

SRIMAAN COACHING CENTRE-TRICHY- UG-TRB: HISTORY

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UNIT-I- STUDY MATERIAL-TO CONTACT:8072230063.

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UG-TRB

HISTORY

UNIT-I- HISTORY OF INDIA FROM PRE – HISTORIC PERIOD TO 1206 A.D.

UG-TRB MATERIALS

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AVAILABLE.**

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CHEMISTRY/COMMERCE (T/M & E/M)/BOTANY (T/M & E/M)/ ZOOLOGY
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PGTRB-COMPUTER INSTRUCTOR GRADE-I -TO CONTACT -8072230063.**

SRIMAAN COACHING CENTRE-TRICHY.**TO CONTACT:8072230063.****SRIMAAN****UG-TRB: HISTORY****History of India from Pre – Historic Period to 1206 A.D.****UNIT-I****SRIMAAN****UNIT-I-HISTORY OF INDIA FROM PRE-HISTORIC PERIOD TO 1206 A.D :****INTRODUCTION TO ANCIENT INDIA:**

Information about the past is based on several sources, each contributing a part in our attempt to visualize the complete picture. There are two primary types of source material for studying ancient Indian history, namely literary and archaeological.

For a comprehensive understanding of historical events, it is essential to analyse both literary and archaeological sources, wherever possible. These sources will help you analyse various facets of the Indus Valley Civilization. It is also called the Harappan civilization as Harappa was the first site to be excavated. The sources of evidence about this civilization are the artefacts, pottery, tools, ornaments and ruins of towns. Some tablets and seals of this civilization have certain symbols engraved on them. However, these symbols have not been deciphered till now.

Therefore, the main evidences of this civilization are the archaeological excavations. The unit will begin with a discussion on the sources of ancient Indian history. It will then turn to the Vedic period..

Vedic culture occupies the most prominent place in Indian history. Its impact on modern India is widely prevalent. The religion, philosophy and social customs of the Hindus who constitute a majority of India have their principal source in Vedic culture. The contribution of Vedic culture to human progress has far exceeded that of the Indus Valley culture and this factor alone is sufficient to justify its superiority. The authors of this culture were the Indo-Aryans, an anglicized version of the original word Aryan.

The Aryans settled down in tribes, led a semi-nomadic life and fought among themselves and with other non-Aryan tribes for cows, sheep and green pastures.

SOURCES OF ANCIENT INDIAN HISTORY

There are many 'sources' through which we come to know about our past. They can be divided into:

- Archaeological evidence
- Literary evidence

Archaeological Evidence

Archaeologists and historians study the remains of past civilizations. Archaeology is the study of the remains of our past like monuments, tools, pottery, coins, weapons, paintings and other artefacts. Thus, archaeology provides us direct evidence from the past, which serves as clues to reconstruct the past.

Most of our information about pre-historic man, the Indus Valley people and other ancient civilizations is based upon archaeological findings. Archaeological findings usually have the following forms:

- Inscriptions
- Coins
- Monuments
- Artefacts

Inscriptions

In ancient times, rulers engraved important messages for people on rocks, pillars, stone walls, clay tablets and copper plates. These writings are known as inscriptions. The study of inscriptions is called epigraphy. A study of these inscriptions throws light upon the language of the people, names of the rulers, the years they ruled, their military achievements, the religious and social conditions of the people and many other details. For example, the edicts of Ashoka are a collection of 33 inscriptions on the Pillars of the Emperor Ashoka of the Mauryan dynasty (269 BC to 231BC). An edict was a formal announcement of the ruler to inform the public. The Ashokan edicts on pillars give us information about the extent of his empire.

Coins:

The study of coins is called numismatics. Coins are made of metals like gold, silver and copper and are therefore not easily destroyed. They have the names and images of rulers stamped upon them. They give information such as the date of accession and death of the ruler. For example, Roman coins discovered in India gives us an idea about the existence of contacts with the Roman empire. The principal source of information of the Bactarian; Indo-Greeks and Indo-Parthian dynasty is numismatics.

The coins of these dynasties throw light on the improvement in the coin artistry of India. Portraits and figures, Hellenistic art and dates on the coins of the western satraps of Saurashtra are remarkable sources for reconstructing the history of this period. The history of the Satavahanas is ascertained from the Jogalthambi hoard of coins. The circulation of coins in gold and silver during the Gupta empire provides a fair idea of the economic condition during the rule of the Guptas.

Monuments

Ancient buildings like temples, palaces and forts are known as monuments. They give us information about the life and times of the people. For example, the carvings on the panels of Qutub Minar tell us about the reign of the early Delhi Sultans, and the carved panels on the walls and railings of the Sanchi Stupa tell stories from the life of the Buddha.

Artefacts

An artefact is something made or given shape by man, such as a tool or a work of art, specially an object of archaeological interest. The ancient artefacts help historians form a picture of cultural and religious life of ancient societies. For example, the artefacts of Harappan civilization with motifs relating to asceticism and fertility rites suggest that these concepts entered Hinduism from the earlier civilization. The stone tools, pottery, buttons, jewellery and clothing found at various sites provide information about the life of early man.

Literary Evidence

It took humans a long time to develop the art of writing. Before paper was invented, people wrote on palm leaves and the bark of birch trees. These written records which include both religious and secular literature, are called manuscripts.

The Vedas, the oldest recorded text of the Aryans, and the Buddhist texts are written sources, which tell us about the past. But since these scripts are associated with rituals or religious practices of the past, these are called religious sources. Other examples are the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Gita* and the *Puranas*. However, there could be books written in the past, e.g., accounts of foreign travellers who came to India and wrote about Indian society. The literature not connected with the religion of the times is called 'secular'. For example, the *Arthashastra*, which was written by Kantilya. The book deals with legal issues and state craft.

INDUS VALLEY CIVILIZATION

Up to 1920, nothing was known about the Indus Valley Civilization. Construction workers at a railway track near Harappa were using the bricks from a nearby ruin, when it was realized that the bricks probably belonged to a very old civilization.

The railway authorities informed the Archaeological Survey of India. In 1921, two archaeologists, Dayaram Sahani and Rakhaladas Bannerjee carried out excavations at Mohenjodaro in Sind and at Harappa, which revealed that a very advanced civilization far older and superior to the European had flourished in India. This generated great enthusiasm, not only in India but in other countries as well. Further excavations at Lothal, Ropar and Kalibangan revealed that the Indus Valley Civilization flourished beyond the River Indus. The area that it covered at that time was approximately 1.3 million square kilometres.

It is true that all the civilizations of the world have originated and developed in the valleys of rivers. A common feature of all civilizations is the river, which provided fertile soil for the civilizations to develop in its valley. When rivers flooded the banks, the water left deposits of fine silt, which made it possible for farmers to produce abundant crops. Floodwater was used to irrigate fields in the dry season. Rivers provided humans with additional source of food in the form of fish. Rivers also served as waterways for the transport of people and goods from one place to another. The Sumerian, Babylonian and Asirian civilizations developed on the banks of Dajla-Farat, the Egyptian civilization on the banks of the river Nile and the Harappan civilization on the banks of the Indus.

