

## POST-GUPTA PHASE – I

### CHARACTERISTICS OF ECONOMY

- The post-Gupta period was characterized by certain changes in Indian economy.
- Many important cities (Taxila, Kaushambi, Pataliputra) ceased to exist after the Gupta period. This decline of urban settlements was not an isolated phenomenon; it seems to have been quite widespread.
- Trade activities also suffered a setback because of various reasons. This is perhaps most clear from the fact that minting & circulation of coins were on a much more limited scale than before.
- Many of these changes had begun in the Gupta period itself
- Emergence of a predominantly agrarian economy
- Large-scale land grants;
- Decline of trade, commerce and urban life;
- Paucity of money;
- Agrarian expansion & growing agrarian character of society; and
- The emergence of relatively closed local units of production and consumption
- Emergence of ruling landed aristocracy, intermediaries and a large body of impoverished peasantry
- There emerged a much more complex society in which social differentiation, represented by different groups like peasants, brahmanas, craftsmen, merchants, rulers etc. was present.
- Land-grants grew in number in the Gupta and especially post- Gupta times and became widespread throughout the country.
- From the 5th century onwards revenues of the donated lands & mines and minerals in the said area transferred to the donees
- The donated land, village or villages were exempted from the interference of soldiers and royal officials.
- Brahmana donees got the right to punish all offences against family, private property and person, with the privilege to enjoy the fines thus received.
- Contemporary Dharmashastra literature recommended the grant of land or of revenues therefrom to state officials, in lieu of their salary.
- Land-grants influenced — land rights, the socio-economic conditions of the peasantry, the right to free enterprise of craftsmen & traders in the donated towns & the emergence of a relatively closed economy.

- Emergence of a closed Economy due to : — The attachment of peasants, artisans & merchants to their respective settlements & restrictions on their movements.

### DECLINE OF TRADE

- Commercial decline set in during the Gupta period, and it became more pronounced by the middle of the 6th century CE.
- The inflow of Roman coins into India stopped after the early centuries of the Common Era.
- The emergence of the Arabs & the Persians as competitors in trade did not augur well for Indian merchants.
- Silk and spices were important items in the Indo-Byzantine trade.
- The Byzantium, learnt the art of growing silkworms in the 6th century CE.
- Consequently, the silk trade was badly affected.
- The contacts with Central Asia & Western Asia were completely wiped off by the Huna invasions.
- The coastal towns carried on low intensity trade with countries of South-East Asia & China.
- Decline of trade was due to the weakening of links between coastal towns and the interior towns & further between towns and villages
- The trade in basic necessities such as salt, iron artefacts etc. continued.
- Some long-distance trade went on in prestigious, expensive luxury goods such as precious stones, ivory and horses.
- The large-scale, organised trade was replaced by itinerant petty traders, pedlars & trickle trade.

### PAUCITY OF COINS

- Gold coins were so abundant during the Kushana periods went out of circulation after the 6th century.
- The absence of silver and copper coins also attracts attention.
- The gold content of the later Gupta coins was only half of that of the Kushana coins.
- The coins of Harshavardhana are too meagre & the Rashtrakutas & the Palas who came to power in the Deccan and Bengal respectively in the 8th century issued no coins.
- Metallic currency was absent in most parts of northern India, Bengal, Odisha, Central, Deccan & south India.
- According to some historians, that earlier, coins served the purpose of currency in later period and rendered the issue of fresh coins unnecessary.

- However, the period was characterized by unprecedented agrarian expansion and this would have necessitated more metallic money.
- Further, coins were an expression of sovereignty – no ruler would have willingly forgone the privilege of minting coins in his own name.
- The decline of trade and the grant of land to high functionaries in lieu of money payments did away with the need for coins.
- There is evidence for barter and the use of cowries as a medium of exchange in daily transactions.

