FOUR

Economic and Social Life, Education and Religious Beliefs (*800–1200*)

Although we have not yet studied political developments in north India from 1000 to 1200, the entire period from 800 to 1200 may be regarded as one for the purpose of studying economic and social life,and religious beliefs. Economic and social life, ideas and beliefs change much more slowly than political life. That is why many of the earlier features which existed before the ninth century continued during this period also. At the same time, there were a number of new factors which made the period different from the earlier one. Generally speaking, new elements as well as elements of continuity are found in every historical period, but the extent and direction of change varies.

TRADE AND COMMERCE

The economic situation, especially trade and commerce in the country during this period is a matter of debate among historians. Some consider it to be a period of stagnation and decline, a set back both of foreign trade and long distance trade within the country, decline of towns, and greater localism and regionalism. The virtual absence of gold coins till the tenth century is considered to be a proof of this.

We can hardly examine here all these points in detail. Suffice it to say that the fall of the Roman empire did not seriously affect India's trade with the West since two large empires, the Byzantine empire with its base in Constantinople, and the Sassanid empire based in Iran rose during the subsequent period. Both of them took keen interest in trade with India and the Indian Ocean region. After the

rise of the Arab empire in the seventh century, the Arabs expanded the trade of the West to India, Southeast Asia and China.

There is no reason to believe that Indian traders were excluded from this expanded trade. Hence, gold and silver continued to come to India in return for its favourable trade. That is why India continued to be considered a country full of gold and silver, and hence an attractive prize for foreigners to invade and trade with. Why the gold and silver was used for decorating temples and palaces, or for jewellery, or simply buried for future use, and not used for coinage, is a question to which no satisfactory answer is available.

We have seen how a large number of states arose in the country during the period, and the growing power and authority of those holding superior rights in land. Many of these kingdoms expanded agriculture by building bunds, wells, etc. In some instances, as in Bengal, Sind and the Tamil country, in order to strengthen their own positions, the rulers invited Brahmans to settle down by giving them grants of rent-free lands. Since the bulk of these lands were uncultivated, many tribesmen who were nomads, or cattle-rearers or food-gatherers were induced to settle down to agriculture. Such expansion of cultivation further strengthened the position of the local chiefs, *samantas*, etc.

We do not know the impact of this development on internal trade. The growth of small towns which catered to local trade, along with greater local self-sufficiency seems to have gone hand in hand. In north India, in particular, the decline of long distance trade within the country apparently led to the decline of trade guilds or *shrenis* and *sanghs*. The guilds had often consisted of people belonging to different castes. They had their own rules of conduct which the members were legally bound to obey, and were entitled to lend or borrow money or receive endowments. With the decline of long distance trade and commerce, these bodies lost their former importance. We find very few references in north India during the period to guilds receiving endowments. In the course of time, some of the older *shrenis* emerged as sub-castes. For example, the *Dvadasa-shreni*, which was a guild, became a subcaste of the Vaishyas. Jainism, which was patronized by the mercantile sections, also received a set back in north India.

In some of the Dharamshastras which were written during this period, a ban is put on travel beyond the areas where the *munja* grass does not grow or where the black gazelle does not roam, that is, outside India proper. Travel across the salt seas was also considered polluting. These bans were not taken seriously, for we have accounts of Indian merchants, philosophers, medical men and craftsmen visiting Baghadad and other Muslim towns in West Asia during this period. Perhaps, the ban was meant for Brahmans only, or was meant to discourage too many Indians going to the areas dominated by Islam in the West and Buddhism in the East for fear of their bringing back heretical religious ideas which may be embarrassing and unacceptable to the Brahmans and the ruling groups.

The ban on sea travel did not interfere with the growth of India's overseas trade with the countries of Southeast Asia and China. A brisk trade between south India and the countries of Southeast Asia had started from the sixth century onwards. The growing geographical knowledge about the countries of the area is reflected in the literature of that time. The peculiar features of the languages of the area, their dresses, etc., are mentioned in the books of the period such as Harisena's *Brihatkatha-kosh*. There are many stories about the adventures of the Indian merchants in the magical waters of the area, stories which became the basis of the well-known story of Sindbad the Sailor. The Indian merchants were organised in guilds, the most famous of them being the *Manigraman* and the *Nandesi* which had been active since early times. These guilds displayed a spirit of enterprise, engaging in retail and whoselsale trade in many foreign countries. They also gave handsome grants to temples, which became centres of social and cultural life, and sometimes also advanced money for trade. Many of the Indian traders settled down in these countries. Some of them took wives from the local population. The priests followed the traders. In this way, both Buddhist and Hindu religious ideas were introduced in the area. The Buddhist temple of Borobudur in Java and the Hindu temple of Angkor Wat in Cambodia testify to the spread of both these religions there. Some of the ruling families of the area were semi-Hinduized, and they welcomed trade and cultural relations with India. In this way, Indian culture mingled with the local culture to establish new literary and cultural forms. Some

observers think that the material prosperity of the Southeast Asian countries, the growth of civilization, and establishment of large states was based in large measure on the introduction of the Indian technique of irrigated rice cultivation.

