VI

EVERYDAY LIFE: THE DAILY ROUND IN CITY AND VILLAGE

THE VILLAGE

We have no certain means of assessing the population of ancient India, since the detailed registers which were kept in many kingdoms have long since vanished. One authority has suggested that during the medieval period the total population of the Sub-continent was between 100 and 140 millions,¹ a figure which seems reasonable, although based on very slender evidence. But whatever India’s

Fig. xii.—A village (from a relief at Amarâvatî. c. 2nd century A.D.)

population in ancient and medieval times, it was certainly mainly rural. At the present day it is said that 85 per cent of India’s total population dwell in villages, and we may be sure that the proportion in the past was no less, but probably more. The average man in ancient India was a countryman.

No one who has travelled from Delhi to Calcutta by train could fail to be impressed by the monotony of the great Gangetic Plain. The shabby little villages, often very close together, are punctuated only by rivers and canals. They have a few trees on their outskirts,
and here and there a small grove divides one from another. Otherwise there is nothing to be seen between the villages but little fields separated by narrow footpaths and occasional rough roads. But this was not the case in ancient times.

Even when the first Englishmen set up their trading stations in Madras, Bombay and Calcutta there were more trees in the countryside; and in the earlier period India was much better afforested. Hsüan Tsang's account of India shows that in the 7th century dense jungle lined the banks of the Ganges for many miles on end. The countryside was wilder than it is today. The tiger, now rare except in certain districts, roamed the length and breadth of the land. In the West the lion, now almost extinct, was common. Herds of wild elephants, carefully preserved by kings, were numerous in regions where they are now unknown. The foothills of the Vindhya and the Ghats, now in many places almost denuded of larger trees by centuries of woodcutting and many generations of browsing goats, were richly forested. In fact the age-old agricultural techniques of India had not yet exhausted her soil, and her peasants had not yet torn up her forests, though in some places, notably Magadha (South Bihar) and parts of the Tamil country, this process was almost complete by the Middle Ages, if not before.

The Indian village differed very little from that of the present day, but while most villages in the North are now open and undefended, in earlier times they were usually walled or stockaded, as they are still in many parts of the Deccan. The village was a cluster of huts, small and large, often grouped round a well or a pond, near which was a small open space with a few trees. In earlier times villages often had clubrooms, which served as rest-houses for travellers and as centres of social life; later the place of these halls was taken by the village temples. The villagers formed a self-conscious community, and often had an energetic communal life. We quote from a Jataka story.

"One day they stood in the middle of the village to transact village business, and they...[decided to] do good works; so they would get up betimes, and go out with knives, axes and crowbars. With their crowbars they rolled away the stones on the four highways; they cut down the trees which caught the axles of their carts; they levelled the irregularities [of the roads]; they built an embankment and dug tanks; they made a village hall; they showed charity and kept the [Buddhist] commandments."

This vigorous corporate life continued into the Middle Ages. Tamil inscriptions show that the village councils (p. 107) took an active interest in the communal welfare, dug and renewed reservoirs, made
canals, improved the roads, and cared for the village shrines. This strong sense of the community was one of the chief factors in the survival of Hindu Culture.

Most of the villagers were free peasants, and their land was to all intents and purposes their own, though the king claimed its ultimate ownership (p. 110f). The lot of the peasant was hard, though perhaps poverty was not so grinding as it later became, and agricultural indebtedness was certainly less heavy. Most peasant holdings were small, and were usually worked by the owner and his family; but there were a few large farmsteads, the owners of which cultivated their estates with hired labour. Kings too had large demesnes, worked by serfs and labourers, who in Mauryan times received one and one quarter

Fig. xiii.—Country scene (from a terracotta plaque found at Bhilā, near Allahābād. ? 1st century B.C.)

pana per month with maintenance. Other land was let out by the owners to share-croppers in return for one half of the crop.

These landless labourers existed in the Indian village at least from Mauryan times, and probably earlier, their state an unhappy and despised one. Illness, famine, idleness, or some other cause would sometimes compel a peasant to sell his holding, or result in his eviction for non-payment of tax, and he would be reduced to shame and penury as a casual labourer. But this process, whereby land tended to become concentrated in the hands of a few landowners, was more than counteracted by the Indian joint family system. On the death of the head of the house there was usually a partition of the family lands, and thus a few generations might see the break-up of a large
estate. A real class of squires or large farmers never appeared in Hindu India.

To heavy taxation, forced labour, and the visitations of the king and his officers, were added periodical dearths and famines to afflict and impoverish the peasant. Though Megasthenes declared that famine was unknown in India, he certainly wrote in this particular from inadequate knowledge. References to famine, with its attendant horrors, are fairly common in ancient Indian literature (p. 445). Indeed a great famine is said to have occurred not long after Megasthenes left India, at the end of the reign of Candragupta Maurya. The more energetic and conscientious kings did what they could to prevent and relieve famine. The Arthaśāstra even suggests that a king is justified in confiscating the hoarded wealth of his richer subjects in order to feed the hungry. The state granaries would be opened in emergency, the charity of religious establishments and private persons was no doubt of some help; but with such poor communications local famine might be even more severe than it is now. There is reason to believe that rainfall was rather heavier than in recent years, and the pressure of population on the means of subsistence was not as great as it has now become. Hence outbreaks of dearth and famine were probably less frequent in ancient days, but when they did occur they caused even greater hardship and loss of life.

Throughout our period there was a gradual expansion of cultivation as a result of pressure on the land. The Arthaśāstra suggests a positive policy of colonization, clearing of waste, and development of new villages, while the Jātaka stories show us groups of hardy peasants from overpopulated villages cutting new settlements from the jungle, and even tell of whole villages emigrating en masse to the wilds to escape the attentions of extortionate tax-collectors.

