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Northern India: Distributive Political Economies and Regional Cultures
C. AD 800-1300

Theories of Historical Change

Historians writing a century ago recognized the post-Gupta period as different from the previous historical scene. From the perspective of colonial historiography this period was viewed as a Dark Age in contrast to the 'Golden Age' of earlier times. Thought to be characterized by small, unimportant kingdoms with much political confusion, it tended to be dismissed as something of a long hyphen between the Guptas and the Delhi Sultanate. The implicit assumption was that, in the absence of empires in India, there was political chaos. When work on regional history gained momentum it was discovered that the period was seminal to significant historical changes. Regional sources were read more avidly and the underlying similarities between the regions became noticed. The focus shifted from the dominance of the Ganges Plain to other parts of the subcontinent. Historical questions focused on the nature of these changes in form and in space.

In the last half-century this period has attracted the attention of many historians. Apart from the interest in regional history, this attention grew from the debate on whether or not the polity of these times constituted what has been called Indian feudalism. More recently there have been alternative theories seeking to explain the structure of emerging states and societies, such as the system incorporating an integrative polity or that of the segmentary state. The latter was proposed and discussed more fully in relation to south India, and initially elicited much discussion. This, however, revealed inadequacies of a kind that questioned its application, particularly to the wider history of this period.

It may be appropriate here to mention briefly the characteristics of the first two theories before proceeding with a description of the changes that occurred at this time. The counterposing of these theories has introduced varied and detailed explorations of the political economy, social changes and the historical role of religious institutions, all of which have contributed to enriching the historical investigation of this period. This has also been made possible because the range and quantity of textual and inscriptional sources are impressively larger than for pre-Gupta times.

Despite the many arguments supporting what is regarded as either a feudal society in India or a feudal mode of production, a summary may suffice. The extensive exploration of the term 'feudal' in the histories of other societies and its application to diverse contexts has resulted in variant meanings. There is generally agreement on the essentials among historians using the concept for interpreting this period of Indian history, but this does not negate degrees of difference.

The considerable evidence of royal grants of land reflects an alienation of rights to land revenue, with the more powerful political authorities investing these rights in those of lesser authority. Grants to brahmans and to officers created holdings of land or villages where the recipients had the right to collect revenue but were not required to pay tax. The grant could either be of the revenue from the land or, more commonly over time, of both the land and its revenue. In either case the grantee appropriated the surplus produced by the peasant through rent and labour taxes. The appropriation used the rights invested in the grantee and did not preclude coercion or the threat of force. The rights and obligations of the grantee in relation to those settled on the land were listed, together with the taxes and revenues which he could collect. In effect, the landed intermediary had immediate authority over the peasant. These changes are said to have coincided with a decline in urbanism and trade during this period and up to the tenth century, reflected in the excavation of urban sites. The decrease in profitable maritime trade is said to have accelerated a decline in urban centres, together with some environmental changes that may have led to a fall in agricultural production in some areas. This marginalization of trade was accompanied by a paucity of coins. It therefore became necessary to pay officials with grants of revenue from land instead of cash, which occurred more frequently after the seventh century. The number of feudatories, that is, holders of grants of land, increased, as did the hierarchy among them since they were not all of equal status. With differential access to political power there was decentralization and a parcelling of sovereignty.

It is also argued that the *Puranas* predicted a crisis in the Kali Age – the present and last cycle of time – when traditional rulers would lose their authority and be replaced by new *kshatriyas*. It was described as an age when righteous rule would be overthrown, with the lower castes taking over the functions of the upper castes, accompanied by the oppression of the people by those in authority. A general insecurity in relation to the existence of family and property was also predicted, such disorder being righted only with the coming of the last incarnation of Vishnu, the brahman Kalkin. This has been read as a reference to social changes of consequence in the centuries AD.

The argument in support of feudalism states that the movements of peasants were restricted and the grants converted the peasants who were paying tax to the state into peasants paying rent to the grantee. They were subjected to the requirements of *vishti* or forced labour/labour tax, as well as to non-customary taxes that the grantee had the right to impose. Grantees began to acquire fiscal and judicial rights that could aggravate the burden of labour, dues and demands on the peasant. There is some disagreement on whether this constituted serfdom. Villages tended to become self-sufficient and isolated from each other. There were a few instances of what have been interpreted as peasant uprisings, but the more widespread lack of these is partly attributed to the ideology of *bhakti* directing attention away from the impoverishment of material conditions. It is said these conditions roused little resentment because of the unflinching belief by many in the determinism of fate, reflected in part by the popularity of astrology.

Contractual relations in this model seem to have been limited to those between the king and the intermediary, referred to by historians as the feudatory. Underlying his loyalty to the king, the feudatory was expected to maintain armed levies, which he was in duty bound to furnish for the king's service. Disloyalty was regarded as a heinous offence. The feudatory might also be called upon to give his daughter in marriage to the king. He was expected to use the currency of his suzerain, whose name he dutifully mentioned in his inscriptions and charters. Attendance at court on certain occasions was obligatory. The use of a title and symbols of status were allowed, such as a throne, a fly-whisk, a palanquin, the riding of an elephant in state processions and being heralded by the sound of the five special musical instruments. The surplus wealth of the feudatories went into conspicuous consumption

imitating the royal court, particularly in palatial homes, and in richly endowed temples.

Some of the more powerful intermediaries were permitted to grant land in their turn, without necessarily obtaining permission from the king, although a reference to the suzerain may have been made in the text of the grant. This is seen as an Indian parallel to sub-infeudation. Such feudatories often had their own sub-feudatories, thus building up a hierarchy. This had started in an earlier period where a Gupta king had Surashmichandra as his feudatory, who in turn had Matrivishnu as his sub-feudatory. It gradually became more frequent. The hierarchy was reflected in the titles taken by the feudatories, where the more exalted called themselves *mahasamanta, mahamandaleshvara,* and the lesser ones were the *raja, samanta, ranaka, thakkura* and so on. These titles were not an invention of this period as some go back to earlier centuries, but their connotations differed in a changed context. Thus *samanta,* which had earlier meant a neighbour, was now used as a general category to refer to a subordinate ruler, a chief or a grantee.

More recently there has been an attempt to analyse these changes from a different perspective and some historians have suggested what they call an integrative polity, rather than a feudal society. It is argued that the formation of states in the post-Gupta period was in itself a different process from the earlier one and therefore created a different kind of economy and society. This can be seen in various ways. Territories emerged under new names and ruling lineages were associated with territorial names rather than only with clan names. With more areas being brought under cultivation, settled societies stratified by caste were frequently in the proximity of forest societies that were not stratified by caste. Ruling groups attempted to bring the latter closer in structure to the former. In the process of mutual political dependency links were forged between the emerging kingdoms and the chiefdoms. Rather than see the change as a decentralization of power, as in feudalism, it is thought better to view it as the rise of smaller states drawing on local sources of power and emerging as centres of authority.

This may be seen as the horizontal spread of the state system where pre-state polities were transformed into states that transcended the bounds of local politics. Monarchy was established in what had been pre-state societies. The creation of centres of power involved the colonization of an area with settlements established by subordinate branch lineages of the main dynastic line, often with the entitlement of a *samanta.* The latter were ranked and therefore had varying access to the court. Their power was derived from the dynastic centre and there were rights and obligations between the two recorded in the grants. Rulers governed through an administration whose control was mitigated by the network of lineage connections and the influence these had over administrative functions.

Agriculture was expanded through the transformation of non-sedentary peoples into peasants, a change that occurred largely in peripheral areas. Networks of trade developed gradually, reflected in increased commercial taxes. The acceptance of caste society, largely determined by conversion to *jatis,* brought diverse groups into a defined system. Religious institutions also received grants and their network was parallel to that of the land assignments to the *samantas.* Sacred places played multiple roles. They were linked to political and economic interests with grants from royalty and the court, and where temples controlled the hinterland they could become the base for urban centres. Local cults were integrated into an overall structure of Hindu sects and the patrons of these included the ruling lineages. Temples that focused on these cults fulfilled a political as well as a religious function.

This theory has been applied in some detail to the creation of the status category of the Rajput and the Rajput state. Even where they claimed lineage links and created kinship networks, the Rajputs were not necessarily kin-related groups and may well have come from different backgrounds. They

acquired political power over a defined territory and had access to economic resources through a shared control of land and trade. Their legitimation was assisted through grants of land to brahmans, temples and monasteries. Particular lineages became ruling elites through military resources and the support of other lineages. These retained power through ranked statuses such as *raja, ranaka* and *thakkura.*

This theory appears more suitable to the creation of the Rajput category and has yet to be applied more generally to the history of this period. The pattern of lineages and branch lineages was not universal. Regional variations occurred even in the granting of land: changes in terminology, in rights and obligations, with their implications, would be worth investigating both in time and space. The making of a grant could have been an attempt to maintain a balance between contesting factions. Hierarchies in ranks are likely to have been a source of disaffection. A realistic view of balancing *samantas* is evident in the theory of *mandala,* where, in a circle of kings, the one desirous of supremacy is surrounded by serried ranks of friends and enemies, and politics is connected with degrees of support and hostility within the widening circle. The concept of an integrative polity differs from that of feudalism but, like the latter, it has contributed to further exploration of the nature of societies during this period and has suggested alternative analyses.

Given the variations in organizing resources and in caste and custom, a uniform pattern of explanation presents problems. There are still many questions that require a fuller investigation. For example, the focus on agriculture would yield more specific data if differences of soil, crop patterns, agricultural technologies, types of irrigation and the nature and importance of landholdings could be introduced into the analysis of particular areas. There is little evidence, for instance, in the Punjab and the north-west generally, of a pattern of grants of land, and the dominant caste in the Punjab has been a trading caste: nor is there evidence for the creation of states based on systems of lineage connections. A comparative study with other areas would be revealing both for the north-west and for the granting of land as a system. If the pattern of caste hierarchy had regional variations, then the structure of service relationships, integral to the hierarchy, would also vary within the upper levels of society.

It has been established that the policies and activities of this period resulted in a re-ordering of society and economy. How it is to be interpreted and labelled still remains a matter of debate. What began as a study of these changes being seen as a counterpart to those taking place in Europe, and defining 'medievalism', has now taken on other dimensions. Some of these trends can be better recognized through comparisons that surface in the discussion of a feudal mode of production. Other trends become apparent through a different perspective. And above all there are variations. Variance would arise not only from the manner of structuring economic conditions of the time, but also from the intervention of caste as a system of organizing society, where enhancing the privileges of some and denying rights to others was implicit.

Despite the continuity in the forms developed during this period, the suggestion that there were two phases is worth reconsideration, although the characteristics may have differed from those originally suggested by Kosambi. The earlier phase saw the opening up of new areas, the creation of intermediaries and *kshatriyas,* with the stirring of religious practices in some ways different from the prevailing ones. The later phase saw the establishing of the new system. The change from the earlier to the later lay in the enhancement of grants of land, the revival and resurgence of commerce, increased conversion to caste and the formation of new religious sects. Each of these aspects would have modified or exaggerated the influence of the others. Thus if a decline in commerce characterizes a feudal society, then the resurgence of commerce would have changed some aspects of the feudal

nature of society, and transregional trade might have interfered with integrative polities. Whether it is because the quantity and quality of source materials differs, it does seem that there might have been some justification for describing the earlier phase as witnessing change introduced by those in authority, but with the participation of those at the local level, whereas the later phase was characterized by the intervention of more ranks of intermediaries representing those at a local level and perhaps taking the initiative in creating a change. Whereas initially the intervention of the state led to the granting of land and a change in the economy, in the latter part of this period the initiative towards change came from the intermediaries aspiring to a higher status.

Theories of explanation have recognized that the structure of the state in post-Gupta times was different from that of pre-Gupta times. Although there were some states in areas where none had existed before, many were created from a realignment of existing administration. The state was now characterized by a distributive political economy where power, authority and resources were distributed through a chain of linkages rather than a one-to-one relationship with the state or its representatives. A major point of departure lay in the extensive grants of land that came to be seen as property, overriding the rights of others on the land. The increasing emphasis on the divinity of the king could also be viewed as expressive of his growing weakness, paralleled by the multiple centres of authority – the grantee, the tributary raja, the temple. The distribution was unequal because of the hierarchy and was expressed in tributary relations and claims to lineage connections. The insistence o n *kshatriya* status points to caste statuses underlining inequality. Regional identities indicated differences, but similarities drew on the pattern of land grants requiring the intervention of the landed magnate and the suppression of the peasant, as well as on the spread of Sanskritic culture with attempts at cultural homogeneity.