The chief Indian port for sailing to Java, Sumatra, etc., was Tāmralipti (Tamluk) in Bengal. In most of the stories of the period, merchants start for Suvarnadvipa (modern Indonesia) or to Kataha (Kedah in Malaya) from Tamralipti. A fourteenth century writer in Java speaks of people from Jambudvipa (India), Karnataka (south India), and Gaud (Bengal) coming unceasingly in big numbers in large ships. Traders from Gujarat also took part in this trade.

On account of its prosperity, China had become a main focus of trade in the Indian Ocean. The Chinese consumed enormous quantities of spices, which were imported from Southeast Asia and India. They also imported ivory, the best of which came from Africa, and glassware which came from West Asia. To these were added medicinal herbs, lac, incense, and all types of rare commodities. Generally, products from Africa and West Asia did not go beyond Malabar in South India. Nor did many Chinese ships go beyond the Moluccas in Southeast Asia. Thus, both India and Southeast Asia were important staging centres for trade between China and the countries of West Asia and Africa. Indian traders – especially from the Tamil country and Kalinga (modern Orissa and Bengal) – played an active role in this trade, along with Persians, and at a later stage, the Arabs. Much of the trade to China was carried in Indian ships, the teakwood of Malabar, Bengal and Burma providing the basis of a strong tradition of ship building. The weather conditions were also such that it was not possible for a ship to sail straight from the Middle East to China. The ships would have to wait for a long period in ports in between for favourable winds which blew from the west to the east before the monsoon, and from east to west after the monsoon. Indian and Southeast Asian ports were preferred by the merchants for the purpose.

The main seaport for foreign trade in China during this period was Canton, or Kanfu as the Arab travellers called it. Buddhist scholars went from India to China by the sea route. The Chinese chroniclers tell us that the number of Indian monks in the Chinese court towards

the close of the tenth and the beginning of the eleventh century was the highest in Chinese history. A Chinese account of a slightly earlier period tells us that the Canton river was full of ships from India, Persia and Arabia. It says that in Canton itself there were three Hindu temples in which Indians resided. The presence of Indians in the Chinese Sea is testified to by Japanese records which give the credit of introducing cotton into Japan to two Indians who were carried over to the country by the black current.

Indian rulers, particularly the Pala and Sena rulers of Bengal, and the Pallava and Chola rulers of south India, tried to encourage this trade by sending a series of embassies to the Chinese emperors. The Chola ruler, Rajendra I, sent a naval expedition against Malaya and the neighbouring countries to overcome their interference in the trade with China. The embassy sent to China by Rajendra I travelled in an Indian ship. There is evidence to show that there were many shipyards which were located on the west coast, including Gujarat. Thus, growth of India's foreign trade in the area was based on a strong maritime tradition, including ship building, and the skill and enterprise of its traders. The Chinese trade was very favourable to the countries engaged in it, so much so that in the thirteenth century, the Chinese government tried to restrict the export of gold and silver from China. Indian ships gradually gave way to the Arabs and the Chinese ships which were bigger and faster. We are told that the Chinese ships were several storeys high and carried 600 passengers apart from 400 soldiers. An important factor in the growth of the Chinese ships was the use of the mariner's compass—an invention which later travelled from China to the West. Already Indian science and technology were being left behind.

Thus, India's trade with the western areas and with Southeast Asia and China grew steadily. The lead in this trade was taken by south India, Bengal and Gujarat. This was an important factor in the wealth and prosperity of these areas.

Condition of the People

There was no decline in the high standard of Indian handicrafts such as textiles, work on gold and silver, metallurgy, etc., during the period. Indian agriculture also continued to be in a flourishing condition.

Many of the Arab travellers testify to the fertility of the soil and the skill of the Indian peasant.

All the literary works of the period tell us that the ministers, officials and feudal chiefs lived in great ostentation and splendour. They aped the ways of the king in having fine houses which sometimes were three to five storeys high. They used costly foreign apparel such as imported woollen clothes, Chinese silk, and costly jewels and ornaments made of gold and silver to adorn their bodies. They maintained a large number of women in their households and had a train of domestic servants to look after them. Whenever they moved out, a large number of attendants accompanied them. They assumed high-sounding titles, such as *mahasamantadhipati*, and had their own distinctive symbols, such as banners, decorated umbrellas and the yak-tail to whisk away flies.