In the flat plains the land was cut by canals running from the great rivers, and dotted with artificial reservoirs (usually referred to in Anglo-Indian jargon as “tanks”), which were made by damming smaller streams or enlarging lakes by stopping their outlets. From these water-supplies, whether natural or artificial, water was raised by counterpoised “sweeps”, and fed into smaller channels which watered the fields. The “Persian wheel”, turned by an ox, is nowhere clearly mentioned in early sources, though it may have been used.

Irrigation works, often of enormous size, were undertaken by beneficent kings as a religious and social duty. The most famous of these reservoirs was that of Girmar, the history of which has come down to us, thanks to two inscriptions on the site (pp. 63, 105). We do not know when the great embankment, over 100 feet thick at the base, finally crumbled. Probably the largest achievement of Indian
irrigation until recent years was the lake at Bhojpūr, near Bhopāl, built in the middle of the 11th century by Bhoja Paramāra, the king of Dhārā. This too has vanished; the embankment was breached by the Muslims in the 15th century, and has never been restored; but it is evident from those traces which remain that the lake originally covered no less than 250 square miles. In the extreme north of India we read of Suyya, a great engineer in the service of king Avanti-varman of Kāshmīr (9th century), who “made the streams of Indus and Jhelam flow according to his will, like a snake-charmer his snakes”. In the south, at the end of our period, Paes saw the building of a mighty tank at Vījayanagara, the embankment of which, he says, was a crossbow-shot wide. The first efforts at its construction were unsuccessful, so King Kṛṣṇa Deva Rāya ordered a great human sacrifice of prisoners to appease the gods, and finished the work with the labour of 20,000 men.

Most of the larger irrigation works of Hindu India have now vanished, but in Ceylon ancient reservoirs of enormous size still exist, though the canal systems which they served have largely disappeared, and are only now being repaired. After many centuries of neglect, recent governments, both in India and Ceylon, have begun to redevelop the irrigation systems without which tropical agriculture cannot flourish, and which were among the first concerns of kings of ancient times.

AGRICULTURE AND STOCKBREEDING

The staple corn crops of ancient India were, as they are today, wheat and barley in the cool north and elsewhere as winter crops, rice in the irrigated plains, and millet in the dryer lands, such as parts of the Deccan, where rice would not grow well. Among other crops sugar cane was widely grown, and sugar exported to Europe, while leaf vegetables and gourds of various kinds were cultivated nearly everywhere, as was the sesameum, much valued for its edible oil. Numerous types of peas, beans and lentils were grown throughout the sub-continent. South India, especially Kerala (Malābār), grew many spices, particularly pepper, cardamom; ginger and cinnamon, which were carried all over India and exported to Europe. The Hīmālayan foothills produced the precious saffron. Cotton was at all times the staple textile crop.

Of fruits pride of place was taken by the mango, which was grown in orchards and much valued. The small Indian banana, or plantain, was also grown in damper parts of the land. The coconut was a comparatively late importation from S.-E. Asia, and is not mentioned
in early sources, though it was well known in the Middle Ages. In
the coastal areas grew palmyra and talipot palms, which provided
India’s chief writing material, and also the alcoholic drinks now
known as toddy and arrack. Another valued palm was the areca,
whose hard, slightly narcotic nut, broken up, mixed with lime and
other ingredients, and wrapped in the leaf of the betel vine, formed
the támbúla, or chewing quid, which was introduced into Northern
India from the South early in the Christian era, and has ever since
been a most popular source of post-prandial solace to the Indian.
The date palm was grown in the dryer regions of the West, but is
little mentioned in literature. The sour fruit of the tamarind was
widely used to flavour curry. The grape, introduced from Persia with
the almond and walnut, was cultivated in the Western Himálayas.
Sandal and other trees which mostly grew in the South provided
much-prized fragrant woods.

The Greek travellers were very impressed by the fertility of
India’s soil and the energy and ability of her cultivators. The
modern traveller’s impressions are diametrically opposite, but the
Greeks judged Indian agriculture by standards lower than ours, and
the soil was less exhausted then than it is now. The Greeks found it
a great source of wonder that India produced two crops a year. In the
wetter parts of the land the two crops might even grow without
irrigation, while in the plains a summer crop of rice was raised
during the monsoon, and a second irrigated crop in the dry season.

Ancient India knew the use of manure, and the Arthaśāstra lays
down several rules for the management of the king’s farms which in-
dicate a well-developed agricultural technique. The Indian peasant
has until very recently been so conservative in his methods that we
may assume that the ordinary villagers of ancient days cultivated the
land much as do those of the present day, ploughing with shallow
wooden ploughs drawn by oxen, harvesting with sickles, threshing
with oxen, and winnowing by tossing their corn in the wind.

The basic livestock of the peasant were cattle, used for ploughing,
transport and food. Villages employed a communal cowherd, who
drove the cattle, branded with their owners’ marks, to the waste
beyond the ploughed fields every morning, and returned with them
at dusk. We have no means of comparing the yield of the cattle of
ancient days with that of their scrappy modern counterparts, but as
there was more pasture and waste it may have been better. Milk and
curd were important articles of diet, as was ghee (ghṛta), which is
butter clarified by heating, which will keep indefinitely in a hot
climate.

The inviolability of the cow was of slow growth. Though there
seems to have been some feeling against the killing of cows even in Vedic times, Aśoka did not forbid the slaughter of cattle, and oxen, at any rate, were killed for food even later. But the Arthasastra refers to the existence of herds of aged, diseased and sterile cattle, and it therefore appears that even before the Christian era they were normally allowed to die a natural death, at least in some parts of the country. The same work suggests that those who kill cattle should be put to death, but from the context it is clear that this prescription applies only to killers of beasts stolen from the royal herds.

