

## MODULE - 1

India and the World  
through the Ages



Notes



213en01

1

# ANCIENT WORLD

Go to the market or to the railway station, sit in your home or stand on the road and look around you. You will find many things where metal is being used. This metal could be copper, bronze, iron or any other may be steel. Steel is a refined form of iron only. Discovery of metals brought profound and dramatic changes in the lives of people.

You have read about pre-history in the introductory lesson. You have learnt that during the Stone Age human learnt to make tools and weapons of stone, bone and wood. They lived in caves and found food by hunting and food-gathering. Later, they learnt about agriculture, domestication of animals and led a settled life. The Stone Age was followed by the Metal Ages – Bronze Age and Iron Age. It was with the discovery of metal that human civilisation became highly evolved. During the Bronze Age, advanced civilisations came up in Mesopotamia, China, Egypt and India. We will read about these civilisations in some detail in this lesson. We will also read about the Iron Age Civilisations in Greece, Rome and Persia, as well as India.

Isn't it surprising that the use of iron started so long back. We still use iron in some way or the other, don't we? Look around you and you will find many things made of iron and steel. We all have steel utensils in our homes. Steel is a refined form of iron.

Further, we will read in detail about Ancient India, about the emperors and dynasties that ruled India during that period. You will realize that India's contribution to human civilisation is immense. Isn't it interesting and exciting to know about our glorious past? Let us start the journey into our past and know how we humans have travelled through the ages and evolved into sophisticated, advanced and highly civilised people.



## OBJECTIVES

After reading this lesson, you will be able to:

- describe the contributions of ancient Bronze Age Civilisations – Mesopotamian, Chinese, Egyptian and Indus Valley;

- recognize the contributions of the Iron Age Civilisations – Greek, Roman and Persian;
- explain the important developments in Indian history from the Vedic Age down to the time of Harsha;
- examine the different aspects of India’s contribution to world civilisation;

## 1.1 THE BRONZE AGE

Towards the end of the New Stone Age, began the use of metal. Copper was the first metal used by them. The cultures based on the use of both stone and copper are called Chalcolithic Cultures. This is also called Bronze Age because of the invention of bronze in this period which is an alloy of copper and tin. Gradually copper and bronze replaced stone, wood, and bones to some extent for making weapons and implements. People learnt how to make bricks and use them in construction. These bricks were baked and sun dried. Town-based civilisations came up for the first time in different river valleys. These towns became centers of trade, commerce and administration. The Bronze Age people had built up great civilisations and made significant contributions. In this section, we will read about four major Bronze Age Civilisations of the world, that is, Mesopotamia, Egypt, India and China.

### 1.1.1 Mesopotamian Civilisation

Mesopotamia was the land lying between two rivers, Tigris and Euphrates, which lie in modern day Iraq. These rivers were often in flood and in this process they deposited a lot of silt which made the land around them very fertile. This resulted in increased food production. The abundant agricultural produce enabled the growth of a number of crafts persons like smiths, potters masons, weavers and carpenters. They sold their products and got their necessities from others in exchange. They carried on trade with far-off places like India. Carts, wagons, boats and ships were used for transport and communication. They also developed the art of writing. Their script was a collection of symbols and pictures. They drew wedge-like lines and so this script came to be known as Cuneiform script.

The earliest cities of Mesopotamia were like small states, each with its own administration. The ruling class consisted of priests, kings and aristocrats. Besides them there were merchants, ordinary people and the slaves. The people of Mesopotamia worshipped many gods and goddesses like sky, sun, moon, fertility, etc. Each city had its own patron god or goddess.



