together they constitute what we today call the '**Old World**'. Different kinds of human ancestors co-existed at this time (see Fig. 4.6), and it was around 3.3 million years ago, that one of these ancestors made the earliest stone tools. This marked the beginning of the so-called 'human behaviour', as opposed to the behaviour of animals, who do not possess the cognitive ability to make such tools. Thus, human beings came to be known as 'hominins', or tool makers. The tools they created are sometimes called extra-corporal limbs because they functioned as extensions of the human body, helping people perform tasks they could not accomplish with their hands alone. Humans made these tools, used them, and discarded them when they wore out. Over time, these discarded tools got

Old World: Geographical area of the oldest human settlements of the earliest palaeolithic period.

Fossil: The preserved remains, traces, or impressions of plants, animals, or humans from the distant past. Fossils form when these remains get buried under layers of earth and slowly turn into stone over thousands or millions of years.

buried in the upper layers of the earth and were later discovered by archaeologists. In the same way, the remains of some of our early ancestors were buried deep underground, and over thousands or even millions of years, turned into **fossils**. The discovery of such tools and fossils are major sources of evidence that helps archaeologists reconstruct human history and understand how our ancestors lived. It is through such findings that we know that the *Homo habilis* (handy man) lived in Africa, especially in the Olduvai Gorge in Tanzania and Kenya. As noted earlier, their successors *Homo erectus*, the inventors of handaxes and cleavers, were among the first to migrate out of Africa and gradually spread into Europe and Asia. While all human ancestors were tool makers, it was the *Homo sapiens* that developed complex technologies.

a. *Homo habilis* lived in Olduvai Gorge, Tanzania and Kenya, 2-6 million years ago; made chopper stone tools





b. *Homo erectus* lived in the Eastern African Rift Valley 2 million years ago; made handaxes and cleavers.

c. *Homo neanderthalensis* lived in Europe and Southwest Asia till about 40000 years ago; made Middle Palaeolithic flake tools.





d. Living humans, or the *Homo sapiens*, are the only human species living today on earth.

Fig. 4.6. Skulls of early humans and modern humans showing the evolutionary sequence from Homo habilis to Homo sapiens

LET'S EXPLORE

Let us observe the images given above and answer the following questions.

→ Do you notice any changes in the shape or features of the skulls across different ancestors?

→ Can you observe a gradual straightening of the face?

Early human history is divided into distinct periods based on technological progress, such as the development and use of tools, the beginning of agriculture, and changes in human lifestyle and settlement patterns. We will explore these stages in this chapter.

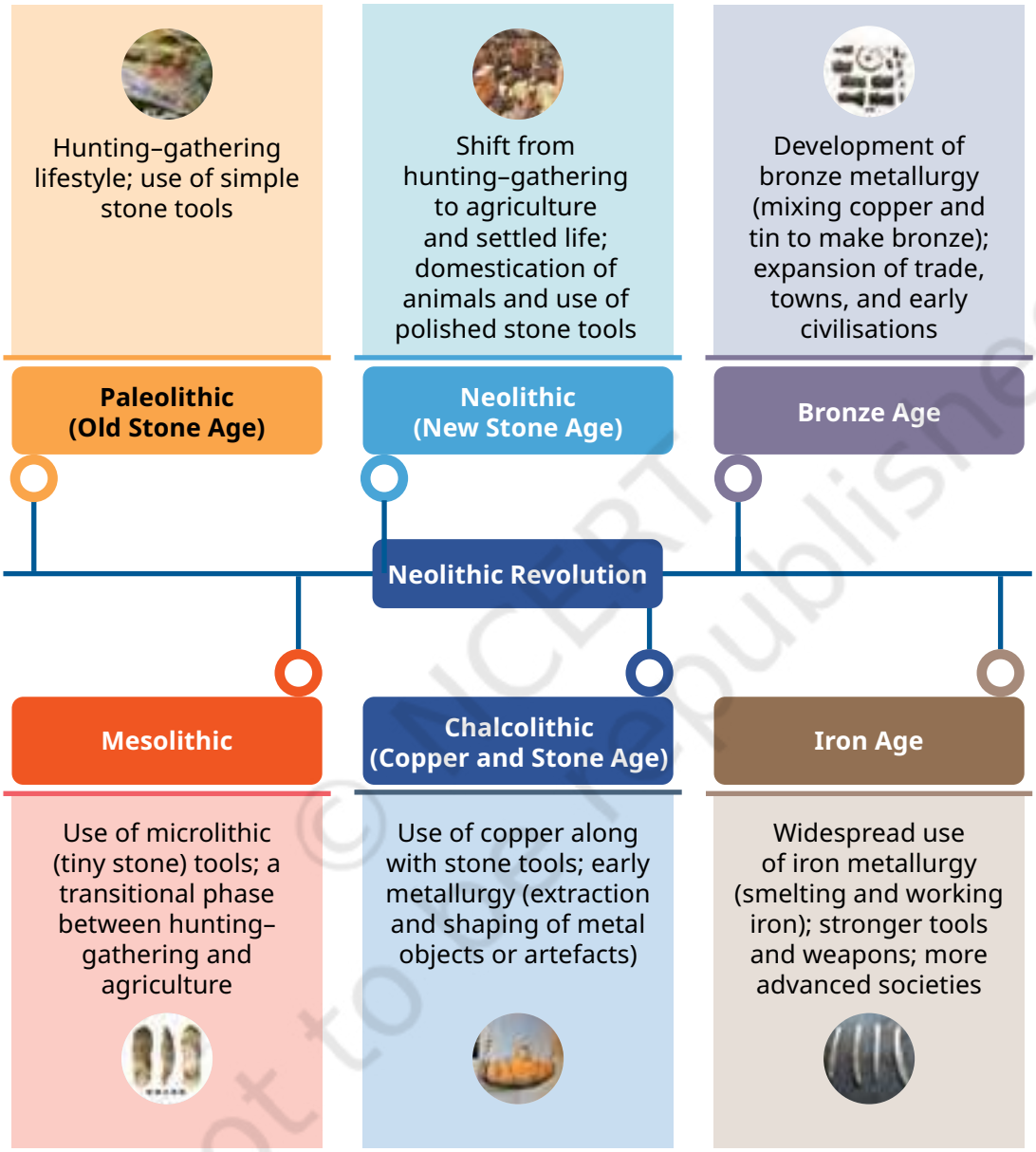


Fig. 4.7. Periods in Early Human History

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THINK ABOUT IT

Why do you think the shift to farming during the Neolithic period is called a **revolution** rather than a simple change? Discuss with your classmates.

Palaeolithic Hunter–Gatherers

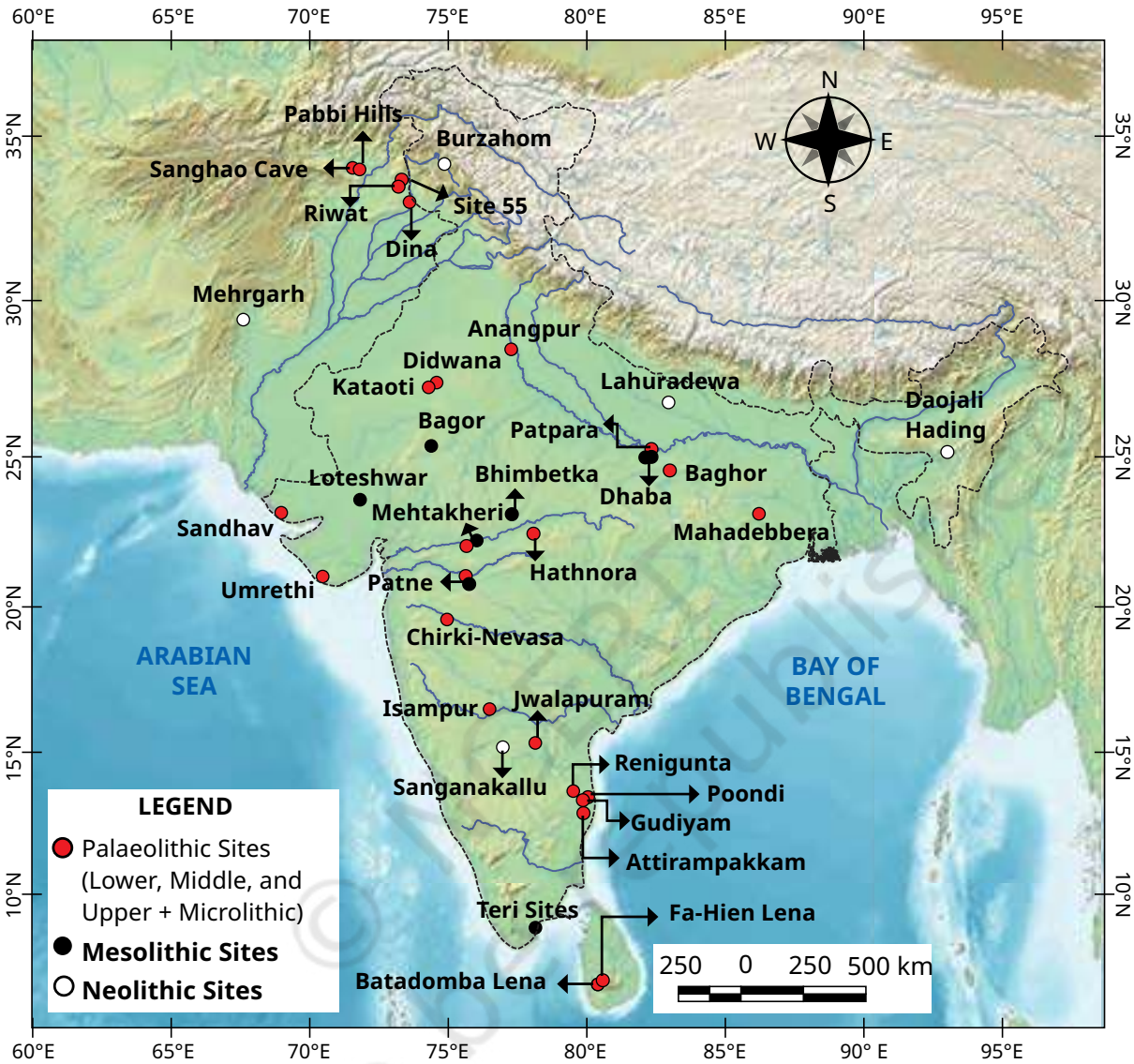


Fig. 4.8. Major early human sites in the Indian subcontinent

The Stone Age is broadly divided into three stages—Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, and Neolithic. The word *palaeo* means 'old', and *lithic* means 'stone', so the Palaeolithic period is also known as the Old Stone Age.

In the Indian subcontinent, the oldest human settlement dates back to about 2 million years ago. Attirampakkam in Tamil Nadu is dated to about 1.5–1.7 million years ago, and Isampur in Karnataka is dated to 1.2 million years ago. At these sites, animal fossils and large cutting tools, including handaxes and cleavers, and other tools, such as stone scrapers and choppers made of quartzite and limestone,

respectively, have been found. These tools were used to chop animal meat, dig out tubers, scrape animal skin, and cleave animal bones to extract protein-rich marrow.



Fig. 4.9. Cleavers and handaxe dating to about 1–5 million years in India

Further progress in hunting and gathering was reflected in the making of smaller stone tools. The main types of stone tools included scrapers, borers, and points. These indicate improved efficiency in hunting by developing projectiles which were tipped with sharp points.



Fig. 4.10. Middle Palaeolithic tools

Later, humans invented the bow and arrow, as well as parallel-sided blade and microblade tools made from rocks with glassy texture (very sharp when freshly made). They also hunted small game animals. Moreover, they developed symbolic communication, decorated the walls of caves and rock shelters with paintings, and used pigments to decorate their bodies. In addition, they were the first to produce beads of stone, bone, and shell.





Fig. 4.11a. and Fig. 4.11b. Microlithic tools and bone points

A distinctive type of stone tool, known as a burin or engraver, was also used to engrave symbolic features on bones and shells (such as ostrich eggs). The microblades were fixed in a handle for ease of use. These developments are associated with our immediate ancestors, *Homo sapiens*, who gradually spread all over the world, including Australia and the Americas, between 50000 and 12000 years ago.

Mesolithic Hunter–Gatherers



Fig. 4.12. Cave art from Bhimbetka, Madhya Pradesh

Around 12000 years ago, Earth's climate became warmer, leading to significant changes in the environment. Forests and grasslands expanded into areas that were previously covered by ice sheets. The new landscapes offered a wider variety of resources, including small game animals, fish, and edible wild grains. Thus, the world witnessed the first-ever population explosion in human history. A variety of microlithic tools enabled the people to gather aquatic food—both marine and freshwater—and fishing was the mainstay of their subsistence economy. Art activity also flourished during this time, and new habitats such as caves and rock shelters were frequently occupied. The World Heritage Site of Bhimbetka in Madhya Pradesh contains hundreds of painted rock shelters with Mesolithic and earlier human occupation.

The Neolithic Revolution

As hunter–gatherers gained adequate familiarity with seasons and different types of food resources, there was a gradual transition to a food-producing way of life, also known as the Neolithic revolution. The hallmark of this revolution was the domestication of select animals and plants, bringing them under human control, and the development of new breeds through cultivation and husbandry. While hunter–gatherers produced tools for procuring food, Neolithic farmers made tools for food production and processing (Fig. 4.13) and developed a variety of earthenware pottery in various shapes and sizes. They utilised several raw materials and resources and established the first village settlements, laying the foundations for the urban revolution.



Fig. 4.13. Neolithic stone tools

The chart (Fig. 4.14) illustrates the gradual shift from hunting and gathering to agricultural ways of life across different regions of the world. It also highlights that this transition did not occur at the same time everywhere, but took place at different periods in different areas.

THINK ABOUT IT

Observe the chart (Fig. 4.14) and identify the animals that were domesticated. Also try and identify the types of human habitats and objects that were used. Are any of these still used in present times?



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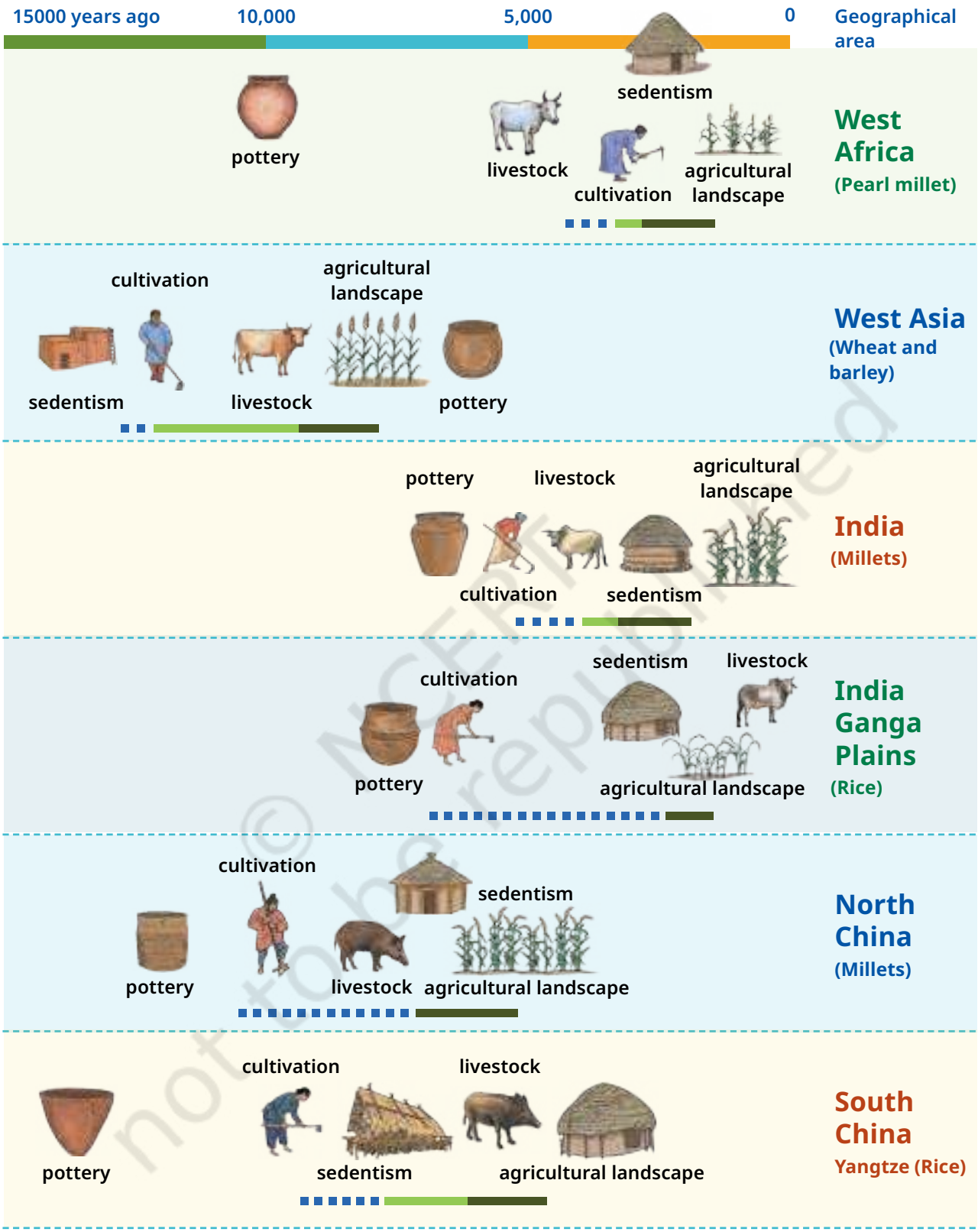


Fig. 4.14. Transition to the agricultural way of life in different parts of the world

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Neolithic Period in Indian Subcontinent

In the Indian subcontinent, we find regional variation in the initiation of agricultural ways of life. In the northwest, the site of Mehrgarh on the Bolan River (in present-day Pakistan) is the oldest Neolithic site. It was also the earliest agricultural village, dating back to about 7000 BCE. Its people built handmade sun-dried brick houses and granaries, buried their dead in graves, and made a variety of ornaments from semi-precious stones, such as lapis lazuli, carnelian, and shells. They cultivated wheat and barley, and raised sheep, goats, and Indian cattle—the zebu humped bull in particular. They were also the first to make copper objects, thus entering the metal age and becoming popularly known as the Chalcolithic people by about 4000 BCE. This laid the basis for the Bronze Age Sindhu–Sarasvatī civilisation around 3500 BCE.



Fig. 4.15. Sanganakallu Neolithic site on top of a granite hill, dating 2000 BCE



Fig. 4.16. Mehrgarh on the Bolan river; layout and house structures

By 2500 BCE, most of the Indian subcontinent was occupied by Neolithic agricultural communities. Cattle, sheep, and goat herding, along with the cultivation of cereals, millets and pulses characterised the Neolithic way of life, sometimes interacting with the contemporary chalcolithic cultures in some parts of the country.

Sindhu–Sarasvatī Civilisation

In the previous section, you have seen how the Neolithic way of life that emerged around 7000 BCE at Mehrgarh in the foothills of Baluchistan, spread in the middle and upper Indus valley and further east. Some of these settlements mastered the extraction of copper from its ores around 4000 BCE, and became the earliest Chalcolithic sites in the subcontinent marking the beginning of the Bronze Age.

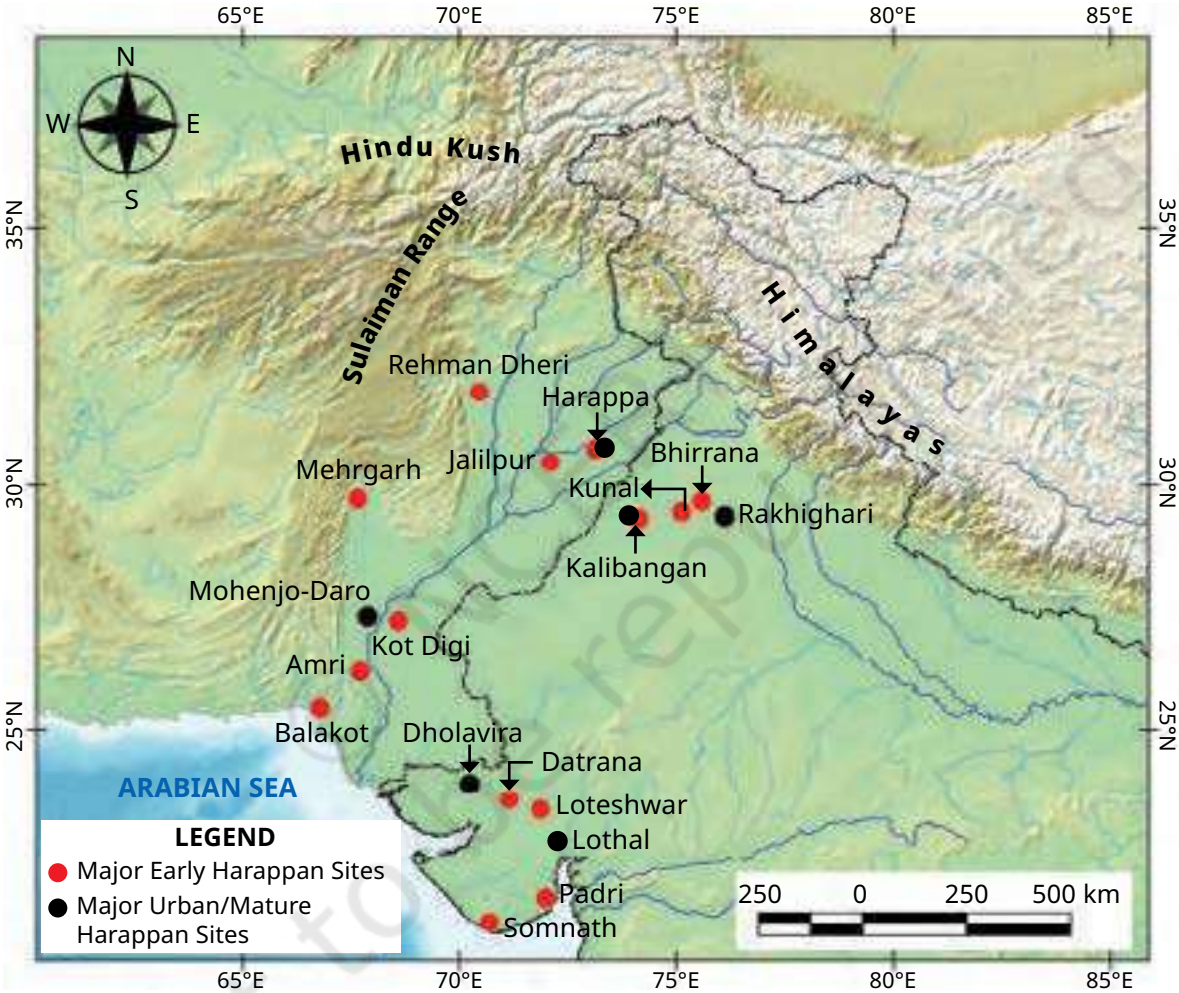


Fig. 4.17. Map showing some major early and mature Harappan sites

In this section, we will look at the early stages that led to the emergence of the civilisation by 2600 BCE.