Distributive Political Economies

The debate on the patterns of change has usefully introduced many themes that require closer examination, especially in the context of a multiplicity of states. Apart from grants of land to beneficiaries, the payment of salaries to officers in equivalent grants of revenue or land, rather than in cash, have been linked to the weakening of the sovereignty of the state and of a centralized bureaucratic system. This raises other questions. The explanation for introducing a system of granting land could relate to the decreasing authority of the king or, alternatively, the well-matched authority of a number of tributary rajas constantly reaching for suzerainty. Brahmans received land grants because they both legitimized the many new kings and claimed that they could avert the evil consequences of events such as eclipses – which they predicted – through performing the correct rituals as an antidote. Equally important, they were the settlers and pioneers in new lands. As landed intermediaries they became wealthy, in some cases functioning as *kshatriyas* when they established *brahma-kshatra* dynasties. Officers receiving grants of revenue from specific lands in lieu of cash salaries, may have spent more time and energy on their own estates than on the administration entrusted to them. The transference of administrative authority to the grantee would have made the grant more attractive.

A grant given for service, especially military service, could sometimes be revoked. Unfortunately there is less evidence available on the revoking of grants or reasons for doing so. To some extent this detracts from more specific information on the legal stipulations of the grant in terms of the definition

and rights of property. A difference between ownership and rights of usage was recognized. Obviously not every governmental right was conceded, and therefore what was not conceded is a matter of interest. In land disputes involving a grant, the king's charter was the final authority. Where the grant could supposedly not be revoked it was stated that the grant should last as long as the moon and the sun endure, and here the right to inherit is implicit. The right to alienate may also be implied.

Other questions relate to the extension of cultivation through state action. Whereas earlier the Mauryan state settled cultivators on deserted lands or on lands newly developed for cultivation, or had such lands worked by prisoners of war, bringing the settlements under direct administrative control, this system gradually changed in the post-Mauryan period. The restructuring of the economy began with the increase in grants of land. New methods of expanding agriculture had to be found. The location of a land grant doubtless had to do with its intention: was it to reward brahmans; to intensify agriculture in areas already under cultivation; to clear forest land and start cultivation, converting the people of the forest into cultivators? Were there perhaps fewer people who could be forcibly settled on land or encouraged to settle, hence the resort to using grantees to enforce cultivation? Was there a growth in population but such that it was balanced by a growth in agricultural production, reducing the need for the peasant to migrate? Alternatively, was the possibility of migration prevented because the peasant was tied to the land through various controls, so that despite the burden of taxes in kind and in labour migration was not an easy solution?

The possibility of multiplying intermediaries at various points in the structure led to a wider diffusion of income from land. This weakened the king and placed him politically in a vulnerable position *vis-à-vis* the intermediaries, since he was dependent on their honouring their obligations. It is likely that the prosperity of intermediaries was at the expense of the peasants, with the demand from the landowner being as high as one-third in some cases. The peasants would also have had to cope with additional taxes imposed by intermediaries. These would have included cesses for the construction of irrigation works such as tanks, water-lifting devices and Persian wheels, or providing free labour on demand. Where the state constructed a major irrigation system it would initially have made demands of free labour. In the eleventh century the Paramara King Bhoj built an extensive reservoir with a dam (near Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh), which would have required a large investment of labour and possibly special taxes. That this was a normal procedure can be assumed by the specific mention in earlier records of this not being done when repairs were carried out to the dam on the Sudarshana Lake in western India.

Revenue was collected by the grantees, who were gradually empowered to carry out judicial functions and assert their authority in cases of dispute. The grantees therefore had both a political and administrative function. This did not eliminate the need for administrators controlled by the king and court, as evident from the functioning of various governments, but it could in theory reduce the number. The powers of the king's officers were specified even to the point of their not being allowed to enter the territory of some grantees. The area that was not given away in grants varied from kingdom to kingdom but was nevertheless substantial enough to constitute crown lands that were directly administered by the king.

Grants to brahmans were intended to bring religious merit to the king or to ward off an impending calamity. The grants reactivated to some extent the rural setting for Vedic practices and were often given to those who were specialists in Vedic ritual. Royal donors could claim that they were defending the norms of caste in governance, a statement that may not have been welcome in areas with a recent memory of a more egalitarian society. The brahmans performed sacrifices on behalf of the king who by accepted theory acquired one-sixth of the merit from such rituals. Kings were careful to

patronize the brahmans, who in turn, to show their gratitude, composed fictitious genealogies for them to ensure their *kshatriya* status. The claim to this status even by intermediaries made them potential aspirants to kingship. Brahman landholders employed cultivators since caste laws forbade them to cultivate. Most such holdings were in fact large enough to require many tenants of various categories.

Among the *samantas* there was a premium on military achievements and heroic acts. The ideology of a warrior caste was current among those claiming *kshatriya* status. Frequent campaigns were essential to perpetuate this image and establish the reputation of military prowess. Where the desire for plunder was not in itself a sufficient excuse for war, an elaborate code of etiquette was established to justify response to the merest disparaging remark. War became a grand pageant, compared in one Chandella inscription to the performance of a Vedic sacrifice; in this kingdom villages were donated to maintain the families of those who had acquired the highest honour of death on the battlefield. This was also a means of encouraging the continuing flow of soldiers.

Village autonomy was naturally hampered by the privileges of the grantee but the relationship varied. The village headman, often a landholder, would have mediated where possible. Designations of such persons, for example *mahattaras* and *pattakilas,* have continued to the present in the *mehtas, mahtos, patels* and *patils,* some of whom retained this function until recently. There is a reference to a *thakkura* of a Chauhan village having to obtain the sanction of the village assembly to raise new dues for the village temple. But this need not have been a common practice. A smaller committee known as the *pancha-kula* – literally of five families – had some appointed members and some local representatives. They functioned as administrating committees both in towns and in rural areas, and on occasion collected the state revenue, recorded religious and secular grants, supervised the sale of goods and trade and acted as arbiters in disputes. These committees are suggestive of the institution of the *panchayat* whose membership was either of a locality or of a caste. Caste *panchayats* of professional castes carried elements of democratic functioning because the status of its members was relatively equal. Nevertheless, this was a limited practice since the wider context of caste was hierarchical. Long-established societies were habituated to accepting hierarchy, but would those freshly inducted into the caste system and more familiar with the egalitarian clan have acquiesced to the same degree?

Many issues have entered the discussion of whether or not this was feudalism. Among them are the ties of vassalage, the creation of fiefs and the existence of serfdom, all drawing from the debates on European feudalism. They assume not only an economic relationship but also the accommodation of a particular legal system. The numerical growth of *samantas* decreased the concentration of power at one central point. The grant was in a sense a contract between the king and the grantee but need not have created a condition of vassalage. In most regions grants for non-religious purposes were fewer than those for religious purposes. The grant to the brahman would not have required either homage or an oath of fidelity, both required of the European vassal, since the relationship between king and brahman was complementary. Fief has a special meaning in relation to the contract between the suzerain and the vassal, involving the kind of authority delegated over a region and a possible hereditary right which is not applicable arbitrarily to any grant of land, even for services rendered. Servile labour, however much it ties a peasant and may even prevent him from migrating, is not the same as serfdom. The latter requires a contractual relationship between the peasant and the landholder, which could include the cultivation of the latter's land. Servile labour need not always be linked to agricultural production as was serfdom. The use of the term *pida,* pain, for the taxes imposed on the peasant is different from the specific terms used earlier for taxes, such as *bali, bhaga, shulka* and *kara. Pida* indicates a burden, and it is interesting that it was used by those who imposed

the burden. Another form of tying down the peasant was either pledging his field or his labour, imposed because of a failure to pay back a debt often arising out of rent or taxes. Bonded labour had continuity over generations.

Additional taxes would have required improvement in the use of resources, which would have involved agricultural technology and especially irrigation. There are texts that discuss soil, fertility and crops. Irrigation facilities were expanded in the form of wells, tanks and devices for lifting water. The *araghatta* was a water-wheel, but the gearing mechanism associated with the Persian wheel may have been introduced towards the latter part of this period. Land irrigated by this device was regarded as special, and the expense of constructing such a wheel may have been left to the landholder who would charge a tax on its use. A variety of people are said to have been involved in constructing irrigation tanks.

Land being an important economic asset, problems concerning the division of land and inheritance received special attention in contemporary *Dharma-shastras* and their commentaries. The texts discussed disputes over boundaries of fields, fallow and cultivated land, embankments and suchlike. An increase in such disputes might also point to a pressure on the land or even a rise in the population of some areas. The beginning of a more intensive use of land is also reflected in categories of fallow, some following one or two years. Land that had been fallow for five years was treated as having reverted to forest.

Kings and Politics

The genesis of dynasties differed. Some were built up by adventurers through raiding and conquest, others through intermediaries defying a suzerain and eventually being recognized as independent, while still others descended from recipients of grants of land or from administrators. Initially, power relations would have been determined by these origins, as well as the questions of fiscal and military agreements so essential to politics.

Almost in inverse ratio to their actual power, kings took exalted titles such as *maharajadhiraja, parameshvara, paramabhattaraka* and suchlike, which were generally embedded in eulogistic phraseology. Prithviraja III, the Chauhan King, was referred to as *bharateshvara,* 'the lord of Bharata'. A twelfth-century ruler of Kanauj described himself as 'the most exalted, the great king of kings, the supreme lord, the king over horses, elephants and men, the sovereign of the three worlds'. Such statements were not to be taken literally as defining the geography of the kingdom, but as pan of the rhetoric associated with royalty and their world of make-believe. Minor deeds were depicted as heroic acts. Flattery even of the most obvious kind became part of the courtly style, though admittedly the more intelligent rulers preferred subtler forms.

Relations between the king and the brahman, that had once included both dependency and competition, now tended to the former especially as there were tangible benefits for the brahman. Rituals intended to consecrate or empower kings were at one level aimed at balancing the competing authority between the two. Land grants enhanced the relations between patron and client: the brahman validated the king as a *kshatriya* or performed a similar act, and in return received wealth in the form of land. This carries echoes of the competition for power between the *raja* as chief and the brahman as priest that had accompanied the process of state formation in the early first millennium BC. With new states being created through a comparable but more complex process a millennium later, the

potential of that relationship seems to have been revived. The analogy with the earlier system is, however, circumscribed. The wealth in earlier times had been movable and barely heritable, whereas now it was land and therefore immovable, permanent and heritable. There was also a competition over patronage among kings, where the most generous in granting land would be eulogized.

To the extent that land constituted property, it changed the politics of the balance. It allowed the brahman to appropriate the authority of the *kshatriya* and establish a ruling lineage. The branch lineages may not have been kin-related but the fiction of kinship had to be maintained, and this fiction attempted to follow the normative rules, thus adding to the emphasis on caste. In the earlier period the popularity of the Shramanic sects with their heterodox teachings probably led to more questioning of caste norms. Now, when the fiction was more apparent and the norms actually flaunted, with brahmans taking to kingship or trade, the theoretical reiteration of the norms nevertheless continued.

Kingdoms were less frequently named after founding clans than in the past and more frequently after territories. This would be expected, especially where the new state was pan of an earlier kingdom or created with some additions of territory. This is suggested by the continuance of terms from earlier administrative units, such as *bhukti* and *vishaya* in the new names. There was a re-mapping of territories based on dominance and alliances. Administrative structures are said to reflect links between territory and lineages, and although a regulated administration has been suggested it may not have been so regulated in practice. In some areas under Rajput control for instance, the territorial unit was said to be that of eighty-four villages – the *chaurasi* – and was furnished with a *garh* or fort as its nucleus. Those in authority owed allegiance to a Rajput king. Marriage alliances within Rajput families further demarcated the Rajput as a social category. At a wider level the change from clan to caste was not immediate, with those aspiring to high status restrained by having to retain their clan identity. Hence the seemingly contradictory references to brahmans and *shudras* carrying the same name, for instance, Abhira brahmans and Abhira *shudras*.