## MODULE - 1

India and the World  
through the Ages



Notes

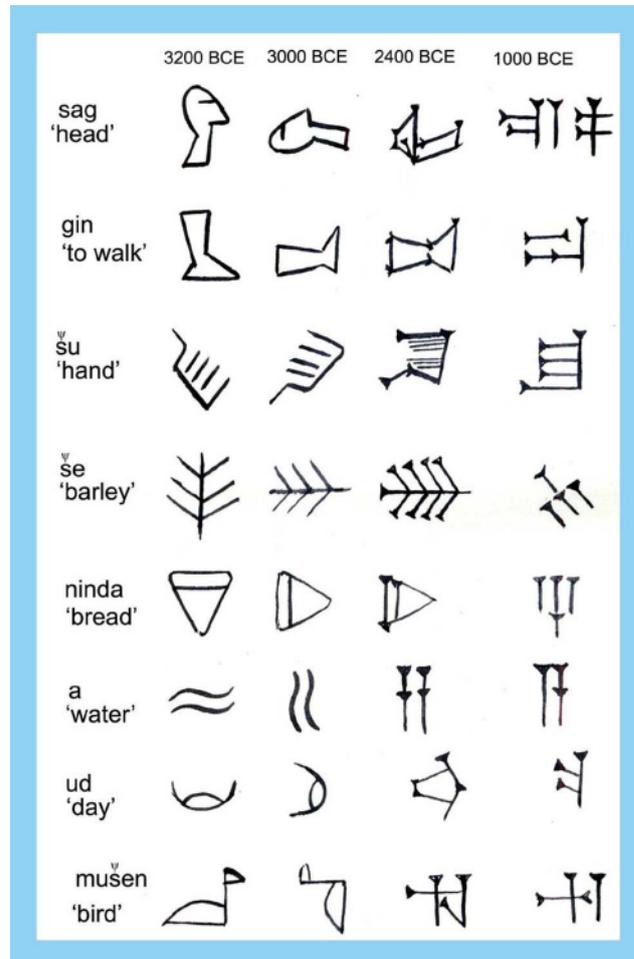


Figure 1.1 Cuneiform Script

### 1.1.2 Egyptian Civilisation

Another civilisation arose in Egypt, along the River Nile, which made the land very fertile. The Egyptian kings were called Pharaohs. They had ministers and officers in their service that administered the land and collected taxes for them. The priests enjoyed a very high and honorable position in society. Temples were dedicated to a particular god in each town or city. The ancient Egyptian script was called Hieroglyphics. Traders and merchants carried on their business both on land and water. There were skilled workers like stone-cutters and carpenters. Egyptians had considerable knowledge of weights and measures.

The Pharaohs built the great monuments of the ancient world – the Pyramids. Since the Egyptians believed in afterlife, they preserved the dead bodies. These were called mummies. The pyramids were built as tombs to keep the mummified bodies of the dead kings.



Figure 1.2 Hieroglyphics Script



Notes

### 1.1.3 Chinese Civilisation

The Chinese civilisation grew up in the Hwang Ho valley in North China. The first rulers known were the Shangs (1523 BC to 1122 BC), who built China's first cities. They also contributed to art and culture. The Chinese writing system was developed during this period. Craftspersons of this period, especially the bronze workers were great experts in their fields.

The Shang dynasty was overthrown by the Zhou, who built strong forts and walled towns to defend themselves from invaders. It was during the later phase of the Zhou rule that iron was introduced, thus ending the Bronze Age in China.

In 221 BC, the Chin rulers came to power in China. They ordered the use of common language, common laws and common weights and measures throughout their empire. Do you know that they were the rulers who built the famous Great Wall of China?

After the Chins, the Han dynasty came to power, who ruled till AD 220. It was during this period that Chinese traders had contact with the West through the famous Silk Route, crossing Central Asia and Persia.

The people of China worshipped a number of deities. Worship of ancestors, nature and spirits were very common. In China a famous religious preacher named Confucius advocated a system of right behavior, which greatly influenced Chinese society and government. He laid emphasis on good moral character, respect to elders and loyalty to the family and obedience to the laws of the State.

**ACTIVITY 1.1**

Did you notice that all the major civilisations arose on the banks of rivers? Identify some important towns which rose on the banks of some rivers. Can you think of at least two reasons what made these towns more successful than those which were not on any river bank?

**Notes****1.2 INDIA: INDUS VALLEY CIVILISATION**

Do you know that India was also part of the Bronze Age Civilisations, which flourished in the valley of river Indus and neighboring regions? This ancient civilisation was discovered when archaeologists began excavating the sites connected with it in the 1920s. The first sites to be excavated were Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro. That is why it is also called Harappa Civilisation. At present, hundreds of sites of this culture are known. The most important cities were Harappa (Western Punjab), Mohenjo-Daro (Sindh), Lothal (Gujarat), Kalibangan (Rajasthan), Ropar (Punjab), Banawali and Rakhigarhi (Haryana), and Dholavira (Gujarat).

**1.2.1 Town Planning**

One of the most interesting features of this civilisation was the emergence of the first urban societies in South Asia. The most remarkable aspect was the high level of sophistication in town planning, crafts and culture. The people lived in well-planned cities. A general feature of the cities was the presence of a fortified citadel which housed public buildings. The cities had wide roads, which cut each other at right angles. The houses were brick – built and most of these were two-storied. There were wells, baths, drains and sewage in each house. Paved roads and street lightings were also known. Apart from the living houses in the lower town, big multi-pillared halls have also been discovered at the citadel area in Mohenjo-Daro. Here, the most striking feature was the Great Bath (180 ft long and 108 ft long and 108 ft wide). The bathing pool in it was 39 feet long, 23 feet wide and 8 feet deep. The Great Granary of Harappa was another important building. The surplus produced by the peasants was stored here.

**1.2.2 Society and Economy**

The people practiced agriculture, animal husbandry, art and crafts, trade and commerce. Main crops were wheat, barley, rye, sesame and pea. Evidence of rice has been found at Lothal and Rangpur. Furrow marks found at Kalibangan show that ploughing was known to them. Sickles were used for harvesting. Various forms of irrigation were practiced. Cotton was a known product. Animals like cows, goats, sheep, humped bulls, dogs, cats, camels and donkeys were domesticated. The people

consumed cereals, fish, meat, milk, egg and fruit. Tools and weapons made from copper and bronze were mostly used. Ornaments were made of gold, silver, precious and semi-precious stones, conch and ivory. Iron was not known to them. Among artisans and craftspeople, there were potters, weavers, masons, carpenters, smiths, jewelers, sculptors, stone cutters, brick-makers and terracotta manufacturers. Trade and commerce were also very important economic activities. Both inter-regional trade and external trade were carried out. Several evidences point to Harappa trade with Mesopotamia. Main imports consisted of metals like gold, tin, copper and various kinds of precious and semi-precious stones. Among the exports were agricultural products, cotton goods, potteries, jewellery, ivory products and other crafts. Harappa seals were probably used for commercial purposes. The society was divided into classes.

