



315en06

## POST MAURYAN DEVELOPMENTS

In the last chapter you read about the Mauryan Empire which was spread over a large part of the Indian sub-continent and also included Kandahar in modern Afghanistan. In around 187 BC, the Mauryan Empire met its end. In the present section we shall study about the political and cultural developments in the Indian subcontinent from the end of the Mauryas to the rise of the Guptas, i.e., from BC 200 and 300 AD. In these five hundred years we see not only the rise of multiple political powers in different parts of the subcontinent but also the introduction of new features in art, architecture and religion.



### OBJECTIVES

After studying this lesson, you will be able to learn about

- the different political regions which came into focus after the decline of the Mauryan Empire
- the groups of foreigners who came from Central Asia and got settled here;
- the growth of trade between the Roman world and India and its impact.
- important features of various schools of art and sculptures which emerged during 200 BC–300 AD and
- the early history of south India and the significance of the Sangam literature.

### 6.1 POLITICAL HISTORY OF NORTH INDIA

The disintegration of the Mauryan empire led to the rise of many regional kingdoms in different parts of the country. At the same time, we witness invasions by various groups of people based in Central Asia and western China. These were Indo-Greeks, the Scythians or the Shakas, the Parthians or the Pahlavas and the Kushanas. It was through such political processes that India came in closer contact with the central Asian politics and culture.

#### (i) *The Shungas*

The last Mauryan king was killed by his Commander-in-Chief, Pushyamitra Shunga, who then established his own dynasty in north India. It came to be known as Shunga dynasty. While the Shungas were ruling in north India, the Indo-Greeks also known as Yavanas, about whom we shall study in some details later, emerged in Bactria (Balkh) as an independent power and soon started extending their rule in the north-western and northern parts of India. There are indications that Pushyamitra Shunga

**Notes**

came in conflict with Demetrius, a Bactrian Greek ruler without suffering much political damage. An inscription engraved on a pillar at Besnagar (present day Vidisha) refers to one Heliodorus, native of Taxila near Rawalpindi in Pakistan, as an envoy of an Indo-Greek ruler Antialkidas in the court of Bhagabhadra, who has been identified with one of the later Shunga rulers. According to the inscription he was devotee of Lord Krishna.

In around the second quarter of the first century BC, the last of the Shunga rulers was killed treacherously by his minister Vasudeva, who then laid down the foundations of the Kanva dynasty. We know virtually nothing about the Kanvas except for the rather cursory references to them in later texts.

**(ii) *The Bactrians or the Indo-Greeks***

After the death of Alexander in 323 BC, many Greeks came to settle on the northern western borders of India with Bactria (area to the north-west of the Hindukush mountains in the present day north Afghanistan) as an important centre. The rulers of Bactria came to be called the Bactrian-Greeks because of their Hellenistic (Greek) ancestry. One of the rulers of the line named Demetrius as mentioned above came into conflict with Pushyamitra.

However, the most celebrated Indo-Greek ruler was Menander. His empire appears to have included southern Afghanistan and Gandhara, the region west of the R. Indus. He has been identified with king Milinda mentioned in the famous Buddhist text *Milindapanho* which contains philosophical questions that Milinda asked Nagasena (the Buddhist author of the text) and informs us that impressed by the answers, the king accepted Buddhism as his religion. Menander is believed to have ruled between c. 155 BC and 130 BC.

**(iii) *The Shakas***

Shaka is the Indian term used for the people called Scythians, who originally belonged to central Asia. Defeated by their neighbours the Yueh-chis (the tribal stock to which the Kushanas belonged) they gradually came to settle in northwestern India around Taxila in the first century B.C Under the successive Shaka rulers their territories extended up to Mathura and Gujarat.

The most famous of all the Shaka rulers was Rudradaman who ruled in the middle of second century AD. His empire was spread over almost whole of western India. His achievements are known through the only inscription that he got engraved on a boulder at Girnar or Junagarh. This inscription happens to be the first royal inscription of early India composed in chaste Sanskrit.

**(iv) *The Parthians***

The Parthians were of Iranian origin and because of strong cultural connection with the Shakas, these groups were referred to in the Indian sources as Shaka-Pahlava. The important inscription indicating the Parthian rule in northwestern area of Pakistan is the famous Takht-i-Bahi inscription recovered from Mardan near Peshawar. The inscription, dated in 45 AD, refers to Gondophernes or Gondophares as a Parthian ruler. Some literary sources associate him with St. Thomas, who is said to have converted both, the king and his brother, to Christianity.



Notes



### INTEXT QUESTIONS 6.1

1. Who was the last Mauryan King  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Who was Heliodorus?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Which Indo-Greek king has been identified with king Milinda of the famous Buddhist text *Milindapanho*?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Which inscription happens to be the first royal inscription of early India composed in chaste Sanskrit?  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. The Shakas were the natives of which region?  
\_\_\_\_\_

### 6.2 THE KUSHANAS

The Kushanas, originally belonged to western China. They are also called Yueh-chis. The Kushanas after defeating Shakas and Pahlavas created a big empire in Pakistan. The first prominent ruler of the Kushana dynasty was Kujula Kadphises. He was succeeded by his son Wema Kadphises. Next ruler was Kanishka. He was the most famous of the Kushanas. He probably ascended the throne in AD 78, and started a new era, now known as the Shaka era. It was under Kanishka that the Kushana empire reached its maximum territorial limits. His empire extended from Central Asia to north India and included Varanasi, Kaushambi and Sravasti in Uttar Pradesh. The political significance of Kanishka's rule lies in the fact that he integrated central Asia with north India as part of a single empire. It resulted in the intermingling of different cultures and increase in inter regional trading activities.