#### URBAN DECAY

- Decline in trade, paucity of coins and absence of coin moulds and commercial seals indicate economic decline.
- The pre-Kushana and Kushana towns in northern India and those associated with the Satavahanas in the Deccan began to decay from the middle of the 3rd or the 4th century.
- The sites such as Sanghol, Hastinapur, Atranjikhera, Mathura, Sonkh, Shravasti, Kaushambi, Khairadih, Chirand, Tamluk etc. in the Upper and Middle Gangetic plains experienced decline.
- Early prosperous centres such as Ujjain, Nagar, Pauni, Ter, Bhokardan, Nasik, Paithan etc. spread over Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Maharashtra witnessed similar trends
- Arikamedu in Tamil Nadu and the Satavahana urban centres in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka were no exception to this phenomenon.
- The second phase of urban decay set in after the 6th century and these centres ceased to be towns thereafter.
- The decline of towns and cities is reflected in contemporary literature & inscriptions as well.
- Up to the 6th century, inscriptions and seals refer to the importance of artisans, craftsmen and merchants in the life of the towns.
- After this such information stopped.
- The decline of Buddhist towns in northern India is attested by the account of Hiuen Tsang who visited India during the time of Harshavardhana.
- Unlike the robust urban life so vividly depicted in Vatsyayana's Kamasutra, post-Gupta literature such as the Kuttanimatam of Damodaragupta (7th century) is concerned with life in the countryside.
- All settlements, were not rural.
- In the post-Gupta period non-agriculturist settlements appeared as seats of administration, military garrisons and religious or pilgrimage centres.
- Military camps are referred to as skandhavara in inscriptions of the 5th-8th centuries.
- Certain towns continued to survive as a result of their conversion to centres of pilgrimage.
- All these non-agriculturist settlements, variously known as pura, pattana, nagara and rajadhani, were centres of consumption and not production.

#### AGRARIAN STRUCTURES

- Strengthening of rural economy due to : –
  - The patronage extended by kings, princes and chiefs to agriculture,
  - improvement in irrigational facilities,
  - increasing knowledge of agricultural sciences
  - Decline of towns may have led to the migration of a number of skilled artisans into the countryside.
  - Land-grants in tribal frontiers brought virgin land under cultivation.
  - 50 ruling powers – in the 5th to the 7th centuries in the Deccan and Central India (Maharashtra, eastern Madhya Pradesh, Andhra, Odisha and Bengal) – depended on revenues from land and agriculture.
  - In post-Gupta times agriculture constituted the basis of the state. Thus, the rise of states presupposes agrarian expansion & the spread of village economy.

#### RURAL SETTLEMENTS

- There are other terms denoting different types of rural settlements.
- Palli normally meant a tribal village.
- The expression Pataka stood for a part of a village. It was a kind of a hamlet with a name of its own but actually formed a part of a larger village.
- Settlements of herdsmen were called ghosas.
- With the spread of agriculture and Brahmanical culture, tribal hamlets, too, changed in character
- A large number of copper-plate charters of the post-Gupta period while recording land-grants describe various types of land which include cultivated, uncultivated, high, low, waterlogged, marshy, grassy and forest land.
- Agrahara villages, were inhabited by brahmanas, were associated with non-brahmanas as well.
- The proprietary right of such villages, however, belonged to the brahmanas only.
- In South India such villages were also known as mangalams.

#### AGRARIAN RELATIONS

##### PEASANT'S OBLIGATION

- The donee was entitled to collect all kinds of taxes – enjoyed these exceptional advantages in addition to such regular taxes as bhaga, bhoga, kara, uparikara, hiranya, udranga, halikakara, etc.
- The Pallava records specify 18 to 22 kinds of taxes.
- By the turn of the 1st millennium CE the number of taxes increased enormously.

##### FEUDAL LAND TENURE

- Yajnavalkya and Brihaspati, authors of Smriti works, mention four grades of land rights in the same piece of land.
- According to them, holders of rights of different grades were:
  - the Mahipati (king),
  - Kshetrasvamin (master of the land),
  - Karshaka (cultivator) and

- the sub-tenant.
- Land-grants led to hierarchical rights over land and sub-infeudation.
- The practice gave rise to a hierarchy of landlords
- From the Pallava period onwards temple servants were remunerated through assignments of land.
- Religious establishments became landed beneficiaries and, in turn, they gave plots of land to their dependants such as petty officials, artisans, musicians, attendants etc.
- Such assignments could be subleased to the actual tiller of the soil.
- Likewise, temple land was leased out to tenants for cultivation.

#### EVOLUTION OF CLOSED ECONOMY

- The rise and growth of a number of rural settlements – not linked to exchange networks and long-distance trade.
- Local needs came to be met locally. The movement of soldiers for wars, pilgrims to religious centres and brahmanas for the acquisition and enjoyment of land grants were possibly the only forms of spatial mobility.
- All this fostered strong local identity.
- The growing sense of localism and the self-sufficiency of the villages is reflected in expressions such as gramadharama, gramacara, and sthanacara: all referring to village or local practices in contemporary Puranic literature.