Introduction of copper tools in the fertile alluvial plains of the Indus and the Ghaggar-Sarasvatī basins enhanced productivity, leading to increased prosperity in these communities. This is also a period of large-scale production of pottery showing diverse regional styles. The regional styles in pottery and craft production

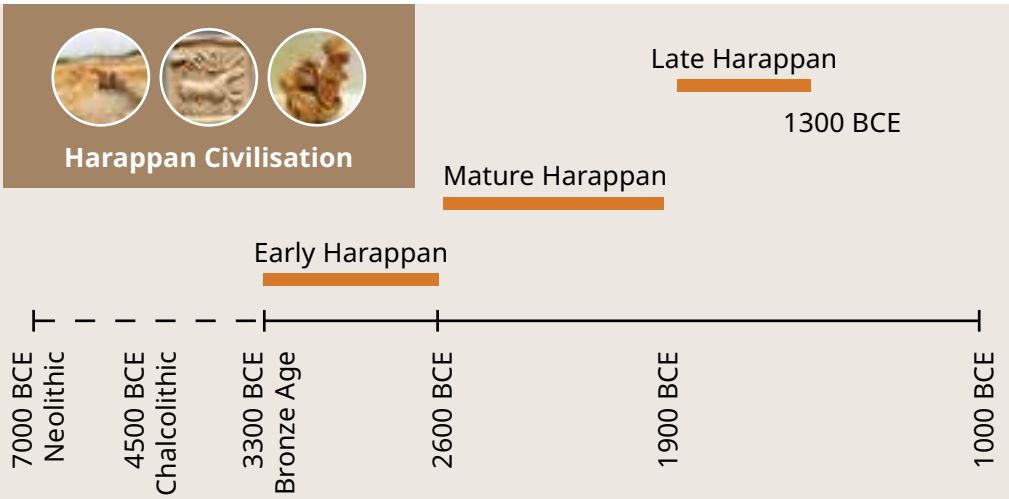


Fig. 4.18. Timeline showing Harappan Civilisation

became more evident in the early Chalcolithic sites of Baluchistan and the Indus and Ghaggar-Sarasvatī basins from 4000 BCE onwards. Some radio-carbon dates suggest that at some sites in the dried river belt of Sarasvati, such as at Bhirrana and Kunal, the Pre-Harappan phase began between 7000 and 5500 BCE. Many of these regional styles evolved over time and became standard features of the Sindhu–Sarasvatī civilisation by about 2500 BCE. Since these sites show a cultural continuity, this stage is generally described as Early Harappan. We see continuity in pottery traditions, semi-precious stone beads, shell bangles, terracotta objects, and copper working. Some other developments, such as building a perimeter wall around the settlement, the use of seals, and even the Harappan writings/script, probably had their beginnings in the Early Harappan stage.

The Harappans were not merely agriculturists; they also practised a number of arts and crafts, and pottery was one of the major craft products that boosted their economy. Pottery remains from different regions show unique styles in the shapes of vessels and their painted designs. Some other crafts that show gradual development include copper work, shell work, and the production of semi-precious stone beads. Evidence of Early Harappan bead production is found from Harappa in Pakistan as well as from Kunal in Haryana and Datrana in Gujarat.

Besides these, the extensive use of graffiti on pottery and a few seals with geometric and simple animal motifs reported from early Harappan sites like Harappa, Rehman Dheri, and Kunal could be seen as forerunners to the script and inscribed seals of the

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Sindhu–Sarasvatī civilisation. It was these technological advancements and economic integration during the Early Harappan period that led to the emergence of the urban centres of the Harappan civilisation.

DON'T MISS OUT

A tradition nearly 5,000 years old

The Early Harappans ploughed fields (Fig. 4.19) at Kalibangan showing horizontal and vertical furrows indicating double crop cultivation, like the seasonal Rabi and Kharif cultivation that is practised even today.



Fig. 4.19. Ploughed field, Kalibangan

THINK ABOUT IT



Fig. 4.20. Stone weights

Harappans had their own standard systems of weight and measurement. This is evident from the meticulously planned settlements and efficient interregional trade practices of the Harappans. They followed a binary multiple (1, 2, 4, 8, 16, etc.) system for weighing smaller units and used multiples of ten for larger denominations. Such cubical stone weights have been reported from several sites. Can you imagine how long-distance trade would have been affected had the Harappans not followed a standard system of weights?

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Bronze Age Civilisations Outside India

In Grade 6, you studied the major features of the Harappan/ Sindhu–Sarasvatī civilisation, such as the well-planned urban cities, water management and drainage systems, standard weights and measures, stone beads, inscribed seals, and the script. In this section, we will explore the main features of other Bronze Age civilisations that were contemporary with the Harappans. These three major civilisations were the Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and the Chinese civilisations.

It is important to note that four early world civilisations emerged in river plains—the Harappan civilisation along the Sindhu and Sarasvatī rivers, the Mesopotamian civilisation in the region around the Euphrates and Tigris rivers in West Asia, the Egyptian civilisation along the Nile River, and the Chinese civilisation in the Huang He basin in northern China. Geographically, Mesopotamia and the Indus and Ghaggar-Sarasvatī valleys are closer to each other. This proximity facilitated strong contacts and trade between the Mesopotamian and Harappan civilisations. The Egyptian and the Chinese civilisations, on the other hand, have little tangible evidence of their direct contact with the Sindhu–Sarasvatī civilisation.

THINK ABOUT IT

Why were rivers important in the growth of early civilisations?



Mesopotamian Civilisation

Although the four civilisations were contemporaneous, the earliest city-based civilisation emerged in Mesopotamia. Mesopotamia, meaning the "land in between," is the Greek name for the land drained by the Euphrates and Tigris rivers in West Asia (Fig. 4.21). In modern times, this region includes mainly Iraq and Kuwait, with some parts of Turkey and southwestern Iran. The crescent-shaped foothills of the Zagros and Taurus, stretching from the Mediterranean in the west to the Persian Gulf in the east, are known as the 'fertile crescent', due to their high agricultural potential.

While farming began in this region 12000 years before present, copper tools arrived here around 4500 BCE. The arrival of copper helped improve agriculture and other economic activities, such as craft production and trade. This eventually contributed to the broader dissemination of farming across the vast plains of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers.

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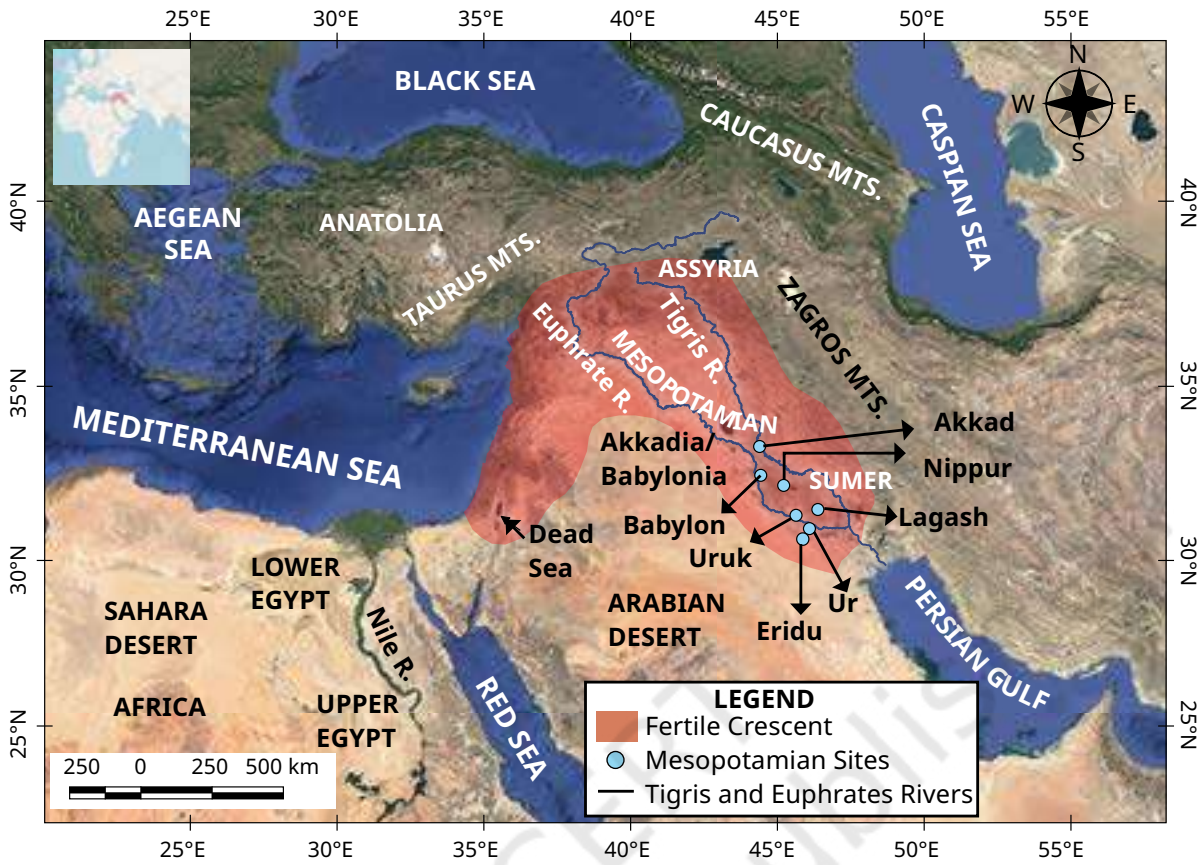


Fig. 4.21. The Fertile Crescent and the extent of the Mesopotamian civilisation

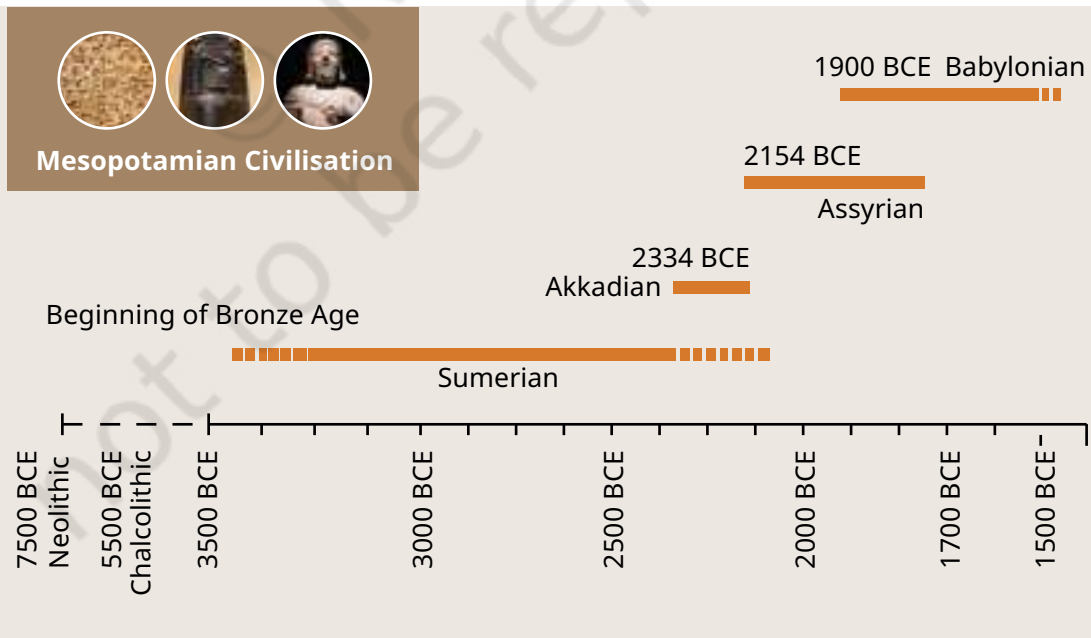


Fig. 4.22. Timeline showing the Mesopotamian civilisation

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Over the next 2000 years, some large cities became **'city-states'** by developing governing systems. Among these, the four major city-based civilisations that flourished from 3500 BCE onwards in Mesopotamia are the Sumerian, Akkadian, Assyrian, and Babylonian (Fig. 4.22).

City-State: A sovereign state centred around a city that rules the surrounding territories.

LET'S EXPLORE

Can you find out which countries constitute West Asia in present times?



a. *The Sumerians*

The Sumerian civilisation was the earliest to evolve into a city-based civilisation at Ur and several other cities in Sumer (present-day southern Iraq) in southern Mesopotamia. The Sumerians were the first to build a system of dams and canals for irrigation, and were also the first to use mud bricks and burnt bricks in the construction of houses, defensive walls, and other structures.

Ziggurat: A tower-like stepped pyramid-shaped temple with several floors above which the main temple was located. The top of the ziggurat was a holy place, and the area around the ziggurat contained palaces and royal storehouses. The surrounding walls had only one entrance as the ziggurat also served as the city's treasury.



Fig. 4.23

The Sumerians worshipped multiple gods, whom they believed had power over natural forces such as floods and winds, and built temples for each of them. Temples played an important role in people's lives, and each city built a grand temple called a ziggurat for its chief god, and the city grew around this main temple (Fig. 4.23). All economic activities, such as agriculture, trade, and the transport of goods, were tied to the temple authority. Also, entry to the sacred temple was restricted to high priests and priestesses, who were probably a part of the ruling class, reflecting a clear division of social hierarchy that existed in the Mesopotamian society.

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LET'S EXPLORE



Do you find any similarities between the temples in India and those of the Sumerian civilisation as centres of socio-cultural and economic activity?



Fig. 4.24. Scenes from Sumerian life on a decorated box. Note the wheeled cart and the elaborate drapery and ornaments worn by the people.

Cuneiform: One of the earliest systems of writing that was developed by the Sumerians. It was written by pressing a wedge-shaped stylus into soft clay tablets. The word cuneiform comes from the Latin word *cuneus*, meaning 'wedge', referring to the wedge-shaped marks used in the script.

The cities were large settlements where kings lived in grand palaces, and the people lived in small brick houses. The lives of people mostly centred around farming, and in addition, several crafts, such as metalworking, pottery, and textiles, were practised. Other professionals like merchants and traders also existed.

DON'T MISS OUT



While the Sumerians were developing canal irrigation, the Early Harappans in the foothills of Baluchistan and neighbouring regions were also building check dams known as 'gabarbands' across small streams to enhance irrigation. A much evolved form of these water management skills of the Harappans can be seen in the elaborate water harvesting system built at Dholavira in Kachchh. Here, water from the two nearby streams was diverted by building dams and canals into a series of deep tanks to conserve it within the site boundary. These interconnected tanks were built from stone and mud-bricks and some of the tanks were cut deeper into the bedrock. Similarly, the huge dockyard at Lothal, built entirely of burnt bricks, is another marvel of the Harappan water management and architectural skills.

The Beginning of Writing

The Sumerians were the first to start writing around 3200 BCE, and their writing system is known as cuneiform due to the wedge-shaped

tool used by the scribes. Cuneiform consists of hundreds of marks pressed onto the damp surface of clay tablets using sharp wedge-shaped reeds (Fig. 4.25). Its scribes enjoyed a high status in the society, similar to the priests and priestesses, and by 3000 BCE, cuneiform was widely used all over Mesopotamia by different city-states, even though they spoke different languages.

The cuneiform tablets give us a glimpse into the lives and beliefs of the Mesopotamians—their great myths and epics, their hymns, the "law codes," and educational treatises. Tablets were also used for keeping a record of farming and craft activities, especially of potters, seal cutters, shipbuilders, carpenters, farm workers, etc.



Fig. 4.25. Cuneiform was used to write several languages of Mesopotamia, but later went out of use by the end of first millennium BCE.

DON'T MISS OUT

- The Sumerians invented the wheeled cart and sailboat.
- They used calculations for building structures and measuring agricultural fields.
- Their number system was based on the number 60, and the concepts of the 60-minute hour, 60-second minute, and the 360-degree circle was invented by the Sumerians.



LET US RECALL

The cuneiform writing system was contemporary to the Harappan script, but while cuneiform has been deciphered, the Harappan script has not yet been deciphered. Do you think our understanding of a civilisation changes when its script is deciphered compared to when it is not?



b. The Akkadians

The power of the Sumerians was overshadowed in 2334 BCE by the emergence of a new city-state centred on the city of Akkad, which lay further north in Sumer, in central Mesopotamia. The people of this region spoke Akkadian, a language different from Sumerian. However, both Akkadians and Sumerians used the same cuneiform script for writing. Akkadian records document the consolidation of

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power over different regions of Mesopotamia and the establishment of the world's first dynastic empire. This was also a period which saw the evolution of creative literature.

LET'S EXPLORE



The Epic of Gilgamesh, written during the Mesopotamian civilisation, is one of the earliest stories written. Try and find out more such stories and share them in class.

The cuneiform tablets of one of the most important Akkadian kings, Sargon, talk about Mesopotamian trade with the eastern territories of Dilmun, Magan and Meluhha. Among these, Meluhha is generally identified with the Sindhu–Sarasvatī civilisation, and Dilmun and Magan are today's Bahrain and Oman peninsula of the Persian Gulf (Fig. 4.26). With the Harappans, they traded semiprecious stone beads, ivory, timber, gold dust, and probably copper.

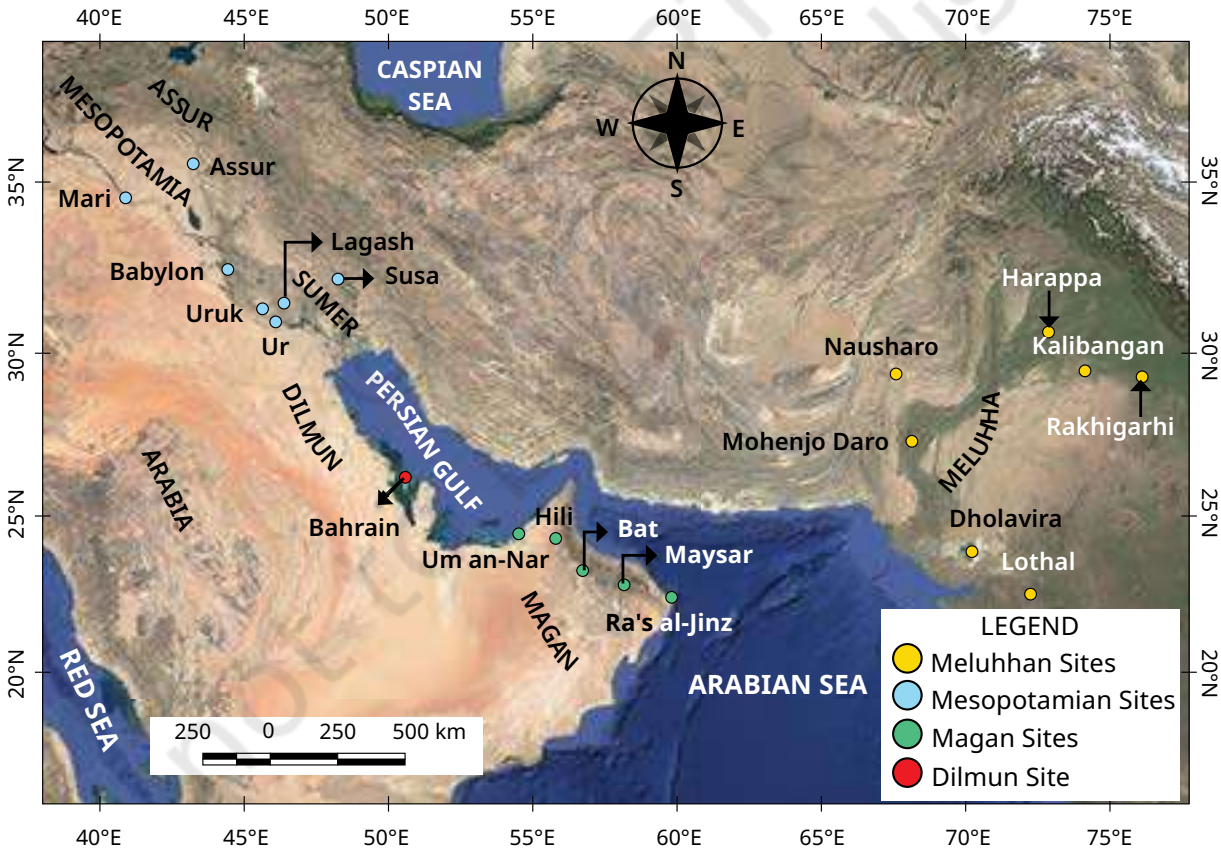


Fig. 4.26. Harappan contact with the Mesopotamian cities and contemporary Chalcolithic sites of Magan (today's Oman) and Dilmun (today's Bahrain)

c. *The Assyrians*

The Akkadian empire lost its supremacy around 2154 BCE to a new city-state, Assur, in northern Mesopotamia. The Assyrian civilisation that supplanted the Akkadians lasted till early 1700 BCE. In a short period, the Assyrian dominance spread across Mesopotamia and spread over the neighbouring regions in the west and south.

d. *The Babylonians*

While the Assyrians were dominant in the north, a new city-state, Babylonia, gained dominance in central Mesopotamia from 1900 BCE onwards. Babylonia's glory started with the ascendance of Hammurabi in 1792 BCE, who conquered the neighbouring regions and expanded the small city-state into a large empire. The most significant contribution of Hammurabi was the compilation of rules and regulations for civil and social conduct known as the *Code of Hammurabi* throughout his empire. It served as a foundational model for many future legal systems.