### 1.2.3 Religion and Culture

The cult of Mother Goddess seems to have been very popular among them. Many figurines of Mother Goddess have been found. One male deity has also been found at Mohenjo-Daro which has been called the prototype of Lord Shiva (Pashupati). This deity is represented in a seal, sitting in a yogic posture and surrounded by animals.

Lingam worship and nature worship of trees were prevalent. Can you see the similarities in the religious practices among the Hindus in India even today? When you visit a Shiva temple, you can see that Shiva lingam is worshipped. You must be aware that Hindus also worship trees like Peepal.

### 1.2.4 Technical Skills

They had also acquired high levels of technical skill. They had knowledge of urban engineering, weights and measures, health and hygiene. They also knew how to write. They used a script which has not yet been deciphered.

### 1.2.5 Decline

It is difficult to say what actually caused the ultimate decline of this civilisation. Natural calamities seem to be the most important cause of the decline of this civilisation. Recurring floods, drying up of rivers, decreasing soil fertility, deforestation due to constant consumption of wood, earthquakes, scanty rainfall, extension of desert seem to have played havoc with this civilisation. According to some scholars, the decline of overseas trade with Mesopotamia may have contributed to the decline of this civilisation. With its decline, literacy and urban life disappeared in India for more than a thousand years.



**INTEXT QUESTIONS 1.1****Notes**

1. Fill in the blanks:
  - (a) Society in Bronze Age civilisation was divided into .....
  - (b) ..... seems to be the most important cause of the decline of Harappa Civilisation.
  - (c) The Harappa people had overseas trade with .....
2. Which was the first metal used by human beings?
3. Name the rivers between which the Mesopotamian Civilisation was founded.
4. Name the ancient Egyptian script.
5. Name at least four sites of the Harappa Civilisation situated in India.

**1.3 IRON AGE CIVILISATION**

Iron Age began about 3000 years ago when it came to be produced on a large scale and its use became common. It was much cheaper and stronger than copper and bronze. So, the use of iron tools and implements enabled our forefathers to clear forests and to reclaim lands for the extension of cultivation. Agricultural production thus increased considerably. This brought radical changes in the social and economic life of the people.

The use of iron had a great impact on transport and communication. Iron rims and spokes were used in wheels to make them stronger. Iron nails and sheets were widely used for making boats and ships. Trade and commerce flourished. This trade brought prosperity. New weapons of war like the use of long, heavy sword, sabre/saber, iron-shield, spear and lance changed the methods of warfare.

The Iron Age was also a period of intellectual progress. The most important development was the beginning of alphabets. This replaced the old pictographic style of writing about which you have already read in the Bronze Age Civilisations of Egypt, Mesopotamia and China. The Civilisations that flourished during the Iron Age were Greece, Rome, Persia and India. They were much more advanced than the earlier civilisations. Let us now read about them in some detail in this section.

**1.3.1 Greek Civilisation**

Greek Civilisation flourished in Greece more than 2000 years ago. There arose many independent city-states, which developed a remarkable system of government. The development of city-state was a unique feature of Greek civilisation. Each city was enclosed by a wall for protection. Inside the city, there was a fort called Acropolis which was situated on a hill top.

Among the Greek city-states, the most famous were Athens and Sparta. Athens was rich and cultured. Athenian citizens included writers, philosophers, artists and thinkers. The society was based on slave labor, but the citizens enjoyed a democratic form of government. You will read about Democracy in detail the later lessons. Sparta was almost like an army camp, where everyone was expected to obey the superiors. Sparta had the best army in Greece. Training in warfare was considered to be the most important thing here.

There was considerable rivalry between Athens and Sparta. But they fought side by side to drive off the mighty Persian army of Darius I and Xerxes, who tried to conquer Greece. Under Pericles, Athens enjoyed a 'Golden Age'. But a long war between Athens and Sparta, called the Peloponnesian War, which lasted for 27 years resulted in the defeat of Athens.

Do you know that Ancient Greece had the distinction of being called the birth place of Western Civilisation? They were pioneers in art and learning, science, literature and sculpture. Socrates, Plato and Aristotle were great philosophers whose works are studied even today. Herodotus and Thucydides were famous historians. Archimedes, Aristarchus and Democritus were great scientists. Aeschylus, Sophocles and Aristophanes were great dramatists. Homer was the author of the famous epics - Iliad and Odyssey.

The Greeks also had great knowledge of architecture. They built many beautiful temples and palaces. The Greeks believed in many gods. Each city had its own protector god or goddess. The gods were believed to live on Mount Olympus. The Olympic Games, first recorded in 776 BC was held every four years at a place called Olympia. Sports and athletic events were held to honor Zeus, the king of gods.

The Greek towns were the centers of administration as well as cultural and economic activities. The farmers mainly grew grapes, olives and grain. Wine and olive oil were important products. The Greeks, at one time, also established vast empires. Alexander of Macedonia, better known to history as Alexander the Great, led his army out of Europe and conquered Syria, Mesopotamia, Egypt, Afghanistan and even parts of Central Asia and North-Western India. This led to the spread of Greek ideas and learning. Alexander died at an age of thirty-three only. After his death, his empire broke up into smaller kingdoms. Later, Greece was conquered by the Romans.