#### SOCIAL STRUCTURE

- Modification the varna-divided society : – Due to Land-grants & the emerging landed intermediaries wielding economic power and political authority
- The new social groups did not fit in with the four-fold varna system.
- The unequal distribution of landed property created social ranks which cut across social status based on varna considerations.
- The inclusion of the foreign ethnic groups & indigenous tribal chieftains in the Kshatriya varna as part of the ruling aristocracy, and the acculturated tribes in the Shudra varna swelled their ranks & transformed the varna-divided society.
- Moreover, the earlier distinction between Dvija (twice born) and Shudra began to be modified in the period.
- One's position in society did not simply depend on the varna to which one belonged.
- His social rank came to be connected with his position as a landholder among different categories of landholders.
- These tendencies began in this period and got accentuated in the 9th-10th centuries.
- From the 9th -10th centuries, the Kayasthas, traders and members of the rich dominant peasantry were also conferred titles such as ranaka, nayaka and so on.

- They constituted a part of the upper section of the society and ruling landed elite.
- New jatis (castes) emerged — affected the brahmanas, kshatriyas, kayasthas and shudras.
- The number of mixed castes and untouchable castes increased.
- The transformation of craft guilds into castes as a result of the decline of trade and of urban centres and the localised hereditary character of the crafts helped the process of the formation of new jatis.

#### LORDS & PEASANTS

- Terms such as bhogi, bhokta, bhogapathi, mahabhogi, brihadbhogi, etc. were used for the landed beneficiaries
- The upper crust of landlords included such dignitaries as ranaka, raja, samanta, mahasamanta, mandalesvara and so on.
- The king, similarly, had many high-sounding titles, connoting his lordship and ownership of land.
- The peasantry itself was not a homogeneous community.
- They were known by various names such as karshaka, krishivala, kinasa, kshetrjivi, halika, ardhasiri, ardhika, kutumbi and bhurnikarshaka among others.
- What is common to these expressions is that they seem to have nothing to do with control over land.
- However, they refer to different categories of tillers of the soil – dependent peasants, sharecroppers, field labourers etc. – none of whom were in absolute, independent control over their holdings

#### PROLIFERATION OF CASTES

- While a number of castes came to be incorporated within each varna, there are also examples of earlier cohesive communities breaking up into many varnas and jatis.
- The Abhira tribe provides a good example as it fragmented into Abhira brahmanas, Abhira kshatriyas and Abhira shudras.

#### BRAHMANAS

- The number of castes which emerged among the brahmanas was considerable.
- Brahmanas who “commercialised” their priestly services, those who came in contact with the aboriginals stood degraded in the eyes of the srotriyaagrahara-brahmanas “who did not engage in manual labour”.
- The migration of brahmanas to various regions for the enjoyment of land-grants also accelerated the process of caste and sub- caste formation within the varna.
- Brahmanas who stood close to political power and held high state offices were a different section.
- The eminent position held by such brahmanas led to the formation of different ranks within the brahmana varna.
- The same process was true also of the kayasthas.

#### KSHATRIYAS

- The heterogeneous origins of the ruling dynasties and their desire for social acceptance explain the proliferation of castes in the kshatriya community.
- Among the kshatriyas, proliferation of caste was caused by the emergence of new ruling houses from among the local tribes and the incorporation of foreign ethnic groups, wielding political power.
- Among the foreign ethnic groups, the Bactrian Greeks, Shakas, Parthians, Hunas etc. were accommodated in the varna system as second class kshatriyas.
- The kshatriya castes multiplied from the 5 th -6 th centuries when many tribal chiefs were transformed into “Hinduised” rajas through the approval of the brahmanas whom they patronized and the performance of Vedic sacrifices.

#### SHUDRAS

- Endogamous groups coming from various communities and regions vastly expanded the base of the shudra varna.
- Petty peasant castes, rich peasants, sharecroppers and artisanal castes, with unequal access to economic power were included in the shudra varna in Gupta and post-Gupta times.
- Tribes became castes as a consequence of their gradual transformation as peasants and these peasant groups were incorporated into the brahmanic society as shudras.
- This considerably added to the number and variety of shudra castes

#### GROWTH OF KAYASTHAS

- The scribe or the kayastha community was a product of the socio-economic forces of the times.
- Land-grants involved the transfer of land revenues and other complex administrative functions created the need for a body of scribes & record keepers.
- The Gupta period witnessed the beginning of fragmentation of land.
- The maintenance of proper records of individual plots was very much necessary for settling disputes.
- This difficult job was carried out by a class of writers who were known variously as kayastha, karana, karanika, pustapala, chitragupta, aksapatalika etc.
- The kayasthas were only one group of the community of scribes.
- However, gradually the scribes and record keepers as a community came to be known as kayasthas.
- Initially, the educated members from the upper varnas were called upon to work as kayasthas.
- In course of time the scribes recruited from various varnas began to limit their social interaction to members of their profession and started practising community endogamy and family exogamy.