The Indus Valley Civilization was an ancient civilization that had disappeared hundreds of years ago leaving its ruins. Most of the remains of the Indus Valley Civilization have been found in the valley of river Indus, from where the civilization derives its name. The city of Mohenjodaro was 640 km away from Harappa. The term 'Mohenjodaro' means 'the mound of the dead, which was a local name of a high mountain located on the fields of Larkana. In the context of the Indus Valley Civilization, author and historian Ramashankar Tripathi states, 'Till so far our way has been full of obstacles but now we can see the horizons of the Indian Civilization.' It has been established by the remains of the Indus Valley Civilization that hundreds of years before the Aryans there was a pre-established civilization in India.

GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES, SOURCES:

Geographical Expansion of the Indus Valley Civilization

According to the Australian archaeologist and Bhilologist Vere Gordon Childe 'The geographical area of the Indus Civilization was much more expanded than the ancient Mesopotamian, Egyptian and Persian Civilizations.'

The remains of the expansion of this Civilization have been found in North India from Ropar of Ambala district to Rangpur district in Kathiawad; from Ahmednagar district in Maharashtra to Ghazipur, Varanasi, Buxar and Patna in the east. This proves that the Harappan Civilization was spread across Punjab and Sindh, in the valleys of north-western frontiers mainly Kathiawad, Rajasthan and Doab. The following are the chief regions of the Indus Valley Civilization:

1. **Baluchistan:** This region was important from the perspective of trade and commerce. The main places that were extremely important include Sukagendor (at the origin of river Dashak), Sotakakoh (at the beginning of Shadi Kaur) and Balakot (in the east of Son Miyani at the origin of river Vindar).
2. **North-Western Border:** Significant artefacts have been discovered from this area in the Gommal valley.
3. **Sindhu:** Several remains have been found in the Sindhu region but many sites have been destroyed on the banks of this river. Several remains have been found at the sites of Mohenjodaro, Chanhudaro, Judeirjo-daro, Amri.
4. **Western Punjab:** This area has the most important Harappan site which is located on river Ravi.
5. **Eastern Punjab:** An important site of this area is Ropar. In recent excavations remains have been found in Sanghol.
6. **Haryana:** In Hisar and Banwali important remains of the Indus Civilization have been found.
7. **Doab of Ganga and Yamuna:** The remains of Indus Valley Civilization are spread across from Meerut to Aalamgir. Recently remains have also been found at Hulas in Saharanpur.
8. **Gujarat:** There are several Indus Valley Civilization sites at the peninsula of Kutch and Kathiawad and the mainlands of Gujarat. Important sites at these peninsula are Sutkotada and Lothal, respectively.
9. **Other sites:** Important remains have also been found at the sites of Bahawalpur, Jammu and Northern Afghanistan..

CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF INDUS VALLEY CIVILIZATION

The cities belonging to Indus Valley Civilization were divided into a lower town area and the citadel. Historians believe that there was some kind of difference between people who lived in the lower town area and those who lived near the citadel. Occupational groups lived in the lower town area and the nobility comprising the king and his nobles lived in the citadel. Nevertheless, there must have been some controlling authority, otherwise the uniformity of the town plan, standardization of weights and measures, collection of taxes and grains would have been impossible. One would probably get a better idea about the social and political life of the Indus Valley Civilization once the script is deciphered..

Dress and Ornaments

The spindles found in the excavations reveal that the Indus Valley people knew the art of spinning and weaving. They were perhaps the first people to cultivate cotton to make clothes. Besides cotton, they wore woollen clothes. Men wore a piece of cloth round their waists and a shawl over their shoulders, while women wore a skirt and do not seem to have worn blouses. Archaeologists have unearthed an idol of a man covered with a shawl (see Figure 1.2). The shawl was tied under the right arm and went across the left shoulder, which left the right hand free. A cloth similar to the *dhoti* worn in rural India was worn at the bottom.

The discovery of needles at the excavation site points towards the fact that the people of this civilization were familiar with sewing. Both men and women wore ornaments. These were made of metal, bone, shell and beads. The Indus people loved ornaments. The chief ornaments worn by women included necklaces, armlets, bangles, earrings, nose-rings, rings and waistlets.

The ornaments of rich people were made of gold, silver and precious stones whereas the ornaments of poor people were made of bones, copper and baked clay. Sir John Hubert Marshall who was the Director General of Archaeology in India stated, 'seeing the shine and design of gold ornaments it seems that they are brought from an ornament shop of Bond Street (London) and not from a pre-historical house of five thousand years ago.'

Farming and Cattle Rearing

Agriculture was the chief occupation of the people of the Indus valley. The climate and seasons were conducive for farming and annual flooding of the rivers made the land fertile. This facilitated the growth of crops. The chief crops that were grown were wheat, barley, cotton, maize and millet. They also grew fruits and vegetables. Different methods of irrigation were in use. Channels and embankments were also built to control the flow of water into the fields. Ploughs and sickles were commonly used agricultural tools.

According to Dr Basham, the people did not know how to cultivate rice but the remains of rice at Lothal and Rangpur have proved this conception wrong. Similarly Dr Lal has said that the cultivation of cotton was the specialty of Indus people. Grinding machines of wheat, barley and crushing machines and storehouses reflect their proficiency in agriculture. Adequate irrigation facilities were developed for agriculture.

Domestication of animals

Agriculture being the chief occupation the Indus people used to domesticate buffaloes, cows, sheep, pigs, dogs, oxen, etc. The people also earned their living by domestication of animals, which were also helpful in agriculture.

Pottery and Trade

Next to agriculture, pottery seems to have been the most popular industry of the people. They were skilled in the use of the potter's wheel. Reddish-brown clay was baked, glazed and decorated with various designs in black. Some broken bits of pottery found in the excavation sites have geometric designs and animal motifs. They speak of the excellent craftsmanship and artistic skills of the Harappan people.

Trade, both by land and by sea, thrived in the Harappan society. A number of seals of Indus origin have been found at various sites in Mesopotamia (Sumer). This indicates that trade flourished between the two civilizations. In order to measure articles, they used a stick with markings on it. They also used various kinds of weights and measures. Figure 1.4 shows samples of the ornaments, pottery and seals prevalent during the Indus Valley Civilization.

More than 2000 seals have been found at various sites. The seals were made of terracotta and steatite, a soft stone. Most of the seals are rectangular but some are circular in shape. Some of them have a knob at the back, which contains a hole. It is believed that different guilds or individual merchants and traders used these seals for stamping their consignments. They have a carved picture with some inscription on the other side. These seals throw light on the religion, customs and economic activities of the society. The animal shown in the seal may be a sacred bull. Small-scale industries were also chief sources of living.

Carpenters, potters, weavers, goldsmiths, connoisseurs, sculptors, etc., constitute the different professions of the time. Potters made a good living by making earthen toys. The Indus Valley Civilization's economy appears to have depended significantly on trade, which was facilitated by major advances in transport by bullock-driven carts as well as boats. Most of these boats were probably small and had flat-bottoms, perhaps driven by sail, similar to those one can see on the Indus River today. Archaeologists have discovered a big canal and docking facility at the coastal city of Lothal. The artefacts of this civilization found at the sites of other ancient civilizations suggest trade links with portions of Afghanistan, the coastal regions of Persia, Northern and Central India, and Mesopotamia.

Social Life in Indus Civilization

On the basis of things found during excavation, it can be said that social conditions during the Indus Valley civilization were excellent. The people of this civilization were resourceful and affluent. The following are certain characteristics of the people belonging to the Indus Valley Civilization:

1. Social organization:

The social organization of the people was divided chiefly into four sections. The first section consisted of the intellectuals, brahmins, astrologers and doctors. The second section included warriors or soldiers. Industrialists, traders, sculptors and artists belonged to the third section. The fourth section comprised labourers, farmers, servants, etc. The society was matriarchal, and the people of this civilization led a comfortable and prosperous life.