### **1.3.2 Roman Civilisation**

In 510 BC, the Romans set up a Republic on the city of Rome which is on river Tiber in Central Italy. The Roman Republic was ruled by the senate, which consisted of a group of elders called senators. They elected two Consuls each year to lead them. By 200 BC, Rome became the leading power of Italy. It was able to defeat rivals like Carthage for the control of the Mediterranean world.



## MODULE - 1

India and the World  
through the Ages



### Notes

## Ancient World

In the early Roman society, there were three classes of people – the patricians (aristocrats), the plebeians (commoners) and the slaves. Roman economy was based on slave labor. Rich Romans owned slaves. These slaves were often trained for the gladiators' fight, which was a fight between the slaves and wild animals. There were also frequent slave revolts in Rome. One such revolt was led by Spartacus in 74 BC.

Although Rome was a Republic, strong and influential leaders fought for power. Julius Caesar was one such leader who got enormous power and became a dictator. In 44 BC, Caesar was murdered and a civil war broke out. After the war, Augustus Caesar became the first emperor of Rome. The Roman Empire spread to three continents – Europe, Asia and Africa. Do you know that it was during the rule of Augustus, the great prophet, Jesus Christ appeared? He was the founder of Christianity. He was born in Bethlehem. According to him, all men and women are the children of God. He taught people to love each other. After his death, the followers of Christ spread his teachings among the people. At its peak, the Roman Empire stretched from Mesopotamia in the east to Gaul and Britain in the west. People throughout the Empire adopted Roman way of living. Towns with baths, temples, palaces and theatres were built. In the countryside, the Romans built huge, comfortable farmhouses called villas. Roman rulers used to preside over victory parades, religious ceremonies and games in the arenas and amphitheatres. Gladiator's fight, chariot racing, and theatre were some of the common amusements.



**Figure 1.4** Roman Colosseum/Amphitheatre

The Roman Empire was divided into several provinces, each ruled by a governor. He had a number of officers under him who looked after different affairs of

administration. The main fighting forces of the Roman army were the legions. Each legion had 5000 soldiers headed by a commander. The Roman Empire was governed by the personal will of the emperor. But his power depended on the army. Weak emperors were often overthrown by the army generals.

By 395 AD, the huge Roman Empire was divided into two halves for better governance. The Eastern part with capital at Byzantium survived even after the fall of the Western Roman Empire in the face of barbarian invasion in 476 AD. Emperor Constance gave Byzantium a new name – Constantinople. It became the home of Eastern Orthodox Christian faith and the capital city of the Byzantine emperors.



### ACTIVITY 1.2

You have read about the famous gladiators' fight in this lesson. You must have also watched some of them on television or in the movies. Did you feel good watching them? Do you think it is a human practice to watch people suffer and find amusement from it? What would your thoughts be on the same? Write in about 50 words.

#### 1.3.3 Persian Civilisation

In the Iron Age, Persia (Modern Iran) was inhabited by the Aryan communities. One branch of them, known as the Medes, settled in the western part of the country. Another branch occupied the southern and eastern parts and was called the Persians. The Medes built up a powerful kingdom covering a vast area of Iran. At first, the Persians also had to acknowledge the supremacy of the Medes. One of the Persian kings, Cyrus, united the Persians in 550 BC. He built a powerful army and successfully conquered Babylon, Assyria and Asia Minor. Darius I was the greatest emperor of Persia. He belonged to the Achaemenian dynasty. His empire stretched from River Indus to the Eastern shores of Mediterranean Sea. He made Persepolis his capital in 518 BC. During his reign, Persian art, architecture and sculpture flourished. He also built a powerful navy.

The Persian emperors were able administrators. They divided their empire into provinces, each governed by a Satrap or Governor. The Persians were good soldiers with strong cavalry, navy and had iron weapons. Though the Persians were defeated by Alexander the Great in 331 BC, their civilisation did not come to an end. Their culture and civilisation continued to flourish under the Parthian and Sassanian emperors. But ultimately they were conquered by the Arabs in 7<sup>th</sup> century AD.

Like the Indo-Aryans, the early Persians worshipped the forces of nature. They believed in the sun god, sky god and other gods. They considered fire to be a symbol of holiness. They also performed fire rites and practiced animal sacrifices. Later, a



Notes

## MODULE - 1

India and the World  
through the Ages



Notes

Ancient World

religious preacher Zoroaster found the religion called Zoroastrianism. He taught them about Ahura-Mazda, the Lord of Heaven and Light, who gives men strength and energy. According to Zoroaster, life was a constant struggle between good (light) and evil (darkness). The holy scripture of the Persians is called Zend – Avesta.



### INTEXT QUESTION 1.2

1. Name the three spheres where the impact of iron implements were felt the most.
2. Name two important city states in Greece.
3. Name the river on which the city of Rome is situated.
4. Complete the sentences below:
  - a) Constantinople was the capital of the .....
  - b) The Persian king who united the Persians was .....
  - c) The Indo-Aryans and the early Persians worshipped the .....

### 1.4 INDIA: THE VEDIC AGE

The Vedic Age marks a new phase in ancient Indian History which began with the arrival of the Aryans in India around 1500 BC. It lasted for almost a thousand years, in the course of which a number of economic, social, political and religious developments took place. The Vedic Age is accordingly divided into two periods of about equal duration - Early Vedic Period and Later Vedic Period.