As well as cattle owned by cultivating peasants there were large herds belonging to professional herdsmen, who led a semi-nomadic life in the wilder parts of the country. One important tribe of these people, the Ābhīras, who dwelt in widely scattered localities of South Rājasthān, Mālwā and Sind around the beginning of the Christian era, was perhaps responsible for the development of the cult of Kṛṣṇa in his pastoral aspect, and Ābhīra chiefs set up a short-lived kingdom in the N.-W. Deccan on the ruins of the Sātavāhanas.

Other domestic animals included the buffalo, second only to the ox as a beast of burden and the favourite victim of sacrifices to the goddess Durgā, whose cult became very popular in the Middle Ages. The goat was bred everywhere, as was the sheep in the cooler districts. The fine goats’ wool fabric of Kashmir was known and used widely in Northern India, and heavier sheep’s and yaks’ wool blankets were exported in small quantities from the hills to the Northern Plains, where the winter nights are usually cold enough to make their comfort pleasant. The domestic pig was also known, though it did not play a very important part in rural economy.

Horses were bred chiefly in Sind and the North-West. They would not breed well in the Deccan, and were regularly imported by sea from Sind, Persia and Arabia to the ports of Western India. The horse was always a luxury animal, used chiefly by the warrior class. For the ordinary people the chief means of conveyance was the ox, of which certain varieties could draw carts at a considerable pace. The kings of Vijayanagara delighted in watching races of light carts to which an ox and a horse were yoked abreast.

The elephant was certainly tamed by the time of the Buddha. It rarely breeds in captivity, and therefore it had to be hunted and captured alive. Special forest tracts were designated as elephant preserves, inhabited by trackers, hunters and tamers, in the employ of the king. Generally the ownership of elephants was confined to kings and chiefs, and peasants living in the vicinity of elephant
forests must have cursed the depredations of these beasts, which would frequently leave the jungle to raid the clearings.

The camel is not often mentioned, but it was certainly known and used as a beast of burden in the dryer parts of the country, and by the Middle Ages was also found in the Deccan. Some medieval dynasties employed the camel in war. The mule and the ass were other common beasts of burden.

The half-wild pariah dog was as common in early India as it is today, and dogs were also used in hunting. In the hills a special breed of large dog, perhaps resembling the modern Tibetan mastiff, was famous beyond the bounds of India. The Persian emperor Artaxerxes I (465-424 B.C.) is said by Herodotus to have exempted the inhabitants of four Babylonian villages from taxation in return for their breeding Indian dogs for war and hunting. These dogs were also known in the Egypt of the Ptolemies. The dog is only once mentioned with respect and affection in Indian literature, and was rarely if ever treated as a pet. The exception occurs in the Mahabharata, where the five Pandava brothers and their wife Draupadi take their dog with them on their final pilgrimage to heaven, and the eldest brother Yudhishthira refuses to enter without his faithful friend. It has been suggested that the episode shows Iranian influence, for with the Zoroastrians the dog was a sacred animal. The domestic cat is rarely mentioned.

The hunting leopard or cheetah (citraka) is only referred to as a wild beast until the Middle Ages, and similarly the hawk was not tamed in early times. Hawking and hunting with cheetahs did not become popular among the ruling classes until the 11th century, and the custom may have been learnt from the Muslims.

The fowl was known, though eggs played but a small part in the diet of early India. The peacock, in earlier times, was certainly used as food, and was the favourite dish of the emperor Ashoka, until he adopted a vegetarian diet. We read of whole villages of peacock-rearers, who supplied their birds to kings and wealthy people, at first largely for food, but later chiefly for ornament. Several other ornamental fowl, especially the ruddy sheldrake or brahmany duck (cakravāka), were kept in the parks of the rich, and parrots and mynahs were very popular as pets, especially with ladies, who are referred to as devoting long hours to teaching the birds to talk.

Silkworms were bred and reared, chiefly in Bengal and Assam. It has been suggested by some that silk was known even in Vedic times, and silk-making moths were certainly indigenous to India; but it is probable that silk made from the cocoons of domesticated worms was first introduced to India from China by way of the Burma
Road, in the second half of the 1st millennium B.C. The earliest
certain references to silk are found in the Buddhist scriptures,
and in the Arthasastra, where it is called cinapaṭṭa, "the Chinese
cloth". In the 2nd century B.C. the Chinese traveller Chang K’ien
found that Chinese silk was imported into Bactria by way of India,
and this suggests that even at this time the Indians had not yet fully
mastered the art of spinning and weaving fine silks, which they cer-
tainly did later. Besides the silkworm another insect of commercial
importance was the lac-insect, which provides both the resin used for
shellac (and in India for articles of ornament), and also the dye
known as lake.

THE WILD TRIBES

In the Himalayan foothills and the remoter parts of the Vindhyas
and the Deccan wild tribes still exist. Most of them are now partly
civilized and Hinduized, but some, though happy folk, knit together
by tribal custom into solid, self-supporting and self-sufficient com-
munities, still preserve vestiges of ferocious and barbaric tradition.
The Gonds of the Eastern Deccan offered human sacrifices at their
fertility ceremonies until well into the last century, the victims often
being unfortunate villagers kidnapped from the more civilized settle-
ments, while head-hunting among the Nāgas of Assam is even now
not completely stamped out.