Kanishka is famous in history as a great patron of Buddhism. He convened the fourth Buddhist Council at Kundalavana (present day Harwan near Srinagar in Jammu and Kashmir) in which a large number of Buddhist scholars took part. It was in this council that Buddhism got split into two schools – Hinayana and Mahayana. Kanishka also patronized the Gandhara and Mathura schools of sculptural art about which you will learn later in this chapter. He built in the city of Purushpura (present day Peshawar), his capital, a giant *stupa* to house the Buddha's relics. The building was still intact with all its magnificence when the Chinese pilgrim Fa-hsien visited the area later in the early fifth century AD. The Kushana power gradually declined from the early third century AD.

#### (i) *Kushana Polity and Administration*

Nothing much is known about the administrative machinery of the Kushanas. Perhaps the whole empire was divided into provinces, each ruled by a *mahakshatrapa* (a military governor), who was assisted by a *kshatrapa*; but how many provinces were there in the empire, is not known. Sources indicate that Kushana horsemen wore trousers while riding. A headless statue of Kanishka found at Mathura reflects the same. A prominent feature of Kushana polity was the title of *devaputra*, i.e., son of God, used by the Kushana kings. It indicates the claim to divinity by the Kushana kings.



(ii) *Contribution of the Kushanas*

The Kushanas occupy a special place in the ancient Indian history because of their contribution to various aspects of life. Their vast empire helped in the growth of internal and external trade. It resulted in the rise of new urban centres. The rich state of economy under the Kushanas is also evidenced by the large number of gold and copper coins that they struck.

Even in literature and medicine, India made progress. Charaka, known as father of Ayurveda, wrote a book on medicine called *Charaksamhita* whereas Asvaghosha, a Buddhist scholar, wrote *Buddhacharita*, a full length biography of the Buddha. Both these scholars were believed to be the contemporaries of king Kanishka. The Kushanas patronized the Gandhara and the Mathura schools of sculptural art which are known for producing the earliest images of Buddha and Buddhisattavas.



**INTEXT QUESTIONS 6.2**

1. Who was the most prominent Kushana ruler?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Who started the Shaka era and when?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Where and under whose patronage did the fourth Buddhist council took place?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Who was Charaka?  
\_\_\_\_\_