Big merchants also aped the ways of the king, and sometimes their living was quite royal. Of a millionare (*kotisvara*) in the Chalukyan empire, we are told that huge banners with ringing-bells were hoisted over his house, and that he owned a large number of horses and elephants. The main building was approached by a staircase of crystal, and had a temple of crystal floor and walls which were adorned by religious paintings containing an image in crystal. Vastupala and Tejahpala who were ministers in Gujarat are reputed to have been the richest merchants of their times.

We cannot, however, assume from the above that there was prosperity all round. While food stuffs were cheap, there were many poor people in the cities who could not get enough to eat. The author of the *Rajatarangini* (written in Kashmir in the twelfth century) has them in mind when he says that whereas the courtiers ate fried meat and drank cooled wine perfumed with flowers, the ordinary people had to be content with rice and *utpala-saka* (a wild vegetable of bitter taste). There are many stories of the hard lot of poor men and women, some of whom took to a life of robbery and plunder. As for the villages where the large bulk of the population lived, we have to get information about the life of the peasants from literary works, grants of land, inscriptions, etc. The commentators on Dharmashastras tell us that the rate of the revenue demand from the peasant was one-sixth of the produce as before. However, from some of the grants we

learn of a large number of additional cesses, such as grazing tax, tax on ponds, etc. The peasants had to pay these taxes over and above the land-revenue. In addition, some of the grants gave the grantees the right to levy fixed or unfixed, proper or improper taxes on the peasants. The peasants also had to render forced labour (*vishti*). In some cases, as in central India and Orissa, we find some villages being given to the Brahmans, and other donees along with artisans, herdsmen and cultivators who were tied to the soil like serfs in medieval Europe. In literary works we hear of chiefs realising money on every opportunity that offered itself. We are told of a Rajput chief that he made money even from sparrows, dead birds, pig dung and the shrouds of dead bodies. Another writer tells us of a village which was depopulated due to the actions of a chief (*samanta*).

To this may be added the frequent recurrence of famines and wars. In the wars, destruction of water reservoirs, burning of villages, seizure by force of all the cattle or the grains stored in granaries and destruction of cities were normal features, so much so that they are considered legitimate by the writers of the period.

Thus, the growth of a society which may be called feudal increased the burdens on the common man.

Nature of Society

A number of important changes took place in Indian society during this period. One of these was the growing power of a class of people who are variously called *samanta, ranak, rautta* (rajput), etc., by the contemporary writers. Their origins were very different. Some were government officers who were increasingly paid not in cash but by assigning to them revenue-bearing villages. Others were defeated rajas and their supporters who continued to enjoy the revenue of limited areas. Still others were local hereditary chiefs or military adventurers who had carved out a sphere of authority with the help of armed supporters. Still others were tribal or clan leaders. Thus, there was a hierarchy among them. But their actual position varied, depending on the situation. Some of them were only village chiefs, some of them dominated a tract comprising a number of villages, while a few

dominated an entire region. They constantly contended against each other, and tried to enhance their sphere of authority and privileges.

The revenue assignments (called *bhoga* or fief) granted by a ruler to his officers and supporters were temporary in theory and were liable to be resumed whenever the ruler wanted. However, in practice this was rarely done, except in the case of outright rebellion or disloyalty. According to current notions, it was a sin to deprive even a defeated ruler of his lands.

As a result, the kingdoms of this period included large areas dominated by defeated and subordinate rulers who were constantly on the look out for reasserting their independence. Within the territories of these rulers, again, various officers looked upon their assignments as hereditary fiefs. In course of time, even various government offices began to be considered hereditary. We have in an earlier chapter seen a case in Bengal where members of a family held the office of *mahamantri* for four generations. Similarly, most offices began to be considered the monopoly of a few families. The hereditary chiefs gradually assumed many of the functions of the government. They not only assessed and collected land revenue, but also assumed more and more administrative powers, such as the right of awarding punishments and exacting fines on their own, which earlier were generally considered royal privileges. They assumed the right to sublet their land to their followers without the prior permission of the ruler, thus increasing the number of people who drew sustenance from land without working on it themselves.

Some historians call this type of a society 'feudal', although features of European feudalism, such as vassalge, serfdom, and manors did not exist in India. It is emphasized that the common feature between the two was that the society was dominated by a class of people who derived their income from the surplus produced by the peasant, but did not work on the land themselves. Also, that the position of the primary producer, the peasant, was a dependent one. A number of other historians prefer to call this society a 'medieval society'. They consider feudalism to be the specific feature of 'medieval' European society, only, as we have mentioned earlier.

Without giving into this controversy further, we may note that a new type of society grew in India from the eighth century onwards,

emphasizing localism and sub-regionalism. This is important for understanding the political and cultural developments during this and the subsequent period.