At one time, of course, practically the whole of India was in-
habited by such peoples, and in ancient and medieval times they were
more numerous and occupied a wider area than at present. From the
earliest invasions they waged a losing battle against the advancing
culture of the Āryans, and at all times they were a source of danger
to the outposts of civilization in the vicinity of their lands. The brief
statement of Asoka’s policy towards the forest tribes (p. 55) throws
a flood of light on the ruthless policy of earlier kings towards them.
Many primitive peoples were exterminated and many more lost their
identity in the course of the growth of Hindu civilization; but some
accepted the suzerainty of their civilized overlords, and retained their
ancestral lands. The Arthasastra mentions such people as useful in
time of war. Many of these tribes came more and more under the
influence of Āryan ways, and their tribal cults were roughly assim-
lated to Hinduism by wandering brāhmaṇs. Such tribes were un-
doubtedly the ancestors of many lower Hindu castes of later times.
Some primitive tribes may well have learnt enough from the Āryans
to become powerful, and it has been reasonably suggested that more
than one important medieval dynasty originated in such a way.

At all times, however, uncivilized tribal peoples continued to exist
in the outlying districts in virtual independence, perhaps occasionally paying tribute in kind to the representative of their overlord. The last great king of Hindu India, Kṛṣṇa Deva Rāya of Vijayanagara, mentioned them in a brief textbook on government in Telegu, the Amuktamālāyada. When the forest folk multiplied in the kingdom, he wrote, they caused no little trouble to the king and his subjects; but, like Aśoka, he advocated fair and honest treatment towards them. "If the king grows angry with them, he cannot wholly destroy them, but if he wins their affection by kindness and charity they serve him by invading the enemy's territory and plundering his forts." 8

At all times the wild tribesmen were a danger to the settled villagers in the outlying parts of the country. In medieval literature, both in Sanskrit and the Dravidian vernaculars, are references to these wild raiders pillaging crops, herds and houses, and capturing victims for human sacrifice. The area of their operations was slowly pushed back, and as more and more primitive tribes were assimilated to the Hindu order they became gradually less dangerous; but throughout the period covered by this book they were a source of fear in many parts of India, the bogey-men with which mothers frightened their naughty children. No doubt many of the characteristics of the demons and malevolent spirits of Hindu mythology, Nāgas, Yakṣas, Rākṣasas and the like, were acquired from the wild tribes (p. 319f).

THE TOWN

By the time of the Buddha, there were small towns all over North India, and some, such as Kāśi (Vārānasī) and Kauśāmbī, had an antiquity of centuries; but even at this time large cities were few. According to an ancient tradition, at the time of the Buddha's "Great Decease" the disciple Ānanda said that he regretted that his master was to die in so small a town as Kuśinagara, and mentioned the six cities which he considered important enough for a Buddha to die in: Śrāvasti, Campā, Rājagṛha, Sāketa (later generally known as Ayo-
dhya), Kauśāmbī, and Kāśi. These were evidently the greatest cities of the 5th century B.C., but their sites are still not wholly excavated, and we have no good means of judging their size, except in the case of one of them. This is Rājagṛha, the walls of which still remain, and show that the fortified area had a perimeter of twenty-five miles. The whole area was not built upon, but Rājagṛha was a garden city, with a central core, and houses in the suburbs surrounded by extensive parks and fields.

Pāṭaliputra in the time of the Mauryas, according to Megasthenes,
was a long narrow city, stretching nine miles along the bank of the Gangā, and reaching only one and a half miles inland. It was no doubt mainly built-up, unlike Rājagṛha, which covered a larger area but must have had a smaller population. At the end of our period Paes states that Vijayanagara was larger and more populous than Rome and contained 100,000 houses, from which we may infer that its population was at least half a million, and probably more.

At the time of writing several excavations have been made at various Indian city sites, but only one such site, and that not representative, has been excavated sufficiently to reveal the plan of the city.

Fig. xiv.—An ancient Indian city, c. 2nd–1st century, B.C. (based on the evidence of contemporary sculpture). (Reproduced from Percy Brown's "Indian Architecture (Buddhist and Hindu periods)", published by D. B. Taraporevala Sons & Co. Ltd., Bombay)

This is Takṣaśilā, where two cities have been discovered, one dating from the time of the Achaemenid kings of Persia and the other from the Greco-Bactrian period. Both were built on either side of a broad main street, and the larger houses of both had central courtyards, in the manner traditional in India from the days of the Harappā Culture; but in other respects the two were very different. The first city, known to archaeologists as Bhīr Mound, shows no trace of town planning; on the irregular and crooked main street opened a maze of narrow alleys, ramifying in all directions at the whim of many private builders. The second city, known as Sirkap, had a fine main street some twenty feet wide, running due north and south, with lesser
roads running off it at right angles and at regular intervals; it was evidently strictly planned.

However we cannot attribute the layout of Sirkap wholly to the orderly Greeks. Two thousand years before their arrival in India the cities of Mohenjo Daro and Harappa had been laid out on similar regular lines, and there is little doubt that other Indian cities were carefully planned. It was by no means uncommon for a powerful king to build a wholly new capital, and this would give much scope to the town-planner. The *Arthashastra* gives detailed instructions for the establishment of such a new city. It advises a square gridiron plan, divided into wards or sectors by six main roads, three running north and south, and three east and west. The chief temples were to be located in the centre, and different classes of the community were to be segregated in separate wards. The fortified city of Śiśupālgarh was certainly built as an almost exact square of nearly a mile on each side (pl. *Vla*), but it has not been sufficiently excavated to ascertain whether the street plan conformed to the *Arthashastra’s* scheme. It is possible that the northern city of Ahicchatrā in Uttar Pradesh did so approximately, but here again the excavated portions are not sufficient to tell with certainty.

The city had two foci, the palace and the temple. Of ancient Indian palace architecture we know little; the fragments of the highly polished columns of the Mauryan palace at Pāṭaliputra, and a large building at Takṣaśilā which may have been a palace, are all that have survived except from a very late period; but from this and other evidence it would seem that the palace was usually situated in or near the centre of the city, and that it was often defended by fortifications as a sort of citadel.