Have you heard of the Vedas? They are the most important source of information on the Vedic Age. The Early Vedic period is known mainly from the Rig Veda, which was the first Veda to be composed. For this period, when the Vedic tribes lived in northwest part of the subcontinent including Punjab and Afghanistan, we do not have much archaeological evidence. This was probably because the Early Vedic people generally led a nomadic life and did not stay for long at any place. Their economy was mainly pastoral. Cattle-rearing was the chief means of livelihood. Horses, goats and sheep were also important. A little agriculture was also practiced. Family, clan and tribes (called Janas) were the social units, and there were no castes. The chief of the tribe was called Raja. Popular assemblies of all members of the Janas, called Sabhas and Samitis, had an important say in public affairs. A number of deities were worshipped, Indra being the most important of them.

The Later Vedic period is known in much greater detail from the vast corpus of Later Vedic literature as well as from archeological material. The Later Vedic literature comprised of the following books, that is, the three Vedas – Sama Veda, Yajur Veda and Atharva Veda. There were also commentaries on all the four Vedas called Brahmanas, Aranyakas and Upanishads.

A large number of sites belonging to this period have also been excavated. They are all marked by a typical pottery called Painted Grey Ware (PGW), and so are known as PGW sites.

During the Later Vedic period, there was a large scale eastward movement of the Aryan communities to Indo-Gangetic Doab and Upper Ganga plains. Towards the end of the period, three important kingdoms came up further East: Kashi, Koshala and Videha. Agriculture was now the main occupation, and number of crops including rice, wheat and sugarcane were grown. Crafts also multiplied, iron weapons and tools were introduced. People now led a settled life in villages. Castes began to emerge and crystallise in the form of four Varnas - Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. The powers of the king and his men increased, and those of the assembly were proportionately undermined. Sacrifices now became very elaborate. The importance of the god Indra receded; new gods such as Prajapati figured prominently. Towards the end of this period, a reaction to the sacrificial ritual could also be observed which we find mentioned in the Upanishads.



Notes



### ACTIVITY 1.3

Read the passage given below and answer the questions that follow:

#### The Various Means of Livelihood (Extract from *Rig Veda*, IX, 112)

We all have various thoughts and plan, and diverse are the ways of men.

The Brahman seeks the worshipper; the carpenter/*takshan* looks for the cracked (wood, to repair); the physician/*bhishaj*, the injured (to treat).

The smith/*karmara* with ripe and seasoned plants, and with birds' feathers,

With stones and with enkindled fire, seeks one who has a store of gold.

I am a poet/*karu*, my father's a physician, and my mother grinds grain upon the stone.

1. List the various occupations mentioned in the passage.
2. What kind of society does it depict?
3. Are the occupation hereditary based? Why or why not?
4. What kind of work did the women folk engaged in?

#### 1.4.1 The Post-Vedic Age

In the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC there came up large territorial states in northern and eastern India known as the Mahajanapadas. There were sixteen such states namely Anga, Magadha, Vajji, Kashi, Koshala, Malla, Kuru, Panchala, Vatsa, Avanti, Kamboja,

**Notes**

Gandhara, Assaka, Chedi, Matsya, and Shurasena. Among them Magadha, Kosala and Avanti were the most powerful. The extension of agriculture, growth of trade and industries, rise of territorial states and beginning of urbanization gave rise to new forces in the society. Thus the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC was also a period of socio-religious transformation. People expressed their dissatisfaction against the ritualistic Brahmanism and Vedic sacrifices. There emerged numerous sects and reformatory movements. This period called the Ancient Period in History saw the rise of two important religions called Jainism and Buddhism.

**1.4.2 Buddhism**

Gautama Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, was born in 563 BC at Lumbini which is situated near the Indo-Nepal Border. He was the son of Shuddhodhana, the chief of Shakya of Kapilavastu. At the age of 29, Gautama left home and attained Bodhi (enlightenment) at Bodhgaya under a pipal tree. He delivered his first sermon at Sarnath near Varanasi. His teachings included four Noble Truths (Arya Satya) and Eightfold Path (Ashtangika Marga).

According to Buddha:

- (i) the world is full of misery (dukkha);
- (ii) desire (trishna) is the cause of this misery;
- (iii) if desire is conquered, then all sorrows can be removed;
- (iv) this can be done by following the Eight fold Path; which included:
  - (a) right memory      (b) right aim      (c) right speech
  - (d) right action      (e) right livelihood      (f) right efforts
  - (g) right memory and      (h) right meditation

Buddha suggested a 'Middle Path' - away from both extreme luxury as well as extreme austerity. He also laid down a code of conduct such as non-killing and non-stealing for his followers. He died at the age of 80 (483 BC) at Kushinagar in Uttar Pradesh.

**1.4.3 Jainism**

Rishabhanath, the first Tirthankara, is known to be the founder of Jainism. Vardhamana Mahavira was the 24<sup>th</sup> Tirthankara of this sect, Parshvanath being the 23<sup>rd</sup> one. Mahavira was born in 540 BC at Kundagram near Vaishali (Bihar). His father was the Chief of Jhatrika Kshatriya clan. Mahavira became an ascetic at the age of 30 years and died at Pawapuri in 468 BC near Rajagriha. His followers came to be known as 'Jainas'.