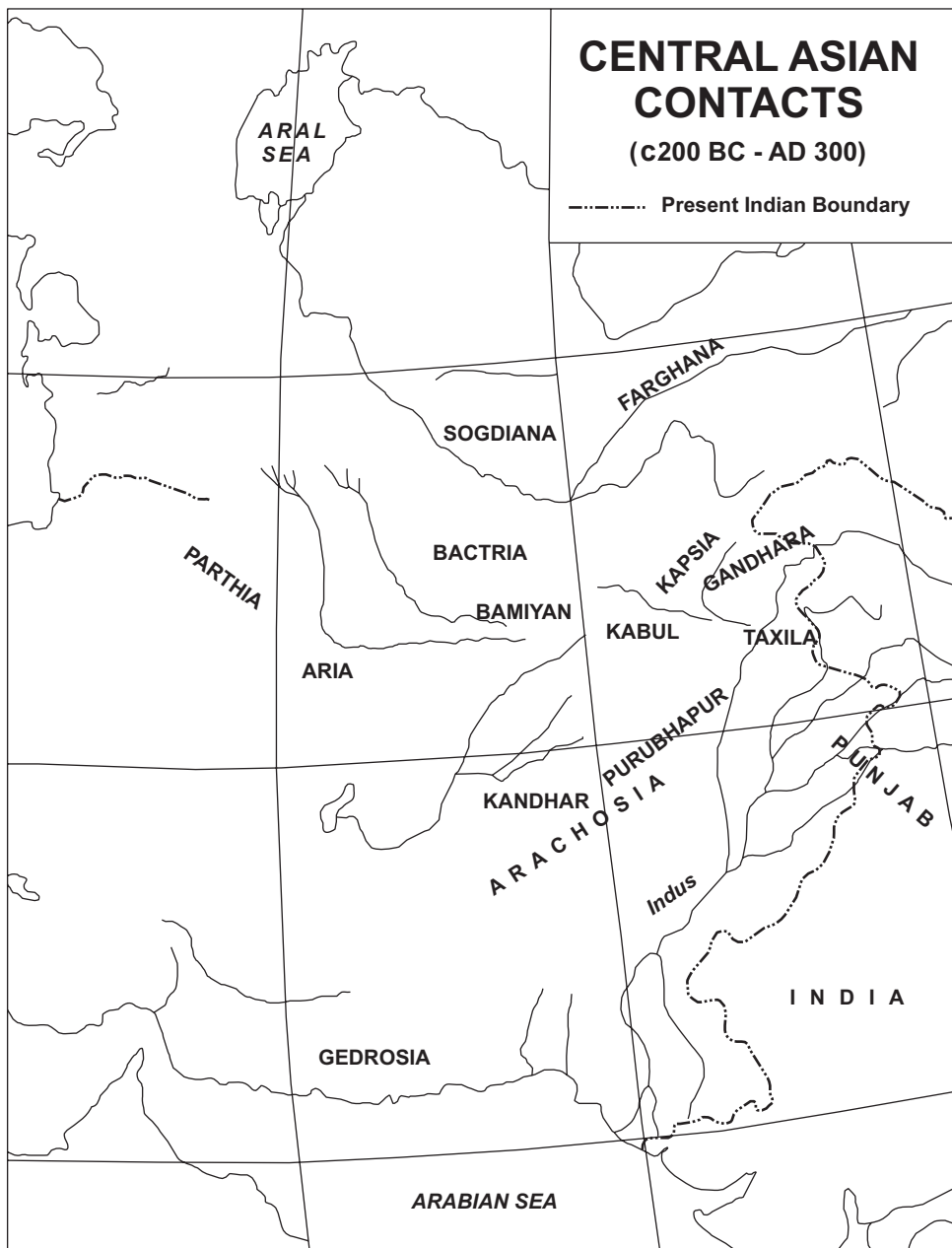
**6.3 CONTACTS WITH CENTRAL ASIA**

Invasions of the Bactrian Greeks and Saka-Pahilavas on India and its subsequent political contact with Central Asia under the Kushanas resulted in immense cultural intermingling between the two regions. These foreign groups gradually lost their foreign identity and were incorporated in the Brahmanical society lower grade as *kshatriyas*. Many of them adopted Buddhism. We have already referred to the Indo-Bactrian ruler Menander who was converted to Buddhism by a monk named Nagasena.

Central Asian contacts also brought to India new methods of making coins. The crude punch-marked coins which were used earlier gradually gave way to refined Greek style coins containing legends and the bust of the ruler. This new format became the model for the subsequent coinage in India. Besides, Indians also borrowed from central Asians, particularly the Greeks, knowledge of astronomy. Early Indian literary works on astronomy frequently quote the Greek astronomers who are referred to as *yavanacharya*. Indians also learned the art of making horoscopes from the Greeks. Central Asian contacts brought a fresh wave in the art of sculpture making. Buddhist sculptures of the Gandhara school, as explained here below, evolved as a result of the amalgamation of the Indian and the Greek styles.



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Map 6.1 Central Asian Contacts



**INTEXT QUESTIONS 6.3**

1. What were the main features of the Greek style coins?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Which term was used for Greek astronomers in early Indian Literature?  
\_\_\_\_\_



## 6.4 EMERGENCE OF EARLY STATES IN ORISSA AND THE DECCAN

We know that the Deccan as well as eastern India were parts of Ashoka's empire. He had conquered Kalinga through a violent battle in which loss of men and property was enormous. It was as a result of the Mauryan rule in these regions that after its decline we notice the emergence of kingdoms in Kalinga and the Deccan for the first time in the Indian history.

### *Kalinga*

After Ashoka, Kalinga (present day Orissa) became prominent under the kings of Chedi dynasty. Unfortunately we have no information about the kings of the dynasty except Kharavela. His achievements are recorded on an inscription, known as Hathigumpha inscription, situated in the Udayagiri hills near Bhuvaneshvar in Orissa. The inscription is so named because the image of an elephant is carved out of stone next to the boulder carrying the inscription. The inscription tells us that he was a follower of Jainism and had fought many successful battles against his neighbours. He probably lived in the first century BC.



### INTEXT QUESTIONS 6.4

1. Who was Kharavela?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Where is the Hathigumpha Inscription?  
\_\_\_\_\_

## 6.5 THE SATAVAHANAS

Satavahanas became prominent in the Indian political scene sometime in the middle of the first century BC. Gautamiputra Satakarni (first century AD) is considered to be the greatest of the Satavahana rulers. He is credited with the extension of Satavahana dominions by defeating Nahapana, the Shaka ruler of Western India. His kingdom is said to have extended from river Krishna in south to river Godavari in north. The Satavahanas had their capital at Pratishthana (modern Paithan) near Aurangabad in Maharashtra.

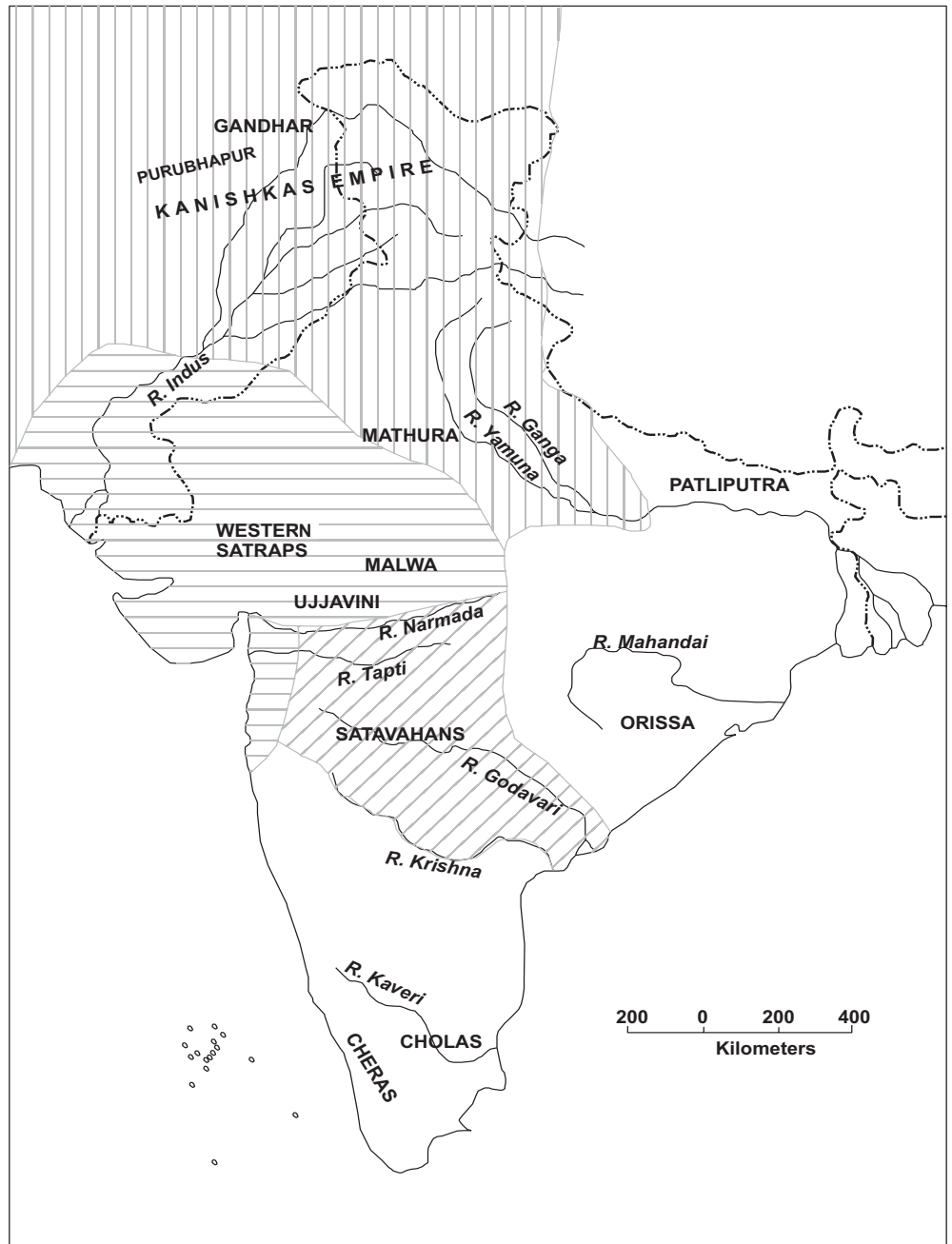
The Satavahana kingdom was wiped out in the first quarter of the third century AD and the Satavahanas kings were succeeded by the Kings of Ikshvaku dynasty.