2. Food:

The chief food items included wheat, barley, meat, rice, peas, milk, vegetables and fruits. People were vegetarian as well as non-vegetarian.

3. Cosmetics:

Both men and women had great interest in cosmetics. Women used to apply lipstick, perfumes, soot, powder, etc., and made different kinds of buns and plaits. Men preferred to keep their hair long and were clean shaven. Combs and dressing boxes were made of elephant's tusk and brass. The amount of goods and services common man used here seem to be better than the other places of the contemporary civilized world.

4. Sources of entertainment:

This civilization had developed several sources of entertainment. Chess was the favourite game of its citizens. Discovery of rattles, whistles, sound-creating elephant and clay toys points towards the presence of several varieties of toys. Hunting, cock fighting and music were the chief sources of entertainment. The citizens took special care in the physical development and entertainment of their children.

5. Scientific knowledge:

The citizens used a script, which was primarily pictorial. Unfortunately, it has not been deciphered. Stone weights were usually of hexagonal shape but the heavier ones were spherical and sharp. After examining the authenticity of weights and measures, it can be concluded that the citizens were familiar with algebra, the decimal system and geometry.

6. Medicine:

Indus people had a knowledge of medicinal plants and they used natural medicinal plants for treating human diseases. The evidences of surgery have also been found.

7. Tools of household:

Several earthen pots, knives, chisels, axes, pitchers, plates and glasses have been found from the excavation sites. Pots were beautified by ornamentation.

8. Last rites:

Evidences show that three techniques were used to perform the last rites for the dead. These are as follows:

- (i) **Absolute meditation:** As per this technique, the dead were buried in the earth.
- (ii) **Partial meditation:** As per this technique, the dead bodies were left in open so that they became food for birds and animals. The leftovers were then buried.
- (iii) **Cremation:** In this technique, the dead bodies were burnt and the ashes were collected in pots and buried.

Settlement Patterns and Town Planning

One of the most remarkable features of the Indus Valley Civilization was its meticulous town planning. This is especially evident in the city of Mohenjodaro.

Architecture in the Indus Valley Civilization

Evidence of town management of this time is found from the remains of Harappa, Mohenjodaro, Kalibanga, Lothal, etc. Towns were so well managed and organized that it is still a matter of wonder. The roads were very broad. The drainage system was very fine. the citadel, the Great Bath and the city of Mohenjodaro. The remains of Mohenjodaro are proof of the unparalleled art of the ancient cities, their cleanliness and construction. It is quite clear from studies that cleanliness was given a lot of importance.

The shape of the city was rectangular. The roads cut each other at right angles and divided the city into large blocks. Within each block, there was a network of narrow lanes. The drainage system was magnificent and lights were arranged on roads. It seems that the town planning was the work of efficient engineers.

Art of Making Buildings

The houses, built of burnt bricks, were constructed on both sides of the roads. There were covered drains along the roads, in which sewage from the houses flowed. Some houses had only one or two rooms while others had several, indicating different living quarters for the rich and the poor. The Indus people were excellent constructors. There are other things related to architecture and idol making, which are living examples of their efficiency.

The interiors of these buildings prove that the Indus people were definitely aesthetically inclined. Of all the remains of the Indus Civilization, the best is the Great Bath. Its walls are cemented. There are stairs on the corners. In order to keep the water safe and the foundations strong, the masons worked cleverly. The system of filling and emptying the water tank was no doubt extraordinary. There was also a system for hot water, which was probably used by the priests. The biggest proof of the durability of the bath is that it was constructed in 5000BC and is till today totally intact.

Town Planning

Excavations at Harappa and Mohenjodaro reveal that all these cities were similarly planned. They were divided into two parts—a raised area with large buildings called the citadel at the western end and a lower town. The roads ran at right angles, bringing out the grid pattern of the township. The citadel was built on a raised platform, constructed with bricks and stones, about 12 metre high and rectangular in shape, and surrounded by a huge brick wall with watchtowers.

This protected the buildings and the people from the recurrent flooding of the river Indus. The citadel was probably the seat of the government and overlooked the lower town. The ruler or the administrator lived here along with the nobles. It also had public buildings such as the granaries, the assembly or town hall and important workshops. At Mohenjodaro, which means 'mound of the dead' in Sindhi, the most remarkable feature was the Great Bath. It was situated within the citadel. It resembled a large swimming pool measuring 55 by 33 metres. A flight of steps led down to the pool at two ends. Broad corridors on four sides with a number of rooms surrounded the pool. It is the finest specimen of the engineering skill of the Harappan people.

In Harappa, archaeologists found the Great Granary located in the citadel. It measured 61.5 by 15.5 metres and consisted of two similar blocks with a wide passageway between them. Each block had six halls further divided into smaller rooms and compartments with openings for ventilation. The largest granary was found in Mohenjodaro. Close to the granaries at Harappa, circular brick platforms have been found. According to archaeologists, these were used for threshing grain. Grain was brought by boats along the rivers. The grain collected as tax was safely stored to be used in times of crises like floods or famine. The granaries prove that the land was fertile.

Town hall

A huge structure almost 70 metres long and over 23 metres wide with walls about 1.5 metres thick has been excavated in Mohenjodaro. It has twenty pillars made of burnt bricks, arranged in four rows of five each. Archaeologists believe that this great hall may have been used as an assembly hall, a prayer hall or as a hall for cultural shows.

Residential area and houses

Below the citadel was the residential area of the town where the merchants, artisans and craftsmen lived. The whole area was divided into blocks by wide roads, which formed a grid. Sun-dried and baked bricks were used for construction of houses. They were single or double storeyed. All houses had a courtyard around which there were rooms. Every house had a well and a hearth for cooking. The main entrances opened onto the lanes or side alleys instead of the main street in order to keep out dust and to ensure privacy. Within the houses, the rooms were built around a central courtyard. Some houses also had wells to supply water. Several *pukkakutchas* and big-small buildings have been found during the excavations of the remains. Houses were well ventilated. The roofs of the houses were flat and made of wood. Each house had its own bathroom with drains, which were connected to the drains in the street.

Streets

The streets and lanes ran straight from north to south and east to west, cutting each other at right angles. They were 4 to 10 metres wide. Roads were paved and suitable for movement of bullock carts. Ruins of lamp posts suggest that there were street lights. Dustbins were provided at regular intervals to keep the roads clean.

Drainage system

Another striking feature of the Indus towns was their drainage system. It was the best drainage system known to the world in ancient times. Drains were constructed on either side of the roads connected to a drain from each house. They were lined with bricks and were covered with slabs of stone, which could be removed in order to clean them. This shows that the dwellers had great concern for health and sanitation.

Religious Beliefs and Practices

No temples or shrines of the Harappan Civilization have been found. Our knowledge of the religious beliefs of the Harappans is based on the information derived from the seals and the terracotta and bronze figures. Seals engraved with the figures of animals like the humped bull, elephant and rhinoceros suggest that these animals were probably considered sacred. The image of a three-headed male God sitting cross-legged and surrounded by animals, like the lion, the rhinoceros, the buffalo and the elephant with two deer under his seat is found on many seals. There is evidence that the peepul tree and the serpent were also worshipped. The terracotta figure of a female deity has been identified as that of the Mother Goddess who represented fertility and prosperity. Some statues also bear soot marks at the base, indicating that incense was burnt as a part of the ritual. These evidences show that Harappan people worshipped images.