Jainism had no place for a supreme creator. It recognized the existence of gods, but placed them lower than the Jaina teachers. The main aim of Jainism is the attainment of freedom from worldly bonds. Like Buddhism, Jainism opposed the ritualistic

practices and evils of Vedic Brahmanism. It also opposed the caste system and accepted the doctrine of Karma and rebirth. Jainism has five cardinal principles:

- (i) Ahimsa or non-violence,
- (ii) Truthfulness,
- (iii) Abstention from stealing,
- (iv) Non-attachment, and
- (v) Celibacy or Brahmacharya.

The three jewels (Triratna) of Jainism are:

- (a) Right vision (Samyak Darshana),
- (b) Right knowledge (Samyak Jnana), and
- (c) Right Conduct (Samyak Charita)



### ACTIVITY 1.4

Reflect on the teachings of Lord Buddha and Lord Mahavira. Think of at least three teachings which you find to be relevant and can be practiced in your daily life. Share your thoughts and experiences with your family and friends.

## 1.5 THE MAURYAN AGE (322 BC-184 BC)

Out of the sixteen Mahajanapadas, it was Magadha that expanded considerably under powerful rulers like Bimbisara, Ajatashatru and Mahapadmananda. The last king of the Nanda dynasty was defeated by Chandragupta Maurya in 322 BC. He established the Maurya Empire uprooting Greeks from the Punjab and Nandas from the Gangetic Plains. By a continuous process of conquest and annexation he was able to unify almost the whole of India. Chandragupta ruled from 322 BC to 297 BC. He embraced Jainism under the influence of Bhadrabahu. He died at Sravanabelgola near Mysore.

Bindusara (297 BC-272 BC), the son and successor of Chandragupta Maurya, was also known as Mitrghata (slayer of enemies). He is said to have conquered Deccan, extending Mauryan control as far as Mysore. He also had contacts with Antiochus I, the Greek ruler of West Asia. It appears from the Buddhist literature that after the death of Bindusara, there was a struggle for the throne among his sons.

Ashoka (272 BC-236 BC) emerged victorious in this fratricidal war of succession and ascended the throne of Magadha. An important event of his reign was the famous Kalinga War in 260 BC mentioned in his Rock Edict XIII. Later, Ashoka, embraced Buddhism, and gave up war. He was a benevolent ruler and did many things for the welfare of his subjects. His policy of 'dhamma' was based on religious toleration, respect to elders, care for the old, kindness, truthfulness and purity. It was through his efforts that Buddhism spread beyond the boundaries of India. The rock edicts and pillar edicts inscribed by him give a detailed account of his reign.



Notes

## MODULE - 1

India and the World  
through the Ages



Notes

After Ashoka's death, his empire disintegrated into pieces. There was also the danger of foreign invasion. The economic condition of the country deteriorated. The last king of the Maurya dynasty was Brihadratha.