Temples have survived better, though we have no Hindu temples from pre-Gupta times. In the temple the religious sentiments of the people were largely concentrated. From the temple came the great and splendid religious processions which filled and still fill the heart of the ordinary Hindu with almost superhuman exaltation. In the medieval period the temple, especially if it was a great and famous temple in one of the sacred cities, was itself a city in miniature (fig. *xv*). It was enormously wealthy, and a source of wealth to the town from the many pilgrims who visited it. Such a temple was a great landowner, with many employees, including priests, musicians, attendants, and dancing girls for the temple services, a staff of scribes and accountants, and many craftsmen and labourers. Often the

* These are traditionally seven: Ayodhya, Mathura, Māyā (Hardwar, in northern Uttar Pradesh, where the Ganges meets the Plain), Kāñcī (Conjeevaram), Ujjainī (Ujjain), Dwārakā (Dwaraka in Saurashtra), and of course Kāśī (Varanasi); but others were almost equally sacred, notably Prayāga (Allahābād), Madurai, and Puri (Orissa).
temple maintained schools and refuges for sick men and animals; it
dispensed charity to beggars, and relieved the poorer citizens in time
of distress and famine. Like the medieval European monastery it
might grant land and privileges to its servants in princely wise. The
great temple, especially in the Deccan, was a corporate body which
often played a bigger part in the life of the ordinary citizen than did
the civil government. The larger Buddhist and Jaina monasteries
were equally influential in their own districts, though they were
usually located outside the big cities.

From literary sources, and from the evidence of sculpture and paint-
ing, we can get some idea of the houses of the wealthy, which prob-

Fig. xv—The temple of Sríraṅgam. 13th-18th centuries, A.D. (Repro-
duced from Percy Brown's "Indian Architecture (Buddhist and Hindu
Period)", published by D. B. Taraporevala Sons & Co. Ltd., Bombay)
ably did not differ greatly, except in size, from the palaces of kings.
The typical larger town house was one of several storeys; three-
storeyed buildings seem to have been quite common, and there are
literary references to houses of seven and even eleven storeys, though
the latter at least are hardly credible. Down to Gupta times most
houses, from palaces to small cottages, were built with barrel-vaulted
roofs, with gable-ends and often ornate finjals (fig. xiv). Roofs
were both thatched and tiled. Later the high barrel-vaulted roof gave
way to a flatter type, with overhanging eaves. Larger houses of
later times usually had raised terraces or flat roofs on which the
members of the household slept in hot weather. In historical times
houses were not, like the houses of the Indus cities, closed in by bare
walls, but had windows and balconies overlooking the street. In the medieval period the balconies were often screened with lattices, so that the ladies of the household might see without being seen, but the balconies of houses depicted at Bhārhut and Sānci have no such screens. The walls were whitewashed, and, as today, might be decorated with painted pictures and ornamentation, both on the flat and in stucco relief. The usual larger house had a square courtyard surrounded by a veranda, behind which were the living quarters. Bathrooms are mentioned in literature, sometimes with running water, probably diverted from a nearby stream.

The ancient Indian greatly loved flowers and trees. Megasthenes describes with wonder the beautiful parks surrounding the palace of Candragupta Maurya, and many references in Sanskrit literature show that wealthy citizens had gardens attached to their houses, and often larger parks in the suburbs containing pavilions in which they spent much of their leisure. There are references in poetry to artificial hillocks (kridāśaila), which suggest that landscape gardens of the Japanese type were sometimes laid out.

As in all hot climates an expanse of water was an almost essential feature of the garden, and the parks of the wealthy contained artificial lakes and pools, often with fountains, and with steps leading down to them for bathing. A further refinement, for cooling the air in the hot season, was the "water-machine" (vāriyantra), which, from the description of the poet Kālidāsa, seems to have been a sort of revolving spray, rather like that used to water lawns at the present day. In the bathing pools the citizens would cool themselves in the hot weather, and literature contains many references to kings and heroes playing in the water with their wives and concubines. We also read of subterranean chambers at one end of such bathing tanks, cooled by the water surrounding them on all sides, in which the tired bather might rest. Another feature of the pleasure garden which was looked on as almost indispensable was a swing, in which adults of both sexes took delight. Gardens were watered by channels which led from the main tank to the trees and flower beds.

Specially loved were flowering trees, which are very frequently mentioned in poetry, especially the aśoka (Saraca indica), a smallish tree bearing a mass of lovely scarlet or orange blossoms, which, it was said, would only flower if kicked by a beautiful woman; other favourites were the tall pale-flowered śīrīṣa (Albizia spp.), the fragrant, orangu-flowered kadambara (Anancephalus cadamba), and the red kimsuka (Butea frondosa); the banana (kadalī) was grown for ornament as well as for its fruit. Bushes and creepers were also much loved, especially the jasmine, of which there were many varieties, and
the white *atimukta* (*Hiptage madabola*); other popular trees were the *campaka* (*Michelia champaca*), with very fragrant yellow flowers, and the hibiscus, or China rose (*jepa*). Most beloved of all flowers, and the subject of much religious and other symbolism, was the lotus or water-lily in its many varieties. This beautiful flower the poets never tired of mentioning, giving it dozens of synonyms and epithets. The rose, common enough in North India today, was apparently unknown, and was probably introduced by the Muslims.

As well as the private gardens of the rich there were public gardens and parks, often mentioned in story. In the vicinity of most cities were groves which were the favourite resorts of the townspeople. Asoka took pride in the fact that he had planted such groves for the recreation of man and beast, and some other kings are recorded as having followed his example.