- That completed the process of caste formation among the Kayasthas (endogamy and commensality are the two basic traits of the caste system).

#### THE UNTOUCHABLES

- The “impure” castes or the untouchables had assumed a definite shape by the early Common centuries. Nevertheless, they were numerically small.
- From around the 3rd century CE onwards the practice of untouchability appears to have intensified and the number of untouchables registered a rise.
- Katyayana, a Dharmashastra writer of the Gupta period, was the first to use the expression asprishya in the sense of untouchables.
- By the turn of the 1st millennium CE hunters, fishermen, butchers, executioners and scavengers appear as untouchables.
- Kalidasa, Varahamihira, Fa-Hsien, Bana and others have given a vivid account of the social disabilities imposed on them.
- The Chandalas were only one section of the untouchables, although the lowest in the social ladder.
- It is difficult to explain the phenomenal growth in the number of untouchables during this period and later.
- However, Brahmanical and Buddhist sources suggest that most untouchable castes were originally backward tribes.
- It has been argued that their backwardness and resistance to the process of acculturation and “Brahmanization” may have prevented them from being absorbed within the society and pushed them to the position of untouchables.
- They may have been dispossessed of their lands and made to settle outside the villages.

#### CRAFTS & CASTES

- Several groups of artisans and craftsmen lost their earlier status and many even came to be regarded as untouchables – resulted from the decline of urban centres where craftsmen were in great demand.
- Craft guilds became transformed into castes & this transformation brought changes in the nature & organization of craft production.
- Various castes such as the swarnakara (goldsmith), malakara (garland maker), chitrakara (painter), napita (barber), etc. emerged out of the numerous crafts (practiced by different groups).
- Weavers, dyers, tailors, barbers, shoemakers, ironsmiths, washermen and others were reduced to the position of untouchables by the turn of the millennium.

## POST GUPTA PHASE – II

- The major sources for the study of the polity of this period are inscriptions, dharmashastra literature, the Harshacharita of Bana and the accounts of Chinese travellers like Fa-Hien, Hiuen Tsang, etc.
- The polity of this period was marked by hereditary monarchies ruling over small territories with one or two of them assuming wider sovereign status now and then

### KINGSHIP

- Most of the country was ruled by kings.
- Only in a few fringe areas there lingered on the gana (tribal republic) form of government.
- After the military expeditions of Samudragupta in north India early in the 4th century CE most of these tribal republics almost disappeared from the political scene.
- Thus, the Madra and Yaudheya in the Punjab, the Abhira in central India, etc. are not heard of again.
- Some of the tribal chieftaincies also slowly became monarchies.
- The King took pompous titles like paramamahesvara, rajadhiraja, paramabhataraka, etc. — indicate their superiority over many other smaller rulers.
- During this period the divine right theory also came into vogue.
- The King in keeping with this theory held such titles as prithvialabha i.e. “the beloved of the Earth goddess”.
- He is called the fifth lokapala as the other existing four lokapalas or guardians of the four cardinal directions were namely Kubera, Varuna, Indra and Yama.
- The concept of the divinity of the King, combined with the notion of the King as guardian and protector.
- Kingship was hereditary – succession to the throne was decided by law of primogeniture, that is, the eldest son succeeding his father, there were many exceptions to this rule.
- Sometimes kings were even elected by nobles & councillors.
- As head of the government, the King was overseer of all administrative activities of his realm.
- He was the supreme judge, and he usually led his army to the battlefields.
- There are occasional references to queens acting as rulers, as in the case of Didda: the queen of Kashmir of a later period.
- Generally, however, the queens remained in the background.

### POLITICAL ORGANISATION

- As compared to the Mauryan period, there is no clear evidence for the existence of a central mantriparishad (council of ministers) to advise the King.

- There were, however, many high officials who were at times called mantrin
- The other designations for higher officials were sandhivigarhika, who was minister for foreign affairs, war & peace; mahabaladhikrita & mahadandanayaka, both of which denoted superior posts in the army.
- Sometimes, the same person was holding more than one such post; for example, Harishena who composed the Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta is said to have been a sandhivigarhika as well as a mahadandanayaka.
- Most of the titles of officials & high officers continued in the post-Gupta period.
- For example, a class of officials were known as kumaramatyas.
- It seems that most of the high officials were selected from this class or cadre and so the kumaramatyas are mentioned in various capacities like sandhivigarhika, mahabaladhikrita, etc.
- The officer called Uparikawas was in charge of a bhukti, an administrative division.
- Ayuktaka was a member of the bureaucracy who, like Vishayapati, functioned at a level higher than the villages, & he was an important intermediate administrative link between the bhukti & the village.
- The officials seem to have been paid in cash in the beginning of our period and later, they were just assigned revenues of some designated territories and they were, therefore, called bhogika or bhogapathi.
- This is known from the Harshacharita which refers to the complaints made to Harsha by villagers against such officials.
- The posts also became hereditary, thereby weakening the King's authority in course of time.