Like their contemporaries—the Mesopotamian and Egyptian people—the people of the Indus Valley used a script, which consisted of picture-like signs called pictographs. Each sign stood for a specific sound or idea. Examples of this script are found on the seals, most of which bear an inscription. Figure 1.6 shows the idol of the Mother Goddess.

Although the Indus Valley Civilization has declined and disappeared, its influence on Indian culture remains. The worship of the Mother Goddess in image form as the symbol of female power or *shakti* was introduced in the Later Vedic Age. The bullock carts still seen in Indian villages today are similar to the carts of the Harappan cities. The realistic carving of animals on the seals can also be seen on Ashoka's Lion Capital at Sarnath.

The religious knowledge of the people of the Indus is based on the findings of seals, inscriptions on copper plate, idols, etc. We do not have any knowledge of their philosophy due to lack of clear and readable written material. According to most historians, the Mother Goddess and Lord Shiva were the most important deities. The primary features of their religion are as follows:

- **The worship of mother goddess:** Mother Goddess or Nature Goddess was the main religious deity of the time. In one of the idols, a plant is seen coming from a woman's abdomen and, in another, a woman is sitting with legs crossed. Sacrifices were also in vogue to please the Mother Goddess.

- **The worship of Lord Shiva:**

The tradition of praying to Lord Shiva was also much prevalent. In one of the seals, a yogi is surrounded by animals and has three faces with a crown of two horns. This image is considered to be that of Lord Shiva. Historians accept Shaivism as the oldest religion after finding its origin in the Indus Valley Civilization.

- **The worship of the womb:**

Along with the worship of Shiva, the worship of the *lingas* or the womb was also in practice. Several rings have been found during excavations, which were made of shell, stone, clay, etc. Structures in the shape of female organs of reproduction have been found from the Indus area as well as in Baluchistan.

- **The worship of trees or nature:**

Coins reveal that worship of trees was also in practice. It had two forms–

- (i) worshipping trees in their natural form
- (ii) worshipping trees in the symbolic form, i.e., worshipping trees while considering them to be a place of residence of God. The Banyan tree was considered to be a sacred tree by the people of the Indus Valley Civilization.

- **The worship of animals:** Animal worship was a popular practice of the Indus people. They considered the ox, bull, snake, sheep, buffalo and lion as holy animals.

- **Other traditions:** There are evidences, which prove the worship of rivers and the sun. Idol worship was practised but historians have differences with regard to the existence of temples. Most probably prayers were offered at sites consisting of pillars and the sign of the swastik. From the discovery of an idol depicting a naked woman, it is assumed that the devadasi system was in practice.

The religious beliefs of the Indus civilization had a lot in common with modern Hinduism.

This proves that the Hindu religion is very ancient and is till today practised with little changes.

The Indus Valley Civilization is one of the oldest civilizations of the world. Its affinity to peace is till today the central character of our culture. The tradition of Indian culture which was started by the Indus Valley civilization is till today constantly flowing. Indian culture is indebted to the Indus Civilization especially in the field of religion and art.

DECLINE OF THE INDUS VALLEY CIVILIZATION

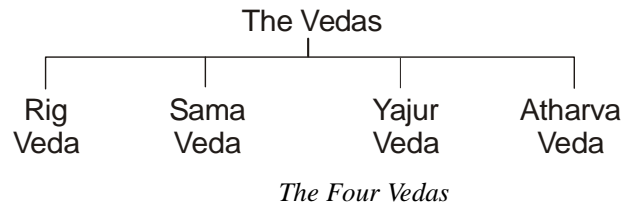
Like other unanswered questions about the Indus Valley Civilization, the question of its devastation, of how, when, and why it disappeared, is unanswered. Many historians have given their own opinion. Seven layers have been found during excavations at different sites, which inform us that the Indus Valley Civilization would have been established and devastated a number of times. The chief reason being the floods in the Indus river. The Indus time and again changed its normal course, which was a frequent cause of devastation.

Another opinion regarding the decline of the Indus Valley civilization is geographical in nature including scarcity of rainfall, change in the course of the river, drought and earthquake, which may have devastated this developed civilization. In the opinion of a few scholars, this civilization was devastated due to the attack of the Aryans. Religious books clarify that there is mention of forts and towns of non-Aryans in the Rigveda which were probably ravaged in these attacks. The use of horses and chariots made these attacks successful. However, it has not been completely clarified as to how this civilization met its end.

The Indus Valley Civilization flourished for about 1000 years with very few changes in lifestyle, customs and habits. Though this civilization began to decline by 1500BC, the exact causes of the decline are not known. However, historians have made various suggestions based on evidence, and they can be summed up as follows:

VEDIC PERIOD

The Aryans first settled in the area around the seven rivers, the Indus and her tributaries known as the *Sapta Sindhu* (seven rivers), between 1500BC and 1000BC.



They named this place as *Brahmavarta* or 'Land of the Vedic Period Gods'.

As their number increased, they began to move eastward and settled in the Ganga-Yamuna plains which now came to be called *Aryavarta* or 'Land of the Aryans'. Gradually, they occupied the whole of northern and western India up to the Vindhya mountains. Our information about the early Aryans is based on the excavations at Bhagwanpura in Haryana and three other sites in Punjab, which have revealed many pottery pieces dating from 1500BC to 1000BC.

However, our chief source of information is the Rig Veda, which was composed in 1500BC. The Vedas are the earliest literary records of the Aryans. Since, our main source of information about the Aryans is Vedic literature, this period is also called the Vedic Age. The Early Vedic period extends from 1500BC to 1000BC. There are four Vedas—Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda and Atharva Veda (Figure 1.7). The word 'veda' means knowledge. The Rig Veda is the oldest of the Vedic literature. It was composed in about 1500BC.

It consists of 1,028 slokas, which are divided into ten books. At first it was transferred orally from one generation to the other along with the other Vedas and is therefore called *Sruti* or 'that which is heard'. Many centuries later, it was written down. The Rig Veda gives us an insight into the political, social, economic and religious life of the Early Vedic period. The Early Vedic polity was structured as follows:

- **The King:** The highest officer of the nation was the king. The morality of the king was very high. Kingship was hereditary. The chief work of the king was to safeguard his nation and citizens. He had to be proficient in the management of soldiers and very just. There were many officers for assisting the king in his administrative work. He had many functionaries, including the *purohita* and *Senani*. The main job of *purohita* was to give advice to the king and practice spells and charms for success in war where as *senanis* fought for him in the war.
- **The ministers of the king:** The king appointed various ministers for running the administration efficiently. The foremost among them was the *Senani*, the supreme commander of the armed forces.
 - **Warriors:** The chief warrior in the army was the second highest officer. He was appointed by the king himself. His work was to take care of the warriors' organization and to lead the army in the absence of the king. Apart from the warriors, the *Gramani* was also an important officer. He used to be the chief of villages. Apart from these office bearers, the diplomats and secret agents also played very important roles in the Early Vedic polity.
- **Organizations and committees:** Organizations and committees were very important in that age. They were created to check the despotism of the king and to discuss the problems of the nation. There were two bodies the 'sabha' and the 'samiti'. The Atharva Veda refers to them as the two daughters of *Prajapati* or *Brahma*. Earlier the *sabha* was responsible for performing only judicial functions. However, historians came to believe that it served as a centre for social gathering. Some considered it to be the village assembly while some considered this as a committee of selected seniors or elders. The *samiti* on the other hand was probably the bigger or central assembly.
- **Judiciary:** Only assumptions can be made regarding the judicial system due to non-availability of proof. The chief justice was the king himself.