By the end of 1400 BCE, the Babylonians had lost their earlier prominence due to repeated attacks by the **Hittites** and other rising powers, who had gained an advantage by mastering new technologies and adopting more efficient ways of using natural resources. This, along with increasing environmental degradation, pressure on agricultural lands, and internal political and economic problems, gradually weakened Babylonian control. As a result, they were unable to maintain their dominance, and new powers emerged in West Asia.



Fig. 4.27. Top part of a stone stele showing King Hammurabi receiving the law from Shamash, the Babylonian god of justice. Note the law codes inscribed in cuneiform below the relief.

Hittites: The Hittites were Indo-European people who established a powerful empire in Anatolia (modern-day Turkey) around the second millennium BCE.

Egyptian Civilisation

Egyptian civilisation is one of the earliest civilisations of the world, known for its rich historical records and lasting influence on other civilisations. It is interesting to note that Egypt was known to the Greeks and Romans, and Greek writers like Herodotus visited and wrote about Egypt as early as the 5th century BCE. A 19th century collection of works titled *de L'Egypte* also provides fascinating details about its history.

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Papyrus: Was made by cutting the inner trunk of the papyrus plant into strips, criss-crossing, pressing, drying, and polishing them into sheets. The papyrus was named after its discoverers; for example, the Papyrus Ebers, named after its discoverer, lists more than 700 cures and spells of Egyptian medicine.

Egyptian history is also reconstructed from **papyrus** or old paper records. These documents preserve both stories and practical details, offering a window into how Egyptians understood the world.

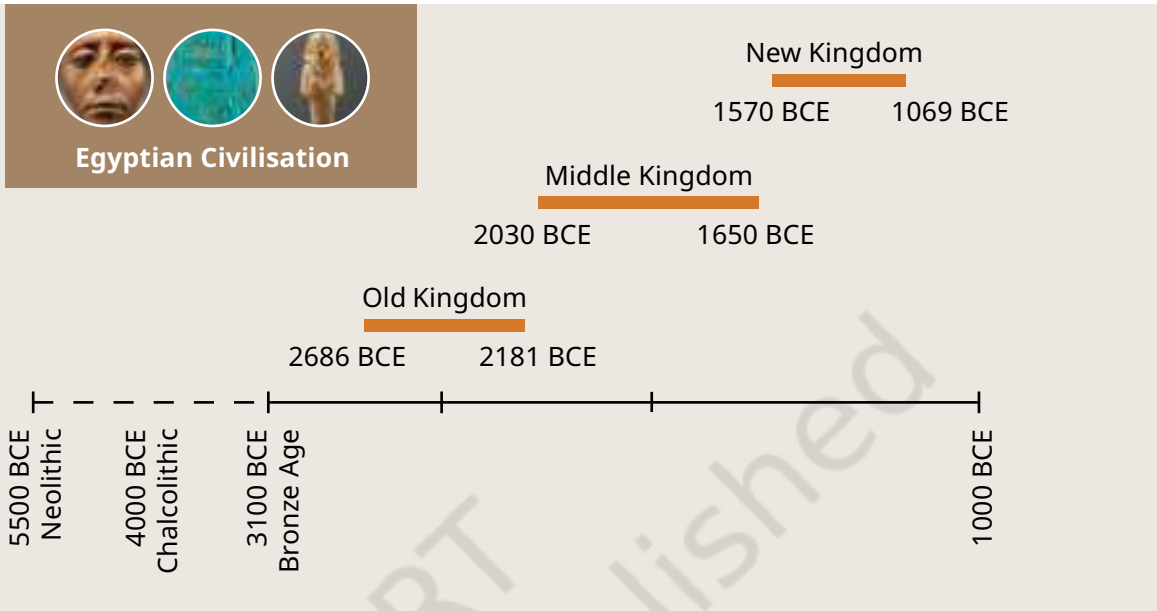


Fig. 4.28. Timeline showing the Egyptian Civilisation

Libraries, dating back to 2000 BCE, stored papyrus scrolls in labeled jars on shelves. One such jar contained the oldest version of the story of *'Sindbad the Sailor'*. Short stories from this period are diverse, including animal fables suggesting a link to *'Aesop's Fables'*, tales of ghosts, miracles, and romances, and even the oldest known form of 'Cinderella'.

DON'T MISS OUT

How was the Egyptian script deciphered?

Pierre Bouchard, a French army engineer, while repairing a fort in Egypt in 1799, found a giant black stone covered in mysterious writing. This was the Rosetta Stone, which had three types of writing, including Greek. Since people could still read Greek, this was a huge breakthrough — like having a bilingual dictionary for a lost language. In 1822, a French linguist, Jean-François Champollion, finally deciphered the script.



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The Egyptian calendar has three seasons, each consisting of four months. Inundation (autumn), Peret growing (winter) and shemu harvest (summer). It is based on the rising of Sirius (Dog Star), where, Year = 365 days (12 months × 30 days + 5 extra days). This is quite accurate, but lost time since the real year is about ¼ day longer.



Fig. 4.29. An illustration from the Papyrus of Ani

THINK ABOUT IT

Why do you think there is a scale with a heart on one side and a feather on the other (fig. 4.29)? What can this papyrus tell us about early Egyptian beliefs?



Let us now learn more about how the Egyptian civilisation grew. Egypt saw the emergence of city-states around 3000 BCE as population increased and resources became available. The river Nile watered the land along its banks, and every summer the river flooded, leading to annual inundations, with rich mud, *'kemet'*, excellent for growing crops.

DON'T MISS OUT

Egyptians referred to their land as Kemet. *Kemet* means 'the black', coming from the black river valley soil.



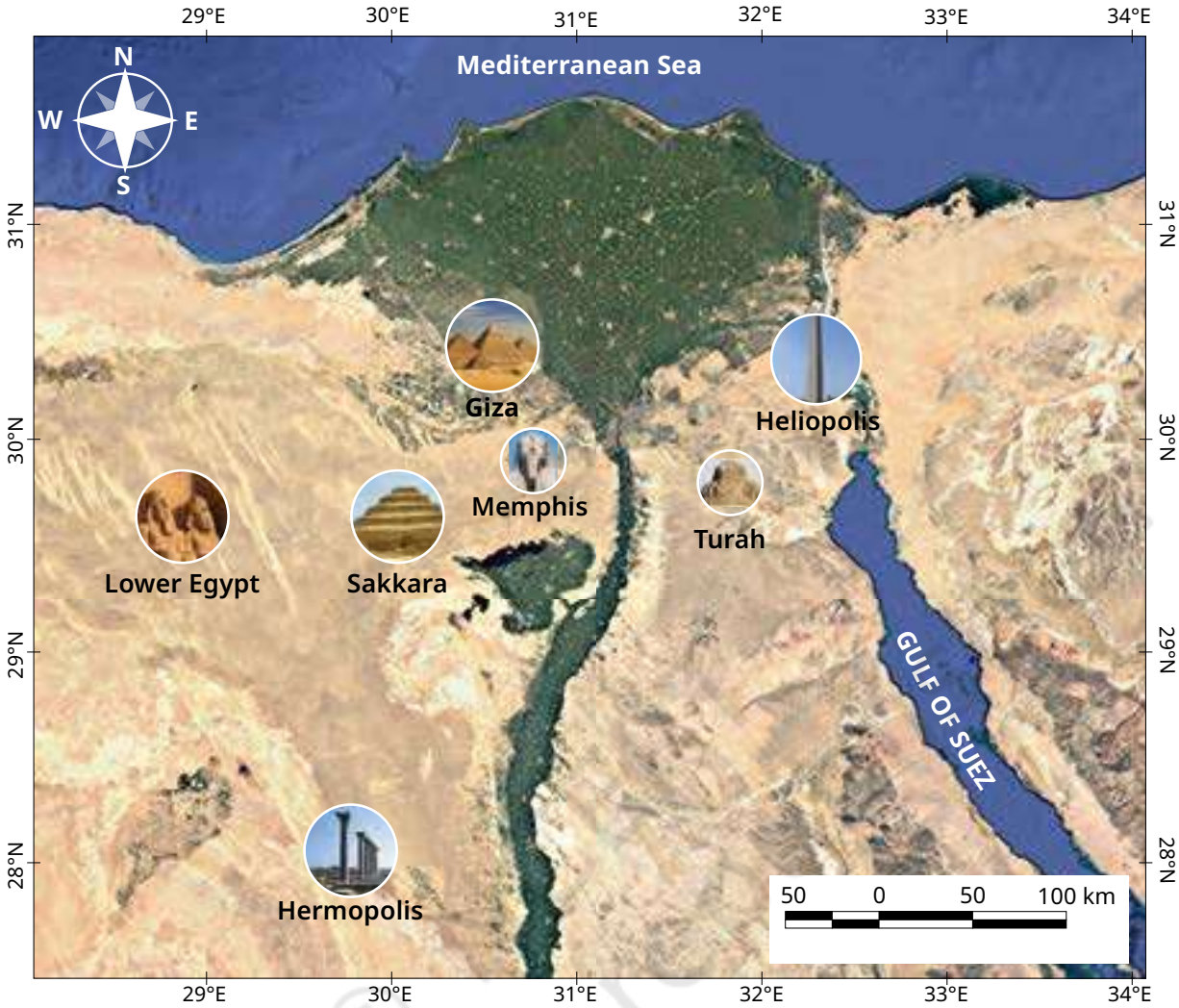


Fig. 4.30. The region in which the Egyptian civilisation flourished



LET'S MAP

Can you locate the River Nile on the given map? Why do you think the northern part is called Lower Egypt and the southern part Upper Egypt?

About 5000 years ago, farmers discovered that by digging ditches they could divert water from the Nile into their fields and store water in reservoirs for later use. By counting the days between Nile floods, the Egyptians developed a calendar.

The need to dig ditches and construct dams required collective effort. These early cooperative efforts must have led to the growth of local government, accompanied by the rise of the administrative class, probably making up the earliest form of local government in Egypt.



Fig. 4.31. The Step Pyramid at Saqqara

Over time, powerful individuals called 'Pharaohs' emerged as the rulers of Egypt. After their death, these pharaohs were buried deep underground and a rectangular structure called a *mastaba* was placed over the burial chamber. Gradually, these *mastabas* were placed one on top of the other to form a pyramid. One prominent example of such pyramids is the step pyramid at Saqqara. The pyramids were built primarily because the Egyptians believed that each person had a *ka* (a spiritual double) that lived on after death if the body was preserved through **mummification**.

Mummification: The process involved removing the internal organs (except the heart) and drying the body with natron. The body was then oiled, wrapped in linen strips, placed in a coffin, and buried with rituals.

LET'S EXPLORE

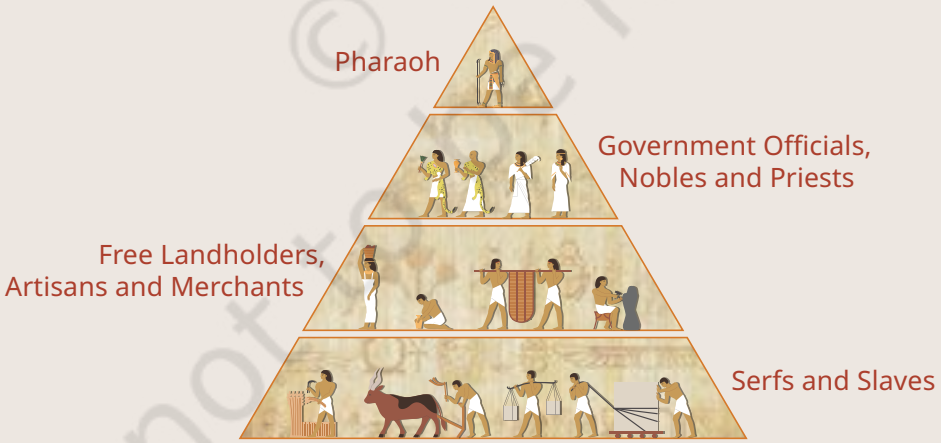


Fig. 4.32 Social hierarchy Pyramid

Look at the social hierarchy pyramid in the image. What were the social classes of early Egypt? What were the different kinds of occupations? What could have been a typical daily routine of the people from each class?

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Fig. 4.33. Daily items used by the Egyptians

THINK ABOUT IT

Observe the images given above. What do they tell you about Egyptian fashion?

- Which social classes do you think used these items?
- What clues in the images help you to make this guess?

Try to explain your reasoning based on the materials, designs, or accessories shown in the pictures.



Early Egyptians enjoyed leisure activities as well. They swam, canoed, played board games and even enjoyed music and dancing. Festivals were central to early Egyptian culture, dedicated to gods and the pharaoh's rule. Each god had a festival in which their statue was paraded, accompanied by music played on instruments such as the 'sistrum'. Festivals also celebrated reign of the pharaoh. For example the Sed festival was held to mark a king's 30th year on the throne. These grand events showed the people's deep reverence for their gods and ruler.

DON'T MISS OUT



Egyptian women, in general, enjoyed more rights than their Greek or Roman counterparts, as they could own property and run businesses. For instance, Cleopatra (69-30 BCE) was trained from childhood to rule; she became queen at the age of eighteen.

Fig. 4.34. An image of Cleopatra at the age of eighteen on the wall of a temple

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The Chinese Civilisation

You have already seen in the case of Mesopotamia and Egypt how rivers helped civilisations grow. Can you recall how they supported people's lives?

The Chinese civilisation flourished along the rivers— the Huang He (Yellow River) and the Yangtze. These two river valleys were also centres of early Chinese Neolithic cultures dating to around 7000 BCE. Around 2000 BCE, the introduction of copper/bronze metallurgy brought many of the Neolithic settlements, especially those in the Yellow River basin, to the threshold of the Bronze Age. However, it was only around 1600 BCE that urban centres began to emerge with the expansion of agricultural productivity and advancements in metallurgy and craft production. These events led to the rise of the first Chinese Bronze Age territorial empire.

The history of China is organised into various dynasties, the Shang dynasty (1600–1046 BCE) and the Zhou dynasty (1046–256 BCE) were two well-known dynasties of the Bronze Age. By 600 BCE, the use of iron became popular throughout China, and the Chinese Iron Age generally dates from this period onwards. The name 'China' probably comes from the Iron Age Qin (Ch'in) dynasty (221-206 BCE), also known as the first imperial dynasty of China, which is credited for unifying the country. Another important Chinese dynasty of the Iron Age was the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE).



Fig. 4.35. Timeline showing the Chinese civilisation

DON'T MISS OUT

- The Zhou rulers were both kings and priests, believed to be appointees of heaven, but they could be dismissed when their people did not prosper.

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- Public officials were chosen with great care, after being examined in archery, horsemanship, calculations, writing, and music.

How do we know what we know about China?



Fig. 4.36. Chinese oracle carvings on bone

China has an abundance of historical records as official historiographers recorded events. However, the earliest source of information about China are the 'oracles', which were symbols made on pieces of animal bones and tortoise shells. These bones were heated until they cracked, and interpretations were made based on the patterns of the cracks. These oracles were often used to foretell the future, and today, they tell us a lot about the hopes, desires, and fears of the early Chinese.

LET'S EXPLORE

The Chinese script is logographic, with characters representing entire words or morphemes (smallest meaningful units of language), rather than sounds. Person 人 Tree 木



Explore more examples of Chinese characters that resemble the objects or ideas they represent. Note down at least two such characters and explain how their shapes are connected to their meanings.



Fig. 4.37. L to R – Jade dragon from 3300–2000 BCE; Jade dragon pendant, Zhou dynasty; Bronze wine pouring vessel, Shang dynasty.

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Some other craft items unique to the Chinese civilisation were the jade objects and figurines, which were either ritual or prestige objects. They probably played an important role in social transactions, as jade was not locally available and was obtained from outside China. Marble was also carved into ornaments in the form of birds and animals, and as foundations for wooden pillars. Besides these, the Chinese mastered bronze metallurgy to produce weapons, tools, and elaborate ritual vessels.

DON'T MISS OUT

Chinese artisans skilfully carved jade into shapes of objects such as fish and tied them with a cord. When struck, these jade pieces produced a clear and lasting musical sound. This practice reflects the importance of music in Chinese culture and highlights the high level of craftsmanship achieved by the Chinese people.



Fig. 4.38. The Great Wall of China

The Great Wall of China was built over a period stretching to two thousand years. Initially, several walls were built from 680 BCE onwards by the Zhou and other dynasties as protection against the violent raids of nomadic tribes. These were later joined together to make an effective defence mechanism. The expansion and repair of the wall continued till the 17th century CE.



THINK ABOUT IT

What could have been the other reasons for building the Great Wall of China? Explore and share your findings on the Great Wall through a model or presentation.

Silk was known to the Chinese from the Neolithic period (4000–3000 BCE) onwards and became an important craft during the Bronze Age. However, around the 2nd century BCE, during the time of the Han dynasty, silk became a major item of external trade, so much so that the entire route on which it was traded came to be known as the 'Silk Route'.

LET'S RECALL



Do you remember studying about the Silk Route in Grade 7? How was India connected with it? Can you recollect China's contact with India with reference to Buddhism that you studied in Grade 7?

By 1500 BCE, the Chinese Bronze Age society was highly stratified with the ruling class, nobles, and aristocrats at the top, followed by farmers and labourers, which laid the foundation of Chinese social hierarchical structure that evolved later.

DON'T MISS OUT



A metal-based medium of exchange appeared during the Zhou dynasty, and a money economy developed by the 5th century BCE. China was also the first country to introduce paper currency to the world, and the first to develop civil services through public examination.

We have seen how major Bronze Age civilisations of the world emerged independently in the fertile river plains. Harnessing agricultural productivity and the incorporation of new resources helped economic growth, leading to the emergence of urban cities in all these major centres of civilisation. They developed social and administrative systems independently to ensure and enhance economic growth. The development of writing systems enabled early societies to record economic transactions and social activities, and over time, it also led to the composition of literary and creative texts. Thus, many of our cultural ethos have their roots in the Bronze Age civilisations.

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Before we move on...



- Early human history refers to the long period of human history before the invention of writing and is studied mainly through archaeological evidence such as tools, fossils, and cave art.
- Early humans evolved in Africa and gradually migrated to different parts of the world.
- During the Palaeolithic period, humans were hunter-gatherers who used stone tools like handaxes, cleavers, and scrapers, and lived in caves or open camps.
- In the Mesolithic period, humans developed microlithic tools and began occupying temporary settlements near rivers and lakes.
- The Neolithic period marked a major shift to agriculture and domestication of animals, leading to permanent villages, pottery making, and weaving.
- The Chalcolithic period witnessed the use of copper along with stone tools and the growth of early farming communities.
- These developments led to the emergence of Bronze Age civilisations, characterised by urban centres, trade, writing, administration, and social organisation.
- Major early world civilisations such as Sindhu–Sarasvatī, Mesopotamia, Egypt, and China developed independently in fertile river valleys and made significant contributions in agriculture, writing, architecture, administration, and culture.

Questions and activities



1. Do you think life became easier or more challenging after humans started farming? Give two reasons for your answer.
2. The environment offers human societies both opportunities as well as challenges. Explain with reference to early farming communities and river-valley civilisations.
3. Why do historians divide early human history into different ages such as Stone Age, Bronze Age, and Iron Age? What does this classification tell us about human progress?
4. Imagine you are a Neolithic farmer. Describe one day of your life. What challenges would you face that a hunter-gatherer would not?

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5. Imagine that the Harappan script gets deciphered tomorrow. What new types of information do you think historians might learn?
6. Prepare a table with three columns—Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, and Neolithic—and fill in their distinctive features: tools, settlements, art, and subsistence.
7. "Bronze Age civilisations developed independently but shared common features." Examine this statement with reference to the civilisations given in the chapter.
8. Although rivers provided many benefits, they also created challenges for early societies. Discuss both the advantages and disadvantages of settling near rivers.
9. With the help of your teacher, find out more about the Code of Hammurabi. Why was it important? Do you think it was fair to all sections of society? Give reasons for your answer.
10. If you had to choose one major innovation from early civilisations that changed the world permanently, what would it be and why?
11. Compare the social hierarchy and daily life of people in the Egyptian civilisation with those in Mesopotamia or China. What similarities and differences do you notice?
12. Activity: Using maps, locate the major rivers and civilisations of Mesopotamia, Egypt, China, and the Sindhu–Sarasvatī Valley. Mark the trade links between them.
13. Activity: Choose one early civilisation (Mesopotamia, Egypt, or China) and prepare a mini-scrapbook or a presentation showing their innovations in tools, writing, art, and architecture. Include pictures, brief descriptions, and explain their significance.

Notes

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Chapter 5

State and Society up to 1000 CE



The Big Questions

1. *How did society and state organise themselves prior to 1000 CE?*
2. *How did states and societies emerge and spread to different parts of the Indian subcontinent?*
3. *How did the ideas of dharma and chakravarti samrāṭ help create unity in social values and governance, and promote the idea of the Indian subcontinent as one political entity?*
4. *How did different social, administrative, and occupational groups take shape over time and come together culturally?*

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In the previous chapter, we traced the long journey of human development from our early ancestors to the emergence of settled communities and, subsequently, civilisations. We also examined the Sindhu–Sarasvatī civilisation along with other Bronze Age civilisations of the world.