### ARMY

- Both for maintaining internal peace and for defending against external aggression a standing army became a regular feature during this period.
- There were a number of high military officials and they were obviously in charge of this army.
- Cavalry was an important element of this army.
- Some maritime states like the Pallavas in the south also had navy.
- Chariots do not figure prominently during this time.
- The royal army was supplemented by the militia of feudatory chiefs (samanta).

### ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISION

- The country was organized into many divisions for administrative purposes.
- The highest unit among these territorial divisions was called bhukti which was under the charge of a high official called uparika.
- Sometimes, princes were also in charge of some bhuktis.

- Vishaya was the next administrative division below which was the lowest unit, i.e., the village.
- In certain areas vishaya was also known as rashtra.
- In eastern India the vishayas were also divided into Vithis over and above the village.
- At the level of vishaya the officials (or locally powerful people) called Vishayapatis played a leading role in the administration.
- In each village a headman and the village elders managed the local affairs.
- In urban settlements or towns there were a number of craft and merchant guilds to look after their administration.

#### SAMANTA

- Semi-independent local chiefs called samanta were an important feature of the polity of this time.
- Samudragupta conquered and subjugated a number of territories.
- Some of the rulers of these territories which were on the fringes of the Gupta empire were made subordinate allies of the King.
- They became feudatories – This continued in the post-Gupta period too.
- Some of the Samantas presented the King their daughters in marriage.
- They were obliged to pay homage to the King by personally attending his court
- The King, in turn, recognized their right to continue to rule over their own territories and for this he also gave them charters.
- These subordinate rulers were also obliged to send their men to fight in the King's army during times of war.
- Subject to the above obligations the feudatories or samantas were left to look after the administration of their territories.
- Decentralized polity : – granting of land to priests and officials for their maintenance – parted with some of his administrative rights like taxing the people, punishing the criminals, etc
- The granted territories were also given immunity from the entry of the King's army.
- Naturally, the grantees of such lands became almost independent of the King and became samantas themselves.
- Consequent to this, in the 7th century CE and after, we find officials giving themselves pompous titles like mahasamanta and "one who obtained the privilege of five great sounds (panchamahashabda)".
- Through the use of these titles, the samantas & mahasamantas proclaimed their autonomy.
- The presence of all these features in polity has led historians to suggest that from the Gupta period onwards the political organization which developed in India represented a feudal-type of political organization

#### TAXATION

- The government got most of its revenue through taxation.
- Land taxes called baha, bhoga, etc. were the main items and the land taxes actually increased through the centuries.
- As trade and commerce seem to have declined during this period commercial taxes are not found prominently.
- As far as the lands granted to officials and priests are concerned, the government lost much of its revenue from those lands.

#### JUDICIAL SYSTEM

- Judicial system was more developed now compared to earlier times.
- Many law codes and treatises were compiled during this period and the dharmashastras elaborately dealt with legal matters.
- There were different courts like Karana, Adhikarana, dharmasana, etc.
- Criminal and civil cases were clearly differentiated from each other.
- Laws regarding property & inheritance were elaborate.
- Of course, justice was based on the varna classification in society.
- For the same kind of crime, culprits belonging to a higher varna (caste) got less punishment than those belonging to a lower varna.
- Dharmashastras also insisted that local usages and practices of different guilds and castes should be given due weight while dispensing justice.

#### RELIGION

- While archaeological material suggests that certain elements of Indian religions were present in the archaeological cultures dating prior to the Vedas, the hymns of the Rig Veda give us an idea of how prayers were offered to deities to please them.
- However, the simple prayers of the Rig Veda gave place gradually to complex rituals dominated by Brahmanas & one can notice the growth of a close relationship between the Brahmanas and the rulers & warriors in this situation.
- Wandering ascetics, the Buddhist and Jainas did not accept the dominance of the Brahmanas & the rigid social - moral order which the Brahmanas advocated.
- There, thus, grew the heterodox movements which received support from rulers, rich merchants & other sections of people.
- In the post-Gupta period Buddhism reached the height of its glory, spread to countries outside India and Buddhist structures were constructed on a large scale.
- Meanwhile, certain changes were taking place within Brahmanism & within heterodox sects.
- From the religious point of view, the most important change was that the devotee was

considered as being bound to the supreme godhead by devotion (bhakti) & the godhead was worshipped in the form of images.