The administrative system of the Vedic period continued with little changes. In the later Vedic period several strong monarchies evolved, which developed a feeling of imperialism. Slowly, the powers of the king increased and his post became hereditary. He even increased his officials and ministers.

The Aryans first settled in the region of Punjab. This is proved by the fact that the rivers Kuruman, Kabul and other western tributaries of the Indus are mentioned in the Rig Veda. The Indo-Aryans settled in the region of the waning Indus Valley Civilization, i.e., across the river Indus. Gradually they moved eastwards along the river Ganga. The Aryans brought with them horses and chariots. They subjugated the original inhabitants of the Ganga-Yamuna doab, and reduced them to the status of slaves or *dasyus* who performed all the menial jobs.

Technological and Economic Development

Agriculture and cattle rearing were the main occupations of the early Aryans. They grew barley, wheat, rice, fruits and vegetables. Agriculture was the basis of the economy in the Vedic age. The land where two crops could grow in a year was considered fertile and was coveted for.

Agriculture had developed greatly in the later Vedic period. By then, the Aryans had started using new tools, manure and seeds. Irrigation was done with the help of canals and the plough was also in use. They ploughed their fields with the help of wooden ploughs drawn by oxen. Agriculture being the chief occupation, rearing of animals was necessary. Oxen, horses, dogs, goats and sheep were mainly domesticated. The cow was considered to be pious and important. It was a source of valuation and exchange and it was regarded as a sign of prosperity.

The Aryans introduced the horse in India from Central Asia. They were used to draw chariots and to ride during battles as well as during peacetime by the *rajan* and the nobles and therefore, greatly valued. Hunting, pottery, spinning, weaving, carpentry, metallurgy (copper and bronze) and leatherwork were other important occupations. Shipping was limited to the navigation of rivers for the inland trade. Gold and oxen were used as money during trading.

The most important thing of Vedic period was that no profession was considered to be small except fishing and hair cutting, which were looked down upon.

In the later Vedic period carpentry, metallurgy, tanning, pottery, weaving, etc. started developing. They proficiently started using gold, iron, silver etc. after the spread of knowledge of metals, which made life more prosperous.

Both imports as well as exports were carried on during the Vedic period. The traders are known as '*Pani*'. Clothes, bed sheets, leather, etc., were mainly traded. Trading was done on bullock carts.

Political Relations

The Aryans gave up their nomadic life and settled down in the north-western parts of the Indian subcontinent in the form of different tribal settlements known as *janas* and the land where they settled was called *janapada*. These tribes were constantly involved in battle with one another, either to protect their cattle or their land. A village or *grama* was the smallest unit of the *jana*. A *grama* would comprise a number of families. Each tribe had a chieftain called *rajan*, who was chosen for his wisdom and courage and he ruled each tribe. His chief function was to protect the tribe from the external attacks and maintain law and order.

For his service, the people made voluntary contributions of gifts. A *rajan* could be removed from power if he was inefficient or cruel. He was helped by a number of officials in the work of administration. There is also a reference to two tribal assemblies – namely the *Sabha* and the *Samiti* (as mentioned in the previous section) which checked the power of the king and also advised him on all-important matters. The *senani* or commander-in-chief assisted him in warfare.

A *raj purohit* or high priest performed religious ceremonies and also acted as an adviser. The *gramani* or the village headman looked after the village.

The political life of the Vedic age was classified as follows:

- **Family:** The smallest unit of the administration was the family, which was headed by the oldest person in the home. The tradition was to have a joint family.
- **Village:** Several families made a village. The head of the village was called the '*Gramani*'. The root of the village administrative system was the *Gramani* but the Rig Veda is silent on the matter of its election system.
- **Vish:** Several villages made a *Vish*. The highest officer of the *Vish* was called *Vishpati*.
- **Jan:** Several *Vishs* made a *Jan*. The highest officer of the Jan was called *Gop*. Usually, the king himself would be a *Gop*.
- **Nation:** The highest political unit was the nation. A country was called nation or *rashtra*

Table 1.1 Political Life of the Vedic Age

Unit	Head
Rashtra Janas/ janapada Vish Gram	Rajan/Gopa/Samrat Jyeshta Vishpati Gramani

Social Stratification and Emergence of the Caste System

The early Vedic society consisted of four *varnas*—Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra. There was no complication in the *varna* system. The basis of *varna* was perhaps work rather than birth. It is mentioned in the Rig Veda that, 'I am a sculptor, my father is a doctor and my mother grinds cereals in the house.' The early Aryans differentiated between themselves according to the occupations each followed. The word '*varna*' was later used to refer to the social division, dividing society into the following four occupational groups:

- The brahmins or the priests performed religious ceremonies and prayers and imparted education.
- The kshatriyas or warrior class (to which the king also belonged) fought wars and protected the tribe from danger.
- The vaishyas carried on agriculture, industry and trade, producing goods for the society.
- The sudras, comprising the *dasas*, were the labourers and did menial jobs. They were dark-skinned.

This system was flexible and there were no restrictions with regard to the occupation, intermarriage and inter-dining between these classes.

Thus, the work of a brahmin was to give education. The work of a kshatriya was to save and defend. The work of a vaishya was to trade and the work of a shudra was to serve. But till the later Vedic period the *varna* system had become complex. By now the basis of *varna* changed to birth from work or profession.

The Ashrama system was established keeping in mind the age of man to be 100 years. It was said that 100 years were required for all round development and to achieve the goal of religion, material pleasure and salvation in life. During the first twenty-five years, a student acquired knowledge with much hardship in the ashram of his guru. This was known as the Brahmcharya Ashram. From the age of twenty-five to fifty years (in adulthood) he observed family life, which was called Grihasth Ashram. From fifty to seventy-five years of age he observed Vanprasth Ashram while denouncing family life. From seventy-five to hundred years he left all worldly pleasures and attained salvation in the devotion of god, which was called Sanyas.

LATE VEDIC PERIOD

The history of the later Vedic period is based mainly on the Vedic texts, which were compiled after the age of the Rig Veda. The collections of Vedic hymns or mantras are known as the Samhitas. The Rig Veda were set to tune, and this modified collection was known as the Samaveda. In the post Rig Vedic times, two other collections, the Yajurveda Samhita and the Atharva Veda Samhita were composed. We have to depend upon the Samhitas of the Yajurveda, Samaveda, Atharva Veda, the Brahmanas, the Aranyakas, and the Upanishads, all religious works for the later Vedic period which, roughly speaking, comes down to about 600BC.

During the later Vedic period, the Aryan civilization gradually extended towards the east and the south. The centre of culture shifted to Kurukshetra, and Madhyadesa. The land of the Yamuna and the Ganga came into prominence. Kosala, Kasi, Videha and Ayodhya rose as great urban centres in the east. Literature also mention the Andhras for the first time and other outcaste tribes like the Pundras of Bengal, the Sabaras of Orissa and the Pulindas of south western India. Thus, nearly the whole of northern India from the Himalayas to the Vindhya and perhaps even beyond had come within the rule of the Aryans.