The Caste System

(a) Brahmans and Rajputs

The caste system, which had been established much earlier, continued to be the basis of the society. But there were important changes within the caste system. Thus, there was considerable strengthening of the position of the Brahmans. As we have seen, the ruler of Sind who was himself a Brahman, and the rulers of Bengal and south India, invited Brahmans and gave large scale revenue-free lands to them to settle down. These Brahmans not only expanded cultivation, but also acted as local revenue officials, ministers, accountants, etc. Some of them also played as active role in military affairs. Education, and production of literary works was another important field of their activities. The *smriti* writers of the period appear to reflect the growing importance of the Brahmans by further exalting their position. Some of them argue that the ancient caste of Kshatriyas having disappeared, and the Vaishyas having sunk to the position of Shudras, the only *dvija* (twice born or privileged) section in society were the Brahmans!

But this vein of thinking in the *shastras* did not necessarily reflect social reality. We have already referred to the existence of rich merchants, Hindu and Jain, and the rise of a powerful class of landed chiefs. In this connection, we have the rise of a new section, called the Rajputs. During this period, a large numbers of states were being ruled by Rajputs. These Rajputs were considered leaders of clans which dominated certain tracts of land, and provided the core of the armed forces. The leaders of the clan, most of whom were related to the ruler by ties of blood, considered the state to be ruled jointly by them.

There is a good deal of controversy among scholars about the origin of the Rajputs. Some of them consider them to be of mixed origin, some being descendents of foreigners, such as Shakas, Hunas, etc., and indigenous tribes, and even Brahmans. On the other hand, many of the Rajputs clans, traditionally numbering thirty-six, trace their

geneology to the solar and lunar families of the Kshatriyas which are mentioned in the *Mahabharata*. Modern scholarship lays emphasis on the process by which people belonging to different social groups tried to legitimize their newly acquired power and position by being accorded the status of Kshatriyas. Sometimes a mixed Brahman-Kshatriya status was sought by claiming descent through a Brahman mother. Scholars consider this to be a part of a complex process of social growth. Thus, in some areas of Rajasthan, tribal lands were colonized, and Brahmans, traders and warriors settled on the land. In many areas, this was accompanied by introducing a superior type of economy based on irrigation through wells, bunds, etc. and bringing in superior crops. In the process, some of the cultivators became Rajputs, while some remained Shudras.

What is called 'Rajputization' is accompanied by the growth of the agranian economy, and also of acquisition of political power by some sections. The Brahmans played an important role in this process. Thus, there was the *agnikula* legend, traced to the eleventh century, whereby the sage, Vashishtha, produced four Rajput clans—the Pratiharas, Solanki or Chalukyas, Parmar or Pawar, and Chahamans or Chauhan out of the sacrifical fire. During the period, Brahmans wrote many geneologies of ruling families, linking them to ancient kshatriya families. Thus, the Gurjar-Pratiharas, who are reputed to originate from the Gurjar stock, were linked to Lakshman who had acted as the door-keeper (*pratihar*) of Rama.

This Brahman-Rajput alliance had many political and cultural consequences. The Rajputs, acting as champions of the newly expansionist Hinduism, symbolized their power by building grand temples, and endowed them and the Brahman priests with large grants of lands, gifts, endowments, etc.

It will thus be seen that caste (*jati*) is not as rigid as has sometimes been believed: individuals and groups could rise in the *varna* scale, and they could also fall. Sometimes, it was found difficult to classify new castes in the *varna* scale. An instance of this is the Kayastha caste, which begins to be mentioned more prominently from this period. It seems that originally people from different castes, including Brahmans and Shudras, who worked in the royal establishments, were called Kayastha. In course of time, they emerged as a distinct caste. Hinduism was expanding rapidly during the period. It not only

absorbed large numbers of Buddhists and Jains within its fold, but also many indigenous tribes. Foreigners such as Hunas were also Hinduized. These new sections formed new castes and sub-castes, the tribals often continuing their own customs, rituals of marriage ceremonies, and even their own tribal gods and goddesses who were often made subordinate to Hindu gods. Thus, society and religion became more and more complex.

(b) Shudras, Dalits and Slaves

According to the law-giver Yagyavalkya, it was possible for a Brahman to have food with his farmer, barber, milkman and family friends. According to a modern historian, D.C. Sircar, an important feature of the caste system during this period, was 'the gradual elevation of the social position of the Shudras'. Although they were not allowed to study the Vedas, they became eligible for *smarta* rituals, like birth, death, name giving, etc. As agriculture expanded, many of the tribals were included in this category. The Jats who were a pastoral nomadic tribe in Sind gradually moved to the Punjab and became agriculturists cum warriors. Although in the *varna* system they were classified as shudras, they formed a higher section and considered themselves on par with the Rajputs.