- Vaishnavism and Shaivism as parts of Brahmanical religion attracted many devotees; image-worship became widespread among the Buddhists who worshipped not only the Buddha or Bodhisattva but also a host of other deities; the Jainas, too, worshipped the images of Tirthankaras, various minor deities, stone ayagapatas and other objects.
- The Brahmanas used image-worship to build up pantheons of deities by assimilating gods and goddesses from diverse sources.
- This is how many female deities (shakti) became prominent in Brahmanical religions in this period.
- In fact, there was no homogeneity in Brahmanical religions & religious practices — beliefs varied widely.
- Different sects of Shaivism, such as the Pasupatas, the Kaula-Kapalikas and the Kalamukhas were opposed to the dominance of the Brahmanas.
- They had their own religious orders centered around mathas (monasteries) & they received support from many royal families.
- Brahmanas who cultivated the Vedas & continued to perform Vedic sacrifices received royal support & agrahara settlements of the Brahmanas came to be a major link in the spread of Brahmanical ideas & practices throughout the country.
- The temple also became an institution which drew people together & served effectively in the spread of ideas.
- Although in the complex religious situation of early medieval India the Brahmanas were gaining ascendancy, one should keep in mind also the following terms:
  - The orthodox Brahmanical order continued to be challenged, particularly by movements within Shaivism, by poet-saints and by those who practiced Tantric form of worship.
  - Brahmanism, Buddhism or Shaivism, developed institutional bases in the form of temples and monasteries.
  - Ruling powers and elite sections of society supported institutions and Brahmanas, monks, acharyas (religious heads) and others by grants of land, wealth and by other means.
  - By these acts of patronage, the ruling powers and elite sections of society strengthened their own social base.

#### EMERGENCE OF BHAKTI

- Brahmanism had to accept the growing importance of new gods like Shiva and Vishnu side by side with Vedic gods like Indra and Varuna.
- It also assimilated many other popular deities like Vasudeva, Skanda and so on.
- All these led to the growth of the Bhakti cult.

- An important characteristic of later Brahmanism was its capacity to adopt new trends.
- This became necessary to meet the challenge of the 'heretical sects' which were opposed to Brahmanism.
- Brahmanism gradually shifted its emphasis from Vedic rituals to Bhakti, which implied the cultivation & development of a personal relationship between God and the devotee.
- Thus, a monotheistic concept of God, with either Shiva or Vishnu as his manifestation & Bhakti (loyalty & devotion) to him was gaining strength.
- Soon Bhakti became the dynamic force of later Brahmanism also called Hinduism.

#### SYNCRETISM

- An important characteristic of the new Brahmanism was its genius to syncretize many local deities and to evolve a monotheistic great God.
- Syncretism in this context will mean that deities worshipped at different places & by different people were recognized as identical & were worshipped as manifestation of the same supreme deity.
- Thus, Vasudeva was identified with Vishnu, a minor Vedic god and Narayana, a god of obscure origin mentioned in the Brahmana literature.
- Then, Vishnu was closely connected with the name of Krishna who represented the fusion between martial hero & a flute-playing pastoral deity.
- Vishnu could assimilate many other cults – the cult of the "divine boar" which prevailed among some of the tribes of Malwa; the cult of Parashurama, a Brahmana hero; and Rama, the great hero of the Ramayana.
- Then, Vishnu rose to the status of the Universal God in the Bhagavad Gita.
- Similarly, Shiva came to be syncretized with the Vedic Rudra and Bhairava, a tribal god, & was worshipped in the form of the phallic emblem (linga).
- With Shiva were later associated certain other deities such as Skanda and the elephant-headed Ganesha.
- These theistic cults stressed the merit of worship rather than the performance of Vedic sacrifice

#### TRIBAL RITUALS & ACCULTURATION

- Another important feature of later Brahmanism was its incorporation of the tribal rituals keeping the Vedic Yajna rites supreme only in theory.
- In course of time, the merits derived out of these new rituals were equated with the merit of the Vedic Yajna.
- Further, the sacred spots of the tribals were included as new places of pilgrimage (tirtha) with suitable myths to make them respectable.
- The Itihasa & Puranas are full of such material or stories which inspire bhakti (devotion) to a personal god.