Let us now study the historical developments in the Indian subcontinent, with reference to state and society up to the end of the first millennium CE. By the end of this chapter, we will notice that our understanding of this period is more detailed and qualitatively enriched. This is because, from at least the second millennium BCE, we begin to find literary sources—the *Ṛigveda* being the earliest—that supplement archaeological evidence and provide insights into the social, political, cultural, and moral dimensions of the past. As a result, we gain insights into the social and political realities, ideas, ideologies, institutions, and practices of this period. We will begin with the social and political landscape described in the literary sources such as kin-based social organisation (*jana, kula*) and early forms of polity. Thereafter, we will study their development into more complex and bigger, territory-based political units like *janapadas* and *mahājanapadas*, and eventually into empires during the time of the Mauryas and the Guptas in northern India, and the Cholas in southern India. Alongside these

changes, we will also examine elements of continuity, particularly the political ideal of a pan-Indian monarch—expressed through ritual practices such as the *aśhvamedha yajña* and the concept of the *chakravarti samrāṭ*—as well as the enduring socio-ethical principle of *dharma*.

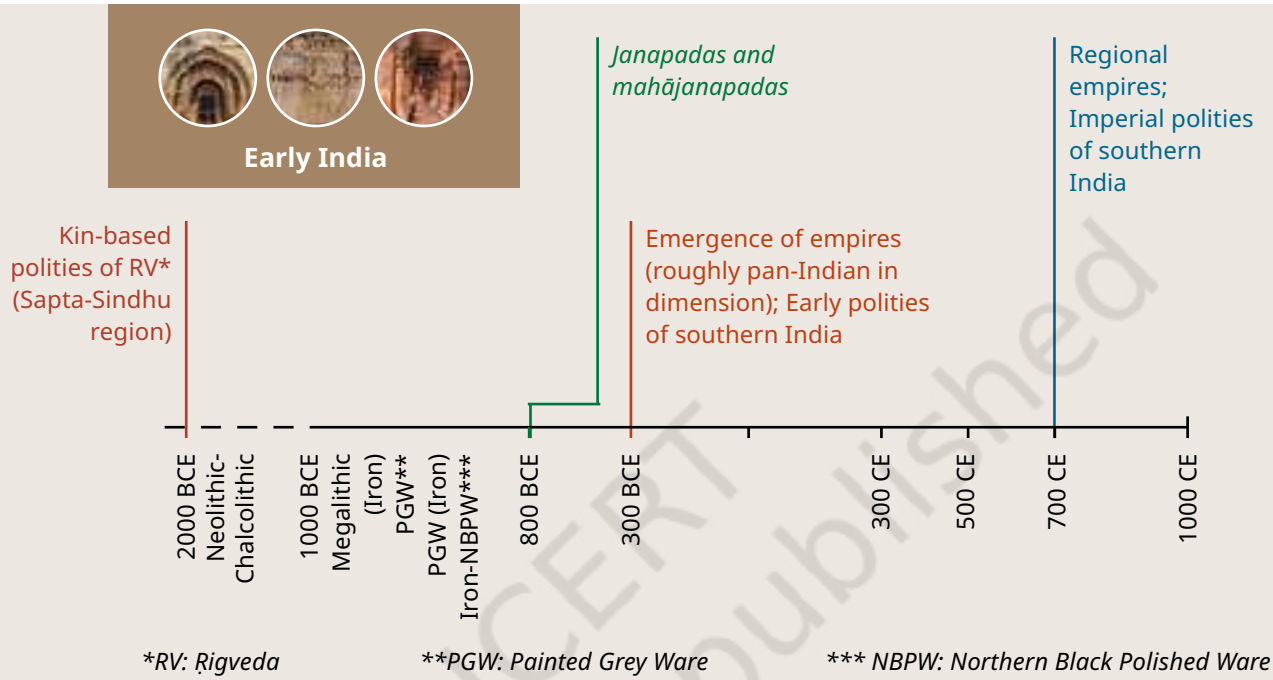


Fig. 5.1. Broad timeline of early India

This long span of time (refer to Fig 5.1) witnessed the rise and fall of many dynasties and regional powers across the Indian subcontinent, which you have also explored in previous grades. In this chapter, we will gain a deeper understanding of the broad features of the state and society of this period, through representative examples from different regions of the subcontinent.

LET'S EXPLORE

As you read the chapter, follow the timeline at the bottom of each page. Notice the important events, changes, and connections across time. Think about which event interests you the most and why. By the end of the chapter, share one event you would like to explore further and document:

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1. What happened?
2. When did it happen?
3. Why do you think it matters?

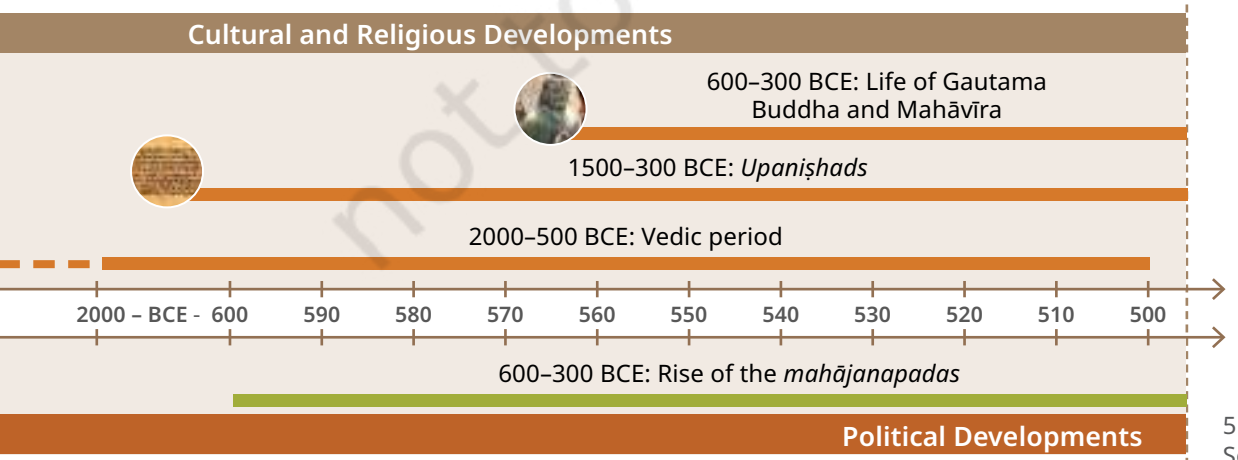


Understanding Early Indian State and Society

Whenever large groups of people live together, certain rules and shared norms evolve over time to maintain order and harmony. These rules and norms bind different social groups into a unified whole, forming a 'system' that helps organise and govern people effectively. From early times, Indian society developed several such systems of organisation based on existing customs, traditions, and agreed practices. Before examining these systems, however, let us first explore a fundamental question—what is society?

A **society** may be understood as a system of social relationships among individuals who share a common territory, culture, and a shared sense of belonging. It consists of structural units such as families or households, institutions such as marriage, and customs that provide a framework for individual and social life. Most importantly, society is primarily regulated by customs and practices rather than formal laws.

And what is a State? As you read in your previous grades under the theme 'Governance and Democracy', a '**State**' refers to an organised political system based on rules and laws. It includes well-defined rights and duties of rulers and subjects, mechanisms of governance, and institutions for enforcing law and order. From a historical perspective, such political systems developed gradually as societies became larger and more complex. By studying early historical sources, historians attempt to understand how forms of governance



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and political authority evolved over time. Against this background, let us now explore the evolution of the state and society in India, beginning with the Vedic period.

The Beginnings...

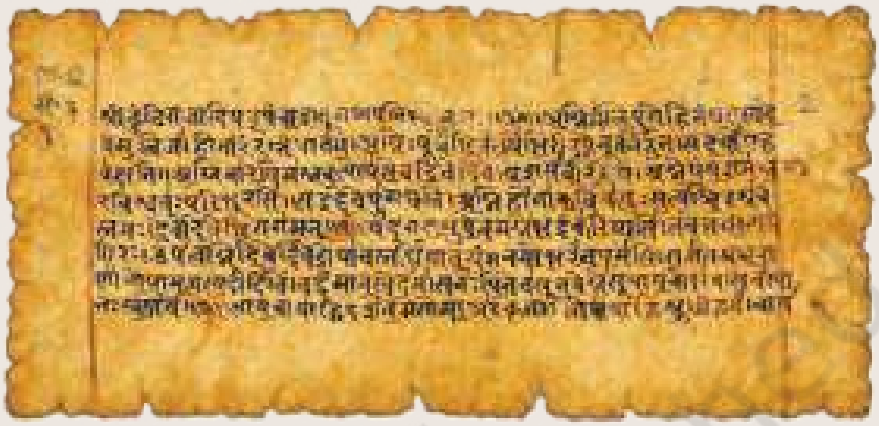


Fig. 5.2. A Ṛigveda manuscript as rendered in Devanagari script

The Vedas constitute the earliest known corpus of Indian literature, especially since the script used by the Harappans of the Sindhu–Sarasvatī civilisation has not yet been deciphered. What we know today as Vedic literature existed in oral form for several centuries before it was written down. We have read in previous grades that the date of composition of the *Ṛigveda* remains debated among historians, with estimates ranging from the fifth millennium BCE to the second millennium BCE. We have also studied earlier that the *Ṛigveda* was composed in the northwestern part of the Indian subcontinent, where the Sindhu–Sarasvatī civilisation flourished. Interestingly, both the *Ṛigveda* and the Sindhu–Sarasvatī civilisation were familiar with copper.

Cultural and Religious Developments

Life of Gautama Buddha and Mahāvīra

1500–300 BCE: *Upaniṣhads*

490 480 470 460 450 440 430 420 410 400

600–300 BCE: Rise of the *mahājanapadas*

Political Developments

State and Administration

The Vedic Period

The Four Vedas

Ṛigveda

The earliest veda, containing some of the world's oldest-surviving poetic compositions. It consists of 1,028 hymns (*sūktas*), some in praise of various deities while others reflect on universal thoughts, such as creation and cessation, birth and death, and so on.

Yajurveda

Elaborates the performative aspects of *yajnās* and the hymns referred to in the *Ṛigveda*. It includes explanations in prose.

Sāmaveda

Comprises hymns drawn from the *Ṛigveda*, carefully arranged for musical recitation. Its chanting tradition forms an important foundation for the system of the seven *svaras* (notes) that lie at the heart of Indian music.

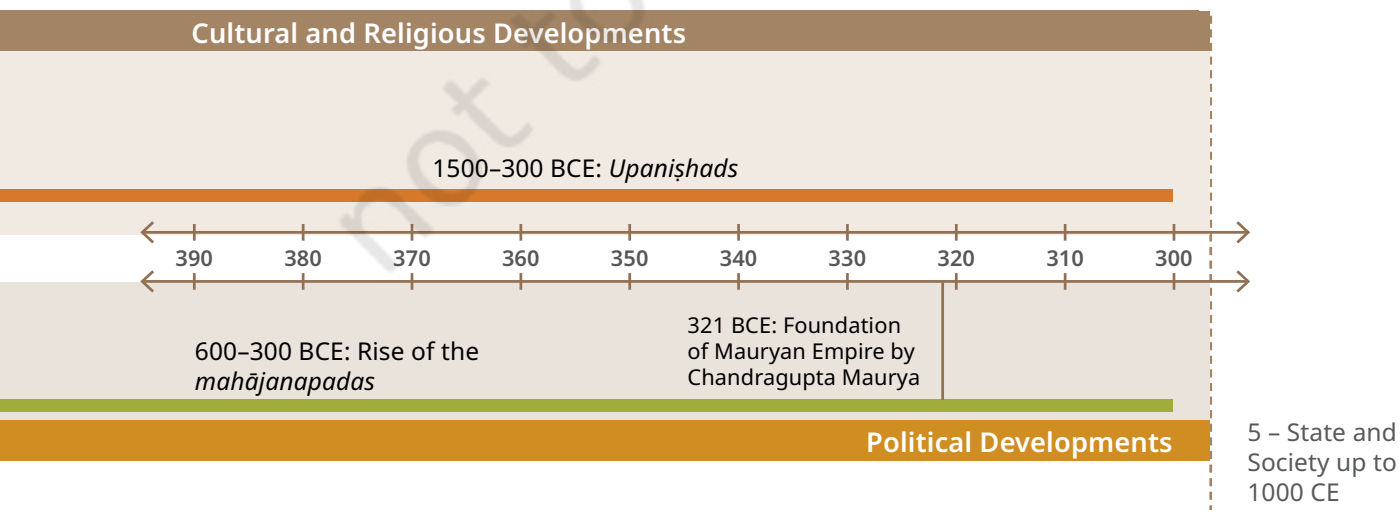
Atharvaveda

Contains a wide range of hymns—some intended to ward off evil, and others related to the treatment of physical and mental ailments.

Each text of the Veda has the following four parts: *samhitā*, *brāhmaṇa*, *āraṇyaka*, and *upaniṣhad*.

- *Samhitās* primarily contain hymns used for invoking the deity and for offering oblations in the *yajña*.
- The *Brāhmaṇa*, composed in prose, offer explanations for ritual performances.
- The *Āraṇyakas* (*araṇya* = forest) expand on philosophical speculations of sages living in forests.
- The *Upaniṣhads* delve into issues like the Self (*Ātman*) and the Ultimate Universal Being (*Brāhmaṇ*).

Note that while *Brāhman* is a concept, *Brāhmaṇas* are texts and *Brāhmaṇas/Brahmins* is a *varṇa* category.



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Vedic texts are often used by historians and other scholars to learn about the times and geographies in which they were composed. For instance, the earliest sections of the *Ṛigveda* were composed in the region known as *Sapta–Sindhu*—including the Indus River, its five tributaries, and the Sarasvatī. Vedic texts are also studied to gain insights into the lives of people, social structures, political systems, economic pursuits, and religious practices. As one of the earliest texts and given the continuity of cultural practices, the Vedic texts are regarded as foundational to Indian culture and traditions.

Political Institutions in the Vedic Period

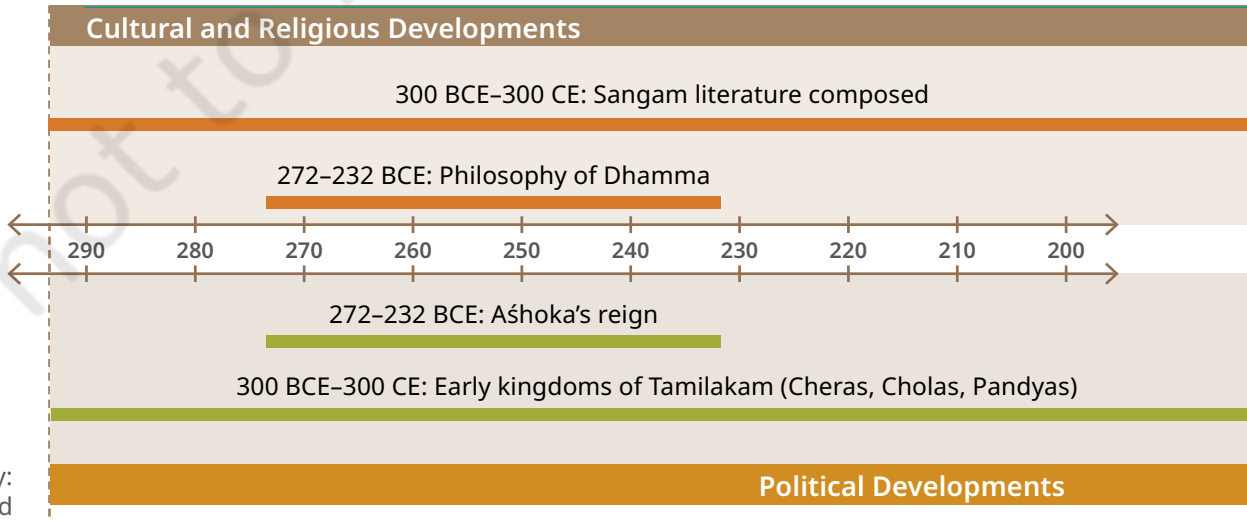
We have read in previous grades that early Vedic society was organised into *janas*, or clans. These were groups of people bound by kinship ties. The *Ṛigveda* alone mentions about thirty *janas*, five of which—the Yadu, Turvaśha, Puru, Anu, and Druhyu—were collectively known as the *pañchajana* ('five peoples').

LET'S RECALL



In previous grades, you have read that the name 'Bharata' first appears in the *Ṛigveda*. It is used in reference to the 'Bharata *jana*', or the people who were ruled by the family of the Bharatas. What does this tell us about how early communities identified themselves and their rulers?

During this period, the rājā functioned primarily as a clan chief who led the group in warfare and ensured the protection of its members. The Vedic texts, particularly the *Ṛigveda* and *Atharvaveda*, refer to three assemblies. These were called the *sabhā, samiti,* and *vidhata*.



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Each of these assemblies played a significant role in early Vedic polity.

Assemblies during Vedic Period

Sabhā	*Samiti*	*Vidhata*
◈ A smaller body that primarily served a judicial function. ◈ Composed of select elites.	◈ A larger assembly focused on policy decisions and political affairs. ◈ Represented the broader population.	◈ A popular gathering attended by members of the community (*janas*). ◈ Functioned as a forum for discussions on warfare and other political matters.

THINK ABOUT IT

In modern democracies, heads of government exercise power but are bound by constitutions and parliaments, which function as representative bodies that check the powers of elected leaders. Do the roles of the *rājā* and the assemblies in Vedic times suggest a similar principle? Can we say that systems of governance in Indian history—since their early institutionalised forms—were guided by the idea of ensuring people's participation in the political process?



Cultural and Religious Developments

300 BCE–300 CE: Sangam literature composed

190 180 170 160 150 140 130 120 110 100

185 BCE: Foundation of Śhunga empire by Puṣhyamitra Śhunga

300 BCE–300 CE: Early kingdoms of Tamilakam (Cheras, Cholas, and Pandyas)

Political Developments

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Fig. 5.3. First millennium BCE (iron finds)

LET'S ANALYSE

If you visualise the maps of the Indian subcontinent of the second and first millennium BCE, you will find more settlements concentrated in the Ganga region in the latter map. Archaeological findings from this region during the first millennium BCE provide increasing evidence of the use of iron implements, a wider variety of grain, and the characteristic PGW pottery. Further, in the second half of the first millennium BCE, particularly in the middle Ganga region (from present-day Prayagraj to eastern Bihar), there is evidence of a refined

'deluxe ware' called NBPW, known for its smooth, glossy black surface. Archaeologically, this phase marks the emergence of a richer, more advanced material culture. Literary sources from this period also contain numerous references to expanding agricultural activities, increased grain output, greater crop variety—particularly paddy—and the use of iron implements.

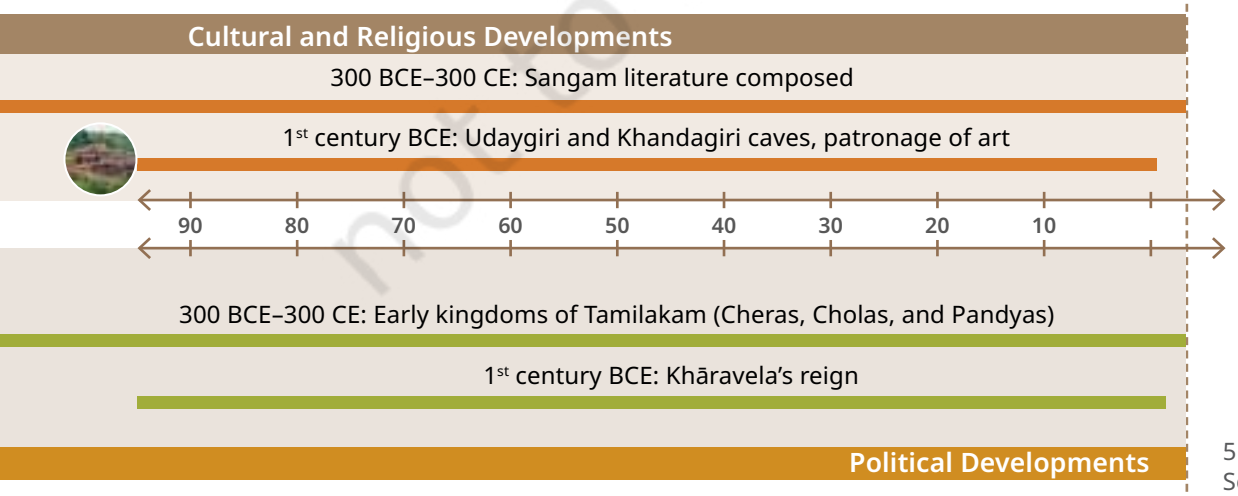
Can you identify the crucial factors behind this change?



Early Kingdoms and Republics

With the passage of time, the political organisation of Vedic society evolved into territorial entities known as *janapadas*. The term *janapada* literally means where a people (*jana*) first set its feet, indicating a transition from kinship-based identity to territorial identity. This transition happened between approximately 1000 BCE and 600 BCE. In other words, people were not only connected solely by kinship ties but also by a sense of belonging to a land that gave them a more concrete sense of identity. Some scholars have viewed this transition as a consolidation of identity for the Vedic *janas*. Thus, control over land, agricultural production, and trade routes became increasingly important, leading to the development of more complex administrative systems. As a result, the period approximately from 600 BCE to 300 CE witnessed the rise of new political formations—mentioned in the contemporary texts as the *mahājanapadas* (bigger political units than *janapadas*).