### *Satavahana Polity and Administration*

Satavahana kingdom was divided into subdivisions called *aharas* or *rashtras*, meaning districts. The lowest level of administration was a *grama* which was under the charge of a *Gramika*. There were also officers called *amatyas* who were perhaps ministers or advisors of the king. Revenue was collected both in cash and kind. Satavahanas kings were the first in Indian history to make tax free land grants to Buddhists and Brahmanas to gain religious merit. This practice became more prominent in succeeding periods. The Satavahana kings claimed to be Brahmanas and considered it their primary duty to uphold varna system i.e. the four fold division of social structure.



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Map 6.2 Satavahana & Kushana Empires



**INTEXT QUESTIONS 6.5**

1. Who is considered to be the greatest of the Satavahana rulers?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Name the capital of the Satavahanas.  
\_\_\_\_\_



3. What was the lowest administrative unit under the Satavahanas?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Rulers of which dynasty started the practice of giving tax free religious grants in India?  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. The Satavahanas claimed to have belonged to which *varna*?  
\_\_\_\_\_

## 6.6 TRADE AND COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES

### (i) *Internal and External Trade Routes*

The most important feature of the post-Mauryan period was the growth of trade and commerce, both internally as well as externally. There were two major internal land routes in ancient India. First, known as Uttarapatha, connected northern and eastern parts of India with the northwestern fringes, i.e., present day Pakistan and further beyond, and the second, known as Dakshinapatha, connected the peninsular India with the western and northern parts of India.

The Dakshinapatha was the major route that connected north and south India. It started from Kaushambi near Allahabad and running through Ujjain (modern Ujjain) extended further up to Bhrikukachcha or Broach, an important port on western coast. The Dakshinapatha was further connected with Pratishthana (modern Paithan), the capital of the Satavahanas.

As regards external trade routes, after the discovery of monsoons by Hippatus a Greek navigator in 45 AD, more and more sea voyages were used for trading purposes. Important ports of India on the western coast were (from north to south direction) Bharukachchha Sopara, Kalyana, Muziris, etc. Ships from these ports sailed to the Roman Empire through the Red Sea.

Trade with southeast Asia was conducted through the sea. Prominent ports on the eastern coast of India were Tamralipti (West Bengal), Arikamedu (Tamil Nadu Coast) etc. Sea trade was also conducted between Bharukachchha and the ports of Southeast Asia.

### (ii) *Trade with West and Central Asia*

An important feature of the commercial activities in the post-Mauryan period was the thriving trade between India and the West, where the Roman empire was at its height. Initially this trade was carried out through land, but owing to frequent obstructions created by the Persians, who ruled the areas through which these trade routes passed, the focus was shifted to sea routes. Now ships could move directly from Indian ports to the ports on Red Sea and Persian Gulf.

The best account of Indo-Roman trade is given in the book called *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea* which was written in the first century AD by an anonymous author. Main requirements of the Romans were the Indian products such as spices, perfumes, jewels, ivory and fine textiles, i.e. muslin. Spices exported from India to the Roman empire included pepper, also called *yavanapriya* (perhaps because of its popularity among Romans). The spice trade with the Roman empire was largely based in south India. Romans also imported several precious and semiprecious stones like diamond, carnelian, turquoise, agate, sapphire etc, besides pearls, indigo, sandalwood and steel etc.





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Against this import Romans exported gold and silver to India. It is proved by a large number of Roman coins of the first century AD found in the subcontinent. This indicates an enormous drain of gold from the Roman empire towards India. Other important items of export from the Roman empire included wine which is indicated by wine-amphorae and sherds of Roman ware found in significant numbers at Arikamedu in south India. Besides, the western traders also brought tin, lead, coral and slave girls.

**(iii) Crafts and Industries**

Crafts production started growing in this period with tremendous impetus, as trade and commerce, both internal and foreign, was dependent to a great extent on the craft activities. The text called *Milindapanho* mentions 75 occupations of which 60 were associated with crafts. The level of specialization was very high and there were separate artisans working in gold, silver, precious stones etc. Ujjain was a prominent bead making centre. Textile industry was another prominent industry. Mathura and Vanga (east Bengal) were famous for variety of cotton and silk textiles. The discovery of some dyeing vats at some sites in south India indicates that dyeing was a thriving craft in the area during this period. The artisans in this period touched new heights of prosperity and there are numerous inscriptions which refer to the donations made by artisans to monasteries.