Grants of land, if of a sufficient size, were an avenue to power which reinforced the fact that political power was relatively open. Nevertheless, the argument that there was now a broader distribution of power through lineage links is perhaps not a sufficient explanation for change, since the reality of power also draws on access to resources and control of labour despite claims to divinity and other forms of legitimacy suggesting power. The nature of contractual relations between those contributing labour and others appropriating labour also have to be defined. Here perhaps the hierarchy of social relationships implicit in the listing of *jatis* would be a better clue than *varnas,* since regional differences discouraged a uniform pattern with regard to the latter. Service relationships based on caste status and the hierarchy implicit in the status would have locked in the obligations of each caste and the system would be subservient to the family that held the land. Where this prevailed the peasant was reduced to a condition of unfreedom. Migration, resorted to in the earlier period, was now difficult and wasteland could not be arbitrarily cleared and settled. Such service relationships were to be increasingly built into the structure of control of landed magnates and could extend to institutional landholders such as temples. The adoption of *varna* statuses sharpened the division between privileged castes and the rest, and between the free and the unfree.

This process marks a substantial departure in terms of differentiating between those who control the land and those who work it. On the first of these there have been many studies and differences of perception. On the second, the rights and terms relevant to the producers remain ambiguous, despite having been raised in the theory of the feudalization of Indian society. These have significance, irrespective of whether or not the grantee was a feudal lord. The nature of labour and its relations to other aspects of society and the economy have yet to be investigated in greater detail. A simple

question of whether peasants had the right to present their complaints at court was mentioned, although infrequently, in the context of kings receiving complaints when travelling in rural areas. But there are folk-stories in which the peasant is anxious to do just that. This assumes that even if such an action was a distant wish in most cases, the peasant felt that he should be able to do so.

Whether the grants amounted to a decentralization of royal authority or a distribution of power to those identified as branch lineages, it involved a restructuring of the agrarian economy. The grant would have acted as a lever for extending agricultural produce not just by technical aids such as irrigation, but also through the concerned supervision of the grantee. The agricultural economy was placed in the hands of those who claimed the knowledge to improve it, namely officers of the administration and brahmans. Agriculture or even its technical supervision was not generally expected of brahmans. Nevertheless, texts dealing with agriculture, such as the *Krishiparashara* or parts of Varahamihira's *Brihatsamhita,* point to agriculture being included in their expertise. Manuals on agriculture would have been a primary requirement for brahman settlers, either to introduce cultivation or to increase the yield.

The focus on grants of land has diverted attention from pastoralism, prevalent in wooded areas and in the drier tracts. Admittedly not as significant as in the earlier period, pastoralism was nevertheless important in the interstices of agrarian areas and in some hill states. Cattle were widely used in rural areas, not only for traction of various kinds but also for providing power to work the water-wheels and mills to crush sugar cane. Pastoral clans were also among those who, like forest-tribes, were converted to castes when they became cultivators.

Grants of land promoted economic change with the sanction of the state, but through the agency of the grantee where the state was not the direct collector of revenue. Grantees had to organize the existing cultivators to their advantage or convert shifting cultivators to sedentary cultivation, adjusting their society to that of the grantee. According to the terms of the grant the state could concede administrative, fiscal and judicial rights to the grantee. These, together with the grant, became the nucleus of the authority of the grantee. The conversions to *jati* involved the creation of new castes which required some reshuffling of local caste hierarchies. The king, according to earlier texts, was to use *danda* or coercion to protect his subjects and to maintain the law. But it was now conceded that the law could vary according to *jati,* locality and occupation. The newly created *jatis* would continue to observe some of their previous customary law.

Urbanism in a New Context

In the immediate post-Gupta period commercial activity in some parts of northern India appears Co have declined, even if produce from the land did not exclude other forms of economic exchange. Excavations of urban sites suggest that material culture in the Gupta period was of a lesser standard compared to the Kushana period, or that there was a desertion of some sites, although here again horizontal excavation would be more helpful in determining de-urbanization. Floods and environmental change have been given as the cause for the latter. Possible climatic changes occurred in the mid-first millennium AD, although the evidence for these is not conclusive. The Chinese Buddhist monk, Hstian Tsang, mentioned passing through some deserted towns. Impressive monuments no longer marked the old trade routes. Declining trade in certain areas could well have been a cause. Towns became deserted when trade routes changed course and the location of markets

shifted. Deserted towns have to be juxtaposed with new urban centres and such juxtaposition indicates that urban decline was not registered uniformly all over the subcontinent. Furthermore, courts were not invariably held in the capital. There were times during prolonged campaigns or tours of outlying areas when a royal court could take the form of a military camp, or was on the move, creating the impression of a deserted town.

Urban decline would have been caused by less availability of produce for exchange. This usually consisted of manufactured items or agricultural produce such as sugarcane, cotton and indigo, which also served rural markets. Trade would have shifted to other areas, with new towns replacing the older ones. Administrative centres attached to the courts of smaller kingdoms would have attracted trade and become commercial centres. Hsüan Tsang writes of Thanesar, Kanauj and Varanasi as commercial centres. The first two had earlier been administrative centres. Increased agricultural production would have required the creation of many more rural markets and while the existence of these may not have created a major commercial decline exchange of produce could have moved out of the older urban centres.

Ports and coastal towns appear to have been less affected by commercial decline, although references pick up from the ninth century. Debal in the Indus Delta, Veraval (the port for Somanatha) and Cambay in Gujarat, Thana and Sopara further south, and ports in the Ganges Delta, were mentioned. Cargoes were of goods either produced in India or brought by Indian merchants from further east. Of the items imported, silk and porcelain came from China, while China imported cotton textiles, ivory, rhinoceros horn and a variety of precious and semi-precious stones from India. The exports westwards continued to be substantially pepper and spices, and textiles. Mention of improved technologies in the production of cotton probably register its importance to commerce. Merchants from west Asia and the eastern Mediterranean settled along the west coast, participating in the Indian trade with the west, and encroaching on the eastern trade as well. Arab merchants strove to replace Indian middlemen in the trade between India, south-east Asia and China by going directly to these places. The north Indian overland trade with central Asia met with vicissitudes owing to the movements of peoples such as the Turks and Mongols.

From the tenth century onwards, commercial exchange finds more frequent reference. Certain guilds continue to be mentioned, such as those of goldsmiths, the organizers of caravans, braziers, oil-pressers and stonemasons. These could of course have been based in the capitals of courts rather than in commercial centres. But some new items were introduced and routes seem to have changed. The most striking item was the import of horses on a large scale. A greater frequency of even small campaigns would have required more horses, which may have been accompanied by a greater dependence on the cavalry wing of the army. Metal stirrups, improved saddles and horse trappings converted the cavalry into a more formidable wing than it had been. The horse became a major item of trade, not only in the north-west but along the west coast down to south India. Indian horse-traders in the north, some of whom were brahmans, traded with merchants from the Indo-Iranian borderlands and the north-west, and doubtless with centres such as Ghazni or others further into central Asia. Commercial centres in India were often located at new sites such as Prithu-daka/Pehoa in the Indo-Gangetic watershed, or others in the western Ganges Plain, and at Veraval and Cambay. New commercial centres in eastern India also became economically profitable.

Horse-dealers at Pehoa included brahmans who were defying the *Dharma-shastra* rule against brahmans living by trading in animals. Providing horses to the elite was doubtless too attractive a business proposition. The other traders involved in the commerce at Pehoa have names that seem to suggest they were non-brahmans. The management of the trade was handled by a committee.

Donations were made to temples in Pehoa and Kanauj. Centres for the horse trade seem to have developed from the locations of animal fairs where horses were the prize animals. Horses were then sold in widely distributed markets. Pehoa was located at the point of entry to the Ganges Plain and was also linked to routes going south-west to Rajasthan and south to the Deccan. The latter would have cut through what had been regarded as areas of isolation. Markets along these routes also became instrumental in introducing caste society to these areas and impinged on those living in nearby forests. Bana's description in the *Harsha-charita* of a Shabara settlement in a Vindhyan forest touches on many nuances of this transition, even though it was written earlier in the seventh century.

An increase in the volume of trade was brought about by a variety of factors. The more obvious among them was the interest of Arab traders in Indian products, and in turn the interest of Indian traders in exchanges with south-east Asia. The initial Arab intention to conquer western India was probably motivated by the wish to control the hinterland of ports and trade centres, rather than merely territory. Where trade had already existed as a viable economic enterprise, as in Gujarat, there was less dependence on affluent landholders. But elsewhere, a less obvious though significant factor would have been a partial repetition of the earlier processes encouraging the evolution of towns. With the growth of the agrarian economy, through inputs by the state or by landholders, there was wealth available for investing in trade. Much of the agricultural surplus went not to those who laboured to produce it, but to those to whom the producers had to pay rent and labour taxes. Added to this were the many varieties of taxes collected from the sale or exchange of produce or from using the facilities provided, such as irrigation works, tools and mills. The existence of wealthy landholders encouraging exchange centres in rural areas led to consumer demand for locally produced items. Such a demand had already existed for necessities such as salt and metals, but now other items could be added.

This encouraged the setting up of rural exchange centres, such as the *hatta.* Some grew into towns trading in items from within the subcontinent, partly determined by the distribution of what was grown. Sugarcane, for example, required a place where the cane or molasses could be exchanged or sold, and the same applied to cotton. Places where the state administration collected its taxes and customs dues, the *mandapika,* were also potential towns. The location of temples and places of pilgrimage could encourage urbanization, such as the location of the Somanatha temple which adjoined the port of Veraval. Temples and shrines at such places were sometimes built or maintained by merchants, with those operating out of Pehoa, for instance, recorded as having made donations to the local places of worship.

Royal action could also be conducive to establishing a market. A ninth-century inscription of a Pratihara king in Rajasthan described the setting up of a market at a location near Jodhpur. Earlier occupied by the pastoral cattle-keeping Abhiras, it became the base for their looting the inhabitants of the area since it was not so accessible to policing by the administration. This was an activity frequently associated with Abhira pastoralists. The king, in a bold action, burnt their villages, took away their cattle and introduced the cultivation of sugarcane and the planting of fruit orchards in the area. The village of Rohinsakupa was converted into a market with a settlement of merchants. A Jaina temple was built and maintained by Jaina monks and merchants. An activity of a different kind that also led sometimes to the emergence of towns was associated with the court. Royal courts often preferred the sophistication of urban culture but sometimes had to make do with temporary, albeit elaborate, encampments. Some royal inscriptions were issued from temporary camps. Such locations, if visited regularly, could enter the network of urbanization. Terms for towns continued to be those used earlier – *pura, nagara, pattana,* and those of a larger size were *mahanagaras.*

Carriers of trade ranged from cattle-keepers to ship-owners. The *banjaras* were cattle-keepers who traversed various parts of the subcontinent and came to be widely used for transporting goods. Camel-herders transported goods across deserts and arid terrain. Such groups indulged in peddling and incipient trade, with occasional more complex commercial transactions. Cattle-herders also provided bullocks for carts, the most common form of transporting goods in the plains. Pack-asses were more frequent in steep, hilly areas. This was an informal arrangement compared to the professional caravans drawn by oxen, or in deserts by camels, and maintained by the *sarthavahas*. The term *shreshthi* for a merchant continued in use, as it does in the present day *setthi*. The *nauvittaka,* or its Arabic equivalent of *nakhuda,* referred to the particularly rich merchants who owned ships, pointing to the expansion of maritime trade. Some wealthy merchants of the thirteenth century, such as Vastupala and Jagadu, made their fortunes in overseas commerce and were admired for this, becoming respected members of the urban council at the Chaulukya capital at Anahilapattana. Jaina centres in western India received handsome donations from some among these merchants.

Interest on money lent, *kusida,* was handled professionally by the financier and moneylender, and was normally 15 per cent. But 15 per cent was known in the Rashtrakuta kingdom and other places. Rates varied according to the item, its method of transportation and the distance it travelled. Both compound interest and interest in kind were mentioned. Interest paid in kind could include commodities or labour. Caste considerations as applied to interest rates appear to have been regularized. Where the brahman was charged 2 per cent the *shudra* was charged 5 per cent or more on the same capital.

A paucity of coins from the seventh to the tenth century, and particularly the termination of good-quality gold coins after the Gupta period, has been cited as characteristic of a feudal economy. Whereas gold coins became less frequent in this period, the broader generalization is problematic, as there were regional variations and the intervention of monetization in various economies differed. A large variety of coins was referred to in the texts, particularly from the ninth century, although the quantity in circulation varied: *dramma, dinara, nishka, rupaka, gadyanaka, vimshatika, karshapana, gadhaiya, tanka* and so on. The mention of transactions in money would imply that coins were in use, the question being the degree of monetization. In some areas, such as the Punjab, Haryana, the north-west and Sind, the circulation of coins was common, and, interestingly, these are areas with few if any grants of land.