Marriages between the higher castes and the shudras were frowned upon, but that they existed is shown by dubbing the marriage of a high caste man with a lower caste woman as *anulom* (according to norm), and the marriage of a low caste man and a high caste woman as *pratilom* (against norm). The origin of new castes, which often consisted of professional groups such as potters, weavers, barbers, etc., or tribals, were explained as the result of such mixed marriages.

As compared to the Shudras, the position of the Dalits seems to have deteriorated. The Dalits included those following professions such as scavenging, skinning dead animals, shoe-makers, hunters, etc. These people were called the *antyaja* or untouchables, and formed the fifth social grade, outside the four-fold *varna* system. They were often required to live away from the areas inhabited by the upper castes. There is even a discussion in the *smritis* on whether the shadow of an *antyaja* was polluting or not. In some parts of the country, the *Chandals* were required to hit a wooden board on a stick as they walked

so that upper caste people would not come into contact with them. In most areas of the country, these sections were not allowed to be owners of cultivated land.

Slavery also existed during the period. Prisoners of war, debtors unable to pay their stakes could be sold into slavery. During famines, many farmers sold themselves or their wife and children for food. Women were also purchased for domestic work or for company. But there were no systematic slave raids as in the case of the Turks. In general, slaves were treated better than people from the *antyaja* or despised castes.

Though slaves were not used for fighting, they could fight because we are told that if a slave saved his master's life, he became free and was entitled to get a share of his master's property. A female slave bearing a child to his master also became free. In general, emancipation of a slave was considered a good deed, and there were rules prescribed for doing so.

Condition of Women

As in the earlier period, women were generally considered to be mentally inferior. Their duty was to obey their husbands blindly. A writer illustrates the wife's duty of personal service towards her husband by saying that she shall shampoo his feet and render him such other services as befits a servant. But he adds the condition that the husband should follow the righteous path and should be free from hatred as well as jealousy towards a wife. Women continued to be denied the right to study the Vedas. Furthermore, the marriageable age for girls was lowered, thereby destroying their opportunities for higher education. The omission of all reference to women teachers in the dictionaries written during the period shows the poor state of higher education among women. However, from some of the dramatic works of the period, we find that the court ladies and even the queen's maids-in-waiting were capable of composing excellent Sanskrit and Prakrit verses. Various stories point to the skill of princesses in the fine arts, specially in paining and music. Daughters of high officials, courtesans and concubines were also supposed to be highly skilled in various arts, including poetry.

As for marriage, the *smriti* writers say that girls were to be given away by their parents, between the ages of six and eight, or between their eighth year and attaining puberty. Remarriage was allowed under certain conditions when the husband had deserted (i.e. was not heard of) or died, or adopted the life of a recluse, or was impotent, or had become an outcaste.

In general, women were distrusted. They were to be kept in seclusion and their life was to be regulated by the male relations—father, brother, husband or son. However, within the home they were honoured. If a husband abandoned even a wife guilty of offensive behaviour, she was to be given maintenance. With the growth of property rights in land, the property rights of women also increased. In order to preserve the property of a family, women were give the right to inherit the property of their male relations. With some reservations, a widow was entitled to the entire estate of her husband if he died sonless. Daughters also had the right to succeed to the properties of a widow. Thus, the growth of feudal society strengthened the concept of private property.

The practice of *sati* was made obligatory by some writers, but condemned by others. According to an Arab writer, Sulaiman, wives of kings sometimes burnt themselves on the funeral pyre of their husbands, but it was for them to exercise their option in the matter. It appears that with the growth of the practice of large number of women being maintained by the leading chiefs, and with the resultant disputes about property, there was a tendency for the rite of *sati* to spread.

Upper class women lived in seclusion and generally were kept away from public gaze. There was, however, no system of *purdah* or veiling of women. Abu Zaid, a tenth century Arab traveller, noted that most Indian princes while holding court, allowed their women to be seen unveiled by all the men present, not excluding even foreigners. In Orissa and Kashmir many women ruled as queens in their own right. Among these may be mentioned Prabhavati Gupta of the Vakataka dynasty who ruled for at least thirteen years as the mother of the *yuvaraja*; Queen Didda ruled Kashmir for fifty years, and withstood all intrigues against her.

We have little information on the lives of ordinary women. They must have worked hard, side by side with their men, in addition to looking after the household, and tending children.

Dress, Food and Amusements

There were no significant changes in the style of dress of men and women during the period, the *dhoti* and the *sari* remaining the normal dress for men and women in most parts of the country. In north India, men use the jacket, and women the bodice (*choli*). From sculptures it appears that long coats, trousers and shoes were worn by upper class men in north India. According to *Rajatarangini*, Harsha introduced into Kashmir a general dress befitting a king. This included the long coat; we are told that a former chief minister, having worn a short coat, incurred the king's displeasure. Woollen blankets were used in winter. While cotton was the material most commonly used, the upper classes also used silk cloth and fine muslin.