**(iv) Guilds**

The communities of merchants were organised in groups known as *Shreni* or guilds under the head called *sreshthi*. Another type of mercantile group was called *sartha* which signified mobile or caravan trading corporation of interregional traders. The leader of such a guild was called *sarthavaha*. Like merchants almost all craft vocations were also organised into guilds, each under a headman called *Jyestha*. These included weavers, corn dealers, bamboo workers, oil manufacturers, potters etc. The guilds were basically associations of merchants and craftsmen following the same profession or dealing in the same commodity. They elected their head and framed their own rules regarding prices and quality etc., to regulate their business on the basis of mutual goodwill. They also served as banks and received deposits from the public on a fixed rate of interest.



**INTEXT QUESTIONS 6.6**

1. What was Uttarapatha?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. What was Dakshinapatha?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What was the impact of the discovery of Monsoons on Indian History?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Which book gives the best account of Indo-Roman trade?  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. What were guilds?  
\_\_\_\_\_

**6.7 ART AND ARCHITECTURE**

Art in the post-Mauryan period was predominantly religious. Two most important features concerning art and architecture of this period are the construction of *stupas*



Notes

and development of regional schools of sculpture. Idols of the Buddha were carved out for the first time in this period. On account of contact with the foreigners from northwest, a specific school of art called Gandhara School of art developed in this period. It was influenced, to a great extent, by the Greek style or art forms.

(i) *Stupas*

A *stupa* was a large hemispherical dome with a central chamber in which relics of the Buddha or some Buddhist monk were kept in a small casket. The base was surrounded by a path for clockwise circumambulation (*pradakshina*), enclosed by wooden railings which were later made in stone. Three prominent *stupas* of this period are at Bharhut and Sanchi (both in M.P), which were originally built by Ashoka but enlarged later, and Amravati and Nagarjunkonda (both in Andhra Pradesh).

The Bharhut *stupa* in its present form dates to the middle of the second century BC. It is important for its sculptures. Its railings are made of red stone. Three big *stupas* were constructed at Sanchi in this period. The biggest of the three, which was built originally by emperor Ashoka, was enlarged to twice its size sometime in the second century BC. A number of *stupas* were also constructed in south India during this period but none has survived in its entirety. The Amravati *stupa*, situated at Amravati in Andhra Pradesh took its final shape sometime in the second century AD. The sculptures on stupas are drawn on the themes based on Jataka and other Buddhist stories.



Fig. 6.1 Sanchi Stupa



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(ii) *Rock Cut Architecture*

Apart from the *stupas*, this period also marks a progress in rock cut architecture. A large number of temples, halls and places of residence for monks were cut out of the solid rocks near Pune and Nasik in Maharashtra under the Satavahanas. The place of worship generally had a shrine cell with a votive *stupa* placed in the centre. This place was known as a *chaitya* and the rock cut structure used as the residence for monks was called a *vihara*.

(iii) *Schools of Sculptural Art*

The first century witnessed the division of Buddhism in two parts, Hinayana and Mahayana. Mahayana Buddhism encouraged Buddha's worship as a god in human form. As a result a large number of Buddha images were built in different regions. There were three major schools of sculptural art which developed in this period. These were: Mathura school of art, Gandhara School of art and Amravati school of art.

**The Mathura School:** The most prominent contribution of the Mathura school to the contemporary art was the images of Buddha which were carved for the first time perhaps in this art form. The Mathura artists used local red stone with black spots to make the images. Mathura has also yielded large numbers of sculptures of Jaina deities besides the *ayagapatas* or stone slabs to place objects of worship. The Brahmanical influence on the art school of Mathura is also evident. During the Kushana period a number of sculptures of brahmanical deities were carved, which included Kartikeya, Vishnu, Kubera.



Fig. 6.2 Gandhara Art - Bodhisattva



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**The Gandhara School of Art:** The Gandhara region was situated in the northwestern part of the Indian Subcontinent. This region was successively ruled by the Greeks, Mauryas, Sungas, Shakas, and Kushanas for many centuries. The school of art which developed here around the beginning of the Christian era has been called variously as Graeco-Roman, Indo Greek or Graeco-Buddhist. This is perhaps because this school has all the influences-Roman, Greek and Indian. The theme of sculptures is predominantly Buddhist but their style is Greek. The chief patrons of Gandhara art were the Shakas and Kushanas.

The stone used for making idols of Buddha and Bodhisattava was predominantly blue-grey schist. Chief characteristics of Gandhara school of art lies in its beautiful portrayal of human figures with distinguished muscles of the body. Buddha is depicted with a garment draped in Graeco-Roman fashion, and with very curly hair. These beautiful images of the Buddha are ranked among the best pieces of sculptures.

**The Amravati School of Art:** The Amravati school of art flourished in the region of Andhra Pradesh between the lower valleys of rivers Krishna and Godavari. The main patrons of this art form were the Satavahans but it carried on even later, patronized by their successor Ikshavaku rulers. This art is said to have flourished between 150 BC and 350 AD. Sculptures of this school are mainly found on the railings, plinths and other parts of *stupas*. The thematic representations include the stories from the life of the Buddha.

An important characteristic of the Amravati school is the 'narrative art'. The medallions were carved in such a manner that they depict an incident in a natural way. For example one medallion depicts a whole story of 'taming of an elephant by the Buddha'. Another important feature of Amravati art is the use of white marble like stone to carve out the figures. There is prominence of human figures rather than of nature.