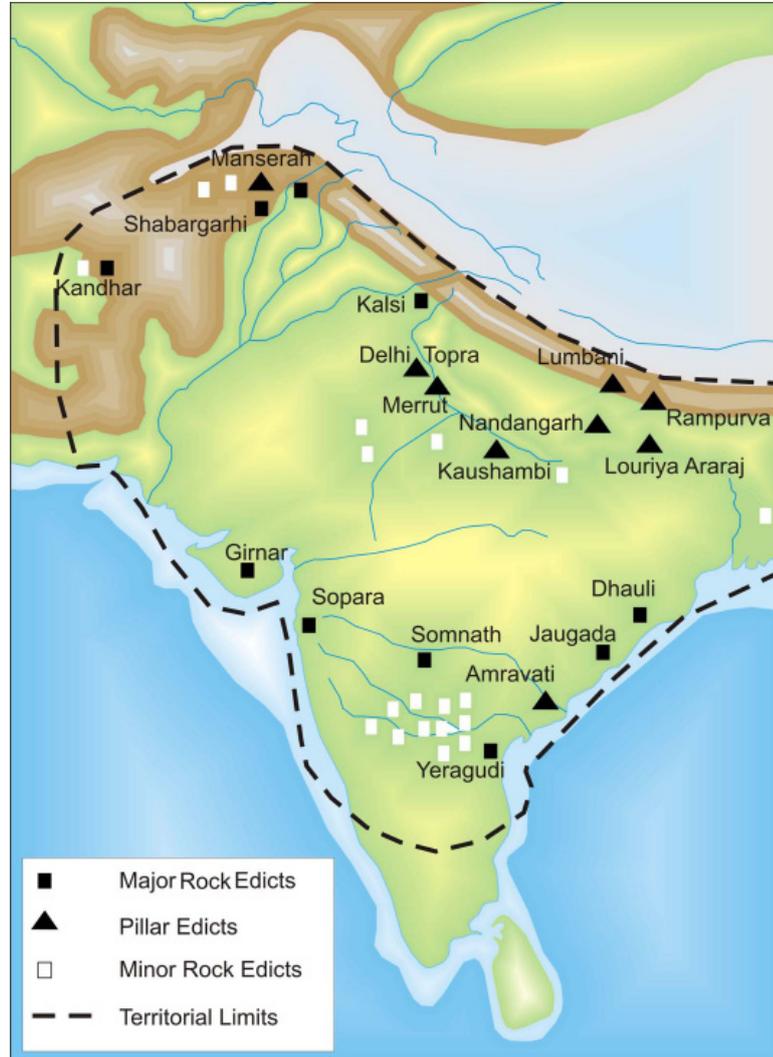


Figure 1.4 Locations of the Various Edicts of Ashoka

### 1.6 THE SANGAM AGE (300 BC-200 AD)

With the Sangam Age, the historical period began in South India. The word 'Sangam' means an assembly of scholars of literacy figures, held under the royal patronage of Pandyan kings of Madurai. Early Tamil literature comprised works such as Tolkkapiyam, the Eight Anthologies (Ettutogai) the 'ten Idylls' (pattupattu), the 'Eighteen Minor Works' and the three Epics (Shilappadikaram, Manimekalai and Sivaga Sindamani). The Sangam Age extends roughly between 300 BC to 200 A.D. Sangam literature refers primarily to Pandyan Kingdom. But it also contains valuable information about the Chola and Chera kingdoms. The Pandyas ruled over an area

comprising southern Tamil Nadu. Madurai was their capital. The Cheras ruled over Kerala and the Cholas occupied Northern Tamil Nadu and Southern Andhra Pradesh.

### 1.7 THE KUSHANA AGE

After the fall of the Mauryan Empire, a number of foreign powers like the Bactrian Greeks, the Shakas, the Parthians and the Kushanas invaded India. They ruled in the western and north-western parts of India. The Kushanas were a branch of the Yue-Chi tribe of Central Asia. The first ruler of the Kushanas was Kujula Kadphises. He was succeeded by Vima Kadphises.

The greatest ruler of the Kushana dynasty was Kanishka, who became king after Vima. Kushana conquered Kashmir and established his supremacy over the Indo-Gangetic plains. He occupied Kashgar, Yarkhand and Khotan in Central Asia. Punjab and Afghanistan were also parts of the empire. Kanishka was a devoted Buddhist. Through his efforts Buddhism spread to China, Central Asia and other countries. He was also a great patron of art and learning. Purushapura (Peshawar) was his capital. Kanishka's successors were Vashishka, Huvishka, Kanishka II and Vasudeva. Vasudeva was the last great ruler of the Kushanas. After his death the mighty Kushana Empire quickly disintegrated. The fall of Kushana Empire marked the beginning of political uncertainty in north India which continued for about a century.

### 1.8 THE GUPTA AGE (319AD-550 AD)

The rise of Gupta Power in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD marked the beginning of a new era in Indian history. Confusion and political disunity were replaced by integrity. Under the leadership and patronage of the powerful Gupta monarchs, considerable progress was made in different aspects of Indian life. There was also a high material prosperity, as mentioned by Fa-hien, the Chinese traveler (4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> century AD).

Maharaja Shri Gupta is said to be the founder of the Gupta dynasty. He was succeeded by Ghatotkacha Gupta. But Chandragupta I (319-355 AD), who assumed the title of Maharajadhiraja, was the first important Gupta Monarch. Another important Gupta emperor was Samudragupta. The eulogy, composed by his court poet Harisena, which is available as Allahabad Pillar Inscription, gives a vivid account of Samudragupta's military exploits. Besides being a great conqueror and ruler, he was also a poet of high order, patron of art and learning and a musician. He also performed 'Ashwamedha yajna' – a symbol of imperial authority.

Samudragupta was succeeded by Chandragupta II (380-415 AD) who assumed the title of Vikramaditya after his victory over the Shaka rulers of western India. In order to consolidate his power, Samudragupta made important matrimonial alliances. His daughter Prabhavati was married to the Vakataka ruler Rudrasena II. The son and successor of Chandragupta II was Kumaragupta I (415-455 AD), whose reign was marked with peace and prosperity. He was succeeded by his son Skandagupta



Notes

## MODULE - 1

India and the World  
through the Ages



Notes

Ancient World

(455-467 AD), who repulsed the Hun invasion several times. The successors of Skandagupta (Purugupta, Budhagupta, Narasimhagupta) were not so powerful and competent. This gradually led to the decline and fall of the Gupta Empire.

Monarchy was the prevailing system of government during the Gupta Age. The king was assisted by a Council of Ministers and other officials in day to day administration. The Guptas had a powerful army. The provinces were ruled by governors. The Governors had under them a number of officers who administered the districts and towns. Village administration under the village headman (Gramika) enjoyed considerable autonomy. The Guptas also developed an efficient system of judicial and revenue administration.

### 1.8.1 Post Gupta Age (550AD-750 AD)

The period between the downfall of the Gupta Empire and the rise of Maharaja Harshavardhana of Thaneshwar is considered to be a period of confusion and disintegration. During this time India was broken into several small independent states. Besides the Huna power, there were four other kingdoms in Northern India. These were the later Guptas of Magadha, the Maukharis of Kanauj, the Pushyabhutis of Thaneshwar and the Mitrakas of Vallabhi (Gujarat). Among the important South Indian Dynasties were the Chalukyas of Badami and the Pallavas of Kanchi. Pulakesin II (609-64 AD) and Narasimhavarman I (630-668 AD) are considered to be the greatest of the Chalukya and the Pallava rulers respectively.

It was Harshavardhana who again made an attempt to raise an empire. He was called Sakalottarapathanatha because he had established his hold practically over the whole of North India. During this time, the political unity of India was, to some extent, restored. Harsha patronised Banabhatta, the author of Kadambari and Harshacharita. Hiuen Tsang, the Chinese scholar-traveler, visited India during Harsha's reign. Shashanka, the king of Bengal, was a contemporary of Harsha.