Of the life and homes of the city poor we are told little in literature, but the cottages here and there depicted in early sculpture are, like the larger houses, barrel-roofed, and apparently one-roomed. We must assume that the poorer folk dwelt, as they do today, in huts made of wood, reed or mud brick, and thatched with straw. Many no doubt had no homes at all, but slept in odd corners of the city with their few possessions around them.

Efforts were made by the more energetic authorities to provide some amenities for the poorer citizens. The *Arthasāstra* suggests that a public well should be provided for every ten families. The same text recommends a fixed tariff of fines for leaving rubbish in the streets, and stringent precautions against fires; every home was to keep elementary fire-fighting equipment in readiness, and on an outbreak of fire all able-bodied citizens in the neighbourhood were liable to be called on to help put out the flames. The city authorities were to provide drainage for surface water, and fines were to be imposed for blocking the drains. We cannot tell how far these recommendations were put into practice, but it is hardly likely that they had no basis whatever in fact.

Undoubtedly the most remarkable description of an ancient Indian city is contained in the early Tamil poem *The Garland of Madurai*, (*Maduraikkāṭṭi*) said to have been written in honour of a 2nd century Pāṇḍyan king Nedūnjēliyan but probably composed a century or two later. After a long panegyric on the king, the poet describes the various regions of his kingdom, and concludes with an account of his capital city, Madurai. This is too long to quote, but we must at least summarize this part of the lovely poem, which has a realism rare in the literature of the North.
The poet enters the city by its great gate, the posts of which are carved with images of the goddess Lakṣmi, and which is grimy with ghee, poured in oblation upon it to bring safety and prosperity to the city it guards. It is a day of festival, and the city is gay with flags, some, presented by the king to commemorate brave deeds, flying over the homes of captains, and others waving over the shops which sell the gladdening toddy. The streets are broad rivers of people, folk of every race, buying and selling in the market-place or singing to the music of wandering minstrels.

A drum beats, and a royal procession passes down the street, with elephants leading to the sound of conchs. A refractory beast breaks his chain, and tosses like a ship in an angry sea until he is again brought to order. Chariots follow, with prancing horses and fierce-looking footmen.

Meanwhile stall-keepers ply their trades, selling sweet cakes, garlands of flowers, scented powder and betel quids. Old women go from house to house, selling nosegays and trinkets to the womenfolk. Noblemen drive through the streets in their chariots, their gold-sheathed swords flashing, wearing brightly-dyed garments and wreaths of flowers. From balconies and turrets the many jewels of the perfumed women who watch the festival flash in the sunlight.

The people flock to the temples to worship to the sound of music, laying their flowers before the images and honouring the holy sages. Craftsmen work in their shops—men making bangles of conch shell, goldsmiths, cloth-dealers, coppersmiths, flower-sellers, vendors of sandalwood, painters and weavers. Foodshops busily sell their wares—greens, jack-fruit, mangoes, sugar candy, cooked rice and chunks of cooked meat.

In the evening the city prostitutes entertain their patrons with dancing and singing to the sound of the lute (yāf), so that the streets are filled with music. Drunken villagers, in town for the festival, reel in the roadways, while respectable women make evening visits to the temples with their children and friends, carrying lighted lamps as offerings. They dance in the temple courts, which are clamorous with their singing and chatter.

At last the city sleeps—all but the goblins and ghosts who haunt the dark, and the bold housebreakers, armed with rope ladders, swords and chisels, to break through the walls of the mud houses. But the watchmen are also vigilant, and the city passes the night in peace.

Morning comes with the sound of brāhmans intoning their sacred verses. The wandering bards renew their singing, and the shopkeepers busy themselves opening their booths. The toddy-sellers again ply their trade for thirsty morning travellers. The drunkards reel to their feet and once more shout in the streets. All over the city is heard the sound of opening doors. Women sweep the faded flowers of the festival from their courtyards. Thus the busy everyday life of the city is resumed.¹⁴

The ancient Indian city was a source of pride to its inhabitants. One of the most memorable records of such pride is contained in the 5th century Mandasor inscription of the guild of silk-weavers, already mentioned in another connexion (p. 150). This commemorates the
building and subsequent repair by the guild of a splendid temple of
the Sun. A poem recording the event was composed “with great
care” by one Vatsabhaṭṭi, probably a local hack-poet commissioned
for the occasion, and was engraved on stone as a perpetual memorial.
No doubt echoing the thought of his patrons, Vatsabhaṭṭi writes in
glowing terms of his city,

“Where the water-lilies are ever shaken by tremulous ripples,
and the geese seem to be shut in a cage of pollen,
blown from the lotuses which shine in the lakes,
bent by the weight of their own stamens;

“Where the groves are adorned with trees
bowed under the burden of blossoms,
and with bee-swarms, drunk with honey,
and with women ever-singing;

“Where lovely women dwell
in houses a-flutter with flags,
most purely white, most lofty,
like fair hills of cloud that glitter with the vine of the lightning;

“Where other mansions, adorned with groves of swaying bananas,
lovely as the high peak of Mount Kailāśa,
shine with their long roof-ridges and pavilions,
loud with the noise of music, and gay with pictures.”

And so the poet in fanciful language describes the beauty of the
city, the goodness of the local king, the benevolence of the guild, and
the splendour of the new temple, until he concludes:

“As the moon the clear heavens,
as the kaustubha * the breast of Viṣṇu,
this fairest of temples adorns
our wholly noble city.”

THE MAN ABOUT TOWN

We can learn much about the life of the Greek and Roman bour-
geoisie from literature and archaeological remains; but the comparable
literature of India is less realistic, and there is no Indian counter-
part of Pompeii. Nevertheless there is enough evidence to recon-
struct the life of the well-to-do young Indian in some detail from
secular literature, among our most important sources being the
treatise on erotics, the Kāmasūtra (p. 172), which was composed to
instruct him in one of his chief recreations.