**INTEXT QUESTIONS 6.7**

1. What are the two most important features of the post-Mauryan architecture?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. What was a stupa?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Which were the prominent stupas of the post-Mauryan period?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Differentiate between a chaitya and a vihara.  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Name the schools of sculptural art that developed in the post-Mauryan period.  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. What kind of stone was used in the Mathura school?  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. Who were the chief patrons of Gandhara school of art?  
\_\_\_\_\_



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**6.8 EARLY HISTORY OF SOUTH INDIA**

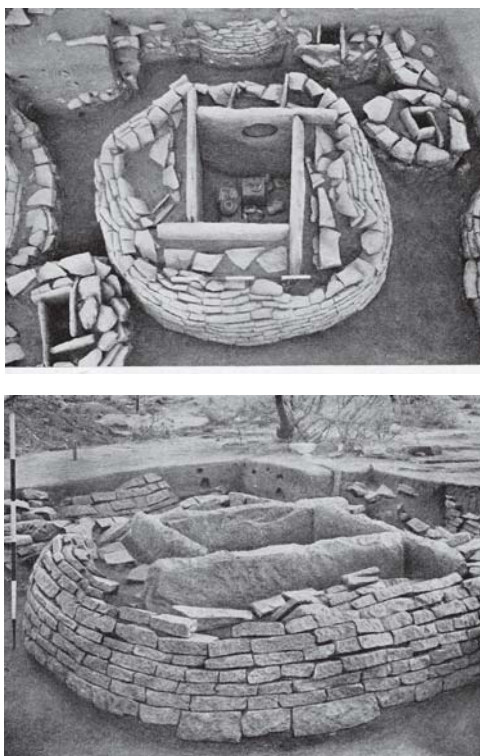
*(i) The Megalithic Cultures of South India*

The neolithic phase of south India, which was highlighted by the use of polished stone axe and blade tools, was succeeded by the Megalithic cultures (1200 BC–300 BC). Megaliths were tomb spots consisting of burials or graves covered with huge (mega) stones. They were, in most cases, located outside the settlement area. These Megalith burials have yielded the first iron objects from south India. Besides these the use of Black and Red ware pottery was also a distinctive feature of the Megalithic people. These Megaliths have been found in large numbers from the Nagpur area in Maharashtra in north to the southern tip of the Indian Peninsula. Prominent sites that have yielded Megalith graves include Brahmagiri, Maski, (Karnataka). Adichallanur (Tamilnadu) and Junapani near Nagpur (Maharashtra).

Identical iron tools have been found universally from all the Megalith graves. These tools which indicate their craft activities and include arrowheads, daggers, swords, spearheads, tridents, battle axe, hoes, ploughshares, sickles etc. These artifacts, along with the food grains such as wheat, rice etc., found at various megalithic sites indicate that the megalithic people followed for their livelihood agro-pastoral and hunting activities. The megalithic period in south India was followed by the Sangam age.

*(iii) The Sangam Age*

The Sangam age refers to that period in the early history of south India when large numbers of poems in Tamil were composed by a number of authors. The term Sangam refers to an assembly or “meeting together” of Tamil poets. Traditionally, three Sangams