Settlement Patterns

As mentioned earlier, between 1000BC and 600BC, the Aryans had moved eastward from the land of the seven rivers into the Gangetic plain. Some crossed the Vindhya mountains into the southern region of India. The Aryans moved eastward probably because of an increase in population. Some of the chieftains carved out kingdoms for themselves and their tribes were called the *janapadas*. The Kurus occupied the region around Delhi and called it Kurukshetra. Hastinapur was their capital.

The Kurus combined with the Panchalas (ruled over the region of Bareilly, Badaun and Farukhabad) to establish their authority over Delhi and the Doab region. The Kauravas and the Pandavas belonged to the Kuru tribe. The battle of Kurukshetra is believed to have been fought in about 950BC. Towards the end of 600 BC, the Aryans had spread further eastward.

A number of *janapadas* combined to form large independent kingdoms called *mahajanapadas*. By the sixth century BC, sixteen *mahajanapadas* were established. These sixteen kingdoms were engaged in the war to capture each other's territory. Kosala, Vatsa, Avanti and Magadha were the four most important ones, which eventually remained and reigned. Finally, Magadha established its stronghold over the whole of the Gangetic plain from 500–300BC.

Technological and Economic Development

The Vedic Aryans were well known for their technology related to the tanning of leather, fermentation of grains and fruits, and dyed scale production of copper, iron and steel, brass, silver and gold and their alloys. Indian steel was believed to be of very high quality in the ancient world and it was exported in large quantities. Tin and mercury were imported from the 7th century. Alchemy was also referred to in literature. They made a special kind of polished grey pottery (known as P.G. ware). Radio-carbon dating dates it back to 1000–800BC. Other varieties of pottery, for example, red or *black-polished* pottery were also made by them.

Farming remained the most important occupation. Taxes were collected by the king, which earned him revenue. Wheat, rice, vegetables, cotton and oil seeds were grown. Besides agriculture, many crafts like weaving, leatherwork, pottery, jewellery designing and carpentry developed. Apart from gold, silver, copper, lead and tin, they had discovered the use of iron. Many agricultural implements and weapons of war were made of iron. Artisans and craftsmen produced goods of fine quality.

They were organized into guilds which regulated the prices. These professions became hereditary with time and constituted subcastes or *jatis*. Many more towns started emerging during these times. Trade also flourished. Goods were sent as far as Taxila, Central Asia and European countries. The barter system was discontinued and money in the form of gold and silver was used. In other words, the economic activities became more complex. The earliest coins of India are commonly known as punch-marked coins. As the name suggests, these coins bear symbols of various types punched on pieces of silver of specific weight. The earliest Indian coins have no defined shapes and were mostly uniface. Secondly, these coins lack any inscriptions. Two well known numismatists, D.B. Spooner and D.R. Bhandarkar, independently concluded that the punching of various symbols representing animals, hills, trees and human figures followed a definite pattern and these coins were issued by the royal authority.

Both literary and archaeological evidences confirm that the Indians invented coinage somewhere between the 5th and the 6th centuries BC. A hoard of coins discovered at Chaman Huzuri in 1933 contained forty-three silver punch-marked coins (the earliest coins of India) with Athenian (coins minted by Athens, a city of Greece) and Achaemenian (Persian) coins. The Bhir (Taxila) hoard discovered in 1924 contained 1055 punch-marked coins in a very worn out condition and two minted coins of Alexander. This archaeological evidence clearly indicates that the coins were minted in India long before the fourth century BC, i.e., before the Greeks advanced towards India (Alexander's invasion of Persia and India). There is also a strong belief that silver as a metal, which was not available in Vedic India, became abundantly available by 500–600 BC. Most of the silver came from Afghanistan and Persia as a result of international trade.

Social Stratification

During the Later Vedic period, the earlier distinctions in society based on varna or occupation became rigid and hereditary. A person's birth became more important than his skill or merit. Each caste had its own code of laws and marriage outside the caste was forbidden. Brahmins occupied a very high position in society as they were learned. They alone could perform the rituals and sacrifices. Only the select few amongst them could advise the king. The common people held them in high esteem.

The position of women also began to deteriorate and they were thought to be inferior to men. They were not allowed to read Vedic literature. Their main duty was to look after the house.

The family shows the increasing power of the father who could even disinherit his son. Women were generally given a lower position. Although some women theologians took part in philosophical discussions and a few queens participated in rituals, women were considered to be inferior and subordinate to men.

There is a mention of the *Ashramas* or the four stages of life—that of *brahmacharya* or bachelor student, *grihastha* or householder, *vanaprastha* or hermit and *sanyasi* or ascetic who completely renounces worldly life. Only the first three were clearly defined in the later Vedic texts; the last or the fourth stage was not well-established, though, ascetic life was not unknown.

PROTEST MOVEMENTS: JAINISM AND BUDDHISM

In the ancient Indian period, two major social movements emerged in response to the rigidity of Hindu customs. These movements went on to become important religions, i.e., Jainism and Buddhism. Let us study these two religions in detail.

Jainism

Jainism had left an indelible impact on the social and cultural development of India. The general belief among the common people is that the founder of Jainism is Mahavira. However, Jainas believe that their religion is the product of teachings of 24 *Tirthankaras* (a saviour who has succeeded in crossing over life's stream of rebirths and has made a path for others to follow). There is no detailed information available about the first 22 *Tirthankaras*. The Jainas hold that their religion is as old as the Rig Veda and their first Tirthankara Rishabha was the father of Bharata, the first Vedic *Chakravartin* king of India. Rishabha was followed by 23 *Tirthankaras*. Very little is known about these *Tirthankaras* except the last two.

The 23rd Tirthankara was a historical figure known as Parsavanath. Parsavanath probably lived in eight century BC, and probably died 250 years before the death of Mahavira. He was a Kshatriya and the son of king Ashvasena of Vanaras. For thirty years, he led the life of an ordinary householder and then became an ascetic. He meditated for 84 days continuously and attained the highest knowledge. The next seventy years of his life were spent in spreading the highest knowledge to the people. His main four principles were as follows:

- (a) Non-injury to life
- (b) Truthfulness
- (c) Non-stealing
- (d) Non-possession

Parsava's teachings were not that rigid as that of his successor, Mahavira. He permitted his followers to lead a married life and allowed them to wear clothes to cover their body.

Early life of Mahavira

The real founder of Jainism was its 24th Tirthankara, Vardhamana Mahavira. His childhood name was Vardhamana. According to one tradition, Mahavira was born in Kundagrama about 540 BC. He was the son of Siddhartha, who was the chief of a Kshatriya clan called Jnatikas. His mother Trishala was the sister of Chetaka, an eminent Lichchhavi prince of Vaisali. Vardhamana was given education in all branches of knowledge, was married to Yasoda and had a daughter called Priyadrasana. After the death of his parents, he renounced the worldly life and became a monk at the age of 30. He left worldly life with the permission of his elder brother Nandivardhana and became an ascetic.

Life of Asceticism

According to followers of the Jain religion, for twelve years, Mahavira roamed about as a naked monk doing all types of penances. During this period, he fully subdued his senses. He was attacked and ridiculed; however, he never lost his patience, nor indulged in feelings of hatred and revenge against his enemies. Within these twelve years of penance, meditation and severe asceticism, he prepared himself for the attainment of highest spiritual knowledge.