His room, we are told,16 should contain a pleasant and soft bed,

* A magical jewel, one of the god’s insignia.
with a pure white coverlet, a decorated canopy, and two pillows, one at
the foot and the other at the head. The room should also have a divan at
the head of which perfumes, unguents, flowers, and pots of collyrium
should be kept on a little table. On the floor nearby should be placed
a cuspidor, to receive the red expectoration caused by betel chewing,
and a chest for ornaments and clothes. On the wall should hang a
lute (vīnā), and the room should also contain a drawing table, a few
palm-leaf books, a round seat and a gaming-board. Attached to the
house should be an aviary, a garden containing swings, an arbour of
climbing plants, and a grass bank on which the owner might sit in the
shade with his guests.

Rising in the morning the man about town washes, cleans his teeth,
anoints his body with unguents and perfume, puts collyrium on his
eyes, dyes his lips with red lac, and looks at himself in the mirror.
Then he chews a betel quid to sweeten his breath. He baths every
day, rubs his body with oil every other day, shaves his face every
fourth day, and his whole body every fifth or tenth day. He eats
three meals daily. Much of his time is spent in charming, graceful
idleness. He amuses himself by teaching his parrots and mynahs to
talk, or by watching fighting cocks, quails or rams; he converses
with the parasites who surround him. In the hotter weather he takes
an afternoon nap.

He had many intellectual pleasures however. He was not merely
a patron and passive admirer of the arts, but was encouraged by
society to be himself creative. He should know something of the
sixty-four arts (p. 184f). He might be a poet in his own right, and
some of the surviving Sanskrit poetry is not the work of professionals.
Large gatherings were often held under the patronage of kings or
wealthy men for the recitation of poetry, and smaller groups would
often meet together for the same purpose, either at the home of one
of the group or at the house of a courtesan. These literary parties
are mentioned in the Kāmasūtra as among the chief pleasures of the
educated man. The members of such circles might form regular
social clubs, and “should stand together in time of trouble as in
prosperity,... and hospitably entertain newcomers to their group”.

The ancient Indian, like his modern descendant, was usually an ex-
trovert, delighting in the company of his fellows, and warm-hearted
in his friendships. The immense stress laid in sacred literature
on the duty of hospitality encouraged and gave religious sanction
to the social propensities of the time.

Sometimes literary parties were held in the open air, in the gardens
and groves about the town, and might be diversified with cock-fight-
ing and bathing. The educated man might also be a painter; his
sanctum, as we have seen, contained a painting-board or easel, and the *Kāmasūtra* even suggests that he should have a special room for sculpture, wood-carving and clay modelling.

**AMUSEMENTS**

The amusements of the ancient Indian townsman were by no means all creative or intellectual. Numerous festivals, participated in by rich and poor alike, divided the Hindu year, and were marked by merrymaking and processions. The most popular festival in early times was the Festival of Spring, in honour of Kāma, the Love-god, who, though he played only a small part in the thought of the theologians, was evidently a very popular divinity. At this festival even respectable citizens forgot their caste restrictions, and paraded the streets scattering red powder over their neighbours, squirting them with coloured water, and playing all kinds of practical jokes. The festival still survives under the name *Holi*, though the Love-god now plays no part in it. It is clearly the survival of a primitive and bloody fertility ceremony; but even at its earliest appearance the grim significance of the red powder seems to have been lost, and it was a sort of Hindu saturnalia, a time of universal merrymaking and licence of all kinds.

Though much reprobated by the brāhman authors of the Smṛti literature, gambling was popular at all times and among all classes except the more rigidly religious people. Six-sided dice have been found in the Indus cities, and the ‘Gamester’s Lament’ of the *Rg Veda* testifies to the popularity of gambling among the early Āryans (p. 408ff).

The word *akṣa* in the context of gambling is generally roughly translated ‘dice’, but the *akṣas* in the earliest gambling games were not dice, but small hard nuts called *vibhiṣaka* or *vibhidaka*; apparently players drew a handful of these from a bowl and scored if the number was a multiple of four. Later, oblong dice with four scoring sides were used; like the European gamester the Indian employed a special terminology for the throws at dice: *kṛta* (cater, four), *treta* (trey), *dvāpara* (deuce), and *kali* (ace). So important was gambling in the Indian scheme of things that these four terms were applied to the four periods (*yuga*) of the aeon (p. 323). Gambling played a small but significant part in the ritual of the royal consecration ceremony, and the gambling hall attached to the king’s palace in the later Vedic period had some magical or religious significance, though its import is not wholly clear. Among the chief men of the realm, whose loyalty was confirmed by a special ceremony at the consecration of the king
(p. 42), was the akṣavāpa, or thrower of nuts or dice, evidently the organizer of the royal gambling parties. The plot of the Mahābhārata hinges round a great gambling tournament, at which Yudhisṭhira lost his kingdom to his wicked cousin Duryodhana, and the Epic tells a similar story in the episode of Nala. The Arthaśāstra advocates the strict control of gambling, which it would confine entirely to officially-managed gaming houses, financed by a tax of five per cent of the stakes and a charge for the hire of dice to gamblers, who were to be forbidden to use their own. Stringent fines were laid down for cheating.

With the dice were played board games, similar to our children’s games such as ludo, which involved a combination of chance and skill. By the early centuries of the Christian era one of these, played on a board of sixty-four squares (aśṭapāda), had developed into a game of some complexity, with a king-piece, and pieces of four other types, corresponding to the corps of the ancient Indian army—an elephant, a horse, a chariot or ship, and four footmen. The original game needed four players, and their moves were controlled by the throw of the dice. As the game was played with pieces representing military forces, and its strategy suggested that of campaigning armies, it was known as caturaṅga, or “four corps”. In the 6th century the game was learnt by the Persians, and when Persia was conquered by the Arabs it quickly spread all over the Middle East, under the name shatranj, the Persian corruption of caturaṅga. It developed into a game for two persons, each with two “armies”, the king of one army becoming the “general” or “minister” of the other, and the use of dice to control the moves was given up. It is not quite certain whether these improvements were made in India or Persia, but the latter is more probable.