The Arab travellers testify to the fondness of both men and women for wearing ornaments. Both men and women wore gold bracelets and earrings, sometimes set with costly stones. A Chinese writer, Chau Ju Kua, says that in Gujarat, both men and women wore double earrings and close-fitting clothes, with hoods on their heads, as well as red-coloured shoes on their feet. Another famous traveller, Marco Polo, tells us that in Malabar men and women wore only a loin-cloth, the king being no exception, and that the profession of the tailor was unknown. Loin-cloth was also the dress of men and women in Quilon. But though their clothes were scanty, the kings of southern India were fond of jewellery. According to Chau Ju Kua, the king of Malabar was dressed in cotton loin-cloth and was bare-footed like his subjects, but when going out on an elephant in procession he wore a golden hat ornamented with pearls and gems, as well as golden armlets and anklets. Marco Polo says, 'What this king wears between gold and gems and pearls is worth more than a city's ransom.'

As far as food is concerned, while vegetarianism appeared to have been the rule in many areas and among sections of the population, the leading *smriti* writer of the times describes at great length the occasions on which the eating of meat was lawful. From this it appears that the peacock, the horse, the wild ass, the wild cock and the wild pig were regarded lawful food.

Arab writers compliment the Indians for the absence of the use of intoxicants among them. However, this appears to be an idealized

picture. In literary works of the period, we have many references to wine-drinking. Wine was drunk on ceremonial occasions, including marriages and feasts, and outings which were very popular among some classes of citizens. Even women in the king's train indulged freely in wine. While some *smriti* writers forbid wine-drinking to the three upper castes, some others forbid it only to the Brahmans, the Kshatriyas and the Vaishyas being permitted to indulge in it with some exceptions.

The literature of the time shows that the people of the towns were fun-loving. Apart from fairs and festivals, excursions to gardens, swimming parties, etc. were widely popular. Fights among various types of animals, such as rams, cocks, etc., as well as wrestling bouts were popular among the masses. The upper classes continued to be fond of dicing, hunting and a kind of Indian polo which was regarded as a royal pastime.

Education, Science and Religious Learning

The system of education which had been gradually developed in the earlier period continued during this period without much change. There was no idea of mass education at that time. People learnt what they felt was needed for their livelihood. Reading and writing was confined to a small section, mostly Brahmans and some sections of the upper classes, specially Kayasthas.

Sometimes temples made arrangements for education at a higher level as well. Generally, a student had to go to the house of a teacher or had to live with him for getting initiation into higher education. In such a case, he had to pay fees to his teacher, or give him a gift at the end of his education. Students, particularly those who were too poor to pay fees, were expected to do personal service to the teacher. The main subjects studied were the various branches of the Vedas and grammar. Logic and philosophy were also studied. The study of politics which included political morality was popular among the nobility. A notable contribution to this branch of study was Kamandaka's *Nitisara*.

The Kayasthas had their own system of teaching the system of administration, including accountancy. Science, including

mathematics, astronomy and medicine were also taught at many centres. Thus, the Arab astronomer, Abu Maashir of Balkh, studied at Banaras for ten years during the ninth century.

The responsibility for giving education for a craft or profession was generally left to the guilds, or to individual families. For instance, we have a detailed description of the careful manner in which a merchant trained his son for his profession.

Education of a more formal kind, with greater emphasis on secular subjects, continued to be provided at some of the Buddhist *viharas* (monasteries). Nalanda in Bihar was the most famous of these. Other such centres of learning included Vikramsila, and Uddandapur which also were in Bihar. All these drew students from distant places, including Tibet. In these centres, education for most of the residents was free. For meeting the expenses, lavish grants of money and land were given to these educational centres by the rulers. Thus, Nalanda had a grant of 200 villages.

Kashmir was another important centre of education. Many Saiva sects and centres of learning flourished in Kashmir during the period. A number of important *maths* were set up in south India, for example, at Madurai and Sringeri. The various centres of education provided a great impetus to discussions, religion and philosophy being the main topics. The numerous *maths* and other centres of education in various parts of India enabled ideas to flow freely and quickly from one part of the country to another. Philosophical education was not considered complete till the philosopher had visited the various centres of learning in different parts of the country, and held discussions with the scholars there. The manner in which ideas could be transmitted throughout the country was important in upholding and strengthening the cultural unity of India.