Historical sources for the period usually speak of sixteen *mahājanapadas.* Among these, Magadha, located in present-day Bihar, gradually emerged as the most powerful. Its strategic location, fertile plains, and strong rulers enabled it to expand its control over



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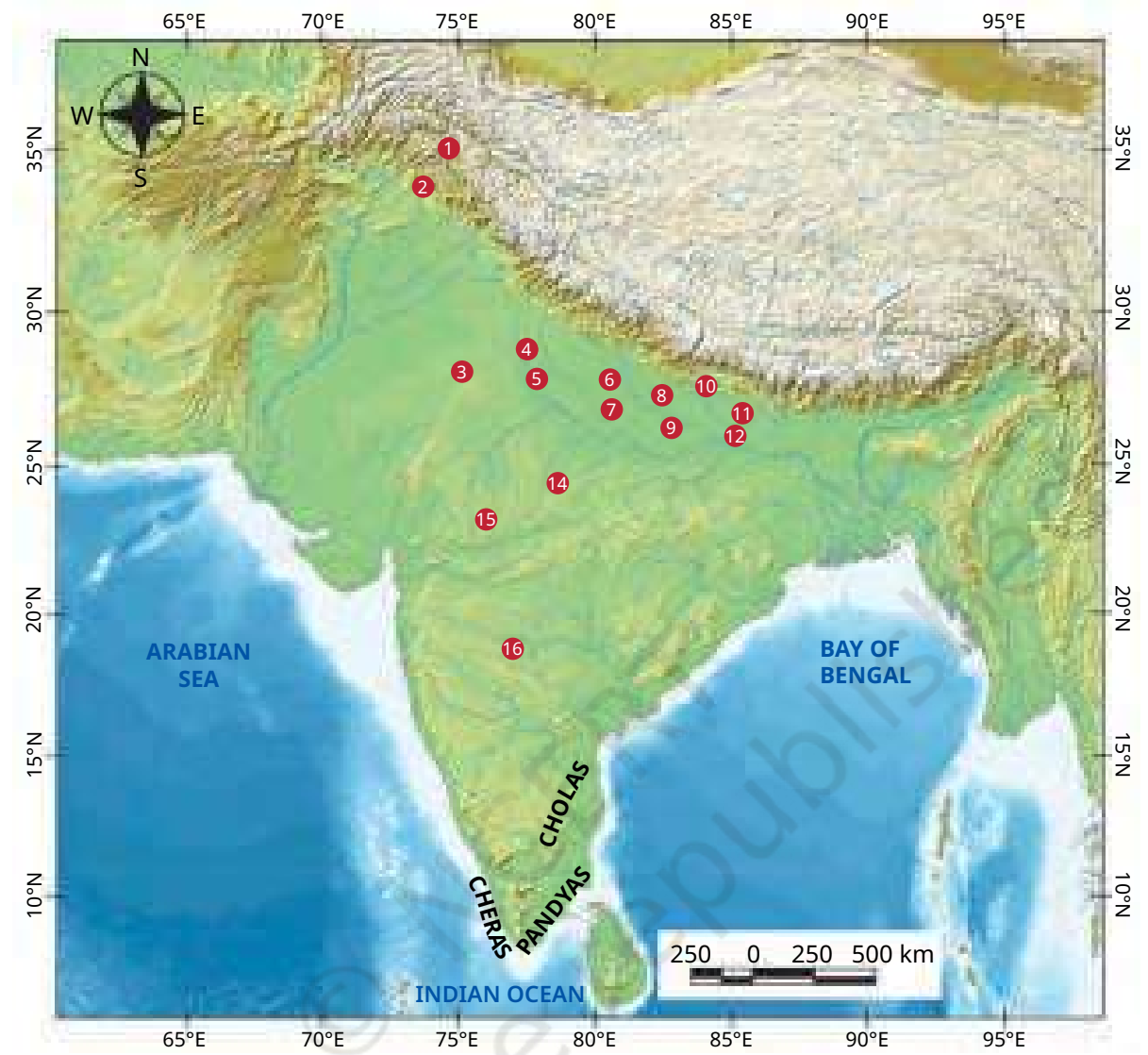


Fig. 5.4. Spatial distribution of the sixteen mahājanapadas and kingdoms of Tamilakam

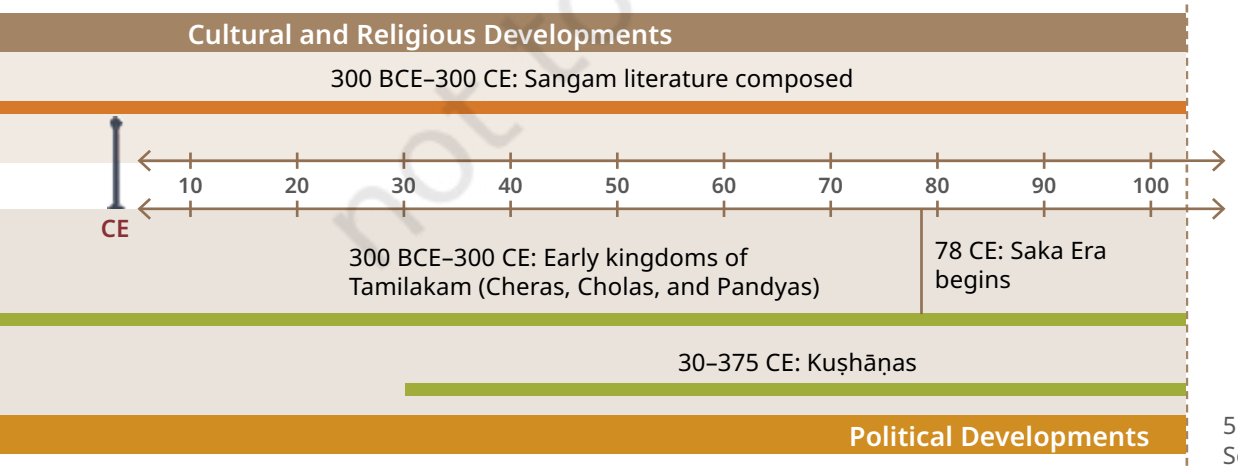
neighbouring regions. This expansion eventually led to the rise of the Mauryan Empire, which became one of the largest and most powerful empires in early Indian history.

Another significant development during this period was the expansion of Vedic culture in the Ganga plains. While the early Vedic culture was most prominent in the northwestern regions, particularly the Indus and Sarasvatī valleys, the later Vedic period saw the Ganga plains emerge as the main centre. Consequently, the

region witnessed significant sociopolitical changes. This included substantial growth in agriculture, the formation of larger political units, and the development of more complex social institutions by about 600 BCE. However, this was also a time when the political landscape of northern India had evolved to include different forms of political organisation. These comprised monarchical states (*rājyas*) and republican states (*gaṇas* or *saṁghas*). In southern India, particularly in the Deccan, the Mauryan Empire was succeeded by the Satavāhana Empire, which lasted nearly 500 years, from the 2nd century BCE to the 3rd century CE. Further south in peninsular India, there were the polities of the Cholas (in the lower Kaveri River valley), Pandyas (in the river valleys of the Tamraparni and Vaigai), Keralaputras (identified with the Cheras in Kerala), and the Satiyaputras (in the northern part of Tamil Nadu). These polities also find mention in the Aśhokan inscriptions.

LET'S RECALL

You may remember from your previous grades that the three important kingdoms of southern India, the Cholas, Cheras, and Pandyas, had their own royal emblems. The tiger was the emblem of the Cholas, the bow represented the Cheras, and the fish symbolised the Pandyas. Much of what we know about these early Tamil kingdoms comes from Sangam literature, the earliest Tamil literary tradition, which dates between 300 BCE and 300 CE. The Chera, Chola, and Pandya rulers were known as the three crowned kings or "*Vendar* of Tamilakam", and their kingdoms flourished in fertile rice-growing regions. Sangam poems also describe brave and ambitious kings, including a Chera ruler who earned the title



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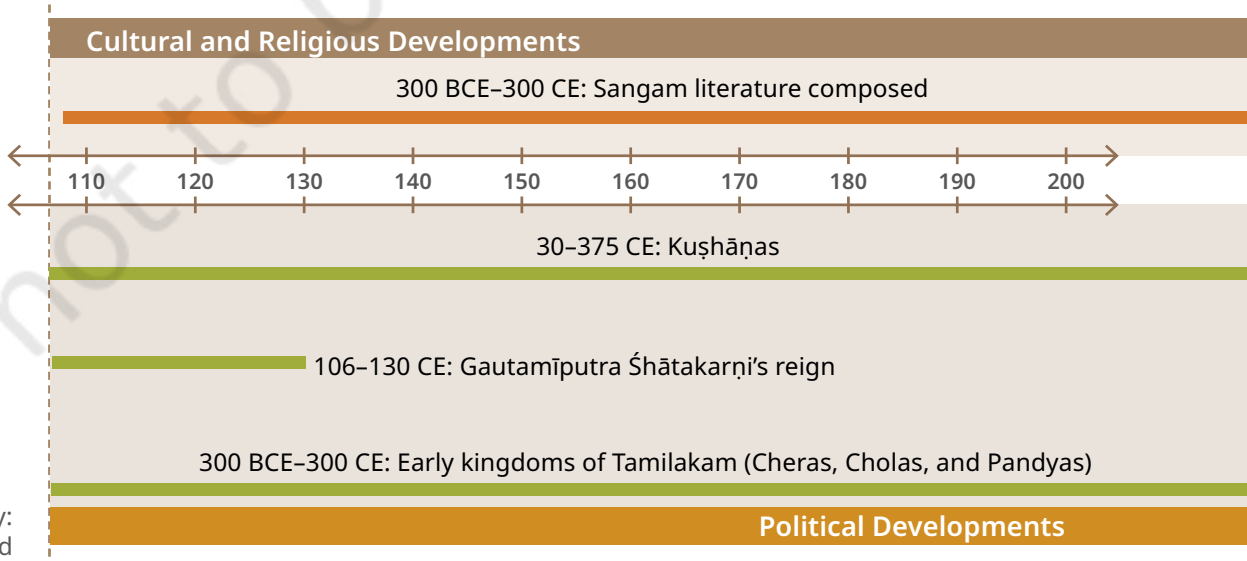


adhirāja after defeating several crowned kings. These poems further mention Vedic *yajñas* and links with epic traditions. However, these early kingdoms should not be confused with the later imperial Chola, Chera, and Pandya kingdoms that emerged many centuries later.

Duties and Ideals of the King

From the 6th century BCE onwards, rulers came to be known by various titles, such as *rājā, mahārāja,* or *samrāṭ*, across different regions, reflecting regional political traditions. Nonetheless, early Indian texts provide important insights into ideas of kingship and governance. For instance, Kauṭilya's *Arthaśhāstra* states, "Only if a king is himself energetically active, do his officers follow him energetically." Further, with reference to the oath of coronation in the *Yajurveda*, the king is advised to judge the strong and weak impartially and fairly in addition to protecting the country from all calamities and do good to the people.

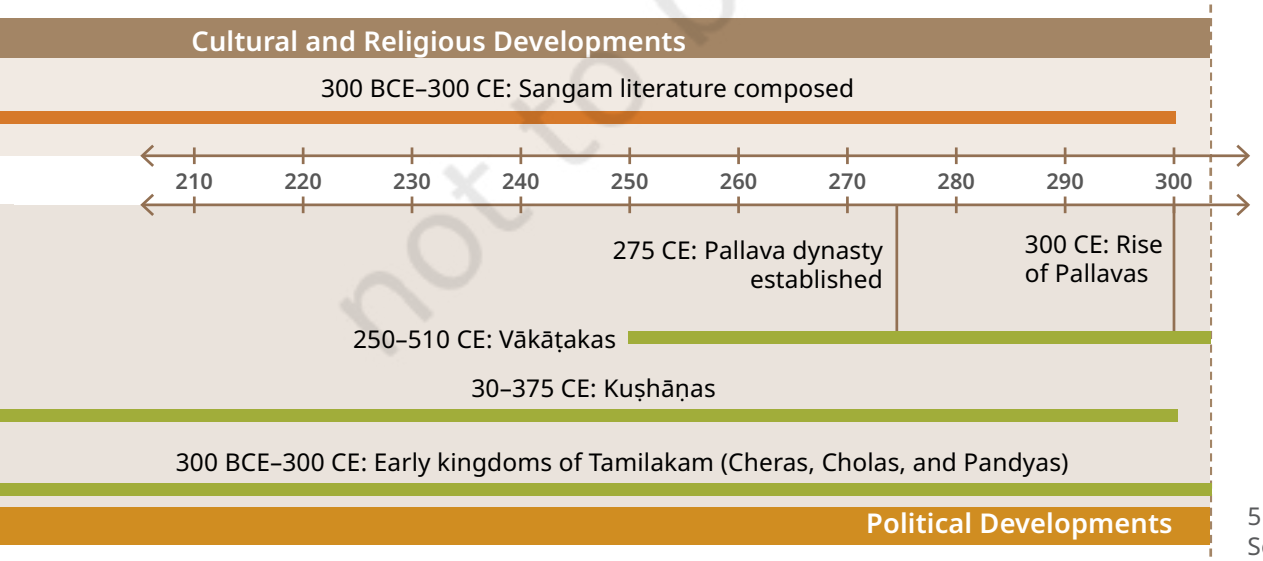
The *Śhānti Parva* of the *Mahābhārata* provides guidance to rulers on ethical conduct, justice, and the responsibilities of a king towards his subjects. The king was primarily responsible for protecting his subjects from external threats and internal disorder. He was also expected to administer justice in cases, such as abduction, robbery, theft, and adultery. Punishments for serious offences—including the killing of a cow, acts of treachery, and the consumption of intoxicating liquor—were severe and could include harsh penalties, sometimes even capital punishment. While kingship was generally hereditary,



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there are references to kings being elected or even expelled. This suggests that royal authority was not always absolute and that succession was not entirely hereditary in practice.

It is important to note that the geopolitical awareness of early Indian monarchs was not limited to the boundaries of their kingdoms but extended to the whole Indian subcontinent. This pan-Indian geopolitical awareness was expressed through terms such as *Jambudvīpa*, *Bhāratavarṣha*, *Aśhvamedha* and *Rājasūya yajña*, *Prithivi*, and *chakravarti kśhetra*. Embedded in these expressions were ideas of sovereignty and political authority over a territory that can largely be understood as the Indian subcontinent. The Mauryan ruler Aśhoka, for instance, in one of his edicts, states that his "energetic exertions" (*pakama*; *parākrama* in Sanskrit) led to "significant changes in the spiritual life in *Jambudvīpa*." Similarly, the meaning of *Prithivi* (*pathivi* in Prakrit) by Aśhoka becomes clearer in the *Arthaśhāstra*, where it is defined as "the area lying between the Himavat (Himalayas) and the sea." The *Arthaśhāstra* further equates the term *prithivi* with the *chakravarti kśhetra*, or the "domain of a universal paramount ruler." This ideal of exercising political authority over the subcontinent continued to be expressed in later periods. Very early during the Sangam period in southern India, a Chera king Nedunjeral Adan is described to have not only won the rank of *adhirāja* for himself, but also to have extended his conquests up to the Himalayas in the north. Similarly, in the 11th century CE, the Chola ruler Rajendra I adopted the title *Gangaikonda* to commemorate his conquest of regions along the Ganga. Thus, the aspiration to exercise political authority over the Indian subcontinent was repeatedly expressed in the history of Indian kingship.



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THINK ABOUT IT



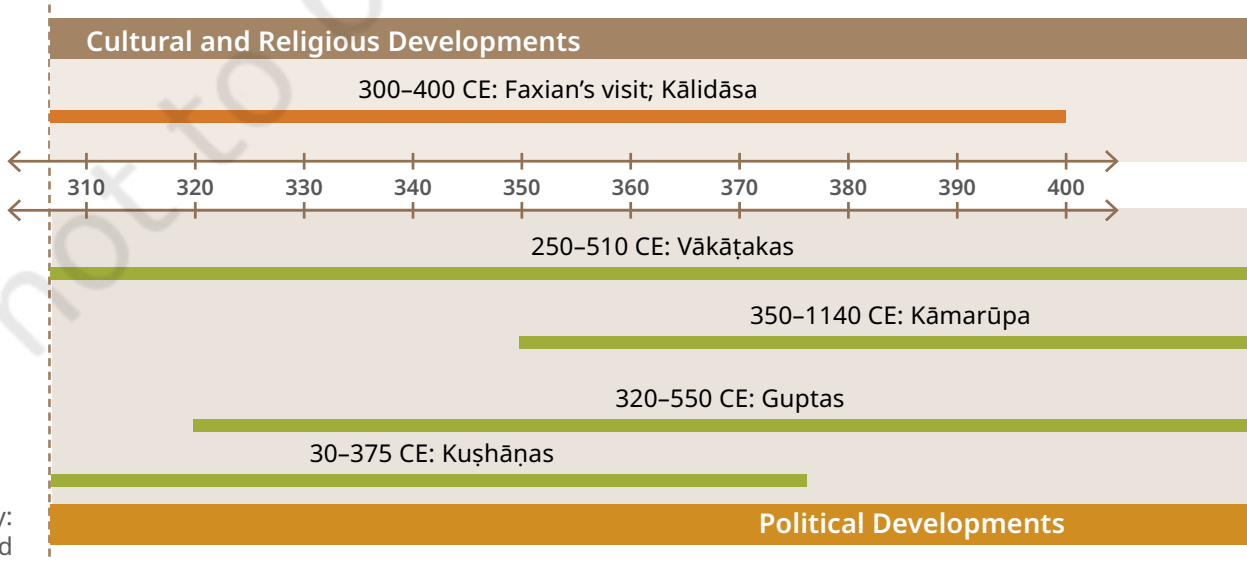
Texts such as the *Mahābhārata* and the *Arthaśhāstra* describe the king's duties as protecting people and ensuring justice. Why do you think it was important for rulers to protect people and ensure justice? What do these descriptions tell us about ideas of governance and the relationship between rulers and subjects during that period?

Council of Ministers

The state, was regarded as an organic whole composed of seven constituents. Kauṭilya identified the seven constituents (*Saptāṁga*) as follows—the king, the ministers, the territory, the forts, the treasury, the army, and the allies. The state can function effectively only if these constituents remain properly integrated.

LET'S RECALL

The *Arthaśhāstra* is one of the earliest and most systematic treatises on statecraft. It presents a detailed picture of administration, and emphasises the importance of training a king in the art of governance and public administration. The *Arthaśhāstra* states that "one wheel does not move the carriage". This statement captures the belief that effective governance requires cooperation and a well-organised administrative machinery. In fact, various literary and epigraphic sources from



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this period indicate that the king did not rule alone but governed through a multi-layered administrative system. Central to this system was the council of ministers (*mantri–pariṣhad*), a small body of elder statesmen, whose primary role was to advise and support the king. The council of ministers generally included the treasurer, the chief tax collector, the chief legal advisor, and the commander-in-chief of the army. An Aśhokan inscription refers to decisions taken by the council of ministers during the emperor's absence, showing that, in exceptional circumstances, the council could take decisions independently in public interest.



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Cultural and Religious Developments

427 CE: Nalanda university established

480 CE: Vallabhī university established

500 CE: Āryabhaṭa

410 420 430 440 450 460 470 480 490 500

350–1140 CE: Kāmarūpa

320–550 CE: Guptas

475–776 CE: Maitrakas

Political Developments

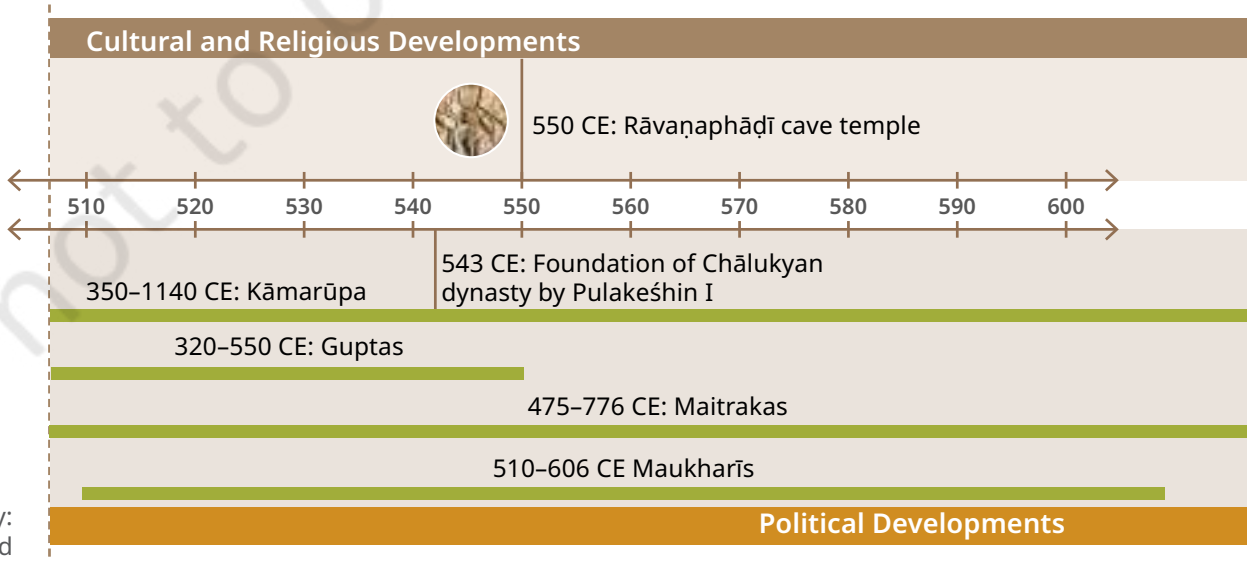
DON'T MISS OUT



Fig. 5.5. Junagadh Rock Inscription, Gujarat

The Junagadh Rock Inscription near Girnar (Gujarat) is unique as it bears inscriptions of three rulers from different periods. The earliest inscriptions belong to the Mauryan emperor Aśhoka (3rd century BCE), whose Major Rock Edicts in Prakrit spread the message of *Dhamma* and moral governance. Later on, the Western Satrap ruler Rudradaman I (c. 150 CE) added a long Sanskrit inscription describing his military achievements and the repair of the Sudarshana Lake. Still later, the Gupta emperor Skandagupta (5th century CE) engraved another record on the same rock, noting the restoration of the lake after severe damage. Thus, this single rock inscription site preserves the records of the Maurya, Western Satrap, and Gupta dynasties, spanning about 700 years and providing valuable information about administration, public works, and political history in India.