This period of history witnessed the consolidation of Hinduism. Hiuen Tsang writes about the existence of caste system in Indian society. There was the rise of several mixed and sub-castes. Hiuen Tsang also mentions the existence of untouchables and outcastes. The position of women had also declined considerably during this period. In the religious field, the ascendancy of Brahmanism brought about the decline of Buddhism. Vaishnavism, Shaivism and Jainism were also practiced.

## 1.9 INDIAN CIVILISATION: AN OVERVIEW

Indian civilisation has a very important place in world history. As in Early Greece and Rome, in India also some kind of democratic and republican form of government

existed in ancient times. We also made tremendous progress in philosophy and various branches of science. Indian contribution to the fields of Mathematics, Astronomy, Chemistry, Metallurgy and Medicine is worth mentioning. Aryabhata and Varahamihira were famous mathematicians-astronomers. Charaka and Sushruta were great physicians. Nagarjuna was a famous chemist as well as pharmacist. The concept of zero and the decimal system first evolved in India.

The ancient Indians also showed great skill in art, architecture, painting and sculpture. Ashokan Pillars, Caves of Ajanta and Ellora, South Indian Temples, the famous Stupa at Sanchi, Buddha's images of Mathura are only a few examples from the vast ocean of Indian art. Many great centres of learning were developed in Ancient India, like Taxila, Nalanda, Vikramshila, Vallabhi, Kashi and Kanchi which imparted education to both Indian and foreign students. Famous scholars and teachers taught in such centre. Indian learning and scholarship was highly appreciated abroad by the Arab Muslims.



**Figure 1.5** *Sanchi Stupa*

Many great works of literature were produced in ancient India. Rig Veda is the earliest specimen of Indo-European literature. The four Vedas, Sutras, the two Epics-Ramayana and Mahabharata, Smritis, Puranas, Tripitakas, Jaina Agamas and other religious texts are the products of ancient India. Moreover, there are a number of drama, prose and poetic works. Great literacy figures like Kalidasa, Banabhatta, Harisena, Vishakhadatta, Bhasa, Bhairavi, Shudraka and many others belonged to this period. Sanskrit, Pali and Prakrit literature made great progress in ancient India.



## MODULE - 1

India and the World  
through the Ages

Ancient World



### INTEXT QUESTION 1.3

1. What were the main occupations of people in the Later Vedic Period?
2. Which religion did Ashoka embrace after the Kalinga war?
3. Name at least four great centers of learning in Ancient India.
4. Name two great physicians of Ancient India.
5. Fill in the blanks:
  - (a) The Tamil work Tolkappiyam belonged to the .....
  - (b) ..... was the capital of the Pandyas.
  - (c) Kanishka belonged to the ..... Dynasty.



Notes



### WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT

- Human civilisation has evolved through various phases - each phase contributing something unique.
- The Stone Ages was followed by the Metal Ages – Copper, Bronze and Iron.
- Town based civilisations came in the Bronze Age.
- The art of writing was developed during the Bronze Age Civilisations.
- The Indus Valley Civilisation was known for its town planning, crafts and culture.
- The Iron Age brought radical changes in the social and economic life of the people in different countries at different times.
- Significant contributions were made in various fields such as polity, philosophy, art, architecture and sculpture by the Greeks, Romans, Persians and Indians.
- Buddhism and Jainism were the first reformatory movements in 6<sup>th</sup> century BC India.
- Indian Civilisation in its long course went through a number of significant developments. It did not remain one and the same throughout.
- India has made tremendous contributions in the fields of Mathematics, Astronomy, Chemistry, Metallurgy, Medicines, Art, Architecture, Literature and Learning.



## TERMINAL EXERCISES

1. How did the Bronze Age mark a shift from the New Stone Age?
2. What were the important features of the Harappa Civilisation?
3. Discuss how did the discovery of iron bring in radical changes in the lives of the people?
4. Describe the Roman society and economy during 5<sup>th</sup> century BC
5. Describe the social, religious and economic life of the Early Vedic people.
6. What is 'dhamma' according to Ashoka?
7. Write a short note on India's contribution to World Civilisation.
8. On the given outline map of the world mark the following:
  - (i) Rivers - Tigris, Euphrates, Nile, Hwang Ho, Indus.
  - (ii) Places - Egypt, Greece, Rome, Iran, Nalanda.



## ANSWER TO INTEXT QUESTIONS

### 1.1

1. (a) classes
- (b) Natural calamities
- (c) Mesopotamia

## MODULE - 1

India and the World  
through the Ages



Notes

## MODULE - 1

India and the World  
through the Ages



### Notes

2. Copper
3. Tigris and Euphrates
4. Hieroglyphics
5. Lothal (Gujarat), Kalibangan (Rajasthan), Banawali (Haryana), Dholavira (Gujarat), Ropar (Punjab)

### 1.2

1. Agriculture, Transport and Warfare
2. Athens and Sparta
3. Tiber
4. (a) Byzantine Empire  
(b) Cyrus  
(c) forces of nature

### 1.3

1. Agriculture and Crafts
2. Buddhism
3. Taxila, Nalanda, Kashi, Vikramshila, Vallabhi
4. Charaka and Sushruta
5. (a) Sangam Age  
(b) Madurai  
(c) Kushana