## ROYAL SUPPORT TO TEMPLES & THEISM

- The Puranas highlighted the merits acquired by visiting great cult entrées like Mathura and Varanasi which were major places of pilgrimage.
- This gave stimulus to the institution of the temple.
- The Puranas & other texts of the period list numerous places of pilgrimage (tirthas) which drew devotees in large numbers because visiting tirthas would ensure merit.
- The temple, which housed the deity, became a place of worship and, thus, drew devotees away from home to an institution which became a public center.
- The Gupta age marked the beginning of temple construction.
- It laid the foundation of the typical styles of Indian temple architecture.
- The Epic and Puranic stories were represented in the temple sculptures.
- Excellent specimens of them are still found in the Deogarh temple.
- The Gupta emperors patronized both Shaivism and Vaishnavism.
- However, the personal religion of most of the Gupta rulers was Vaishnavism which led to the creation of a number of important Vaishnava centers and Vaishnava sculptures in the Gupta period.
- However, in the 6th and 7th centuries CE Shaivism seems to have replaced Vaishnavism as recipient of royal patronage in northern India.
- Shaivism counted among its followers' supreme rulers – foreign as well as indigenous – such as Mihirakula, Yashodharman, Sasanka & Harsha.
- Pashupata or Shaiva acharyas are frequently mentioned in contemporary records which include inscriptions and many literary works like those of Varahamihira, Bana and Hiuen Tsang.

## SPREAD OF NORTH INDIAN RELIGION TO SOUTH

- All the major north Indian religions – Brahmanism, Jainism and Buddhism – travelled southwards.
- The Brahmanas brought with them the Vedic Yajna cult and the two theistic cults Vaishnavism and Shaivism.
- The kings were in favour of the Vedic rituals as they conferred ritual status on them.
- The theistic cults struck root among the people. However, eventually the devotional theistic cults were to prove stronger than any other religious force in the south, and this was recognized even by royal patrons who extended support to Vaishnavism, Shaivism and their sects.
- Among the early Chalukyan kings of Vatapi some professed Bhagavatism & the Pasupata cult
- The famous bas-reliefs of Badami testify to the popularity of the theistic cults in the Deccan in the 6th -7th centuries CE.

- Similarly, the Pallavas of Kanchi patronized the two theistic cults as shown by the monolithic rathas (chariots) at Mahabalipuram and many bas-reliefs on them
- Bhakti Cult, began to spread fast in the south through the brahmana settlements and temple-centers where the exposition of the Epics and the Puranas was institutionalized by means of munificent land-grants.
- The way in which the Brahmanas transformed the earlier religious forms into temple-centered theistic culture in the north was repeated in the south also

## BHAKTI MOVEMENT IN SOUTH INDIA

- The final form of theistic Bhakti was the result of the influence of the Tamil devotionalism – a product of the fusion between ecstatic local tribal cults (e.g. VelanVeriyadal) and northern theistic schools.
- This cross fertilization started at Tirupati and Kalahasti, which then constituted the northern door of the Tamil country – reached to Kanchipuram, the Pallava capital, and soon Madurai, the Pandyan capital.
- The ThiruMurugAtrupadai – a famous devotional work on Muruga, the local tribal god who was syncretized with Skanda in this work – is the earliest example of this cross fertilization
- Tamil devotionalism developed into a great movement when it was adapted to the two theistic cults Shaivism and Vaishnavism
- Tamil Bhakti movement was characterized by : — intense ecstatic piety for the deity, an aggressive militancy against the heterodox cults which were growing in popularity among the people with royal support.
- This movement was spearheaded in the 6th century CE by poet-saints who traversed the country many times with great missionary zeal.
- They sang their hymns, danced and debated with the heterodox cults.
- Among these hymnal poet-saints the Shaiva saints are called Nayanars and the Vaishnava saints as Alvars.
- This great wave of religious enthusiasm attained its peak in the early 7th century and its triumph was largely achieved in the two centuries that followed
- The hymns of the saints of this period are marked by an outspoken hatred against the Buddhists and the Jinas.
- As a result, public debates, competition in the performance of miracles and tests of the truth of their doctrines – became the order of the day.
- Reasons for the success & popularity of these hymnal saints : —
  - Unlike the Brahmanas who propagated Hinduism through esoteric theories and the use of Sanskrit, the hymnal saints sang in easily understood forms using only the popular language Tamil.



- Their Bhakti was not a reverence for a transcendent deity, but ecstatic love for an imminent one.
- Being unable to stand before the force of this Bhakti wave which also attracted royal support, Jainism and Buddhism had to retreat from the South.