Indo-Sassanian coins circulated in large numbers from the fifth century onwards. *Gadhaiya* coins, although of low value, were also in circulation in post-Gupta times. From the eighth to the eleventh century, reference was made to the billon *drammas,* of mixed silver and copper, associated with the Gurjara Pratiharas, and to local issues of bimetallic or copper coins in Sind, the north-west and Kashmir. A tenth-century inscription from coastal western India referred to one gold *gadyanaka* being the tax on every ship that brought commercial goods, and this tax was to be given to the temple and its priests. Gold coins issued by the Ummayads were used in centres along the west coast. From the eleventh century onwards the bull-and-horseman billon coins were circulating in northern and western India and, to a lesser extent, some gold issues. In eastern India there were references to the widely used silver coinage of Harikela. Packets of silver- and gold-dust may also have circulated, despite being a clumsy method of exchange compared to coins. For lesser transactions copper coins were preferred and cowrie shells were normal for more localized exchange. In some cases coinage was debased.

Coins continued to be minted in the north-west and Sind, and their range of circulation would have included some other parts of north India. The Ganges heartland appears to have had a shorter supply

of coins until the tenth century. The circulation of coins for the period from the seventh to the tenth century needs a more detailed regional study, focusing on mints, the weight of coins, material, design and legends. If a paucity of coins contributed to the creation of feudal conditions, then the increased use of coins after the tenth century in many parts of northern India would doubtless have brought about noticeable changes from the earlier pattern.

The Senas in eastern India introduced a cash assessment for revenue. In a thirteenth-century land-charter from western India a payment of three thousand *dramma* was required as revenue, together with various other sums in taxes. An earlier contract of a similar kind dates to the eighth century and suggests that coined metallic money was available. Gradually, gold coins were revived, with the need for high-value money in the purchase and sale of luxury commodities. Arab sources mentioned that Indian merchants bought horses for a large sum counted in *dirhams,* the money used by the Arabs. This may have been only an equivalent valuation in Arab money or else Arab high-value money may have been in use among Indian traders.

The increasing prosperity of merchants in the latter pan of this period led to the acceptance of a larger presence of a commercial economy in the society of the time. Some merchants were given grants in the hope that they would revive deserted towns. Others were appointed to the *pancha-kulas* or committees that supervised the administration not only of urban centres, but also sometimes of the more important rural areas. Merchants recorded their donations in votive inscriptions and these included eulogies of the merchant's family as well as of the king. These brief genealogies are useful sources of information on social history. This was partly an attempt to establish status, but was also a way to keep track of dispersed merchant groups when commerce was no longer limited to a local area. Information on family histories and caste status were prime requirements in arranging marriages and establishing inheritance. Each keeper of a set of genealogies, whether brahman or bard, kept the record for specific families. The tradition continued even into the subsequent period of the Sultanate, evident in inscriptions found in the vicinity of Delhi. This becomes another way of articulating the importance of commerce in the polity.

There were close links between the merchants of Rajasthan and towns in western India, with the Oswals and Shrimals being mentioned in inscriptions at Mt Abu. An interesting overlap between the commercial professions and administration can be seen in persons from Jaina families employed at senior bureaucratic levels in western India. Literacy was at a premium in the Jaina tradition and their experienced handling of financial enterprises qualified them for service in the higher echelons of government. The Chaulukyas often had Jaina ministers, some of whom made greater contributions to the history of Gujarat than many of the rulers. Hemachandra was not only a scholar of extraordinary learning, but was also reputed to be an administrator of considerable ability.

At the close of this period Eurasian commercial connections, both overland and maritime, were emerging as a factor in bringing together the distant areas of the continents from the eastern Mediterranean and Byzantium to east Asia, via central Asia and the Indian Ocean. There were interconnected economic interests, commodities for exchange and competition for markets. The Arabs were moving towards controlling the maritime routes, while many others were involved in the overland trading circuits. The Indian merchant continued to play at least one traditional role – that of the middleman.

New Social Trends

A number of new groups entered the established hierarchy of castes. Perhaps the most visible were the new *kshatriya* castes. They were open to those who had acquired political authority and could claim the status through a genealogy or an appropriate marriage alliance. Other than those claiming connection with existing *kshatriya* castes, they were grantees in the category of *samantas* or chiefs that had been inducted into caste society. The new *kshatriyas* constituted an aristocracy but brought with them elements of their earlier practices that had to be adjusted, at least ostensibly, to the norms of caste society. Practices of the upper castes were imitated and the appropriate status claimed. Such claims enabled the new ruling class to enforce a hierarchy of dominance and subordination, drawing its strength from the changed land relations and the new foci of power. By the end of this period, designations such as *rauta, ranaka, thakkura* and suchlike were available to those who had received grants of land and become grantees.

Somewhat parallel to this was the even larger expansion of *shudra jatis,* through the incorporation of pastoralists and forest-peoples into caste society, often as peasant castes. Some associations of specialized craftsmen, gradually increasing with the demands of both rural markets and of urban commercial centres, also became the basis for *jati* identities. There was less reference to distinctions between *vaishyas* and *shudras,* and in some regions the *vaishya* category was virtually absent. Unlike the south, where rich peasants such as those among the *velalas* remained *shudras,* and where in the relative absence of the *kshatriya* and *vaishya* categories there was little need to seek a higher-caste status, in north India attempts were made by rich landholders to upgrade their caste to *kshatriya.* Lists of *shudra jatis* expanded so much that fresh categories had to be introduced. Apart from mixed castes, a distinction was made between the *sat,* true or pure *shudras,* and the *asat* or unclean *shudras.* The significance of this expansion of categories points not only to larger numbers being inducted, but also to some *shudra* categories moving to higher-status work, who therefore had to be differentiated from those still employed at lower levels.

Merchants consolidated their professional strength through various associations. The most familiar from earlier periods was the *shreni,* translated as 'guild'. According to one source it was a group of persons who performed the same professional work, either belonging to the same caste or to various castes. In the latter case they were doubtless related castes. The tendency would have been to prefer membership for those with *jati* connections. These associations enabled the merchants to organize their trade or crafts with some degree of autonomy. Rulers may well have accepted this, provided it did not interfere with their income from taxes on commerce, and it may even have increased the income. Influential merchants, sometimes included in the category of *mahajanas,* were appointed to various management committees, including those of temples. They were welcomed irrespective of their caste affiliation, perhaps because they made handsome donations.

Brahman castes covered a range of gradations. The most respected were the learned brahmans, the *shrotriyas,* who could have been from wealthy brahman settlements or *agraharas.* They were often named after their area of original domicile, such as Kanauj, Utkala, Gauda and Maithil. As recipients of substantial grants, they developed centres of Vedic learning and Sanskrit scholarship. Many migrated from their *agraharas* to seek employment in distant courts. Bilhana, for example, whose family migrated from Kanauj to Kashmir, travelled extensively in northern and western India before eventually settling at the Chaulukya court in the Deccan. Such employment carried grants and helped in the diffusion and establishing of Sanskritic culture. There were narrations of rivalries at these couns with Buddhist or Jaina scholars. The conversion to Jainism of Kumarapala, the Chaulukya king, asserted by Jaina authors, was contested by Shaivas. Lesser brahmans, such as those trading in horses, some categories of temple priests in small temples or village priests performing routine rites,

had a lower status. Some may have dropped out from rigorous Sanskrit scholarship, while others were priests of local cults that had been incorporated into Puranic Hinduism.

Intermediate castes sometimes claimed high status. Among these were the *kayasthas,* the scribes of the administration who were responsible for writing documents and maintaining records. There was some confusion about where they should be ranked as a caste since some described them as *kshatriyas* who had fallen in status, others as descendants of a mixed-caste union of brahman and *shudra,* which would give them a low status. But contact with rulers improved their social standing and those who received grants of land and made donations became part of the elite. *Kayastha* ministers were mentioned in association with the Chandellas, Kalachuris and Gangas.

Some castes claimed origin from socially elevated ancestors but maintained that their status had been reduced through economic necessity or through a fault in the performing of a ritual. The *khatris,* an established caste of traders in northern India, claimed *kshatriya* origin in recent times, maintaining that their lowered status was purely a result of having had to work in commerce. Gurjaras, Jats and Ahirs also claimed *kshatriya* origin and conceded that they had lost this status. The emergence of new *jatis* had been a feature of caste society since its inception, but in the early agrarian communities it was probably slower since there had not been a pressure to convert non-caste groups to caste status. The restructuring of the agrarian economy in this period, the intensified mercantile activity and the dispersal of certain higher castes accelerated the process of conversion. Flexibility associated with upper-caste society did not exist for those at the lowest levels or those branded as beyond the pale of caste society. Despite some contestation of orthodox views on caste, these generally remained established among the upper castes.

Women of high status were expected to conform to patriarchal norms. Women of the lower *jatis* were often governed by the custom of the *jati,* which in some cases helped in distancing them from patriarchal pressures. Kinship patterns and gender relations would have differed between the major groups of castes and between regional practices. It is likely that in the initial stages of conversion to *jati* status, some customary practices from the previous status were retained. Gradually, however, these were either incorporated into the practices of the specific *jati,* or the proximity to caste society would have required greater conformity to existing caste rules. Thus, encouraging *kshatriya* women to become *satis* when their husbands died in battle or in a raid would have weakened support for practices such as *niyoga,* levirate, and widow remarriage. These practices, and other forms of marriage regarded as low in the normative texts, were not negated among the *shudras.* Cross-cousin marriage was known among some groups in western India, but was infrequently mentioned compared to its frequency in the south. Societies settled in the Himalayan borders continued their practice of fraternal polyandry, although such societies were more often Buddhist.

However, the imprint of the upper-caste model was clear. In the process of claiming higher status, patriarchal requirements would have been insisted upon, particularly in relation to upper-caste laws of marriage and inheritance. Groups in the process of being incorporated into caste status would all have experienced some tensions in this process of change. These groups would have included the forest-chiefs of central India, or those who assisted in the making of dynasties, such as the Bhillas who had associations with the Guhilas in Rajasthan, or the Gonds who were linked to the Chandellas. They were familiar with a relatively more egalitarian system that was also extended to women, so the need to conform to new social codes may have been a problematic transition.

Untouchables had little possibility of improving their status. They were regarded as outside the pale of caste society. Not only was their touch polluting, but even their shadow falling across the path of a brahman called for ritual ablution. They were sometimes assigned to the category of *mlechchha,*

namely, those who could not be included in caste society and who differed in language and custom. Apart from the descendants of the existing untouchables, this category included tribes and peoples – sometimes of foreign origin – who were not eligible for a caste identity. How eligibility was determined remains somewhat unclear and was doubtless influenced, among other things, by the need for labour or profitable occupations. In terms of labour requirements, a permanent category of labour, bonded through both poor economic and low ritual status, was a substantial economic asset to the many dependent on this labour. The continued insistence that birth determined status ensured its permanency.

The status of untouchables was therefore immutable. In rural areas they were often the landless labour, put to any task. In urban settlements they were the scavengers who also maintained the cremation grounds, where proximity to death associated them with a high degree of ritual pollution. Therefore they had to live well away from the limits of normal habitation. Even the Buddhists and Jainas tacitly conceded associating pollution with untouchables in practice, although they otherwise argued against social distinctions determining the quality of a human being. However, other sects, such as some Tantrics and Aghoris, made a fetish of the performance of rites in cremation grounds and the breaking of caste rules, but these were not sects working towards changing the rules of social organization. Their concern was with breaking ritual taboos and orthodox rites.

Given the flux in society at some levels, existing social codes needed modification but doing so in a radical manner was avoided. The modification could take the form of commentaries on earlier *Dharma-shastras*. The more widely quoted were those of Medatithi, written in the tenth century on the highly authoritative text of Manu, and the thirteenth-century commentary of Kulluka. Such commentaries had to adjust the older norms to a changed situation of different practices. These would have been associated with the customary practice of the new *jatis* or with the rise in status of wealthy merchants and landholders. Since major changes were unacceptable within the framework of the normative texts, deviations and exceptions made earlier texts more relevant to contemporary situations.