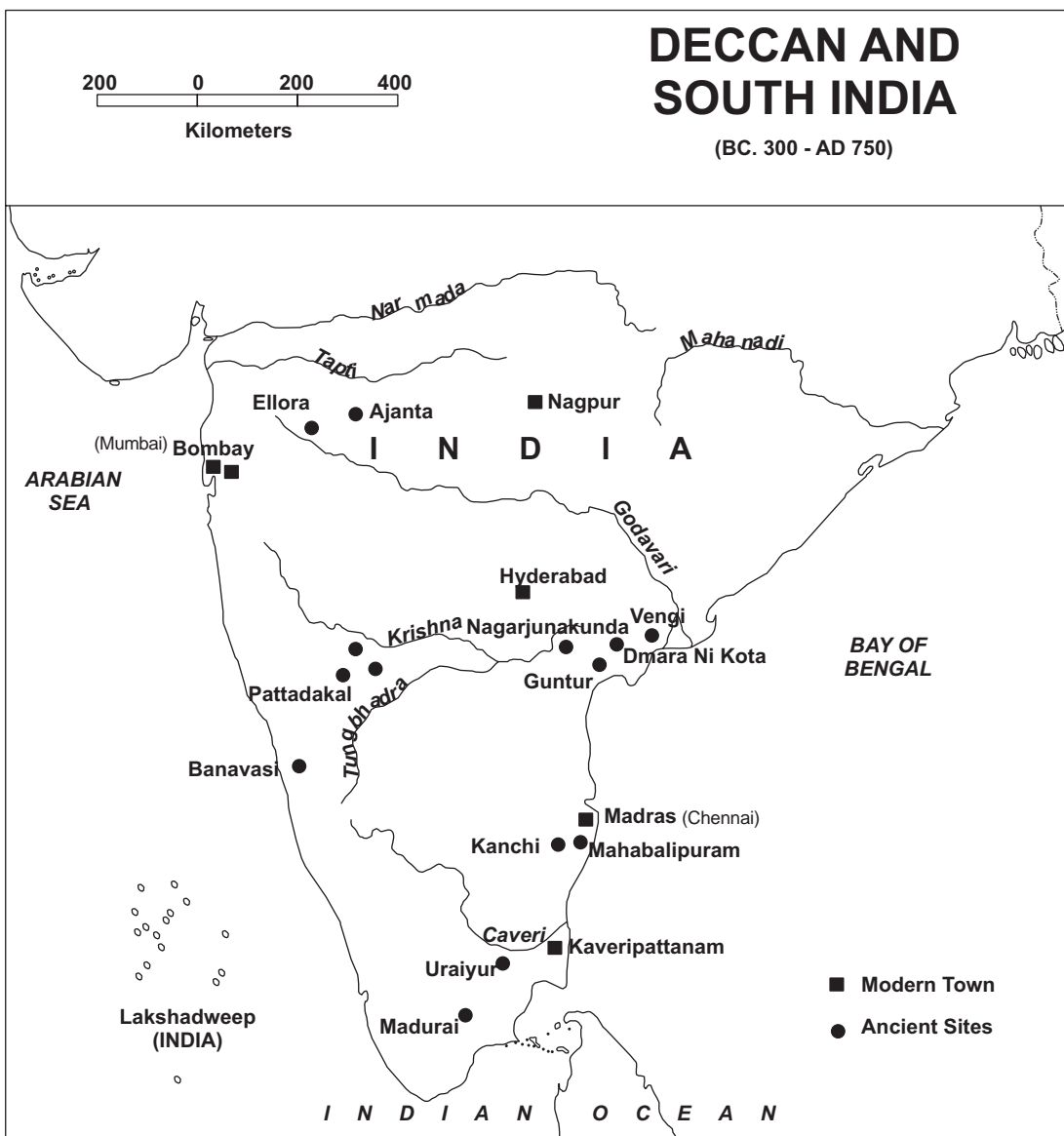


*Fig 6.3 Megalithic Graves*



or assemblies are believed to have been convened one after the other. All the three Sangams took place at different places under the patronage of the Pandya kings of Madurai. Poems within the Sangam literature were composed on two broader themes of love and war. It was later put together in eight collections called *Ettutogai*. This literature is believed to have been composed between 300 BC and 300 AD. A remarkable feature of the Sangam literature is its vivid portrayal of the contemporary society and culture of Tamilaham, or Tamil region and its peaceful and harmonious interaction with the northern (Aryan) culture.

Tamilaham stretches between the hills of Tirupati and the tip of Kanyakumari. It was divided amongst large number of chieftains and the chieftainship was hereditary. The important chieftains who dominated Tamil region during Sangam Age were the Cholas, with their capital at Uraiyyur, the Cheras with their capital at Vanji, (near Karur) and Pandyas with their capital at Madurai. The Cholas, Pandyas and Cheras had several



Map 6.3 India: Tamilnadu and Northern Culture



## Notes

subordinate chiefs. Tribute from subordinate chiefs along with plunder, were the main sources of revenue. There was frequent conflicts between the Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas. It gave large scope to the Sangam poets to compose poems on war.

The whole Tamilaham in this period was divided into five *tinais* or eco-zones, i.e., zones based on their economic resources. These were: *kurinji* (hilly region); *palai* (arid zone); *mullai* (pastoral tracts); *marudam* (wet lands); and *neital* (seacoast). These zones were not clearly demarcated, and were scattered all around the region. Because of their different geographical contexts and ecological specialties people in different *tinais* had their own modes of subsistence. For example, in *kurinji*, it was hunting and gathering; in *palai*, where people could not produce anything they took to raiding and plundering; in *mullai* people practiced animal husbandry; in *marudam* it was plough agriculture; and in *neital* people took to fishing and salt making.

Though the concept of varna was known, social classes in the Sangam period were not marked by higher or lower rankings as in north India. For example, Brahmins were present in the society and they performed vedic ceremonies and sacrifices and also acted as advisers to the chief but they enjoyed no special privileges. People were known on the basis of their occupation they followed, such as artisans, salt merchants, textile merchants, etc. The rich lived in well decorated brick houses and wore costly clothes whereas the poor lived in mud huts and had scanty clothes to wear.

War heroes occupied a special position in society, and memorial stones called *nadukal* or *virukkal* were raised in honour of those who died in fighting, and they were worshipped as godlings. Women in the Sangam period appear to have been educated. This is testified by many poems contributed by women poets to the Sangam literature. Women are also described as engaged in various economic activities such as paddy plantation, cattle rearing, basket-making, spinning, etc. However, the cruel practice of Sati was also prevalent in Tamil society, and it was known as *tippayadal*. But it was not obligatory as there are references to widows present in society. However their position was miserable as they were prohibited to decorate themselves or participate in any form of amusement.

The people were engaged in various economic activities such as agriculture, crafts and trade. Paddy was the most important crop. It formed the main part of peoples' diet and also served as a medium of barter exchange for inland trade. Since Tamil region does not have perennial rivers, the chief, wherever possible, encouraged agricultural activities by making tanks and dams. The Chola king Karikala of the Sangam age is credited with constructing a dam on the river Kaveri. It is considered to be the earliest dam in the country. Among the crafts, the most important was of spinning and weaving of textiles cotton as well as silk. Salt manufacture was another important activity.

The most important feature of the Sangam economy was flourishing trade with the Roman world. It is confirmed by the recovery of a large number of Roman gold coins in south India. The discovery of monsoons and the use of direct sea route between Indian coasts and the western world, as mentioned earlier, was the main reason for the growth of this trade. It led to rise of important towns and craft centres in the Tamil region. Vanji, identified with the present day Karur in Tamil Nadu, was the capital of the Cheras and also an important centre of trade and craft. Muzris, i.e., Cranganore on the south-west coast, was the foremost port of the Cheras. We are told that the Roman ships laden with gold used to come here to take back large amounts of pepper. Madurai, the capital of the Pandyas, is described in the Sangam poems as a large city

**Notes**

enclosed by a wall. It was an important centre of fine textile and ivory working. Korkai, in the Tirunneveli district of Tamil Nadu, was an important Pandya port. It was famous for its pearls. Uraiyur (Tiruchirapalli in Tamil Nadu), the capital of the Cholas, was a grand city with magnificent buildings. Kaveripattinam or Puhar was the main Chola port. The Sangam poems refer to the busy markets guarded by soldiers.