During this period, he met an ascetic called Gosala Makkhaliputta at Nalanda. For six years, Makkhaliputta lived with Mahavira practising severe asceticism after which he separated himself from Mahavira and set up a new religious order called Ajivikas.

In the 13th year on the 10th *Vaisakh*, Mahavira acquired what Jains believe is the ultimate spiritual knowledge (Kevalya) under a sala tree on the bank of river Rijupalika near the village Jrimbikagrama, whose identification is uncertain. Mahavira now possessed the four infinities, which were as follows:

- Infinite knowledge
- Infinite power
- Infinite perception
- Infinite joy

Thus, he became a 'Jina' (a conqueror) or Mahavira (a great hero) at the age of 42 and began his career as a religious reformer. Since then, he entered upon a new stage of life. He became a religious teacher and the head of a sect called *Nirgranthas* (free from all bonds) or 'Jains'.

Later he met the king of Magadha, Ajatashatru, and is said to have converted him. However, the Buddhists say that the king of Magadha followed Buddhism and not Jainism. Mahavira did not have many followers because of the rigorous form of life he recommended to his followers. He asked his followers to remain naked, and said that the noblest act in the life of a Jaina was death by starvation. It is known from *Kalpasutra* that he spent his time at Champa, Mithila, Sravasti, Vaisali, etc. and after 30 years of preaching, he died at Pawa near Rajagriha. We do not know the exact date of passing away of Mahavira. However, Professor Jacobi and some other eminent historians have proved that his death occurred probably in 468 BC.

The religious texts written in Pali language do not recognize Mahavira as the originator of a new religion, but as a reformer. Mahavira accepted most of the religious doctrines of Parsavanath though he made some alterations and additions. Parsavanath emphasized self-control and penance and advised his followers to observe the following four principles:

1. *Satya* (truth)
2. *Ahimsa* (non-violence)
3. *Aparigraha* (non-possession of property)
4. *Astheya* (not to receive anything, which is not freely given)

To these Mahavira added one more, i.e., *brahmacharya* (celibacy).

The Jaina philosophy shows a close affinity to Hindu Samkhya Darshana (or Samkhya philosophy). They ignored the idea of God, accepted that the world is full of sorrows and believed in the theories of Karma (action) and transmigration of souls. According to Mahavira, salvation can be achieved by freeing the soul from earthly bondage. This can be achieved by means of right faith, right knowledge and right action. These are called *Ratnatraya* or three jewels of Jaina religion.

Mahavira advocated a dualistic philosophy, according to which man has twofold nature, earthly and spiritual or *Ajiva* (matter) and *Jiva* (soul). While *Ajiva* is destructible, *Jiva* is indestructible and salvation is possible through the progress of *Jiva*.

Jaina philosophy states that if one desires to attain Nirvana or salvation, it is necessary for him to destroy Karma. One can do so gradually by avoiding evil Karmas. For this, one must observe the five principles, namely:

1. *Satya*
2. *Ahimsa*
3. *Aprigraha*
4. *Astheya*
5. *Brahmacharya*

Through this process, one could attain final liberation of the soul.

Mahavira did not believe in the supreme creator or God. He believed that no deity has created, maintains or destroys the world; however, it functions only according to universal law of development and decay. He advocated a holy ethical code, rigorous asceticism and extreme penance for the attainment of highest spiritual state. He regarded the highest state of the soul as God. He believed man is the architect of its own destiny and could attain salvation by leading a life of purity, virtue and renunciation.

He also rejected the infallibility of the Vedas and objected to the Vedic rituals and Brahminical supremacy. He denounced the caste system.

Principle of non-injury

The Jaina philosophy believes that not only man and animals but plants also possess souls (*Jiva*) endowed with various degree of consciousness. Jains believe that the plants possess life and feel pain and thus lay great emphasis on the doctrine of *Ahimsa* or non-injury to any kind of living beings. The vow of non-violence (*Ahimsa*) was practiced to the point of irrationality. Even an unconscious killing of an insect while walking was against Jain morals.

The Jains would not drink water without straining it for fear of killing an insect. They also wore muslin mask over the mouth to save any life floating in the air. They had forbidden not only the practice of war, but also of agriculture, as both involve the killing of living beings.

Commenting on this extreme form of non-injury, eminent historian V. Smith said, 'The strange doctrine affirming the existence of Jivas in objects commonly called inanimate extends the Jain idea of *Ahimsa* far beyond the Brahminical and Buddhist notions.'

Jain sects

The main sects of Jainism are Svetambaras and Digambaras. The Svetambaras wear white robes whereas the Digambaras use no clothes. The Svetambaras are the followers of the 23rd Tirthankara Parsavanath while the Digambaras are followers of the 24th Tirthankara Mahavira.

Religious texts

Original texts of Jains were called Purvas and were 14 in number. In the third century BC, a Jain council was held at Pataliputra and arranged these Purvas in 12 parts, and named them *Angas*. The last *Anga* was lost and a Jain council held at Balabhi in the fifth century AD rearranged the remaining 11 *Angas*. These books were written in Prakrit language. However, the Digambara sect of Jainism did not recognize the *Angas* and constituted its own sacred texts.

There were several causes, which led to the rise, spread and decline of Jainism. The main ones are as follows:

Causes of the Rise of Jainism

During the time of Mahavira, there arose a discontent amongst the common people against the traditional Vedic religion, as a number of weaknesses and shortcomings had crept in the latter. The Vedic religion or Hinduism had become quite ritualistic and the caste system had become predominant. Therefore, the people were disgusted and started working hard to save the society and culture from these evils. At that time, Jainism came as an alternative to the Vedic religion. It tried to clean the society and religion by introducing a number of reforms. Therefore, common people showed interest in adopting its principles.

Secondly, it has also proved to be closer to the more popular religion Hinduism and with the passage of time, the Jainas also adored Jaina *Tirthankaras* in temples and by the middle ages, their worship was very near to the Hindus with offering of flowers, incense, lamps, etc. Thus, Jainism proved more accommodating to Hinduism and did not offer any serious hostility.

Thirdly, Jainism possesses a tolerant spirit of accommodation with other religions, which helped in its progress and was responsible for its rise. Apart from it, the charismatic personality of Mahavira, simple philosophy of the religion, acceptance of common spoken language of that time as the medium of propagation and patronization of influential rulers were the major factors responsible for the rise of Jainism.

Spread of Jainism

Jainism never spread all over India or beyond its boundaries, yet it became a popular religion at that time, and still exists in many parts of the country. During the life time of Mahavira, it spread in Magadha, Vaisali and its nearby areas, but later, the chief activity of Jainism was shifted to Gujarat, Malwa, Rajputana and Karnataka where they are still an influential Jain community. The members of this community have also played an important role in the early literary development of South India.

Causes of the decline of Jainism

Various factors were responsible for the dramatic decline of Jainism in India. After the demise of Mahavira, Gautama Buddha emerged as a great socio-religious reformer of that period. The teachings of Buddha were simpler and people friendly. Therefore, Buddhism posed a great challenge for the existence of Jainism.

Secondly, Jainism was divided into two sects i.e. Svetambaras and Digambaras, which weakened the religion from its core.

Thirdly, the most important cause of its decline was the great revival of Hinduism. Under the Guptas, Cholas, Chalukyas and Rajput kings, Hinduism got much needed attention and patronization of the ruling class. Reforms came in Hinduism and it became the most popular religion in India. That was the main reason due to which Jainism was confined to some pockets of India.