Two systems of family law, *Dayabhaga* and *Mitakshara,* became basic to the upper castes and remained so until recent years. Both systems referred, among other things, to property held jointly by the male members of a family. According to the *Dayabhaga* system, which came to prevail in eastern India, only on the death of the father could the sons claim rights to property and partition the property. In what became the more widely prevalent *Mitakshara* system, the sons could claim this right even during the lifetime of the father. Doubtless, here too there would have been regional and caste differences. Where the system of cross-cousin marriage or matrilineal custom prevailed, the inheritance of the daughter had to be mentioned, as was sometimes done in inscriptions. In some areas, the wealth given and gifted specifically to a woman, her *stridhana,* could now include immovable property. In parts of Rajasthan and the Ganges Plain, the wives of rulers and subordinate lords received and held lands in their own right, and often the holdings were large enough to enable them to grant land to a religious beneficiary.

Learning and Literature

Among the more telling changes that emerged at this time were some new literary forms with an orientation towards historical perceptions in an attempt at capturing the past. The *Mahabharata* and

the *Ramayana* constructed genealogies of the lineages presumed to be involved in the struggles narrated in the epics. These have parallels in the genealogical section of the early *Puranas,* where an attempt was made to provide the equivalent of a genealogical map of the lineages, actual and fictional, and a listing of the rulers in the dynasties up to the Guptas. But the earliest states in the Ganges Plain in the mid-first millennium BC, being the first of their kind, could not be valorized through precedents from the past.

Buddhist chronicles had had a different perspective on the past. The Sangha as an institution was brought into juxtaposition with the state or other institutions, and their interdependence became part of the narrative. This is illustrated in the Pali chronicles from Sri Lanka, starting with the *Dipavamsa* and the *Mahavamsa* of the previous period, but continuing with others such as the *Chulavamsa* that focused on the relationship between the state and the Sangha. The chronicles of Ladakh and neighbouring areas, using the Tibetan Annals as their model, also described the establishment of Buddhism in the region often being accompanied by the emergence of a kingdom. There were some similarities between these and the chronicles in the Sanskritic tradition, but the latter had different concerns.

The formation of states in the post-Gupta period was an innovatory experience in some areas. For those forging this experience, a past was already recorded in various forms and used for validating the changes in the present. This became a signpost to authority. Drawing on the past as an indirect way of asserting authority was quickly comprehended. The section on historical succession in the *Vishnu Purana,* for instance, provided references to construct a variety of links encapsulating power that were based on the claims of contemporary rulers to connections with heroes from these genealogies. The *Puranas* referred to the creation of the new *kshatriyas* subsequent to Gupta rule. These were the kings who made a point of insisting on their upper-caste ancestry and on their duty to protect caste society. Genealogy took a linear, narrative form and dynastic change was measured in genealogical time.

The lists of dynasties in the *Puranas* petered out after the Guptas, and some post-Gupta dynasties began to write their own history. This was made available in the inscriptions issued by kings – in effect the annals of Indian history – or in the biographies of a few kings, or in the chronicles of regional kingdoms. The format of the inscriptions generally began with an evocation of the deity worshipped by the king and then proceeded to the origin myth, attempting to establish the high status of the dynasty. The earlier kings were often linked to the ancient heroes of the Puranic genealogies or the epics, which established the lineage as either solar or lunar, or occasionally an equivalent. Then followed the vignettes of the ancestors and a much fuller treatment of the reigning king.

The inscriptions incorporating land grants covered much the same ground to start with, including a list, sometimes rhetorical, of the king's many conquests and his upholding of caste society. This near formulaic section was followed by the practical and legal details of the grant: the origins of the grantee, his qualifications and achievements, that which was granted, the rights and obligations involved, tax exemptions if any and the dues and rents and other taxes he was permitted to collect. The text concluded with the list of witnesses who were often officials of the government, the names of those who composed and engraved the grant and finally a curse on anyone attempting to revoke the grant – if it was a grant not to be revoked. The charters were legal documents that had to be precise, whether engraved on stone and located in a temple or other monument, or engraved on copper plates.

Parallel to the inscriptions were some of the biographies or *charitas* that were eulogies of the kings. These need some decoding to understand their intention. The focus was often on a particular matter, crucial to the acquiring of power, which was expanded into a text. Bana's *Harsha-charita*

had described Harsha's accession, which may have involved a usurpation of the throne and, if so, then a contravening of primogeniture. Bilhana's *Vikramankadeva-charita* explained why the king was advised by no less than Shiva himself to replace his reigning elder brother. Sandhyakaranandin's *Rama-charita* centred his biography of the Pala King Ramapala on the revolt by the Kaivartas and his successful reassertion of power. In some biographies and inscriptions the king was described as an incarnation of Shiva or Vishnu, or at least as receiving instructions directly from the deity. This was yet another form of validating kingship. As a unit of time, the fragment of the lifetime could be extracted from cyclic cosmology, and to that extent it incorporated the more secular linear form.

Expanded versions of the format used in the inscriptions were paralleled in chronicles such as the *Rajatarangini,* the history of Kashmir, or the much shorter one of Chamba, as well as those of kingdoms in Nepal and Gujarat and others from the peninsula. But they provide more detailed histories of the rulers and attempt to present the dynasties and the region in an accessible fashion. They formed a category known as the *vamshavalis* and their theme was the history of a monastery, or a dynasty or a region. The presumed history of a temple, a sect or a place of pilgrimage was woven into myths and practices that were narrated in the *mahatmyas* and the *sthala-puranas*. The *Rajatarangini* is exceptional in the fact that Kalhana did search for reliable evidence on the past from a variety of sources, so his narrative is infused with events and their explanations, many of which are historically insightful. It is undoubtedly an unusual text, even if rooted in the *vamshavali* tradition, and his extraordinary sense of history may have evolved from a familiarity with Buddhist writing.

A characteristic of the inscriptions and some of the text is that they were dated in eras, the *samvat*. These were often a continuation from an earlier period, such as the Vikrama era of 58 BC, the Shaka era of AD 78 or the Marsha era of 606. Sometimes they were started by contemporary kings, such as the Vilcrama Chalukya era of 1075, or else arose from wider usage such as the Lakshmana era of 1119. The starting of eras became a sign of status, with the era sometimes named after the king or the dynasty. Calculations for starting an era could have been based on local oral and calendrical traditions, or on observations in astronomy. The frequent use of genealogies, dynasties, eras and chronicles was an indication of comprehending the historical importance of linear time. This was immediate, manageable time, largely dictated by human activities, and was distinctly different from the large cycles that went into the making of the time-cycle of the universe. The use of linear time within the cycle creates a fascinating intersection of cyclic and linear time. The intersection is apparent from the fact that the genealogies and dynastic lists were in linear time but were eventually enveloped in the time-cycle of cosmology.

Grants of land provided foundations for nuclei of brahmanical learning. The widespread distribution of these centres required texts and training that were met through the increasing numbers of *agraharas* and *mathas*. This encouraged the growth of lively locations for discourse, parallel to the monastic institutions of the Buddhists and Jatnas. The network of brahmanical and heterodox learning expressed in Sanskrit gradually established dialogue between various schools. This led to some merging, although there were also accusations of borrowing ideas. Some were seen as brahmanical contestations of the Buddhist critique of Vedic thought. From this perspective there was much intellectual activity, although it may have been limited to the learned few. Of the various philosophical theories, Vedanta was gradually coming to the forefront alongside the teachings of Mimamsa and Nyaya.

There had been an extensive tradition of analytical grammars in Sanskrit. The interpretation of a word in a system of ideas often required grammatical explanation, which encouraged further

interpretations and counter-interpretations. The dialectics of these reveal methods of enquiry. Grammar and etymology were essentially rational enquiries and this was conceded by both the orthodox and the heterodox. Both were now using the same language, which would have heightened their contributions to systems of knowledge.

The brahmanical endorsement of preserving texts continued, especially the Vedic corpus through the oral tradition, but was accompanied by a dependence on literacy. Sanskrit was the language of elite discourse and of literature. But in its more popular forms it carried elements of the local Prakrits. The latter are of linguistic interest. Although their use in creative literature was declining, they nevertheless fostered the emergence of Apabrahmsha in some areas, and eventually some regional languages. The last of the major works in the older tradition of writing in Prakrit included the *Setubandha,* narrating the invasion of Lanka by Rama, Vakpati's *Gaudavaho,* a biography of Yashovarman ruling in Kanauj, and Rajashekara's play, *Karpuramanjari*. Apabrahmsha, or 'falling away', was a form of Prakrit believed to have evolved in western India. When its speakers moved to more central locations they took the language with them. The Prakrit of Jaina writers sometimes had traces of Apabrahmsha forms and these created a link between the older and newer languages, especially in Gujarati and Maharashtri. Gujarati folk-poetry, particularly that depicting the loves of Krishna, became the nucleus of early Gujarati. Bengali, Assamese, Oriya and some Hindi dialects evolved at a later date from the Prakrits. The new religious sects helped accelerate the growth of regional languages, their compositions being in the language commonly used.

The translation of Sanskrit works into the regional languages was usually an adaptation, incorporating much of regional culture rather than invariably being literal. Narratives familiar from the epics were a constant source for themes to be elaborated upon and sometimes substantially altered in the new literature. Confidence in the regional language is apparent when inscriptions use it alongside Sanskrit, or when the Sanskrit used carries recognizable elements of the regional language. This would point to some bilingualism. Even if Sanskrit was the dominant language, it could not exclude the local linguistic idiom at court or elsewhere. Regional languages did not surface overnight. These were substratum languages spoken by many. When social groups using these languages rose in status, the status of their language also rose. Identities were gradually created out of multiple expressions in literature, the arts, intellectual discourse and daily functioning.

Migrant brahmans might have found it more expedient to be bilingual, especially in the peninsula. Or was the world of courtly literature trans-regional but limited to using Sanskrit? Further diversification would have followed from the recognition of the multiplicity of languages identified by location. The *Natya-shastra* listed such languages. The diversification was perceived in part as the function of language. Where the courts of new kingdoms responded to Sanskrit, the larger spectrum of society gradually began to respond to other languages. When chronicles of temples and dynasties were written in the regional language, these became signals of different cultural norms. The new languages often became the carriers of new ideas.

Kings were said to be authors of significant literary or scholarly works. The training of future kings would have involved some intellectual expertise, but when literary forms became the mark of high culture it would be expected that they would be attributed to reigning kings, even if this were not the fashion earlier. Sanskrit was largely taught in institutions attached to temples, in *mathas* and monasteries, but princes of the royal family would have had special tutors.

Although the older system of training in guilds as apprentices to artisans continued for professionals, a number of technical books were written in Sanskrit on subjects such as agriculture, architecture, medicine and the veterinary sciences, pertaining especially to horses and elephants. This

would suggest collaboration between those knowing Sanskrit and specialists in the profession. There was little embarrassment about scholars writing on seemingly mundane subjects, since some of these had become germane both to handling economic resources and kindling curiosity about knowledge and its applications. In each case the subjects treated pertained to practical knowledge for current requirements, such as temple-building or the care and maintenance of animals crucial to the army. Commentaries on earlier texts were another method of updating knowledge.

In studies of medicine the tendency was to write commentaries, for example those of Vagabhatta and Chakrapanidatta on Charaka. References to empirical knowledge in these areas were less common. Where experiments were made practical results ensued, such as the use of iron and quicksilver in medicine. The interest in magic among votaries of Tantric sects led to some experiments with chemicals and metals in particular. The Tantrics claimed that the taking of mercury in combination with certain other chemicals could prolong life. They must also have taken part in alchemical experiments, which became popular particularly during the latter part of this period.

Interest in astronomy was encouraged. At a scholarly level this was linked to advanced work in mathematics, which continued the studies of Aryabhatta and his successors. The study of numbers led to algebra and initiated aspects of the exact sciences. Algebra remained a significant contribution to mathematics and was a source of great interest to Arab mathematicians as had been medicine and astronomy earlier. The Arab interest in Indian sciences continued with some ideas being taken by them to Europe. Among the more brilliant mathematicians was Bhaskaracharya (not to be confused with the earlier Bhaskara), whose mathematical problems were sometimes set in unusual contexts. A problem from his famous work, the *Lilavati,* was set out as follows:

Whilst making love a necklace broke
A row of pearls mislaid.
One-sixth fell on the floor
One-fifth fell on the bed
The woman saved a third
One-tenth were caught by her lover.
If six pearls remained on the string
How many pearls were there altogether?

Quoted in Georges Ifrah, *The Universal History of Numbers* (London, 1998), p. 431

The presence of scholars from others parts of Asia and the subcontinent probably encouraged a more catholic outlook in the Buddhist monasteries compared to the *mathas*. Such monasteries survived mainly in eastern India. Nalanda was perhaps the best known, but the attack by the Turks virtually closed it. Jaina centres of education were closer in spirit to the Buddhist than the brahmanical, and these were concentrated in Gujarat, Rajasthan and, to a more limited extent, in Karnataka.