In the field of religion, Sangam period witnessed a close and peaceful interaction between north Indian and south Indian traditions. The Brahmanas who performed religious ceremonies popularized the worship of Indra, Visnu, Siva etc., in south India. There are also references to the presence of Buddhists and Jainas in Tamil region. The local people, particularly those of the hills, worshipped a deity called Murugan, which in northern India come to be identified with Kartikeya, a war god.

In short, the Sangam literature through its poems on love and emotion (*aham*) and warfare and social behaviour (*puram*) on the whole present a picture of political conflict, social inequality and economic prosperity of early Tamil region during 300 BC–300 AD.

**INTEXT QUESTION 6.8**

1. What are the Megaliths?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. What does the term Sangam refer to?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What are the themes of Sangam literature?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Which are the important chieftains mentioned in the Sangam literature?  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Which are the five tinai or eco-zones noted in the Sangam poems?  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Which Chola chief built a dam on river Kaveri?  
\_\_\_\_\_

**WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNT**

In the post – Mauryan Period, Shungas succeeded the Mauryas in north India. After them the Kushans created a big empire extending from central Asia to Varanasi after defeating the Shakas and the Pahlavas. Kanishka was the most famous of the Kushan rulers. He was a great patron of Buddhism. He convened the fourth Buddhist Council and patronized Gandhara and Mathura Schools of Art. Internal and external trade grew as a result of his vast empire.

In the Deccan, the Satavahanas established a kingdom between the river Krishna and Godavari with their capital at Pratishthana, near Aurangabad. Trade and Commerce





**Notes**

reached its heights in pennisular India because of the profitable Indo-Roman trade. The Amravati School of Art flourished in the region of Andhra Pradesh under them.

The Neolithic phase in south India was followed by the Megalithic cultures dated between 1200 BC–300 BC. The Megalithic graves have yielded iron objects and black and red pottery. Megalithic people followed agro-pastoral activities for their livelihood. The Sangam literature belonging to the period from 300 BC to 300 AD throws light on early history of south India. It deals with the activities of three important chieftains of south India viz the Cholas, the Cheras and the Pandyas. It presents a vivid description of the contemporary society, economy and culture of the Tamil region.



**TERMINAL QUESTIONS**

1. Discuss the major political developments in north India after the Mauryas.
2. Who were the Kushanas? How would you assess their contribution to India?
3. Briefly discuss India's contact with central Asia during the early centuries of the christian era.
4. Write a short note on the achievements of Gautamiputra Satakarni.
5. Discuss the salient features of India's overseas trade.
6. Write an essay on the various schools of sculptural art that emerged after the Mauryan empire.
7. What does the Sangam literature tell us about the political and social structure of Tamilaham during the early centuries of the christian era?



**ANSWERS TO INTEXT QUESTIONS**

**6.1**

1. Brihadratha
2. Heliodorus was an envoy of the Indo-Greek ruler Antialkidas in the court of Kashiputra Bhagabhadra, a Shunga ruler
3. Menander
4. Rudradaman's Junagarh or Girnar rock inscription
5. Central Asia

**6.2**

1. Kanishka
2. Kanishka; in 78 AD
3. Kundalavana (present day Harwan near Srinagar in Jammu and Kashmir); under Kanishka's patronage
4. Considered as the father of Ayurveda who wrote a book on medicine called the *Charaksamhita*

**Notes****6.3**

1. They contained legends and the bust of the ruler
2. Yavanacharya

**6.4**

1. Kharavela was the ruler of the Chedi dynasty which ruled over Kalinga from around the second century BC.
2. Near Bhuvaneshvar, Orissa

**6.5**

1. Gautamiputra Satakarni (late first century AD)
2. Pratishthana (modern Paithan near Aurangabad in Maharashtra)
3. Grama
4. The Satavahanas
5. Brahmana

**6.6**

1. Uttarapatha was a land route which connected northern and eastern parts of India with the northwestern fringes, i.e., present day Pakistan and further beyond.
2. Dakshinapatha was a land route which connected peninsular India with western and northern parts of India.
3. It encouraged sea trade between Rome and the Indian coasts.
4. *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea* written in the first century AD by an anonymous author
5. Communities of merchants and artisans

**6.7**

1. Construction of *stupas* and development of regional schools of art.
2. Stupa was the Buddhist place of worship, as it has reliefs of Buddha or some Buddhist monk.
3. The Sanchi, the Bharhut, and the Amaravati and the Nagajunikonda stupas
4. Within the Buddhist architecture both *chaitya* and *vihara* were rock-cut structures. *Chaitya* was used as a shrine and *vihara*, as residence for monks.
5. The Mathura, the Amaravati and the Gandhara schools of art.
6. Red sandstone with black spots
7. The Shakas and the Kushanas

**6.8**

1. Megaliths were tomb spots consisting of burials or graves.

**Notes**

2. It refers to an assembly or “meeting together” of Tamil poets.
3. Love and War
4. The Cholas, Pandyas and Cheras
5. *Kurinji* (hilly area); *palai* (arid zone); *mullai* (pastoral tracts); *marudam* (wet lands); and *neital* (seacoast)
6. Chola chief Karikala of the Sangam age.

**HINTS TO TERMINAL QUESTIONS :**

1. Refer 6.2
2. Refer 6.2 .2
3. Refer 6.3
4. Refer 6.5
5. Refer 6.6.2
6. Refer 6.7.3
7. Refer 6.8.2