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THINK ABOUT IT

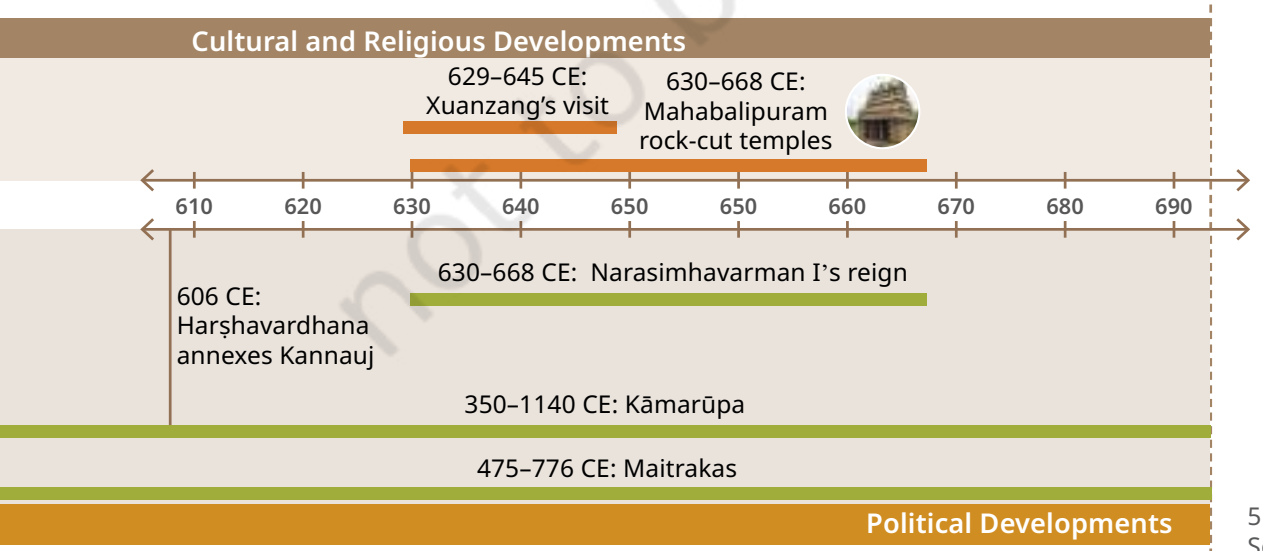
Why do you think different rulers chose to record their inscriptions on the same stone instead of a new one? Discuss your answers with your classmates.



How Were Empires Administered?

Early Indian kingdoms and empires were generally divided into provinces, which were further subdivided into divisions and districts. For instance, the Satavāhana empire comprised *āḥāras* (administrative divisions), each with its respective ministers (*amātyas*). Below the *āḥāras* were villages, each led by a village headman known as *grāmika*. While supreme authority rested with the king, the general administration was carried out by officers operating both at provincial and local levels. District governors or *pradeśhikas* were responsible for judicial and administrative functions. It is important to note that district officers often made decisions after consulting important residents such as bankers, caravan leaders, artisans, and scribes. In addition, cities had their own governors who were in charge of revenue collection and maintenance of law and order.

The period between approximately 300 CE and 800 CE was characterised by the decentralisation of power, as, for administrative convenience, the kingdom (*rājya*) was divided into several provinces, known as *bhuktis* in the north and *manḍalas* or *manḍalams* in the south. The provinces were further subdivided into divisions—*viṣhaya* or *bhoga* in the north and *koṭṭams* or *valanāḍu* in the south. Lower



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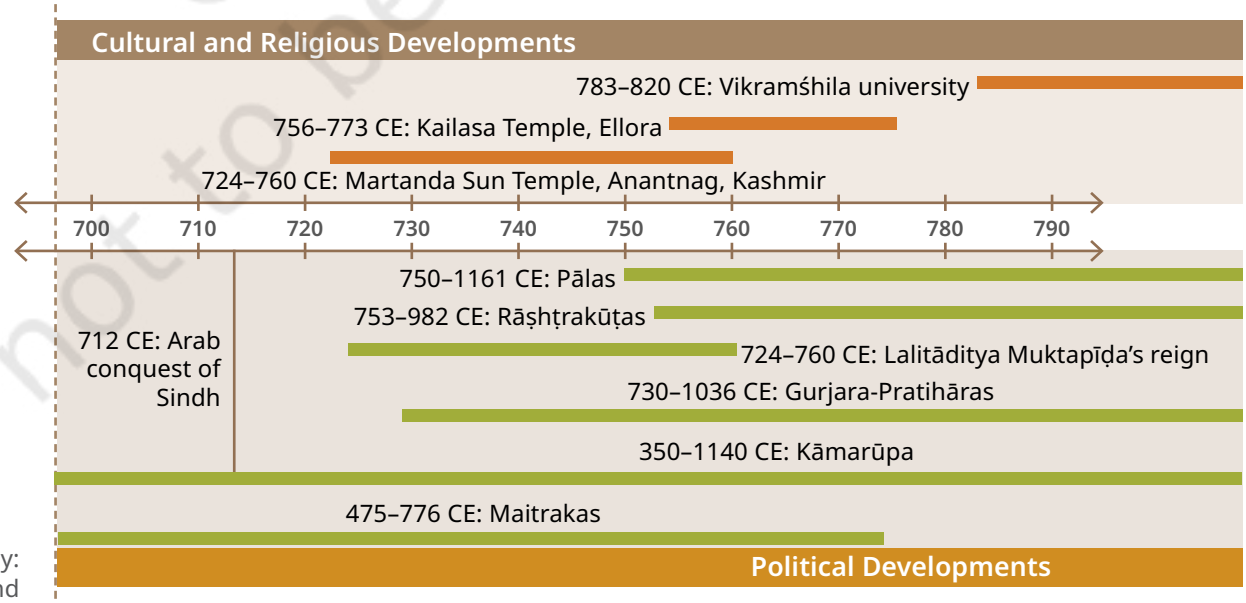
units of administration were the districts—*adhiṣhṭhāna* or *paṭṭana* in the north and *nāḍu* in the south; groups of villages, that is, modern *tahsīl*, were called *vithis* in the north and *paṭṭalā* and *kūṛram* in southern Indian records. Finally, villages formed the lowest administrative units. To govern various administrative units, a large machinery was developed, consisting of provincial governors and district officers.

THINK ABOUT IT



How would dividing a kingdom into provinces, districts, and villages have helped rulers manage their empires? What similarities can you identify between these administrative divisions and the system of governance in India today?

Interestingly, the Guptas retained much of the earlier form of administration. So, as in Kauṭilya's *Arthaśhastra*, the *mantri* was the head of the civil administration, while other important officers included the commander-in-chief, the general, and the chief of the palace guards. A new 'minister of peace and war' (*sāndhivigrahika*) was introduced during the Gupta period. The *amātyas* of Kauṭilya's time also evolved into a broader category that included *kumārāmātyas*, who were administrators at the local or provincial level. Details of the district-level administration of the Gupta period are available from various records. For instance, the Damodarpur copper plates during the period of Kumaragupta I record that the district office comprised the following five members: the head district officer, the chief banker, the chief caravan trader, the chief artisan, and the chief of revenue



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collection. Like other kingdoms of this period, the Pallavas (c. 275–897 CE) in the south also adopted a combination of centralised monarchy and decentralised local governance. While the king was the supreme head of state, the kingdom was divided into provinces, districts, taluks, and villages. One of the most striking features of the Pallavas was the tax-free land grants to villages. These were known as *Brahmadeya* villages.

It is further interesting to note how villages functioned relatively independently of the royal administration. For instance, the village assemblies had small committees known as *variyams* that managed specific tasks like irrigation, gardens, and temple management. Like their contemporaries, the Chālukyas (c. 543–753 CE) of

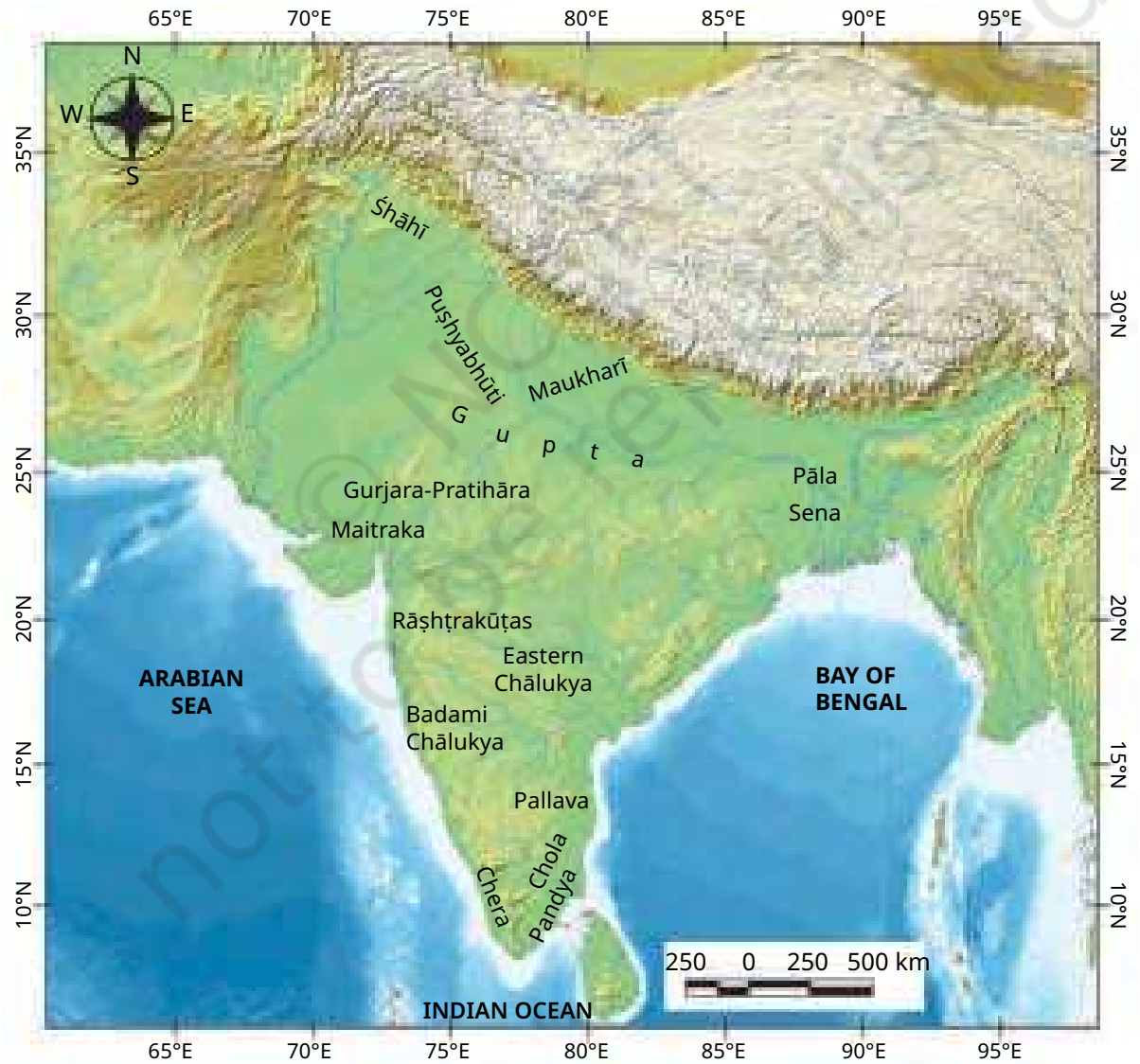


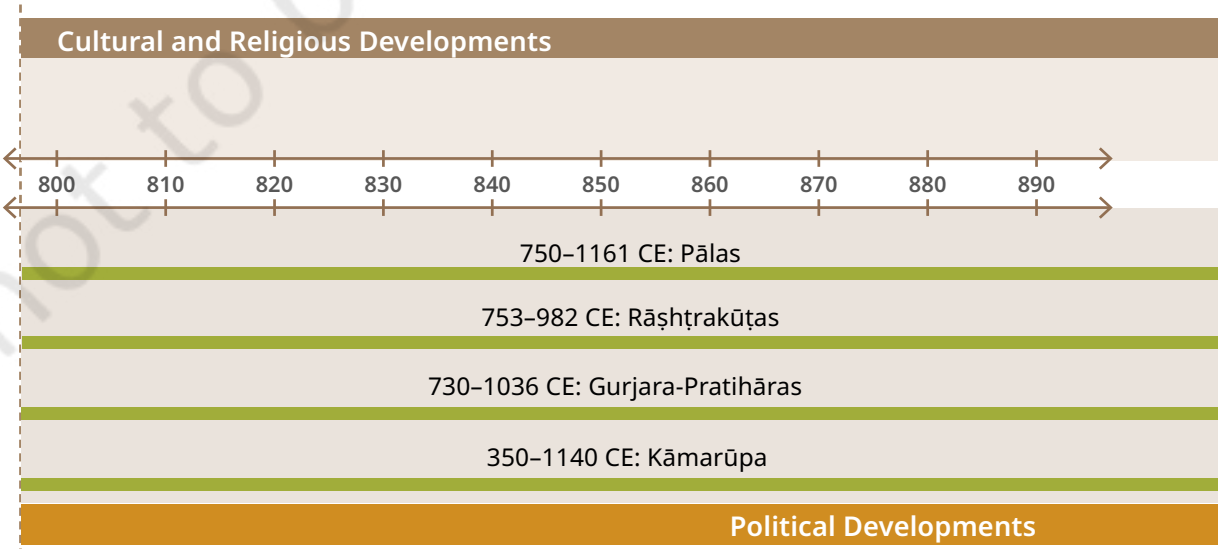
Fig. 5.6. Kingdoms and empires flourishing between 3rd and 10th century CE

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Badami followed a monarchical system along with a decentralised administration. The king's duties and the kingdom's administrative divisions, along with the autonomous functioning of village assemblies, largely followed the same pattern discussed above. Thus, instead of the *Brahmadeya* villages of the Pallava dynasty, the Chālukyas gave land grants to Brahmin settlements known as *agrahārams*. Some of these *agrahārams*, such as those at Aihole and Badami, gradually developed into prominent centres of learning.

As you have read in previous grades, the Gurjara–Pratihāras ruled over large parts of Northern and Western India from about the 8th to 10th centuries CE. The main capital of this dynasty, Kannauj (in modern-day Uttar Pradesh), became a coveted site for various political kingdoms of the period. The 'struggle' to control Kannauj later came to be known as the 'tri-partite struggle' because of the involvement of three major powers, namely the Gurjara–Pratihāras, Pālas, and Rāṣhṭrakūṭas. The administrative systems of all three kingdoms followed the same pattern, that is a mix of monarchy and decentralised administrative units comprising provinces, districts and villages. In all cases, the village remained the smallest administrative unit and was largely self-reliant and autonomous in major practical functions, including infrastructure, social welfare, and education.

Remember meeting the early Cholas, a powerful kingdom of southern India, and the famous King Karikala in your previous grades. Now, we will explore the later Cholas, also known as the imperial Cholas (9th–11th century CE), who were noted for their efficient administrative and revenue systems. Like other empires of the period, the Chola empire was divided into *manḍalams* (provinces), which were further subdivided into *valanāḍus* (districts), *nāḍus* (groups of villages), and



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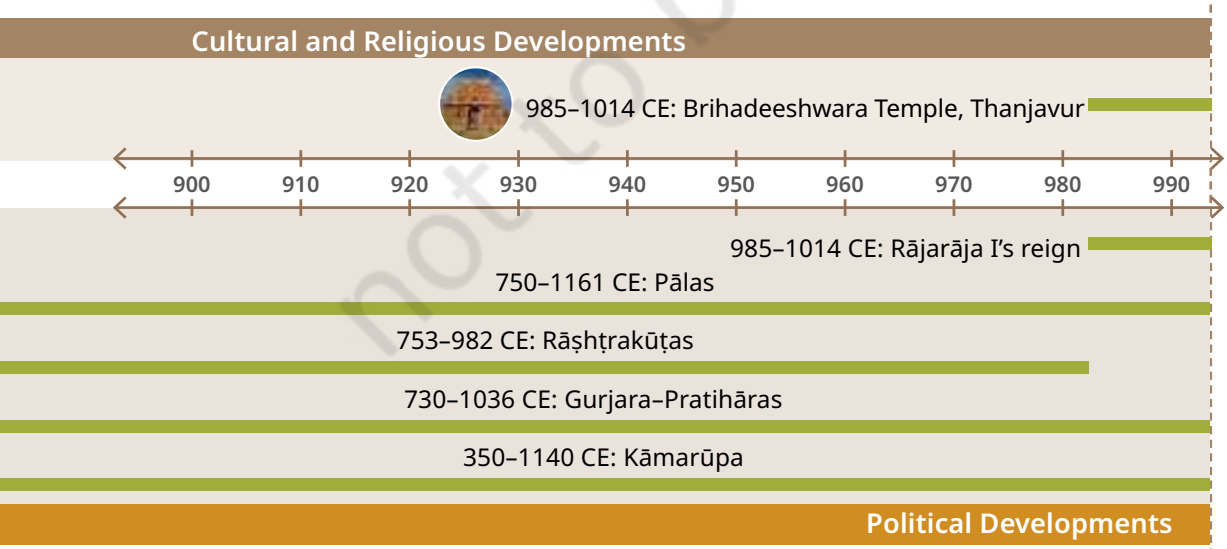
finally *Urs* (individual villages). As usual, the village was the smallest unit within a district. Village councils or assemblies played an important role in settling disputes and managing local affairs. As in other parts of India, the village assemblies of the Chola empire were responsible for all local administrative functions, including revenue collection, land management, irrigation, road construction, record maintenance, and so on. Thus, the village assemblies functioned as independent, self-reliant institutions and were not dependent on the government for patronage.

DON'T MISS OUT

The Uttaramerur inscription of Parantaka I (10th century) of the Chola period provides a vivid description of village governance. Located in the Vaikuṇṭha Perumal Temple in Kanchipuram district of Tamil Nadu, these Tamil inscriptions furnish details about the functioning of village assemblies, and inform us about the *Kudavolai*, or the 'ballot pot' system used in village elections. In this system, the names of eligible candidates were written on palm leaves and placed inside a large pot. During a public gathering, a young child was asked to draw the leaves, one by one, to select representatives for the village assembly and its various committees. To ensure fairness, the draw took place in full view of the community, often at a temple. The elected members were then divided into specialised committees (*variyams*), each entrusted with important village responsibilities, such as managing irrigation (the tank committee), administering justice, and collecting taxes.



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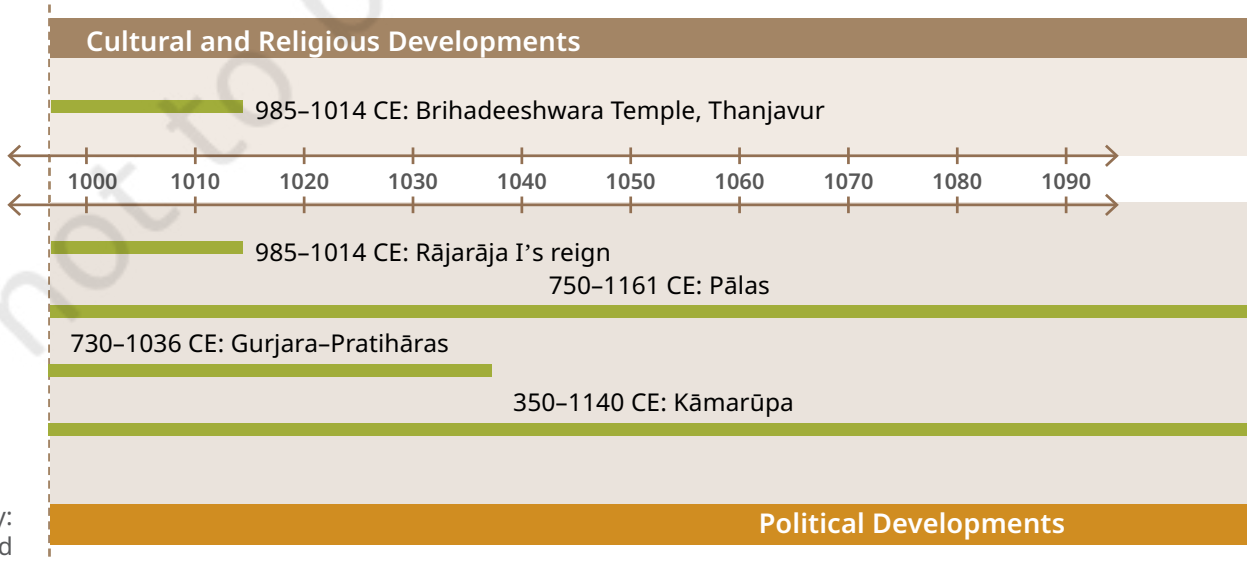


Ethics: The Foundation of Law and Life

Ethics form the basis of law and life, making it important to explore the roots of ethical thought in Indian history. Some of the earliest Indian texts, such as the Vedas and the epics, discuss questions of reality, right conduct, the origin of all things, and the nature of the universe. Vedic texts describe how life should be lived ideally. The *Bhagavada Gītā* emphasises knowledge, faith, action, virtue and an ethical way of life.

India has a long tradition of ethical thought, and these moral principles often guided both state and society. One important principle through which reality is understood is *samatva*, or the principle of sameness. According to this principle, all bodies are made of the same matter, and all forms of consciousness are manifestations of one supreme consciousness. The Vedas describe this consciousness as *satya* (real, true) and *ṛita* (right), as well as and "the invisible origin of all things". The *Mahābhārata* also includes characters from all *varṇas* who, despite their differences, repeatedly uphold the principle of *samatva*. The epics, often, critique discrimination and present goodness as non-discriminatory. They emphasise the ideal of a good person and ruler "as one who works for the welfare of all beings."

Ṛita is another concept that is described in the *Ṛig Veda* as an all pervading cosmic order that represents harmony and balance in nature, and in human society. It is seen as the principle that regulates the forces of nature, upholds moral values, and represents the underlying order that maintains balance in the universe.



The idea of justice is closely linked to *dharma*. Here, *dharma* does not mean religion; rather, it refers to duty, obligation, righteousness, and moral conduct. It represents a way of life in which ethical values are central and individuals are expected to perform their duties according to their roles and responsibilities in society. In Buddhism, the term 'dhamma'—the Pāli equivalent of the Sanskrit word *dharma*—is used to express similar ethical principles.