Both Buddhist and Jaina centres of learning were now using Sanskrit quite extensively. The Jainas were prolific in the writing of biographies, chronicles and narratives of kings and courts, in addition to texts on religion. Keeping track of the activities of various Jaina sects and their teachings gave some historical flavour to their narratives, as it had done earlier in the Buddhist tradition. Authors such as Hemachandra in the twelfth century, and Merutunga in the fourteenth century, contributed substantially to this genre of writing, and the Jaina tradition paralleled the concerns of the Buddhist tradition in many ways. The *Dvayashraya-kavya* was a fine example of sophisticated scholarship combining grammatical exegesis with some history, and the *Parishishtaparvan* and

Prabandhachintamani drew on the *prabandha* or chronicle tradition. The writing of biographies and hagiographies included works on the life and activities of Mahavira, such as the *Mahavira-charita.* An interesting aspect of Jaina literature was the continuation of narratives about the story of Rama from the Jaina perspective. Texts, both by Jaina authors and others, often deviated to a lesser or a greater extent from the established versions, including the *Ramayana* of Valmiki. Other traditions drew upon the patriarchal and orthodox versions of the story, and changes had included Sita being eventually sent once again into exile; or a *shudra* being killed because he had dared to practise the austerities and rites permitted only to the upper castes.

The Jaina insistence on literacy required that texts be written, maintained and preserved as part of the *bhandara* or treasury of the Jaina temple. These developed into impressive libraries of manuscripts and remain so to this day. Texts were frequently written on palm leaves, but could also be on *bhurjapatra* or birchbark. The strips were written upon, and held together by cord passed through a hole in the strip. Wooden covers made the manuscript more secure and were occasionally painted in the current style. Specially prepared cloth could also be used, but generally only for a few purposes. Paper was a later, borrowed innovation. The scripts and styles of writing were still derived from the earlier *brahmi* script, although this had evolved into new forms, such as the *sharada* script, that were closer to the later *Devanagari.*

Poetry and prose romances were often embellishments of themes familiar from epic and Puranic legends, and the narrative aspect could be subordinated to the linguistic. Prosody and the technicalities of composition were studied in some detail. Anandavardhana and Abhinavagupta explored some of the ideas first mooted in the *Bharata Natya-shastra,* such as the suggestive meaning and sound of words, and the place of poetry in drama. Writers and poets were welcome at the new courts, evoking the court establishments of earlier times. An exception to the romantic courtly style was the eleventh-century anthology of prose stories, the *Kathasaritsagara (The Ocean of the Stream of Stories*), by Somadeva, with its mix of folk and courtly themes, some of which suggest commentaries on travels to distant places.

Drama, patronized by various courts, retained the individuality of earlier plays. A sharp edge to the dialogue was given by the religious sectarian rivalry that entered the better-known plays, such as Rajashekhara's *Karpuramanjari* and Krishna Mishra's *Prabodha-chandrodaya.* Satire was directed at Buddhist or Jaina monks and some Shaiva sects were pilloried for their anti-social behaviour. Occasional Shaiva ritual practices were regarded as abhorrent, a critique also extended to practices among some Kaula and Tantric sects. The new cults were probably discussed at court as much as among ordinary people.

Lyric poetry had a more personal appeal, although often couched in sophisticated form. Perhaps the most spontaneous was the outburst of erotic poetry, characteristic of this period, with a possible ancestry in the earlier single-stanza poems of Bhartrihari. Erotic mysticism, expressing the relationship between the individual and his deity, seems to have caught the imagination of people. Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda,* written in the twelfth century, describes the love of Krishna for Radha, the lyrical quality of the poetry being virtually unsurpassed. Bilhana, in his *Chaurapanchashika,* describes the love between a princess and a man who has broken into the palace, a theme where the erotic is inevitable.

Articulation of the erotic is evident in poetry and temple sculpture, perhaps released by the rituals and ideas current in Tantric belief and practice which were being assimilated among the elite. Nineteenth-century colonial authors wrote about it as the depravity of taste, the pandering to the sensuous and the degradation of morals in India – a view emerging largely out of Victorian definitions

of morality. Possibly the absence of the imprint of 'original sin' may have encouraged a freer treatment of the erotic in India. The representation of erotic themes is striking, whether in the *Gita Govinda* or in the sculptures at Khajuraho. Some are sensitively rendered, others are more audacious. In some other societies elsewhere the expression of these were suppressed or sublimated, but in segments of Indian society they were a part of aesthetic expression. This may also have been a way of challenging social conventions.

Monuments and their Historical Role

Regional variation was not only expressed in the emergence of new languages, but was also visible in styles of architecture and in art. Temples grew in size from small places of worship to impressive, monumental structures, built in almost every region. The latter were built at times when, according to the chronicles of the Turkish rulers, raids on temples by the Turks were becoming more frequent. Curiously, there is little reference to such raids nor much concern that the temples being built should be specially protected.

The overall architectural requirements and their ground-plans evolved from the earlier temples. The flat-roofed forms had acquired a *shikhara* or central tower over the main shrine and now there were smaller *shikharas* over subsidiary shrines as well, sometimes adjoining the main shrine. The central tower was tall, often tapering slightly in a convex shape. This altered the elevation and provided scope for new styles and decorative features in the Nagara or north Indian style. But this did not exclude regional variation in the design of the elevation. The north Indian temples were also centres of civic and corporate life although the area enclosed by most was less than that of their southern counterparts. However, the component parts were the same. The *garbha-griha* was where the main image was placed and the *shikhara* was built over it. This location was approached through the *mandapas* – the halls or antechambers – some with open spaces, creating a play of light and shadows, and were used for various occasions.

The small, early temples were essentially places of worship, and were experimenting with new aesthetic forms. Temples of the later period were considerably larger and were the locations for major ceremonies of royal initiation and legitimation, linking the icon, the deity and the king. Such state spectacles required space. Sculptured panels often depicted state occasions such as the consecration of the king, and this was again the encapsulation of a sense of power. The earlier, smaller temples tended to fall into disrepair and only some were renovated. The later, larger ones were rich and therefore more frequently renovated, although their wealth made them potential targets for looting.

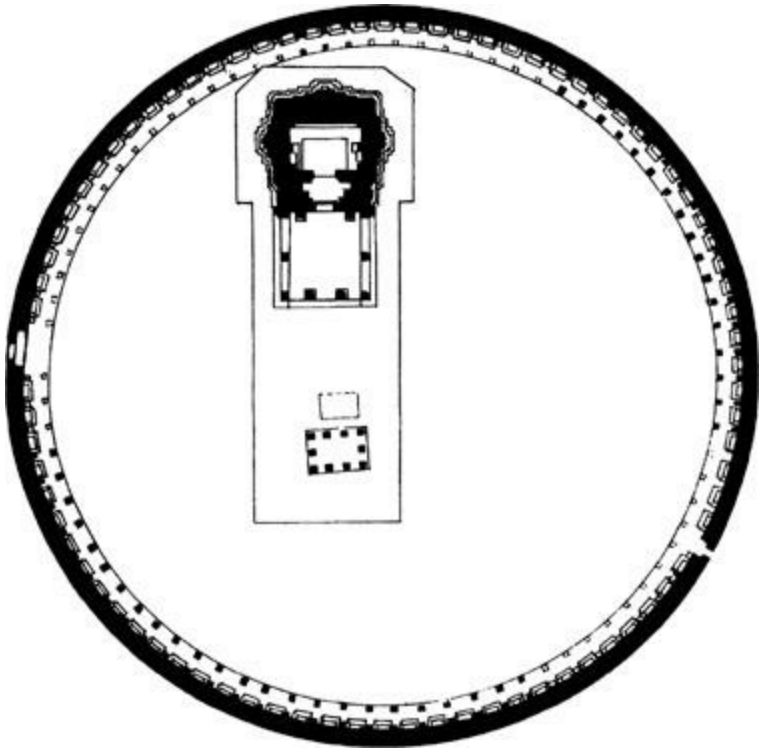
The Salt Range in the north-west was the site of temples rebuilt by the Hindu Shahiyas in the ninth and tenth centuries, such as Malot, their unusual architecture hinting at an almost Romanesque or even Baroque style in their fluted columns and decorative features. These could have evolved from earlier Gandhara forms and from the temples in Kashmir. The small Ambamata temple at Jagat (Rajasthan) is exquisitely proportioned. The early Shiva temple at Eklingji near Udaipur is plainer and housed the deity of the rulers of Mewar. The ninth-century Harshadmata temple at Abaneri in Rajasthan is among those that had fallen into disrepair, but despite this the sculpture is of an impressive quality. The Maladevi temple at Gyaraspur in Madhya Pradesh commands a view of the countryside from its location halfway up a hill, with an unusual form that is partly structural and partly rock-cut. The

Mukteshvara and Gauri temples at Bhuvaneshwar in Orissa are also of this period. The temple to Surya – the Sun god – at Osian in Rajasthan points to the transition from early to late. This is also true of the Sun temple at Martand in Kashmir, which although of an earlier date than the one at Modhera in Gujarat, was equally renowned. During this period the construction of temples also began in the hills in Kumaon and Garhwal.

Among the temples of the later period, the Jaina temples at Mt Abu, built in white marble by Vastupala and Tejapala, ministers to the Chaulukyas, are representative of Jaina architecture in western India. They are richly adorned with sculpture, which, though profuse, is subsidiary to the architecture. The temples at Khajuraho – Lakshmana and Kandariya Mahadeo – are among the best examples of the Bundelkhand group in central India, and these too are rich in sculpture. They display a balance in size and form that makes of each an aesthetically remarkable structure. The erotic sculpture at Khajuraho, as at Konarak in Orissa, and the eagerness of visitors to see it and guides to show it, often diverts attention from the impressive qualities of both architecture and sculpture. Among the more dramatic structures is the unfinished Shaiva temple near Bhopal, started by the Paramara King Bhoja in the eleventh century. Engraved sketches of some parts of the temple-plans are visible near by, also the ramp used for transporting large stones. The temples of Orissa, particularly the Lingaraja at Bhuvaneshwar and the Sun temple at Konarak, are monumental. The Jagannath temple at Puri in Orissa, built in the twelfth century, gradually became even more monumental. The greater use of erotic sculpture was associated with fertility cults and with some Tantric concepts. Closer to the Shakta cults and contemporary with the earlier temples were the Yogini temples, sometimes in the vicinity of other temples as at Khajuraho and sometimes as centres on their own as at Hirapur in Orissa. Yogini temples tend to be clustered in central India.

Characteristic of Gujarat and parts of Rajasthan were the *vav* – the unique step-wells. A well of substantial size whose surface was located at a considerable depth was reached by flights of steps and enclosed by basement galleries. These were decorated with icons and scenes from mythology as in the Queen's step-well at Patan. The *vav* was a structure hewn out of the earth that went down, sometimes many storeys, instead of being built up. Such step-wells in their simpler forms were used for supplying water to places on the edge of the desert and also provided cool spaces during the heat of summer. Some were used for irrigating land, presumably in areas where the water table was low.

The construction of temples was supervised by the *sutradharas*. Manuals on construction – the *shilpa-shastras* – were now being used where large temples were constructed. Craftsmen associated with the building profession – carpenters, masons, stonecutters, sculptors – had a low status in the social codes and were often included as mixed castes. The question then is, who wrote the manuals? If the *sutradharas* were formally trained in Sanskrit this would have raised the status of their otherwise technical and professional education. Or were the manuals written in conjunction with brahmans? The need for manuals became apparent when every independent dynasty declared its presence through various activities, of which building stone temples in a recognized style would have been one. To follow the established norms of temple building required the supervision of a *sutradhara* and a manual. *Sutradharas* were being named in inscriptions, such as the references to Kokasa, and they were associated with particular temples. However, it is not clear whether they travelled between courts or whether each body of architects and builders was attached to one court. The formalization of architecture in a text disseminated a style and way of building, but it might also have acted as a check on experimentation.