#### REFORMS IN THE BHAKTI MOVEMENT OF SOUTH INDIA

- Whereas the Brahmanas were obsessed with caste regulations, the Bhakti movement ignored caste & included men and women of all castes.
- Among the Nayanars, Karaikkal Ammai was a woman and Nandanar was a member of the depressed class.
- Among the Alvars, Andal was a woman and Timppan was a hymnist from a "low caste".
- Thus, the whole movement carried elements of protest and reform. However, it soon got engulfed by Brahmanical orthodoxy.
- The Bhakti movement ran parallel to the growth and consolidation of early medieval monarchies, under the Pallavas, Cholas, Pandyas and the Cheras.
- Many rock temples were cut, and structural temples were built for Shiva and Vishnu.
- These temples were endowed with vast landed tax free property.
- Extensive land grants donated to the Brahmanas is evident from the thousands of donative inscriptions on the walls of the south Indian temples.
- A prince-priest axis soon emerged.
- The monarchs fervently welcomed the rich temple-centered bhakti as it suited the monarchical ideology.
- The Brahmanas welcomed this as it enabled Brahmanism, with its institutional base in the temple-centered agrarian settlements, to emerge as the most dynamic force in south India.
- Everywhere, the local temple was the nucleus of religious life and a new social formation.
- In these temples the two arms of the Brahmanical religion – the ritualistic Vedic cult & the theistic devotional cult – could meet.
- The temple-centered Bhakti enabled the all-embracing caste system to attract all the original tribes of south India within its fold
- This order fixed the ritual and social status of the tribes with the Brahmana as the fixed point of reference.
- The ideology of Bhakti could bring together kings, priests and the common people within a network of understandable social relations.
- With the increasing patronage of kings and landed magnates, the Bhakti movement soon became part of the establishment.
- Thus, all traces of dissent, protest and reform were obliterated in the 10th century CE.
- The Alvars and the Nayanars do not appear any more.

- Their place was taken by Vaishnava acharyas, all of whom were Brahmanas or the Shaivite acharyas who all came from the rich landed Vellala caste.

#### THE RISE OF TANTRISM

- The religious practices which originated in the most primitive fertility rites of the non-Aryan tribal circles later came to be known as Tantrism.
- It not only infiltrated into the other 'civilized' cults (Jainism, Buddhism, Shaivism, Vaishnavism etc.) but also emerged as a challenge and reaction to these cults, as all of them had developed vested interests and had become parts of the establishment by the early medieval period.

#### MAIN FEATURES

- Women clearly enjoyed a higher status in all the tribal belts.
- Since in the Sanskrit texts they were bracketed with the shudras, it became necessary for them to raise their traditional ritual status by means of Tantric initiations.
- The reason for the importance of female deities in Tantrism is that in all the tribal belts the cult of the mother goddesses was widely prevalent.
- These aboriginal goddesses entered into Brahmanism as Shakti, in Buddhism as Tara and Jainism as many Yakshinis.
- The Gaudavah – a Prakrit text of the early medieval period – associates Kali and Parvati with such tribals as the Kols and the Sabaras
- Shakti is known as Matangi (a goddess of Matanga tribes) and Chandali (a goddess of the Chandalas).
- At the end of the Gupta period many tribal goddesses were absorbed into the higher cults, together with many magical rites and a new form of animal sacrifice.
- All these increased in importance throughout the early medieval period.
- Tantrism emerged as a religious factor in the 6th century CE and became a strong force by the 9th century

#### TANTRISM & HETERODOX RELIGIONS

- Tantrism penetrated Buddhist, Jaina and the Brahmana theology.
- Early Buddhism and Jainism tried their best to check the infiltration of these Tantric practices into their cults.
- In the earliest phase of their history Buddhism & Jainism launched a systematic campaign against the cult of image worship, rituals and sacrifices as destructive of all morals.
- Mahayanism is said to have developed into Mantrayanism or Vajrayanism in the Andhra region by adopting Tantric practices
- Many Tantric texts emerged since the 3rd century CE from Andhra and Kalinga and spread to Vanga and Magadha where Nalanda developed as a centre of Tantric study during the reign of the Palas.

- The Vajrayana Tantric literature is so vast that only a nominal catalogue of its works found in Tibetan language comprises three high volumes.
- Idol worship and rituals appeared in Jainism in the early centuries of the Common Era.
- Puranas and other literature emphasized that the devotees of Adinatha could get victory over enemies and ward-off diseases and evil spirits.
- In the early medieval age Tantrism infiltrated into Jainism on a significant scale
- As a result, Jainism developed a pantheon of Yakshas and Yakshis (the attendant demi-gods and goddesses of the Tirthankaras) together with a number of mantras (magical formulae) to propitiate them.
- Many Jaina Tantric texts, which incorporated elements of magic and miracle, glorified the cult of Yakshis like Padmavati Ambika, Siddhayika and Jvalamalini.
- These Yakshis were believed to bestow superhuman powers on their devotees.
- The Yapaniya sect of the Jainas was the foremost in propagating Tantric mode of worship in early medieval Karnataka.



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