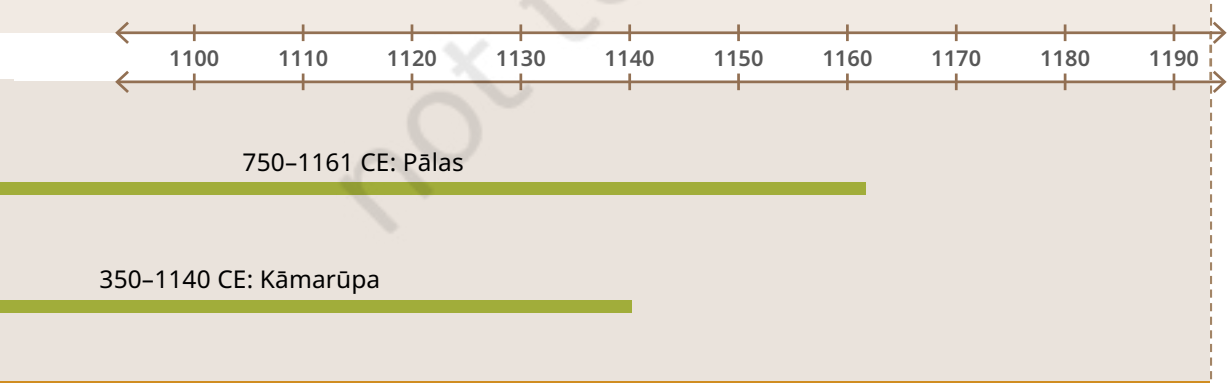
DON'T MISS OUT

The word 'dharma' is derived from the Sanskrit root *dhri*, which is also the root of *dharati* (the earth). In the *Mahābhārata*, Bhishma says that *dharma* "is that which upholds beings; whatever upholds all beings is *dharma*." In the sense of the law of existence, it is also said that "the *dharma* of iron is to sink and of wood is to float."



The connection between politics and ethics is further evident in historical records from different periods, from the Mauryas to the Cholas. For instance, Aśhoka's edicts promoted *dhamma* by emphasising moral conduct, respect within the family, ethical behaviour in everyday life, non-violence, and compassion. Evidence of ethical principles in governance continued into later periods. The 10th century CE Uttaramerur inscription, for instance, specifies that candidates for village assembly elections should have "honest earnings" and be "pure" of mind. Literary works from different periods also highlight the importance of moral conduct in public life. Kāmandaka's *Nītisāra* and Bāṇabhaṭṭa's *Kādambarī*—widely celebrated as one of the world's first novels—contain reflections

Cultural and Religious Developments



Political Developments

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and advice on kingship and governance, reinforcing the enduring connection between ethics and political authority in Indian history.

Social Structures and Everyday Life

Varṇa and *Jāti*

In previous grades, we learned about the *varṇa* system and its fourfold structure—*brāhmaṇas, kṣhatriyas, vaiśhyas,* and *śhūdras*. Early Vedic texts do not indicate any fixed social status strictly based on birth. Instead, it is generally agreed that social identity was shaped by several complex and overlapping factors, including ethnicity, subgroups, geographic region, village affiliation, *gotra* (a kinship-based subgroup), language, and, especially occupation. While this system distinguished individuals and communities from one another, it also connected them through shared social, economic, and cultural relationships. At this stage, occupations remained flexible and mobile, and the idea of strict hereditary occupations had not yet become firmly established. Evidence of this flexibility is often drawn from a verse of the *Ṛigveda* in which the seer refers to occupational diversity within a single family.

Kārurahaṁ tato bhiṣhagupalaprakṣhiṇī nanā /
Nānādhiyo vasūyavo'nu gā iva tasthimendrāyendo pari srava //

– *Ṛigveda* 9.112.3

I am a poet;
my father is a physician,
my mother is a grinder of corn;
having various occupation, desiring riches we remain (in the world) like cattle (in the stalls).

LET'S EXPLORE

Read the verse given above and discuss it in groups. As you do so, think like historians—look for clues in the source and use them to understand what life may have been like.

While discussing, keep these questions in mind:

→ What does the source tell us? (evidence)

→ What can we understand from it? (interpretation)

→ What might it not tell us? (limits of the source)

Now answer the following:

1. What occupations are mentioned in the family described in the verse? What does this indicate about the nature of occupations in Vedic society?
2. How does the above verse challenge the idea that social status and occupation were fixed by birth?
3. What different occupations do you find in contemporary society?

After the discussion, compare your group's responses with those of another group and note the similarities and differences in interpretation. Did all groups interpret the source in the same way? What does this tell us about how historians use evidence to understand the past?



The earliest reference to the four social categories, understood by historians as *varṇa*, appears in the *Puruṣhasūkta*, a hymn in Book 10 of the *Ṛigveda*. Over a period of time, these four social categories (*varṇas*) came to be associated with specific roles and tasks. The *brāhmaṇas* were mainly expected to study and teach the Vedas and other sacred texts, perform and officiate *yajñas*, and give and receive *dāna* (gifts). Rajanya (*Kṣhatriyas*) were tasked with warfare, protecting people, and administering justice. They were also expected to study the scriptures, sponsor yajñas, make donations, and uphold social order. *Vaiśhyas* were associated with economic activities, such as agriculture, pastoralism, and trade, while also participating in scriptural study, sacrificial rituals, and acts of charity. *Śhūdras* were expected to assist the other *varṇas*. However, practically, the *Śhūdras* were also engaged in various economic activities such as agriculture, animal husbandry, trade, and arts and crafts.

Thus, the concept of *varṇa* was based on a system of values in which knowledge was given the highest status, followed by political power and wealth. Therefore, it is important to remember that the division of the four *varṇas* was a functional one. For instance, the Buddhist text *Sutta Nipāta* states that, "No *brāhmaṇa* is such by birth. No outcaste is such by birth but only by his deeds. A *brāhmaṇa* is such by his deeds." Over time, however, this flexibility in social roles gradually got reduced.

Gradually, a distinct social structure called *jāti* emerged due to various factors, including intermarriage among the *varṇas*, migrating communities becoming **endogamous**, and territorial differences. While the number of *varṇas* was fixed at four, there

Endogamy: The practice of marrying within one's own social group, community, clan or tribe. It is a social custom in which people are expected to choose marriage partners from within the same group.

was no restriction on the number of *jātis*. As new social groups and occupations developed, the number of *jātis* continued to grow.

Social Mobility

Varṇa and *jāti* were not always rigid social categories, and there was considerable social mobility within and across these categories. For example, several rulers came from diverse social backgrounds including the Nandas, Mauryas, Śhuṅgas, Satavāhanas, Vākāṭakas, Guptas, and Puṣhyabhūtis.

There are also instances of occupational mobility within social groups. For instance, the Mandsaur Stone Inscription (473 CE) mentions a guild of silk weavers who migrated from Lata in Gujarat to Dashapura in Madhya Pradesh during the Gupta period. This guild was proficient not just in weaving but also in archery, astrology, and other occupations. Likewise, there are several inscriptions, such as the Karitalai copper-plate inscriptions of Mahārāja Jayanātha (late 5th century CE), which record *brāhmaṇas* as land managers.



Fig. 5.7. Karitalai copper plate of Mahārāja Jayanātha

Sangam literature like the *Tolkappiyam* refers to four-fold division of society and mentions different groups such as *Arasar* (kings), *Vanigar* (traders/ merchants), and *Velar* (farmers). We also find references to *Antanar* (*brāhmaṇas*), who were often patronised by ruling elites and the kings. However, the *varṇa* classification mentioned in the *Tolkappiyam* seems to be premised on occupation, and the four-fold *varṇa* classification was marked by fluidity. For instance, the *Pattinappalai* describes a prosperous, dynamic, trade-oriented society where different occupational groups such as merchants, salt-makers, fishermen, artisans, agriculturists, and warriors, interacted actively. This suggests that society was organised more on the basis of occupation and economic functions than on a rigid *varṇa* classification.

Family and Society

In Vedic society, the *kula* (family) formed the smallest and the most basic social unit. It was connected to the larger political structure

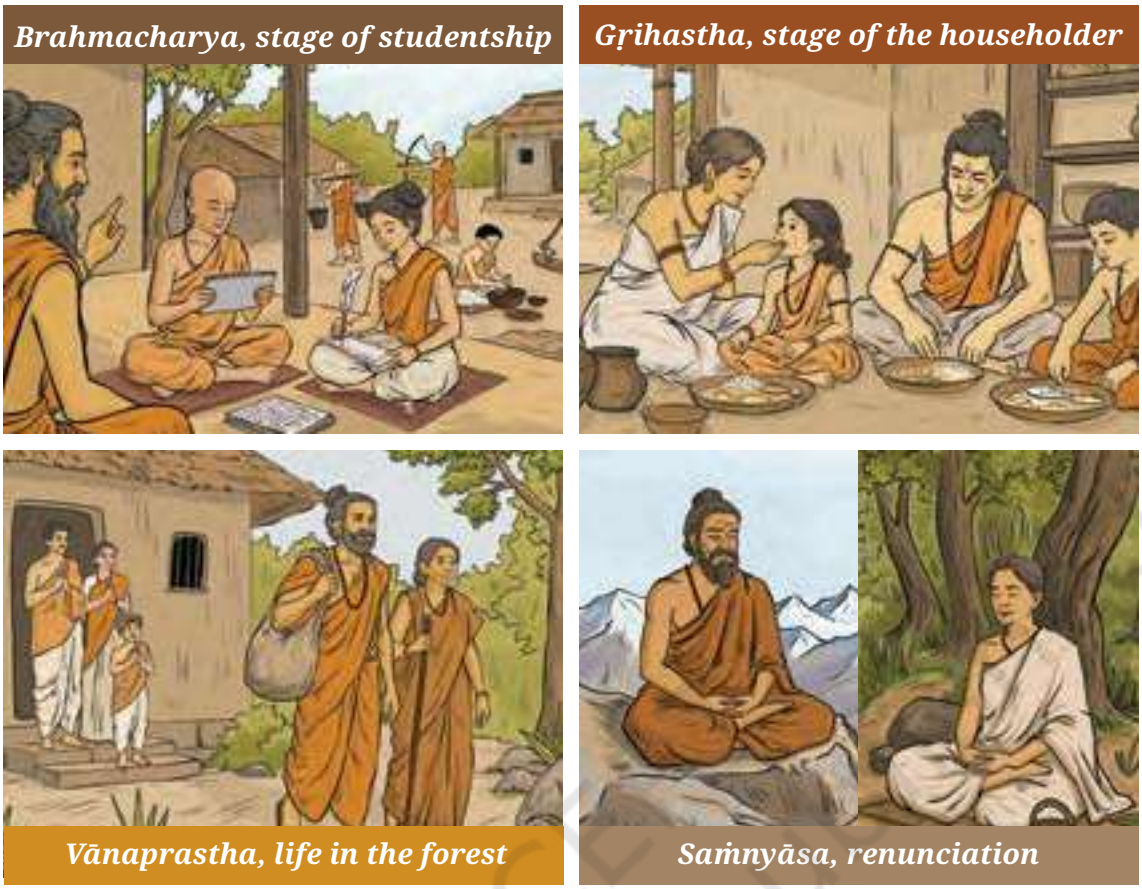


Fig. 5.8. The four āśhramas

through the village, or *grāma*, which consisted of several families. A group of *grāmas* together formed a *viśha*, headed by a *viśhapati*. Above the *viśha* was the *jana*, with the *rājā* serving as the chief protector of the *jana*, or the people. In this way, the family or *kula* was inseparable from the *jana*. During the later Vedic period, the term *kula* came to denote a household comprising several members bound by kinship. The concept of *gotra* referred to a **patrilineal** lineage or clan traced to a common ancestor, traditionally linked to a Vedic sage (*ṛiṣhi*). *Gotra* affiliation often played an important role in regulating marriage practices as well. Everyone was expected to perform the duties appropriate to their *varṇa* and stage of life (*āśhrama*). This division of one's life into the four *āśhramas* (Fig 5.8) and their respective *dharmas*, in principle, provides fulfilment to the person in their social, moral, and spiritual aspects, which would lead to harmony and balance in society. All the stages of life were accompanied by numerous rituals and ceremonies, particularly the *ṣhoḍaśha saṁskāras*, or the 'sixteen rites of passage'.

Patrilineal: A social system wherein family identity and inheritance, are passed down strictly through the male line.

Apart from the *āśhramas*, the concept of the four goals of life or *puruṣhārthas* was also significant. These were (1) righteousness (*dharma*); (2) material well-being (*artha*); (3) fulfilment of desires (*kāma*); and (4) liberation from all worldly ties (*mokṣha*). The fulfilment of these four ends of life is important for every human being. In this framework, *dharma* and *mokṣha* hold particular significance from an ethical point of view, as they provide direction and purpose to human life. For instance, the pursuit of wealth (*artha*) is a desirable objective, provided it is guided by *dharma*, that is, aligned with the welfare of society.

Role of Women

The Vedic period is often described as a period during which women held a high and respectful position in society. Women participated in scholarly learning and, in certain contexts, performed rituals alongside their male counterparts. Textual references also indicate that women took part in activities such as chariot races and attended social gatherings, including the *sabhā*. Several hymns of the *Ṛigveda* are traditionally attributed to women sages—most notably Apālā, Viśhvavārā, Ghoṣhā, and Lopāmudrā—highlighting women's active engagement in intellectual and religious life. In addition, goddesses such as Uṣha, the goddess of dawn, and Aditi, the mother of the gods, occupied significant and revered positions in Vedic culture. The tradition of respect for women is evident in texts composed after the Vedic period, too. For instance, *Manu-smṛiti* mentions:

Yatra nāryastu pūjyante ramante tatra devatāḥ |
Yatraitāstu na pūjyante sarvās tatrāphalāḥ kriyāḥ ||
|| *Manu-Smṛiti* 3.56 ||

"Where women, verily, are honoured, there gods rejoice; where, however, they are not honoured, there all sacred rites prove fruitless."

Over time, the position and roles of women fluctuated, even declined, as social and political conditions changed. However, there are many examples of women continuing to contribute to household management, agriculture, crafts, and religious practices.

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Literary works of the Gupta–Vākāṭaka period (around the 4th to 6th centuries CE) feature female characters who are depicted as highly educated and skilled in the arts. Other historical records also mention queens and royal women who played important roles in governance and religious patronage. For example, as discussed in the Grade 7, Part I textbook, Prabhāvatī Gupta, daughter of the Gupta ruler Chandragupta II, ruled as a regent in the Vākāṭaka kingdom and issued land grants in her own name. Women also appear as donors on several **votive inscriptions** from the post-Maurya period.

Sangam literature similarly portrays women as active participants in society and the economy. They performed important agrarian tasks such as planting, weeding, husking, winnowing paddy, and were also involved in cattle rearing, spinning, fishing, salt production, and garland selling. Sangam texts further mention influential women such as the celebrated poetesses Avvaiyar and Vennikuyattiyar (woman potter). Similarly the women bards and dancers quite like their male counterparts contributed to the cultural, literary, and social roles of women in early historic southern India. Later, during the Chola period, inscriptions record the activities of royal women such as Sembiyan Mahādevī, who supported temple building and religious institutions.

Votive inscription: Text engraved on stone, metal, or other materials, dedicating a gift, sculpture, or structure to a deity or sacred place.

Religious Life and the Emergence of Bhakti

The Vedic pantheon did not follow a rigid hierarchical structure, and different deities are praised as supreme in different hymns of the Vedas. These deities were invoked through prayers and sacrificial rituals (*yajñas*), which involved making offerings, most often to the sacred fire. The faith of the Vedic people was intertwined with the worship of nature, as each Vedic deity was associated with an element of nature, such as the sun, rain, fire, earth, dawn, etc. Some of these ancient practices continue today in the form of festivals celebrated across India, for example, the sun worship during Chhath and on Makar Sankranti. Such practices are often understood in the context of early societies' dependence on nature for survival. As a result, nature was viewed not merely as a resource, but as sacred and powerful. The Vedic worldview, therefore, reflected an early sense of respect for, and responsibility towards, nature.

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DON'T MISS OUT

Around the middle of the first millennium BCE, a discernible trend of renunciants emerged. These individuals advocated non-attachment to material comforts and social relationships, choosing to live as ascetics and wanderers, rather than as householders. Contemporary sources refer to them by different terms, such as *parivrājaka* (wanderer), *bhikṣhu* (one who lives by begging alms), or *śhramaṇa* (one who strives). While Gautama Buddha and Mahāvīra emerged as influential thinkers of this period, the idea of renunciation was already present in the Vedic tradition. As discussed earlier, amongst the four stages (*āśhrama*) of life, *vānaprastha* and *saṁnyāsa* clearly have a renunciatory connotation.



Over time, the Vedic religious tradition evolved towards forms of worship centred on personal deities such as Viṣhṇu, Śhiva, and Śhakti, laying the foundations for later devotional practices. One such practice was 'Bhakti', a path that offered a direct connection with the gods without the need for elaborate rituals prescribed in the Vedas, and which was accessible to all, regardless of class or gender.

Bhakti has a long tradition in India, with early references found in texts such as the *Mahābhārata*. However, the organised and widespread devotional set of practices known as the Bhakti tradition gained prominence in the 6th century Tamil region through the devotional activities of the Āḻvārs and Nāyanmārs. The Āḻvārs were twelve saint-poets who composed hymns in praise of Lord Viṣhṇu. Alongside the Āḻvārs were the sixty-three Nāyanmārs, the Śhaiva saint-poets, who composed hymns in praise of Lord Śhiva. Together, the Āḻvārs and Nāyanmārs created a large body of Tamil Bhakti literature, which represents one of the most significant cultural and religious developments of this period. You will learn more about the Bhakti tradition in the second part of the Grade 9 textbook.

The Quest for Knowledge

In early India, education was an integral part of life, serving a holistic purpose. Truth, patience, regularity, humility, control of senses, purity of self (*sattvaśhuddhi*), cognition of the underlying unity of life, nature and environment, and reverence for all beings were the inner values cultivated by Indian education. Pupils were trained to live in accordance with *dharma*—the guiding principle for

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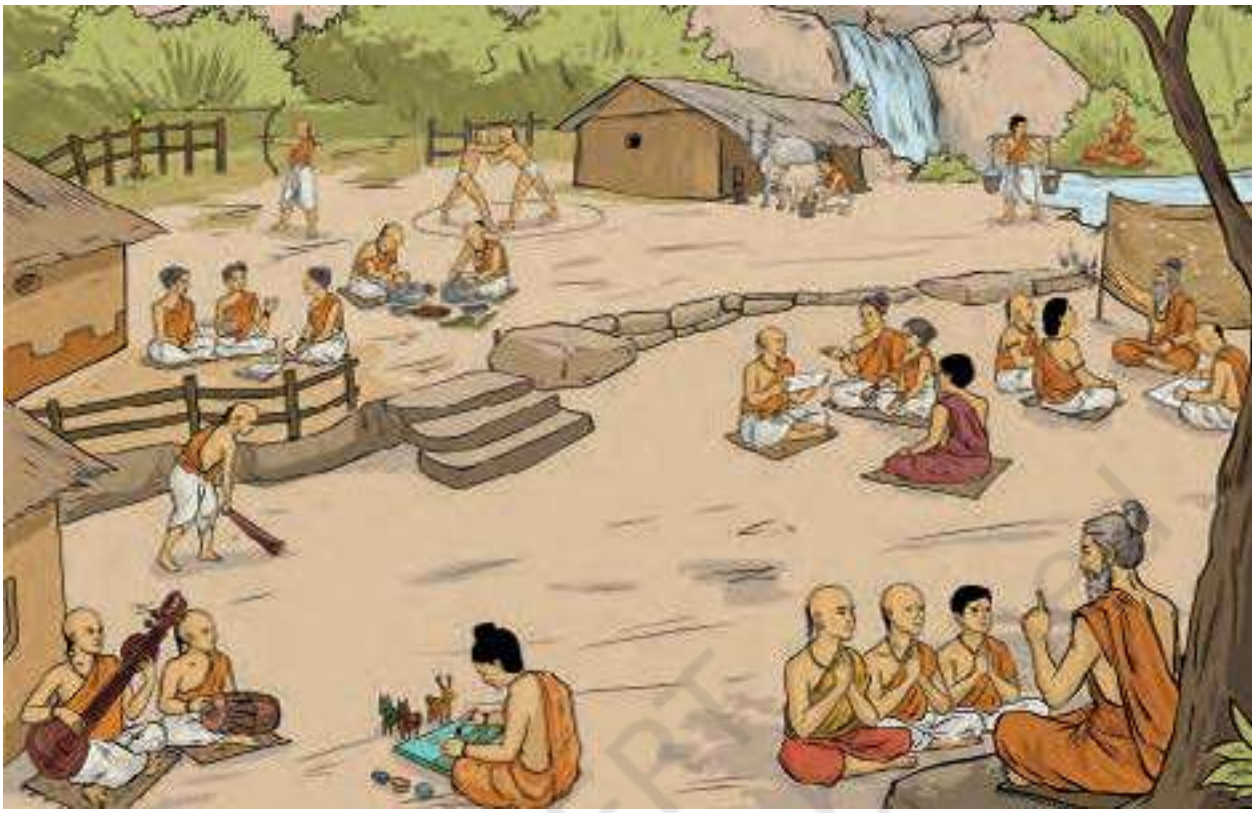


Fig. 5.9. Representative illustration of a Gurukula

the individual, the family, and society. *Dharma* required everyone, including students, to fulfil their duties towards parents, teachers, and the gods. Good character and moral conduct were seen as the foundation of society.

Indian education also imparted practical skills across a wide range of subjects. Students studied the Vedas, along with grammar, logic, philosophy, ethics, mathematics, science, medicine, and astronomy. They were also trained in various arts and crafts, including music, dance, painting, physical education, and martial arts such as archery. Alongside their studies, students practised yoga, meditation, and service to the guru, making education a complete preparation for life, not just a path to a career. The teacher–student relationship (*guru-śhiṣhya parampar*ā) was regarded as sacred. The teacher (*guru* or *ā*c*hārya*) was highly respected and seen as a guide who helped students move from the darkness of ignorance to the light of knowledge. The teacher's home served as the centre of the *gurukula*, and the relationship between the teacher and student was close and mutually supportive, with the student treated as a member of the teacher's family. Students living in the *gurukula* followed a

disciplined life marked by self-control, obedience, and devotion. Education was treated as a critical part of life, which was imparted holistically.