7. Circular Devi temple: plan

As in earlier times, sculpture reflected the impact of regional styles. Eastern India produced a distinctive sculpture in stone and metal. The stone, dark grey or black, shone with a metallic lustre when polished. Buddhist icons at Nalanda set the standard and Pala patronage also extended to the sculpting of icons of Puranic Hinduism. Although used in other parts of north India, the choice of bronze as a medium for sculpture was put to particularly effective use in eastern India, Kashmir and Nepal, even though it did not attain the aesthetic brilliance of Chola bronze sculpture. The Indian contribution to the fine arts was primarily in sculpture. Had it preserved an independent form it might have continued to evolve its own style, but when reduced to architectural embellishment it declined aesthetically as did temple styles in later periods. Sculpture in terracotta, usually treated as the art form of the less privileged, continued to be the medium for some striking terracotta icons and decorative friezes.

Painting was now used to illustrate manuscripts. Initial attempts at such illustrations began in eastern India, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Nepal. Copying texts to ensure their constant availability was a normal activity in Buddhist and Jaina monasteries, but illustrating such manuscripts was an innovation within this tradition. The illustrations often depicted faces with angular features and prominent eyes. These were the experimental beginnings of what developed in later centuries into a fine tradition of miniature paintings, largely illustrating books. Mural painting became less common, but paintings of a popular kind gradually surfaced in painted hangings, which might have had earlier beginnings.

The temple was by now fulfilling many roles. Where a *matha* was attached to a temple, this complex was the counterpart to the *stupa* and monastery of the earlier period. Where it received grants of land or villages, it too became a landlord with accompanying powers. The temple was the institution of the Puranic sect and as such it played a civic role: as a symbol of royal or local power depending on who was its patron; investing in commerce and credit; as an employer; and if it became a centre of pilgrimage it would also acquire a market. Those who managed temple property provided a nucleus for agrarian or urban corporations. Where the temple invested in commerce, its priests had close associations with administrative and commercial organizations.

The act of worship had a permanent location in a temple or a shrine, a location that was strengthened when it became a place for pilgrimage. The location could include the worship of more than a single deity, although one was supreme. Flowers, fruit and grain were offered to the deity who was believed to sanctify the offering. The action was embedded in a ritual of worship – *puja* – that also encapsulated the personal tie between worshipper and deity. Worship included *vratas* or the observance of vows, fasts and other such acts seen as devotion to the deity. It was therefore different from the ritual of sacrifice performed according to Vedic rites. These were less frequent now. Vedic sacrifices no longer sufficed in claims to legitimacy. Other forms such as genealogies and patronage of temples became more immediate.

The temple, particularly the section that housed the image, was not open to every worshipper. The so-called unclean *shudra* castes and the untouchables were not permitted entry. They had their own separate cult shrines, generally in the section of the village or town that they inhabited. Their deities were either different or were variant manifestations of the deities worshipped in the temple, and this was also the case with some of the rituals and offerings. Thus libations of alcohol were excluded in the temple and the sacrifice of animals, common to the ritual of the lower castes, was less frequent in temples, although those dedicated to Kali could make concessions to such offerings. This was a matter of caste, but the survival of places of worship was also dependent on environmental factors. Despite the imprint of Sanskritic culture many communities retained their earlier places of worship, which were small and less distinctive. Such temples would tend to merge into the landscape since they were constructed of locally available material and conformed to local architecture, function and climate. This also made them more susceptible to weathering and decline.

Because the temple received offerings and donations it was also a treasury and a financial centre. The giving of gifts – *dana* – to brahmans and to the temple was an appeal to the deity through an intermediary. A temple built through royal patronage was seen as symbolizing the power and well-being of the kingdom. This was demonstrated by the characteristics which accompanied the establishment of a state – the titles of the king accompanied by a genealogy and often the writing of a *vamshavali,* the building of a capital with a royal temple constructed according to the norms of the *shilpa-shastras,* and agricultural and commercial expansion. As an institution with managerial functions the reach of the temple included extensive areas surrounding it.

The temple as an institution not only employed a large hierarchy of priests and others with administrative skills, but also those who would have provided religious discourses and the recitation of religious texts. Thus, there were recitations by professional narrators, often with a commentary, of the *Puranas,* the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata,* and other compositions now regarded as sacred. The adoration of the deity through music and dance meant that *devadasis* were also maintained. Occasions for pilgrimages were linked to festivals and the larger the number of such occasions the better, for pilgrims brought devotion and donations. At some temples, such as Somanatha, the pilgrims paid a pilgrim tax that provided a healthy income for the local raja, provided it had not already been looted from the pilgrim by other rajas, which was a common complaint.

Puranic Hinduism required a location where the deity could be established permanently in an appropriate building for worship. Even though the worship was devotional and awaited the grace of the deity, an icon could be the focus for devotion and the giving of gifts. An icon was not necessary for worship, but gradually became common. The centrality of the icon further distanced Puranic Hinduism from the Vedic religion. An object of worship, even aniconic and with no recognizable form, could be converted into a deity and sometimes at a later stage replaced by an anthropomorphic deity with a human form. If required, additions were made to this form in the shape of extra physical

features – such as arms, generally symbolizing the attributes of the deity. The ritual was performed by brahmans who had conceded the importance of the object of worship and the rites connected with this, or by priests from the earlier form of the cult who were now recruited to the brahman fold. The *Puranas* and the *Agamas,* relating to both Shaiva and Vaishnava worship, were texts recording the mythology that were intended to explain the rites in the worship of a deity. The *Mahatmyas* and the *Sthala-puranas* narrated the supposed history, legends and myths of the place of worship, with further explanations for rituals and observances. Not every cult deity was converted in this manner. The choice had much to do with popular support, political clout and the advantages of incorporating the cult into mainstream worship.

Temples were also a signal of the upward social mobility of the patrons who financed the building. Vastupala and Tejapala, from a merchant family, had sufficient wealth to build temples at Mt Abu where they created a significant Jaina centre. This was on the scale of royal patronage. Their inscriptions at the site not only laud their own families but also indicate the status and power of their community of merchants. A signal of a different kind came from the Chandella dynasty. These kings narrated a complex origin myth linked to the lunar line in their inscriptions but their origin was also associated with the Gond tribes of central India. It is said that they originally worshipped a rock, Maniya Deo, installed in their earliest capital at Mahoba. Through the processes of acquiring Rajput status and subscribing to Sanskritic culture, which involved devotion to Puranic deities, they expressed this change by building the temples at Khajuraho which were distinctly different from the shrine of Maniya Deo. This illustrates a shift from a local cult to the patronage of a Puranic sect. Tribal priests could accompany such a transfer and eventually become priests of the Puranic sect with which the icon was associated. If the icon were linked to a Puranic deity this would assert the upper-caste status of the patron. This is also evident in the mutation of what appears to be a local cult associated with Vishnu-Jagannath in Orissa in the temple at Puri. When, in the thirteenth century, the king claimed to be the deputy of the god, the political dimensions of incorporating the territory where the god was worshipped were intermeshed with the requirements of belief and ritual. Such mutations have many layers of growth. The territory covered by the cult and its sacred geography became part of the circuit of pilgrimage. When such a cult acquired royal patronage, then the territory and the cult in turn became a base of support for its royal patron. The cult provided a hinterland of worshippers and a network of links, parallel in some ways to the network of grants of land. A comparable pattern can be seen in the western Deccan, with the worship of Vithoba as a manifestation of Vishnu at Pandharpur.

In eastern India Buddhist monastic complexes, some built under the patronage of the Palas, constituted monumental religious architecture. The more impressive of these were the monasteries at Mainamati and Vikramashila, and the magnificent Somapuri monastery at Paharpur. Structures at the Buddhist site of Ratnagiri in Orissa were renovated in the eleventh century and it became a centre for Tantric Buddhism. The monasteries at Nalanda were enlarged. This patronage may have been encouraged by the Buddhist association with the mercantile community active in south-east Asia, and in the increasingly profitable trade with Tibet.

These monumental structures of eastern and southern India already had parallels in some parts of south-east Asia, such as Cambodia and Java. The *stupas* at Pagan were closer in style to the south Asian ones but their clustering created a relatively different form. The linguistic linking of Sanskrit with Javanese can also be seen in Old Javanese, but here again, despite the closeness of Sanskrit, the assertion of a Javanese presence is unmistakable. The many versions of the story of Rama in south-east Asia, with local narrative traditions enveloping the kernel of the original story and creating a

variety of renderings, were evocative of plural cultural strands. The links continued with areas of the subcontinent that had a strong interest in south-east Asian trade, such as Gujarat, the Coromandel coast and eastern India.

Forms associated with Islamic architecture, the most obvious of which were the true arch and the dome, would have been innovations. Early attempts at such buildings would have been in the north-west and probably also in the Arab settlements along the west coast. This is evident from the reference to the mosque at Cambay destroyed by the Paramara king and the Shia'h mosque at Mansura desecrated by Mahmud. The establishing of the Sultanate was marked at Delhi and at Ajmer by converting the existing temple into a mosque, doubtless to proclaim victory but also to appropriate sacred space.

Religions Mutations

Buddhism was a proselytizing religion and Buddhist monks and teachers had taken it to various parts of Asia. It was therefore not unexpected that monks from distant places in Asia came to Buddhist monasteries in India, attracted by the libraries of manuscripts and the potentialities of discourse. These monks linked the areas from where they came or from where they were trained to other centres of Buddhism. Atisha, for example, contributed to the evolution of Tibetan Buddhism in the eleventh century although he was from eastern India and, according to tradition, was trained in Suvarnadvipa, possibly Java. Buddhist monasteries had provided a support to the state, but the ideology of Puranic Hinduism gradually replaced the Buddhists. The Puranic ideology was now honed to efficiency in its additional role of converting groups into caste society and religious sects, necessary to the establishing of states in areas that hitherto had none. Hostility between the Buddhists and some sects of Shaivas grew from philosophical and religious contestation, as well as competition for patronage. There was a questioning of the Shramanic emphasis on renunciation, which was seen as too unrealistic for the ordinary person. Monkhood was sometimes caricatured as an idle and comfortable life, made possible by the work of others. Brahmans, familiar with migrating to distant parts of the subcontinent, had taken their promises of ritual status to lands still further away. The Indian connections in south-east Asia were not only of value in commercial matters, but also in the forging of cultural norms. These connections were also of assistance to the Arabs, enabling them eventually to capture much of the trade when they established trading settlements in south-east Asia. In Java and the Malay peninsula these settlements evolved into an impressive cultural interweaving of the local culture with beliefs and practices from India and west Asia.

By the end of this period, the Vaishnava, Shaiva and the Shakta-Tantric sects were dominant in northern India. Jainism was restricted to the west and Buddhism, which had been largely confined to the east, was declining. An attempt was made to assimilate the Buddha into the Vaishnava pantheon as an incarnation of Vishnu but this did not attract enthusiasm. The worship of the Buddha by non-Buddhists remained largely formal and deferential. The militaristic ethos of the Rajputs was incompatible with the emphasis on non-violence of the Shramanic religions, even though some Jainas distinguished themselves on the battlefield. Among those involved with Puranic Hinduism, the idea of non-violence was now closer to the teachings of a few *bhakti* sects who opposed violence for reasons largely similar to those of Mahavira and the Buddha.

Many of the changes introduced into Hinduism at this time resulted from a compromise between

orthodox belief and a popular demand for a more personal religion. Image worship increased substantially and a multitude of new forms took shape, many basically anthropomorphic. Ritual was not confined to elaborate sacrifices, and was more commonly individual worship, even if the worship was channelled through a temple or a shrine. This reflects new patterns of thought, aspirations and connections, as well as a different historical situation. The mythologies associated with the gods had a wide reach through versions in the regional languages and oral recitation. These included narratives that grew out of cults incorporated into Puranic Hinduism, which became part of the texts of regional languages when they acquired a literary form. The multiple *Upapuranas* gave even greater flexibility to incorporating local custom into ritual and belief. The theory that deities could be incarnated in human form was used as a method of incorporation. Such incarnations also served a political purpose and helped in legitimizing those kings who claimed to be incarnations of deity.

The perception of deities became more complex. Krishna, for example, regarded as an incarnation of Vishnu, was viewed as a pastoral deity, the herdsman who spent his hours with the milkmaids and particularly with his beloved Radha. This became the source of intense devotional worship, celebrated in poetry from which the erotic was not always absent. But was he also the philosopher of the *Bhagavadgita,* carrying the universe, carrying time, defending virtue against evil and reiterating the codes of caste and behaviour? The name Krishna literally means 'dark' and he has been associated with the Tamil Mayon, 'the black one', also a herder of cattle. A number of traditions are reflected in the various manifestations of Vishnu, which may be one of the reasons for his popularity. However, the connection between the topography of modern Vrindavan near Mathura and the life of Krishna was introduced by sects of a later period, such as the followers of Chaitanya from eastern India. Similarly, the link between the topography of present-day Ayodhya and the life of Rama was referred to in the *Ayodhya Mahatmya* of the mid-second millennium AD and was established through the activities of the Ramanandin sect, drawing on the possible identity of Ayodhya with Saketa.