The growth of science in the country slowed down during the period so that in course of time, it was no longer regarded as a leading country in the field of science. Thus, surgery declined because the dissection of dead bodies was regarded as fit only for people of low castes. In fact, surgery became the profession of barbers. Astronomy was gradually pushed into the background by astrology. However, some advance was made in the field of mathematics. The *Lilawati* of Bhaskar II which was written during this period, remained a standard

text for a long time. Some advance was made in the field of medicine by the use of minerals, especially mercury. Many books were written on plant sciences and for the treatment of animals (e.g. horses, elephants, etc.). But no way was found for breeding fine quality horses so that India remained dependent on the import of such horses from Central Asia, including Arabia and Iran. With the conquest of these areas by Muslim rulers, the Indian rulers had to face many difficulties in securing the supply of good horses.

There were many reasons for the stagnation of Indian science during the period. Experience suggests that the growth of science is closely connected with the growth of society as a whole. As we have seen, during the period society was becoming increasingly rigid and narrow in character. There had been a setback in urban life and communications, with growing religious orthodoxy.

Another reason was the tendency for the Indians to isolate themselves from the main currents of scientific thought outside India. This is reflected in the writings of al-Biruni, a noted scientist and scholar from Central Asia who lived in India for about ten years during the early part of the eleventh century. Although a great admirer of Indian science and learning, al-Biruni noted the insular attitude of the learned people of the country, viz., the Brahmans. He says: 'They are haughty, foolish, vain, self-conceited, stolid. They are by nature niggardly in communicating that which they know, and they take the greatest possible care to withhold it from men of another caste among their own people, still much more, of course, from any foreigners. According to their belief, no other created beings besides them have any knowledge of science whatsoever.'

Religious Movements and Beliefs

The period is marked by a revival and expansion of Hinduism, and a continued decline of Buddhism and Jainism. Not only were the tenets of Buddhism and Jainism challenged at the intellectual level, but on occasions, the Buddhist and Jain monks were persecuted. According to tradition, the Pandya king at Madurai executed large numbers of Jain monks at the instance of a Saivite preacher, Sambandar. In some instances, their temples were also taken over. Thus, the temple of

Puri was once a Buddhist temple. The temple near the Qutub Minar had once been a Jain temple, then converted into a Vishnu temple. We do not know how widespread such instances were, but even if they were few and far between, they can hardly be defended. However, they were not part of a misplaced religious philosophy of temple-destruction, as in the case of the early Arab and Turkish invaders later on.

During this period, Buddhism was gradually confined to eastern India. The Pala rulers were patrons of Buddhism. The decline of the Pala power after the tenth century was a blow to Buddhism in the area. But even more serious were the internal developments in Buddhism. Buddha had preached a practical philosophy, with a minimum of priesthood and speculation about God. This worship now became more elaborate. The belief grew that a worshipper could attain what he desired by uttering magical words (*mantra*), and making various kinds of mystic gestures. They also believed that by these practices, and by various kinds of austerities and secret rites, they could attain supernatural powers, such as the power to fly in the air, to become invisible, to see things at a distance, etc. Man has always yearned for control over nature in this manner. It is only with the growth of modern science that many of these yearnings have been fulfilled. Many Hindu yogis also adopted these practices. The most famous among them was Gorakhnath. The followers of Gorakhnath were called Nath-Panthis, and at one time they were popular all over north India. Many of these yogis belonged to the lower castes. They denounced the caste system and the privileges claimed by the Brahamans. The path they preached was called *tantra* which was open to all, irrespective of caste distinctions.

Thus, Buddhism did not so much decline, as it assumed forms which made it indistinguishable from Hinduism.

Jainism continued to be popular, particularly among the trading communities. The Chalukyan rulers of Gujarat patronized Jainism. It was during this time that some of the most magnificent Jain temples, such as the Dilwara temple at Mt. Abu, were built. The Paramara rulers of Malwa also built many huge images of Jain saints and of Mahavira who began to be worshipped as a god. The magnificent Jainalayas which were built in various parts also acted as resting places

for travellers. In south India, Jainism attained its high water-mark during the ninth and tenth centuries. The Ganga rulers of Karnataka were great patrons of Jainism. During this period, many Jain *basadis* (temples) and *mahastambhas* (pillars) were set up in different parts. The colossal image at Sravana Belgola was set up during this time. The statue is about 18 meters high and was cut out of granite rock. It shows the saint standing up, practising rigid austerities, unmindful of the snakes coiled around his feet, and the anthills which had grown up. The Jain doctrine of the four gifts (learning, food, medicine and shelter) helped to make Jainism popular among the people. In course of time, the growing rigidity of Jainism and the loss of royal patronage led to the decline of Jainism.

The revival and expansion of Hinduism took many forms. Siva and Vishnu became the chief gods and magnificent temples were built to proclaim their supremacy. In the process, many local gods and goddesses, including the gods and goddesses of tribals who had been Hinduized, became subordinate or their consorts. In eastern India, the consorts—Tara the consort of Buddha, Durga and Kali the consort of Siva became themselves the chief objects of worship. Nevertheless, the rise of the worship of Siva and Vishnu signified the growth of a process of cultural synthesis. Thus, in an era of disintegration, religion played a positive part. But the religious revival also increased the power and arrogance of the Brahmans. This resulted in a series of popular movements which targeted the Brahmans, and emphasized the element of human equality and freedom.