Apart from it, the absence of popular religious preachers after the demise of Mahavira, the absence of protection by the later rulers and its hard principles led to the decline of Jainism.

Jainism could not occupy the position of a main religion in India or outside India. However, it has contributed enormously in the field of art, architecture, literature and philosophy and has made valuable contributions to the Indian culture.

Buddhism

Another great religious reformation movement of sixth century BC was Buddhism, which gave the biggest challenge to Brahmanism. Gautama Buddha, a contemporary of Mahavira, was the founder of Buddhism. He was the son of Suddhodan, the chief of the kshetraya clan of Shakyas and the Raja of Kapilavastu in the Nepal *terai*. His mother was Mahamaya. Gautama was born in 563 BC.

The *Jatakas* contain the Buddhist traditions about the birth of Buddha. They tell us that Buddha's life did not begin with his birth in the Lumbini Garden. On the other hand, Buddha was the product of an infinitely long evolution through various form of life. Before he descended into this world, he lived in the Tusita heaven. He was then a Bodhisattava and his name was Sumedha. He was greatly touched by Buddha Dipankar, the Buddha of the previous world, and wanted to become like him. He therefore left Tusita heaven and decided to be reborn through Mahamaya.

Jatakas tell us that before the birth of Buddha, Mahamaya had a dream of white elephant with six tusks entering into her body. The astrologers were called to interpret the dream and they told Suddhodan that according to this dream, his wife would give birth to a very great man, a prophet or an emperor.

In 563 BC, when she was returning from her father's house to Kapilavastu, Mahamaya gave birth to Buddha under a sala tree in the village of Lumbini. Later on in 250 BC, Ashoka set up a commemorative pillar there and in the inscription he stated 'Here, Buddha was born, the sage of the Sakyas "*(Hida Budhe jate sakya muniti)*". However, unfortunately after seven days, Buddha's mother Mahamaya died and his stepmother and aunt, Prajapati Gautami, then brought up Siddhartha (Buddha's childhood name).

From his childhood days, Siddhartha exhibited signs of a contemplative frame of mind. The royal pleasure and amusements failed to attract his mind. He was married at an early age to a beautiful girl Yasodhara, the daughter of a Shakya noble. However, the pleasures of the palace did not bind him to the worldly life. He led a happy married life for some time and even got a son Rahul from his union with his wife.

A few incidents, which Buddhists call four great signs, occurred and they exercised tremendous influence on the future of Gautama. One evening, his charioteer Channa drove him in the city and he came across an old man. Next, he saw a man suffering from disease; however, it was the sight of a dead man, which touched the deepest chord of Gautam's heart. The fourth sign was that of a mendicant, who had renounced the world and was moving about in search of truth.

Great renunciation

Gautama decided to find out the cause of all suffering and wanted to know the truth. His hatred towards the world was intensified and he realized the hollowness of worldly pleasure. After the birth of his son, Rahul, he made up his mind and decided to leave his palace and his family. One night, accompanied by the charioteer Channa and his favourite horse Kanthaka, he left home at the age of 29. This is called *Maha-Bhinishkramana* or the great renunciation; thereafter, Gautama became a wandering ascetic looking for the supreme truth.

Enlightenment

For six continuous years, he lived as a homeless ascetic and sought instructions from Alara Kalama. His next teacher was Udraka Ramaputra. His new teachers failed to satisfy him. He spent some time in the caves near Rajagriha, the capital of Magadh. From Rajagriha, he went to the forest of Uruvela and spent a few years in self-mortification. He then meditated with five ascetics named Kondana, Vappa, Bhadiya, Mahanama and Assagi.

Gautama practised continuous fasting until he was reduced to a mere skeleton. He then realized that mere suffering and sacrifice could not lead to truth. He thought that he had wasted six years. The five disciples also left him alone. At last one day he sat under a Pipal tree (*Asvattha*) on the banks of River Niranjana (the modern Phalgu) at Gaya and took a vow, 'I will not leave this place till I attain the peace of mind, which I have been trying for all these years.' Finally, Gautama attained supreme knowledge and insight. He found out the truth and the means of salvation from human sufferings. He got the highest knowledge or *bodhi*. Gautama thus became the Buddha, 'the enlightened one' or Tathagata.

The turning of the wheel of law

After attaining supreme knowledge, Buddha decided to impart the knowledge to the common people. From Gaya he went to Saranath near Banaras and he gave his first sermon to his five disciples in the deer park. These five disciples were once his comrades when he was doing penance and fasting. They hated Buddha because he had left the path of suffering. They are known as the five elders. This first sermon by which, he started converting people to his faith is known as turning of the wheel of law or '*dharma chakra Pravartana*', which formed the nucleus of all Buddhist teachings.

For the next 45 years, he preached his gospel and message of salvation to the common people. He visited different parts of the country, spoke to the people in their local languages and illustrated his teachings. He made large conversions at Rajgriha, the capital of Magadha. He also converted his father, his son and other relatives at Kapilavastu. Kings like Prasenjit of Koshala, Bimbisara and Ajatashatru of Magadha became his followers. He died in 483 BC at Kushinagar in the district of Gorakhpur at the age of 80. Thus, Buddha attained *Parinirvana*. After his death, his remains were divided into eight parts and distributed among his followers who were spread in different parts of the country. *Stupas* or mounds were built on these remains to preserve them.

Buddha realized the truth by following a life of purity and discipline and asked his followers to follow the same path. His teachings were simple and he explained them in simple ordinary man's language illustrating them with common tales. He never tried to establish a new religion but he propounded a new way of life free from dogmas and rituals.

Buddha pointed out various paths by which one could attain *Nirvana* or salvation from the cycle of birth and death. He denied the authority of Vedas and denounced the method of sacrifice and hegemony of priestly class. Unlike the Brahminical religion, he did not consider Sanskrit as a sacred language, nor rituals an essential part of religion.

He was not in support of offering of prayer to god to win his favour. The philosophy of Buddha was rational in its nature. Like Jainism, Buddha denied the infallibility of the Vedas. He rejected the supremacy of the priestly class. Buddhism dislodged the principles of social immobility, inequality and injustice. It upheld the sanctity of human intellect and freedom; people irrespective of their position, caste and colour, were allowed to embrace the new religion.

Four Noble Truths

After attaining enlightenment at Bodhgaya, Buddha held that there was misery and sorrow all around. Man turned to god and religion to find a cure or an escape from such sorrow and trouble. To escape from the sorrow and miseries of life, he discovered the truth and its cure. His teachings begin with the four great truths relating to sorrow, the causes of sorrow, the remedy for sorrow and the ways for the removal of sorrow. These four truths are; first, there is suffering and sorrow in the world namely old age, disease and death.

This sorrow or suffering is due to the existence in the world. Secondly, everything has a cause and the cause of all types of sorrow is *Trishna*, i.e., desires and cravings. Man is a bundle of cravings and desires and so long as he is a slave to these desires, he cannot escape from pain and sorrow. Third is the remedy or cessation of sorrow. This pain of sorrow can be removed by suppressing desires and yearning for possession. Fourth and the last is the true way to conquer desires and removal of sorrow. Buddha says that the desire or *Trishna* cannot be conquered in an ordinary manner. It requires a disciplined life, which he called the middle path or the noble eight-fold path.