LET'S EXPLORE

Compare your school life with the life of a student in a *gurukula* in early India. Think about aspects such as daily routine, subjects studied, relationship with teachers, discipline, and living arrangements. What advantages and challenges do you think each system of education might have for students?



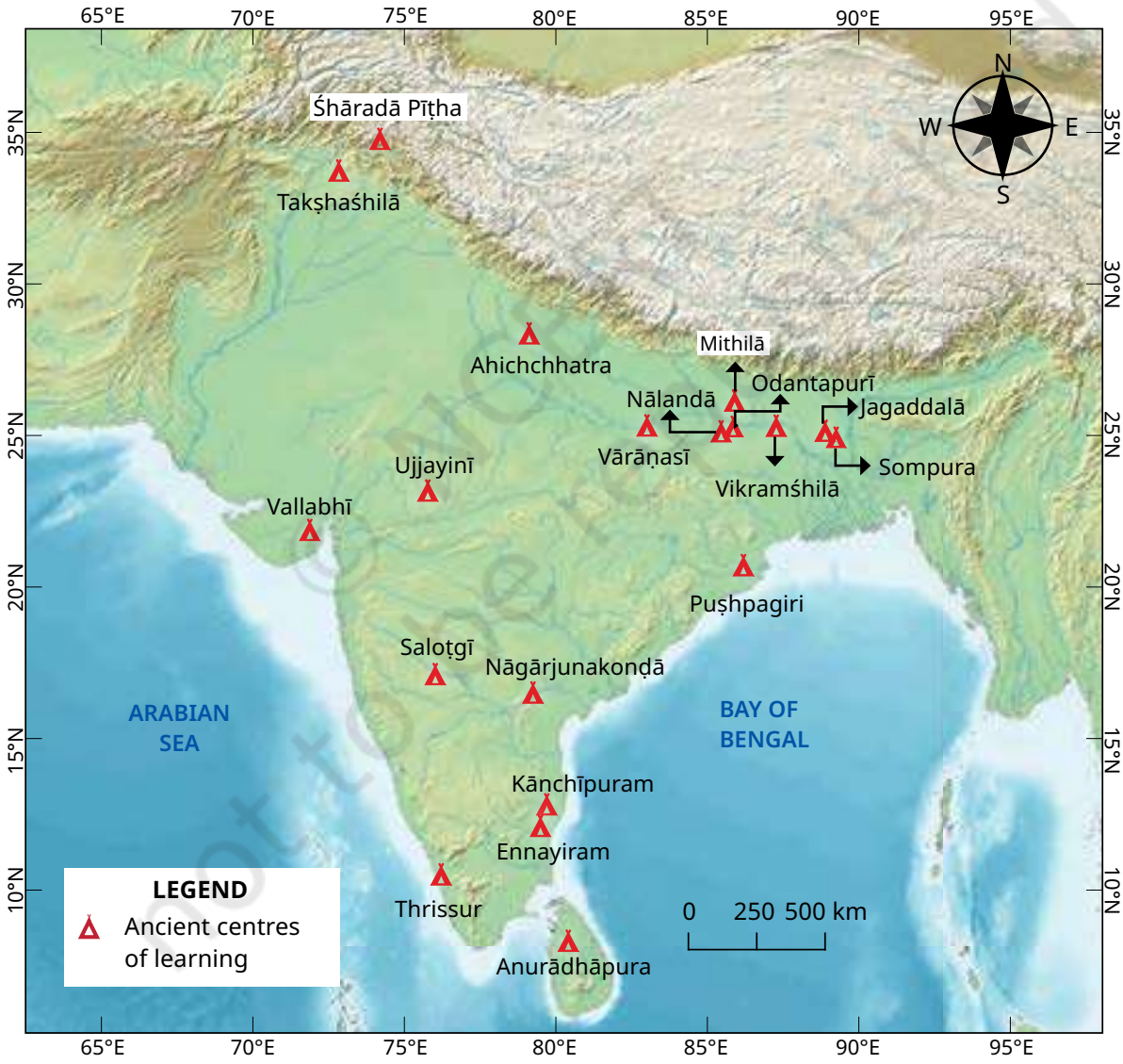


Fig. 5.10. Some of the prominent universities and advanced centres of learning in early India



Fig. 5.11. Panoramic view of the ruins of Takshashila. It was a large campus with very well-organised urban systems, including various types of housing, drainage, and waste management.

India's long tradition of learning and intellectual activity is reflected in the establishment of several important centres of education before the second millennium CE. Historical and literary sources indicate that during this period, institutions of higher learning emerged across the Indian subcontinent, attracting students from both India and other regions.

Over several millennia, India produced a vast and diverse body of literature spanning subjects, such as philosophy, grammar, medicine, astronomy, mathematics, culinary practices, agriculture, architecture, and various aspects of everyday life. Notably, despite the rise and fall of kingdoms and political changes over time, many of these knowledge traditions and practices persisted.

Literary Heritage of Early India

Foundational Texts for Sanskrit Grammar

Pāṇini's *Aṣhṭādhyāyī*, Piṅgala's *Chhandaśhāstra*, Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣhya*

***Smṛiti* Literature–*Dharma*, Law and Ethics**

Manu-smṛiti, Yājñavalkya Smṛiti, Nārada Smṛiti, Viṣhṇu Smṛiti

Classical Works on Medicine

Charakasamhitā and *Suśhrutasamhitā*

Sanskrit poetry and *Kāvya*

Kālidāsa's *Raghuvaṃśha* and *Kumārasambhava*

Tamil Literature

Tiruvalluvar's *Tirukkural*; the Tamil epics *Silappadikāram* and *Maṇimēkalai*; the vast body of Sangam texts covering a wide range of themes including love (*akam*), war or public life (*puram*), political organisation, social structures, and economic activities

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Economy

Agriculture and Land Revenue

The Mauryan state developed an elaborate administrative system to regulate and supervise economic activities. Agricultural land within villages was divided into individual holdings, while common resources such as pastures were maintained for grazing cattle. Villages also included groves on their outskirts. The state encouraged agricultural expansion by clearing forests, although certain categories of forests were protected by law. The basic tax on land was a fixed proportion of the produce, generally one-sixth. For the purpose of revenue assessment, land was classified into different categories. Kauṭilya provides a detailed description of various types of village land, including cultivated land, wasteland or fallow land, high and dry land, sown fields, and groves. A wide range of crops were cultivated in different regions. These included several varieties of rice, pulses, wheat, linseed, mustard, saffron, sugarcane, vegetables, and fruits.

The economic foundations laid during the Mauryan period continued to develop in the post-Mauryan period. Agriculture remained the backbone of the economy, sustaining both rural livelihoods and state revenue. The *Milindapañho*, a Buddhist text traditionally attributed to Nāgasena, describes eight stages of agricultural operations, ranging from preparing and weeding the fields to harvesting and winnowing crops, indicating a detailed understanding of farming practices.

During this period, the expansion of agriculture in the Deccan likely contributed to increased cotton cultivation, as the region's black soil was particularly suitable for this crop. The *Amarakoṣha*, a standard Sanskrit lexicon, includes a special chapter on forest, crops, plants, and manure. Agricultural life in southern India is further documented in the Sangam literature, which highlights the land's fertility and the abundance of agricultural produce. Sangam texts refer to the Chera region as rich in commodities such as jackfruit, pepper, and turmeric, and vividly describe the cultivation of crops such as ragi and sugarcane.

Irrigation

Agriculture was closely dependent on irrigation, and considerable importance was placed on the construction and maintenance of structures such as reservoirs, canals, and dams. You may remember

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that earlier in this chapter, we discussed the Junagadh inscription of Rudradaman I (see Fig. 5.5). This inscription records that Puṣhyagupta, a governor appointed by Chandragupta Maurya, constructed a dam on Sudarshana Lake near Girnar in Saurāṣhṭra (or the Kathiawad region in Gujarat). This inscription highlights the active role of the Mauryan state in developing irrigation infrastructure. Facilitation of agriculture continued to be a major preoccupation of the state because it was one of the major sources of revenue.

LET'S RECALL

The Cholas were builders of irrigation systems that included canals, lakes, and tanks with connecting channels. Do you remember reading in your previous grades about the Grand Anicut (Kallanai) built by Karikala Chola? Such irrigation structures helped store and distribute water, supported agriculture, and encouraged the growth of settlements. The Grand Anicut continued to be used and repaired by later rulers and administrations over many centuries, showing the lasting importance of irrigation works undertaken by Cholas. Remarkably, it remains in use even today.



THINK ABOUT IT

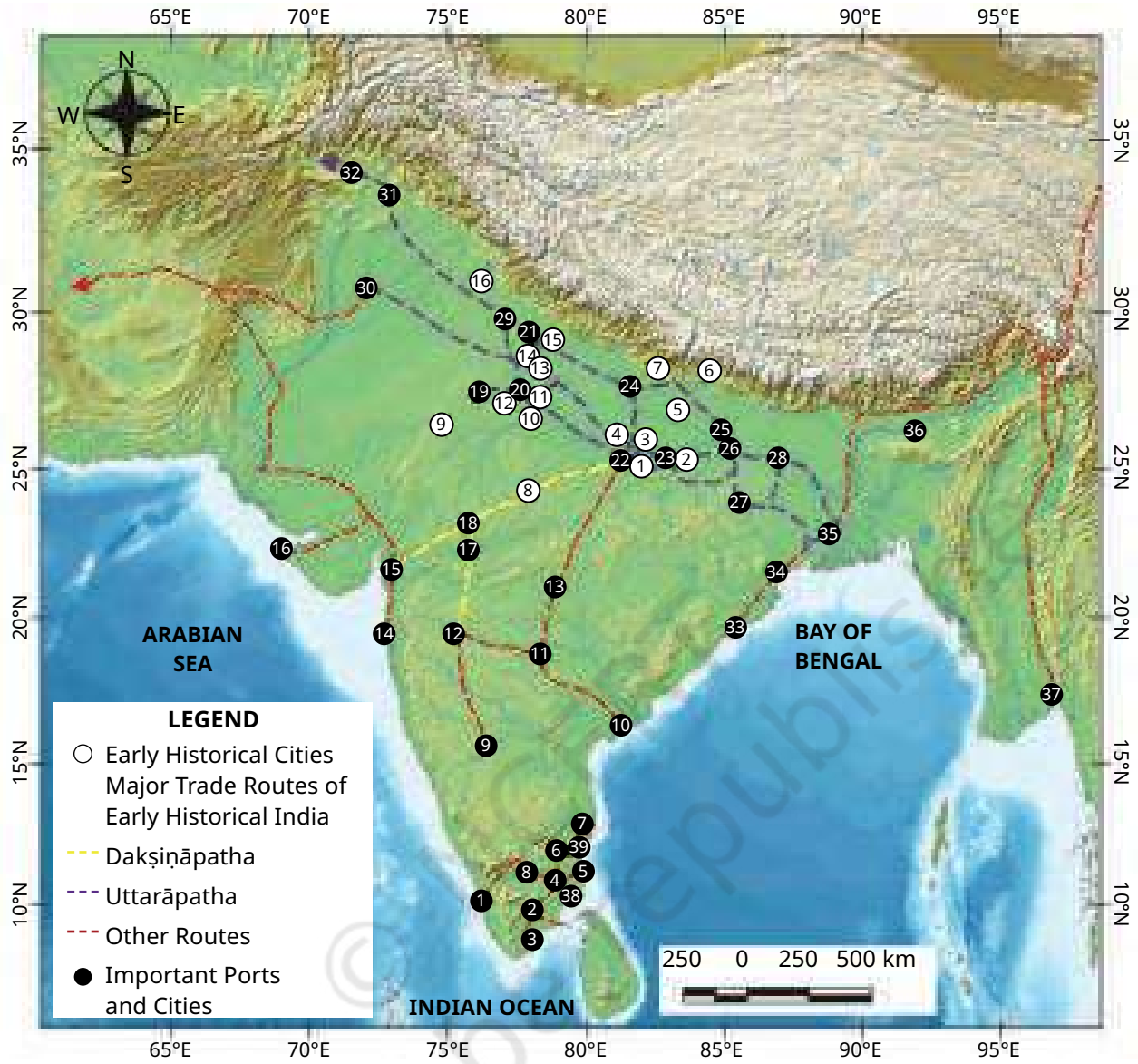
Why do you think irrigational structures like dams and canals were considered so important that their construction was recorded in inscriptions?



Trade: Trade Routes and Ports

One of the most significant features of economic development during this period was the expansion of trade and commerce. The emergence of well-structured states provided the necessary infrastructure and conditions for trade to flourish. The *Arthaśhāstra* identifies trade as one of the major economic activities and notes that Magadha traded textiles, gems, coral, pearls, metals, and minerals with various parts of northern, central, and southern India. Salt was another important commodity, and its production was strictly regulated by the state. The state also ensured the safety of trade routes and took measures to prevent the adulteration of goods and protect consumers from unfair practices. As we learnt in previous grades, trade networks within the Indian subcontinent, as well as those extending beyond it, had been developing since the times of the Harappans. By around the 6th century BCE, two major land routes—*Dakṣhiṇāpatha* and

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1. Muziris
2. Madurai
3. Korkāī
4. Uraiyūr
5. Puhār
6. Kovalūr
7. Kāñchīpuram
8. Karūr
9. Suvarṇagiri
10. Masulipaṭnam
11. Potanā
12. Pratiṣhṭhāna
13. Bhojakaṭa
14. Sopārā
15. Bhārukachchha
16. Dwārkā
17. Māhiṣhmatī
18. Ujjayinī
19. Virāṭa
20. Mathurā
21. Hastināpura
22. Kauśhāmbī
23. Kāśhī
24. Śhrāvastī
25. Vaiśhālī
26. Pāṭaliputra
27. Rājagṛiha
28. Champā
29. Thuna
30. Shibipura
31. Takṣhaśhilā
32. Puṣhkalāvatī
33. Kalinganagara
34. Tāmralipti
35. Chandraketugarh
36. Prāgjyotiṣhapura
37. Thāṭon
38. Kāveripaṭṭinam
39. Arikameḍu

① Bhīṭā
② Prahalādpura
③ Jhūsī
④ Śhringaverapura
⑤ Sohgaurā
⑥ Kuśhīnārā
⑦ Piprāhwā
⑧ Vidiśhā
⑨ Sāmbhar
⑩ Baṭeśhwara
⑪ Sonkha
⑫ Noha
⑬ Atranjīkheḍā
⑭ Jakheḍā
⑮ Ahichchhatra
⑯ Rūpaḍ

Fig. 5.12. Major trade routes of early historical India

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Uttarāpatha—had emerged and were later maintained and expanded by successive dynasties. Over time, these routes served as important trans-regional networks, linking different parts of the subcontinent. They facilitated the movement of goods, people, and ideas, connecting inland regions with coastal ports and thereby integrating overland and maritime trade systems.

Indian ports also played a significant role in facilitating trade and commerce, attracting both Indian and foreign traders. Trade links between the Harappans and the Mesopotamians already existed, involving ports along the western coast of India, the Persian Gulf, and other regions. Over time, these networks expanded as major ports such as Muziris, Kāveripaṭṭinam, Arikameḍu, and Masulipaṭnam, developed and grew. [*Note: Some of these ports have been marked on the map (Fig. 5.12) to help you locate them geographically.*] Maritime trade utilised both coastal routes and long-distance overseas routes across the Indian Ocean. By the early centuries of the Common Era, India's trade with Rome had expanded significantly, conducted through both sea routes and overland connections via Central Asia. We will learn more about India's trade interactions with different regions in a chapter titled 'India and the World – 1' in part 2 of this textbook.

LET'S RECALL

In previous grades, we studied the *Silappadikāram*, which mentions two important routes in the Tamil region that also extended into northern India. The first route linked Kanchipuram to the famous port of Poompuhar (Kaveripattinam), and the second connected Kanchipuram to Kanyakumari.



Guilds

The early Indian economy was supported by collective organisations of traders, artisans, and merchants known as guilds (*śhreṇīs*), which were associations of people engaged in the same profession, craft, or occupation. These guilds played a significant role in the expansion of trade and commerce, especially after the rise of territorial states in the form of the *mahājanapadas* (6th century BCE). Metallic coins, beginning with silver punch-marked coins, also came into circulation during this period. The Jātaka literature refers to eighteen types of guilds, indicating that they were well-established and influential institutions in the economic life of early India. Guilds regulated the quality of goods and often fixed prices to protect both artisans and consumers.

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The conduct of their members was supervised through guild courts, which enforced professional standards and discipline. In addition, guilds functioned as banks, financiers, and trustees.

DON'T MISS OUT



Fig. 5.13. Nashik cave inscription

Guilds as Financial Institutions

The Nāśhik cave inscription (2nd century CE) of the Śhaka king Nahapāna and his son-in-law, Uśhavadāta, sheds light on the economic role of guilds in early India. It records that monetary donations were deposited with professional guilds (*śhreṇīs*), which were obligated to pay a fixed rate of interest on these endowments. The interest generated was used to maintain Buddhist monasteries and caves. This indicates that guilds were not merely associations of craftspersons and traders but also functioned as banking and credit institutions, capable of securely investing funds and generating a steady income.



The economic prosperity achieved during the pre-Gupta period laid a strong foundation for the cultural and economic developments of later periods. Industries continued to expand, supported by the availability of raw materials and the skill and enterprise of artisans and craftspersons. Literary and archaeological sources refer to a wide variety of textiles, including silk, cotton, wool, and linen. Diverse weaving techniques were in use, and centres such as Mathurā, Kāśhī, and Kāmarūpa emerged as important hubs of textile production. References to guilds of silk weavers further indicate the organised nature of the textile industry. Merchants of various categories figure prominently in literary and epigraphical sources, highlighting the growing importance of trade.

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DON'T MISS OUT

An inscription on the southern gateway of the Great Stupa at Sanchi refers to the benevolent and welfare activities carried out by the guild of ivory workers from Vidiśhā. These ivory workers were responsible for carving the stone sculptures on the gateways and railings surrounding the stūpa, indicating the active role of craft guilds in both artistic production and religious patronage.



In this chapter, we explored the foundations of state and society in early India, while tracing the development of political institutions, social structures, economic life, and cultural traditions. From the culture of the Vedic period to the robust administration of vast empires, social and political ideas evolved over time while maintaining a remarkable continuity. The chapter also highlighted the dynamic nature of early Indian society and its intellectual and cultural achievements. On the whole, the developments of this period laid the groundwork for many enduring traditions that continue to shape the Indian subcontinent's social and cultural life even today.



Before we move on...

- Indian civilisation demonstrates a remarkable continuity in its cultural, social, and political traditions.
- The structures of social, cultural, and political life in India evolved from Vedic period and took various forms across space and time.
- The rise of powerful states such as Magadha and empires like the Mauryas and Guptas led to the emergence of structured systems of administration, taxation, military organisation, and governance.
- Early political organisation evolved from clans (*janas*) led by a *rājā* to larger kingdoms and republics (*gaṇas* or *saṁghas*) and later to powerful empires such as the Mauryas, Guptas, and Cholas. The economy was largely based on agriculture, supported by irrigation works, while trade networks, ports, and guilds played a vital role in the growth of commerce and crafts. Despite political changes, knowledge traditions, trade networks, cultural, and devotional practices such as Bhakti continued to flourish across regions.

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Questions and activities

1. How did political organisation change from the Vedic period to the age of large empires such as the Mauryas and the Guptas? Explain the administrative system of the early Indian states.
2. Describe the role of the king, important officers, and the methods used to govern large territories.
3. After studying this chapter, what do you think were the most important features of the state and society in India before 1000 CE?
4. What do early texts such as the *Ṛigveda*, *Arthaśhāstra*, and the *Mahābhārata* reveal about political and social life?
5. What can we learn from early Indian society about *varṇa* and the role of women?
6. Explain how assemblies like *sabhā* and *samiti* limited the power of the *rājā*. Which modern institutions perform similar functions today?
7. What do the terms *varṇa* and *jāti* refer to in early Indian society? How were they different, and what factors may have contributed to the formation of various *jātis*?
8. Why do you think education in early India emphasised both knowledge and moral values? How might this have benefited society?
9. Look at the major trade routes of early India (Fig 5.12). How do you think these routes helped people in the exchange of goods, skills, beliefs, and cultural practices.
10. What might have been the advantages and challenges of ruling a large empire in the absence of modern communication systems?
11. Many ideas about governance come from texts composed by scholars and advisors of the king. What might be some limitations of relying only on such sources?
12. Read the source and answer the questions:

    The Nāśhik cave inscription (2nd century CE) of Uṣhavadāta records:

    "Uṣhavadāta, son of Dinika, son-in-law of king Nahapāna ... has bestowed this cave on the *Saṁgha* generally; he has also given a perpetual endowment, three thousand—3000 *kāhāpaṇas*,

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which, for the members of the *Saṁgha* of any sect, and any origin dwelling in this cave, will serve as cloth money and money for outside life (*kuśhaṇa*); and those *kāhāpaṇas* have been invested in guild dwelling at Govadhana—2000 in a weavers' guild, interest one *pratika* (monthly) for the hundred, (and) 1000 in another weaver's guild, interest three quarters of a *paḍika* (monthly) for the hundred."

a. What does this source tell us about the economic role of guilds?

b. Why were guilds trusted with money deposits?

c. Identify the donor and the donees from the given source.

13. Mark and locate on the map of India the following important centres: Pāṭaliputra, Nāśhik, Ujjayinī, Vikramśhila, Kānchipuram, Mathurā, Rājgṛiha.

14. Prepare a short presentation or poster on one of the following—

a. Life in the Vedic society

b. Early education system (*gurukula*)

c. Trade and guilds in early India

d. Role of women in early Indian society

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Notes

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