We have already referred to the growth of tantrism in North India in which anyone irrespective of caste, could be enrolled. But far more important and broad based was the growth of bhakti movement in south India. The bhakti movement was led by a series of popular saints called Nayanmars and Alvars. These saints rejected austerities. They looked upon religion not as a matter of cold, formal worship but as a living bond based on love between the god and the worshipper. The chief objects of their worship were Siva and Vishnu. They spoke and wrote in Tamil, the language which everyone could understand. These saints went from place to place carrying their message of love and devotion. Some of them belonged to the lower classes. There

was also a woman saint, Andal. Almost all of them disregarded the inequalities of caste, though they did not try to oppose the caste system as such. The lower castes had been excluded from Vedic scholarship and Vedic worship. The path of bhakti advocated by these saints was open to all, irrespective of caste.

The bhakti movement not only won to the fold of Hinduism many adherents of Buddhism and Jainism, they also won over many tribals. A series of *acharyas*, led by Nathamuni, collected and systematised the teachings of the Alvars and declared them equivalent to the Vedas. These early saints and their writings began to be worshipped in the temples, and a whole set of rituals and ceremonies were elaborated. Many of these are followed to this day.

Many of the tribals from hilly areas became settled agriculturists in river valleys. These were the areas often held by Brahmans who introduced new agricultural techniques, or by temples where tribal gods were assimilated as supporters of Vishnu or Shiv. Expanded agriculture, and the new temple rituals strengthened the position of the ruler and local states such as the Chola state. The temples also strengthened the position of the Brahmans who supervised the temples, and received rich grants of land from the rulers. Thus, the Bhakti movement had far reaching economic and social consequences as well.

Another popular movement which arose during the twelfth century was the Lingayat or Vir Saiva movement. Its founders were Basava and his nephew, Channabasava, who lived at the court of the Kalachuri kings of Karnataka. They established their faith after bitter disputes with the Jains. The Lingayats are worshippers of Siva. They strongly opposed the caste system, and rejected fasts, feasts, pilgrimages and sacrifices. In the social sphere, they opposed child marriage and allowed remarriage of widows.

Thus, both in south and north India, the revival and expansion of Hinduism took two forms—a renewed emphasis on the Vedas and Vedic worship, on the one hand, accompanied by a powerful literary and intellectual movement, and, on the other, a popular movement based on tantra in north India, and on bhakti in south India. Both tantra and bhakti disregarded caste inequalities and were open to all.

At the intellectual level, the most serious challenge to Buddhism and Jainism was posed by Sankara who reformulated the Hindu

philosophy. Sankara was born in Kerala, probably in the ninth century. His life is shrouded in obscurity, and many legends have grown around his life. Persecuted by the Jains, it is said that he undertook thereafter a triumphant visit to north India where he worsted his opponents in debate. The victory was completed by a warm welcome by the king on his return to Madurai, and the banishment of the Jains from the court.

Sankara's philosophy is called *advaitavada* or the doctrine on non-dualism. According to Sankara, God and the created world are one: the differences were apparent but not real, and arose due to ignorance, *maya* being a part of it. The way to salvation was devotion to God, strengthened by the knowledge that God and the created beings were one and the same. This philosophy is called *vedanta*. Thus, Sankara upheld the Vedas as the fountainhead of true knowledge.

The path of knowledge put forward by Sankara could be followed by only a few. Sankara did not reject the path of bhakti by which the devotee merged with God. But for this, the heart had to be cleaned through *jnana* or knowledge. It could not, thus, influence the masses. The *acharyas* from Nathamuni onwards were all orthodox Brahmans, and had argued that the path of bhakti was open only to the three upper castes, and that for the purpose, dutifully following rituals prescribed by Brahmans, and the study of the scriptures was necessary.

In the eleventh century, another famous *acharya*, Ramanuja, tried to assimilate bhakti to the tradition of the Vedas. He argued that in order to attain salvation, grace of God was more important than knowledge about Him. Ramanuja emphasized that the path of *prapatti* or total reliance on, or surrender to God was open to all, including the Shudras and the Dalits. Thus, Ramanuja tried to build a bridge between the popular movement based on bhakti, and the upper caste movement based on the Vedas.

The tradition established by Ramanuja was followed by a number of thinkers such as Madhvacharya (tenth century), and in north India by Ramananda, Vallabhacharya and others. In this way, bhakti in its popular form became acceptable to all sections of Hindu society by the early sixteenth century.