Minor sects and cults were not rejected out of hand by orthodoxy. Some were tolerated, while others were encouraged by priests who performed the ritual both as worship and livelihood. Local priests tended to be sympathetic to popular religion. The worship of the Sun-god Surya rose in popularity and received royal patronage in the form of magnificent temples, particularly in northern and western India – not to mention the vast complex at Konarak in Orissa. The popularity of Surya might have been due to what is believed to have been the migration into India of the Magha or Shakadvipi brahmans from across the north-western borders, perhaps reinforced by the presence of Zoroastrians in western India. But elsewhere it was a continuation of the earlier worship of the Sun. Existing deities took on fresh significance and new gods emerged. Ganesh or Ganapati, the elephant-headed god, rose further in status. In origin perhaps a totem god, he had been given a respectable parentage and described as the son of Shiva and his consort, Parvati. There was a more visible worship of the goddesses, often associated with the fertility cult.

Puranic Hinduism, apart from the assimilation of innumerable cults and deities, also shaped strong sectarian tendencies focusing on particular schools of thought. These two trends seem to be contradictory, but the contradiction is reconciled by the attempted formal organization of belief systems and philosophies through the sects. In common with the Shramanic religions, these teachings were closely related to the historical founders of sects, such as Shankaracharya, Ramanuja, Madhva and Basavanna, and sometimes to a believed succession of teachers, suggesting historicity. The history and evolution of the sect centred on the interpretations of what was said by the founders, a common occurrence in sectarian religions. Some of the sectarian teaching was intended to undermine the Shramanic sects, but at the same time it appears there were attempts to imitate them in various

ways. The strength of the sect was dependent on patronage, particularly on the donation of property that allowed it to build an institutional base. This transformation of aspects of Puranic Hinduism into sectarian religions would also have contributed to the decline of the earlier sectarian religions – Buddhism and Jainism.

Sectarianism would have encouraged rivalry and hostility between sects. This was sometimes expressed by more than one sect claiming the same king as patron. For instance, there are contradictions between Shaiva and Jaina sources regarding whether Kumarapala, the Chaulukya King who had been a Shaiva, was actually converted to Jainism. A number of Jaina temples were attributed to his patronage; according to Jaina sources these were destroyed by his successor Ajayapala, who is described as hostile to the Jainas. Such hostilities did not, however, take on the dimensions of a holy war.

The term *pasamda* that referred to any kind of sect in the Ashokan edicts now came to mean 'heretic', and eventually 'fraud'. Thus the brahmans on occasion refer to the Buddhists and Jainas as heretics and the latter sometimes use the same word for the former, in both cases infused with invective. The sparring could be amusing, as in the courtly dramas of the *Mattavilsa-prahasana* or the *Prabodha-chandrodaya,* but on other occasions it was ruthless.

Sects with teachers and poets propagating *bhakti* began to find expression in regions north of where they had originated. They were to become a dynamic force in north India from the fourteenth century, playing much the same catalytic role as they had done in the south. This was not a proselytizing movement, but an expression of similar thoughts arising out of not dissimilar conditions. It could draw on a variety of earlier religious expression: the Shramanic sects, Vaishnava and Shaiva worship, as well as the esoteric and popular levels of the Shakta tradition. But the *bhakti* movement veered more towards an appeal to deity without the trappings of elaborate ritual. Some among them were almost on the edge of being puritanical protest.

Other popular cults and sects sometimes demonstrated their protest in a more startling manner, such as the rites of the Shaiva Kalamukhas and Kapalikas or the Kaulas, or certain kinds of Tantric rituals that often were a deliberate reversal of upper-caste practice. Some of their rituals, however, were rooted in those sections of society that had hardly known the Hinduism formulated by the brahmans, and were therefore not protesting but worshipping in their own ways. The adjustment to this on the pan of the orthodox was either to exclude such groups from caste status or else, if they carried social support and patronage, to make them respectable by slowly transforming them.

Tantrism, so-called after its compositions, the *Tantras,* influenced the practices of virtually every older religion, apart from upholding a belief and practice contrary to Vedic Brahmanism. Although originating earlier, it became widely practised from about the eighth century when it gradually surfaced throughout the subcontinent. In the east it had close ties with Tibetan religious expression. Some of the ritual was similar, together with the belief in the efficacy of *mantras* (prayers and mystical formulae), *mudras* (hand gestures) and *mandalas* (magical diagrams representing the cosmos). It was open to all castes and included women in the rituals, which identified it with non-orthodox sentiment. Goddesses were accorded great veneration, as is evident from the collection of legends in the *Devi-mahatmya.* The Devi, or the goddess, had an individuality of her own and was worshipped for this rather than merely as a consort of a god. The *sapta-matrikas,* or seven mothers, were more closely associated with male counterparts. Since goddesses could be created as and when occasion required it, there are large numbers of them.

The commanding position accorded to goddesses was sometimes the surfacing of a substratum

religion, doubtless associated with the rise of subaltern groups who could with their new status elevate the worship of the goddess. The symbols associated with the worship of a Devi often derived from forms of fertility worship, which is not unexpected. At a conceptual level, but not in terms of introducing change into social codes, the worship of the goddess challenged patriarchy. Women were permitted to establish their own *ashramas,* to act as priestesses and to teach. This carried forward, as it were, some of the activities of the Buddhist or Jaina nuns and some of the sentiments of the women poets from the early *bhakti* tradition. Tantrism was also linked with the Shakta-Shakti cult that regarded female creative energy – *shakti* – as essential to any action.

Those desirous of joining a Tantric sect had to be initiated by a guru. Tantric ritual involved the ritual partaking of the five Ms – *madya,* alcohol, *matsya,* fish, *mamsa,* flesh, *mudra,* gestures, and *maithuna,* coition. In the final state of purification everything and everyone was equal. The ritual being what it was, secret meetings became necessary, especially when some other sects denounced its practices as being depraved. Gradually there was a bifurcation into the Left-Hand path that experimented with these practices, and the Right-Hand path that restricted itself to yoga and *bhakti.* Although Tantrism has often been condemned for its more extreme activities, it seems also to have been a vehicle for opposition to the brahmanical ordering of society. Elements of social radicalism in such movements become visible when the movement is viewed in the context of the broader social norms.

Vajrayana Buddhism had incorporated Tantric ideas and the Taras or saviouresses, spouses of the male bodhisattvas, received veneration similar to that of Shakti. Among the many magical formulae which Vajrayana Buddhism has popularized is the oft-repeated Tibetan prayer, *om mane padme hun*/behold the jewel is in the lotus, which is the symbolic representation of divine coitus. Buddhism had undergone many changes with the evolving of new sects and practices, but the incorporation of Tantric ideas made it less distinctive as a religion.

In western India where the Jainas grew in strength, their patrons were largely from the trading community, although royal patronage, especially from the Chaulukyas, provided them with an even more established position. Although small in numbers, they were prosperous and visible. Since they were forbidden agriculture as a profession for fear of injuring small creatures of the soil (although they accepted the occasional grant of land), their forte was commerce and their profits enabled them to become patrons of culture and learning. A further stabilizing factor was that since they were literate, financially astute and proficient in management they often found high office at royal courts. In spite of the destruction of Jaina temples by kings, both Hindu and Muslim, Jainism remained resilient.

Buddhism, however, was eventually to lose the status of even a minor religion. Its decline was gradual, but towards the thirteenth century became rapid. Its association with Tantric cults was confusing since much of its original ethical teaching, which had been its initial strength, was being submerged in the new ritual. The support of the Pala kings sustained Buddhism in eastern India and they doubtless used the religion as an avenue of control over trade, and in their diplomatic relations with Tibet and south-east Asia. Royal patronage kept it going in some other areas for brief periods. But the Buddhists did not always succeed in winning royal patronage. Confrontations with the growing strength of Puranic Hinduism, and its ability to incorporate new castes, was a fresh challenge to Buddhism.

The new landholders were either brahmans or patrons of the brahmans and of Puranic Hinduism. Buddhism and Jainism ceased to play a major role in the transformation of the polity except in limited areas. Where chiefs were being converted to landholders and other members of the clan to peasants, the introduction of caste was a useful mechanism of control over the new *kshatriyas* and *shudras.*

The use of caste in this process came more easily to Puranic Hinduism than to the Shramanic sects. The new *kshatriyas* would not have been attracted to Buddhism. Unlike the Puranic texts authored by brahmans, Buddhist and Jaina texts had no extensive genealogies of the kind on to which the new *kshatriyas* could latch themselves and acquire status. Buddhist myths explaining the origin of government related it to a contract between an elected ruler and the people and were divorced from any divine sanction. The Buddhist *chakkavatti* with the symbol of the wheel of law was a distant concept from the models of conquest held up to the *kshatriyas* and Rajputs. Patronage therefore went to the ideology of Puranic Hinduism.

The Buddhist Sangha was best established in an area that had an existing, sedentary agricultural society, with a capacity to maintain the institutions, or where there was sufficient commercial activity for the community to maintain monastic centres. Even when Buddhist monasteries were given grants of revenue or land, these were more frequently villages or land already under cultivation. Monks were not supposed to pioneer agricultural change, although they did work as supervisors in various capacities relating to the income and the better functioning of the Sangha. Ideally, monks were expected to play the passive role of being recipients of alms and donations. This could have distanced, if not alienated, Buddhism from a society changing its systems. This was a contrast to brahman grantees where brahmans could be settlers and pioneers, could profitably restructure the landscape to agrarian requirements and, above all, could found dynasties.

The major successes of Buddhism, apart from periods when they received royal patronage, were in areas of existing agrarian societies that were also developing into centres of exchange or in areas where commerce was the primary activity. The thrust of trade carried it to distant places that in turn made it attractive to those who wished to profit by this trade. This is not to deny that in all periods there were conversions to Buddhism from religious conviction. But the decline of Buddhism virtually everywhere except in eastern India requires a wider explanation than just a change in the religion. Nor was the coming of Islam primarily responsible for Buddhist decline, despite the thirteenth-century Turkish attack on Nalanda. By the eighth century AD Buddhism was more prevalent in north-western India and eastern India than elsewhere. The conversion of these areas to Islam was a gradual process. The decline of Buddhism in the Ganges heartland and the peninsula occurred before the Turkish conquest.

The coming of the Arabs, Turks and Afghans brought a new religion to India that found roots in various ways in many communities. Islam was unable to create a homogeneous, monolithic community, and in this it was conditioned by the same segmentation that earlier religions in India had experienced. Apart from the Muslim theologians, an early impact of Islam was the arrival of Muslim mystics from Persia, distinct from and sometimes disapproved of by Muslim theologians. The Sufis first settled in Sind and the Punjab, from where their teaching travelled to Gujarat, the Deccan and Bengal. The amalgamation of Indian and Islamic mysticism evolved into new schools of Sufism different from those in Persia. Sufi ideas attracted an interest in India, particularly among those inclined to mystic teachings and asceticism, since much of the symbolism was similar. Their dialogue with the *bhakti* movement was to the advantage of both, as they questioned orthodoxy in their explorations of the meaning of religion and of the human condition. They attracted large followings which gave them a political potential that converted their *khanqahs* or hospices into centres of political discussion as well.

The period from the ninth century in the subcontinent, far from being ‘dark’, was a period of

illumination as it was germane to many later institutions. The states that emerged, together with the new political economies, were characterized by a hierarchy of grants of land and accompanying landholders that set the pattern for a few centuries. At the same time, Indian traders were active in the Indian Ocean and overland through central Asia to more distant markets than in the past. They were again significant participants in Asian trade. Together with the emergence of new *jatis,* there was also a reshuffling of castes, often ancestral to those that were registered in subsequent centuries. Regional linguistic roots of this period were seminal to the languages now used in various regions of India. Religious cults and sects, dominating the lives of rural and urban populations at a popular level today, link themselves to the religious expression of this time. Regional cultures were finding their shape within these changes. The greater range and amount of historical evidence available from this period compared with earlier ones has allowed the reconstruction of a more complete picture.

The most challenging and stimulating aspect of the history of this period is the interface between the emergence of regional cultures and the firming up of the contours of sub-continental cultures. The interplay of assertion and accommodation that this required led to significant new dimensions in Indian history.