The game was learnt by the crusaders from the Muslims, and soon spread over Europe. By the Middle Ages it had almost attained its modern form as chess, the “general” of the Muslim game becoming the queen. Thus the world’s most intellectual game is the product of three cultures, each of which contributed something to its finished form.

Organized outdoor games were not common, except among children and young women, who are sometimes referred to as playing ball, like Nausicaa in the Odyssey. A form of polo, introduced from Central Asia, became popular among warriors in the Middle Ages, though it is little mentioned in literature, and a kind of hockey was also played. But, in general, ancient India did not put such stress on athletics as did the Mediterranean world. Chariot racing is mentioned as early as the Rg Veda, and bullock racing was popular
in the late medieval period. Boxing and wrestling are often referred to, but were not generally the hobbies of respectable young men, but the preserve of low-caste professional pugilists, who performed for the amusement of an audience. The archery contest, however, was a much-loved amusement of the warrior class, and vivid descriptions of such contests occur in the Epics.

Classical sources refer to gladiatorial displays at the court of Candragupta Maurya, and in the medieval Deccan duelling became frequent. The Portuguese traveller Nuniz writes that if two nobles of Vijayanagara quarrelled they would fight to the death in the presence of the king and his court. Despite the growth of the doctrine of non-violence throughout our period, animal fights were always very popular. The favourite animals to be pitted against each other were the fierce little Indian quail (lāvaka), the cock and the ram; we also read of fights between bulls, buffaloes and elephants (pl. XLIIIb).

One form of animal contest confined to the Dravidian South was the bullfight, of which we have a vivid description in an early Tamil poem. This sport did not closely resemble the Spanish bullfight, where the scales are heavily weighted against the bull, for here the bull appears to have had the advantage. The fights were popular among herdsmen, who entered the arena unarmed, and “embraced the bull” in an attempt to master it, rather like the cowpunchers of an American rodeo. They made no attempt to kill the bull, and it was not previously irritated, but the bullfight was evidently a sport of great danger, for the poem contains a gory description of a victorious bull, his horns hung with the entrails of his unsuccessful opponents. The bullfight was looked on as an ordeal to test the manhood of young men, since it is stated that the girls who watched the performance would choose their husbands from among the successful competitors in a sort of Tamil svayamvara. Though Tamil literature gives no evidence of this, the bullfight had certainly some ritual significance, and was connected with the fertility of the crops. A similar sport was practised as part of a religious ceremonial by the ancient Cretans, and this fact, like many others, links the Tamils with the earliest civilizations of the Mediterranean world. Wrestling with young steers is still a favourite pastime of some pastoral peoples of India.

Many of the amusements of ancient India were provided by professional entertainers. As well as those who practised highly developed arts such as drama, music and dancing, there were others who travelled through town and village, diverting the ordinary folk who could not fully appreciate the nuances of the more sophisticated
art forms. We read of musicians, bards, acrobats, jugglers, conjurors and snake-charmers, popular then as now. As well as the courtly theatre there was a folk-drama, occasionally referred to in literature, which portrayed scenes of mythology and legend in dance, song and mime, and from which the Sanskrit drama developed.

CLOTHES AND ORNAMENTS

The garments worn from Vedic times onwards did not fundamentally differ from those worn by Hindus in later times. Like most ancient peoples living in hot climates Indians usually wore lengths of cloth, draped around the body and over the shoulders, and fastened with a belt and pins. The lower garment (paridhāna, vasana) was usually such a cloth, fastened round the waist with a belt or string (mekhalā, rašanā); and the upper garment (uttariya) was another such length, draped shawl-wise over the shoulders. The latter garment was often discarded in the home, or in hot weather, especially by the lower orders. A third garment (prāvāra) was also worn, draped like a mantle or cloak, in the cold season.

This was the general garb of both sexes, as it is today, and varied only in the size and pattern of the cloths and in the manner of wearing them. Sometimes the lower garment was of very small proportions, or a mere loincloth, but the lower garments of the rich often reached almost to the feet. In early sculpture the lower garment is depicted as elaborately pleated in front, and held with a long girdle, the end of which hangs down in front of the garment between the legs (pl. XVIIa). In some sculptures the girdle appears to have been the end of the cloth itself, which might also be thrown over the shoulders in the manner of the present day sāri. Sometimes the end of the cloth was drawn between the legs and fastened at the back in the manner of the dhoti.

Though all these garments were unstitched the art of sewing was not unknown, and women are often depicted wearing jackets or bodices (colaka, kañcukka). With the invasions of the Śakas and Kuśāṇas from Central Asia trousers were introduced, and were in vogue among the ruling classes at least until Gupta times, for the Gupta kings are often shown on their coins as wearing them (fig. xxiv, p. 389). Kuśāṇa kings are shown on their coins, and in the remarkable headless statue of Kaniska (pls. XXIa, XLVIIe), wearing long quilted coats, quilted trousers, and boots of typically Central Asian type, which must have been as uncomfortable in the average temperature of India as the thick European clothing worn by the pioneers of the East India Company. The wearing of shirts and
The wearing of trousers seems to have been quite common in medieval Kashmir and the North-West. In medieval South India goddesses and queens were often depicted as wearing what seem to be light close-fitting trousers. The cloth used for all these garments varied from wool, worn in the Northern winters, to diaphanous silks and muslins, which showed the limbs of the wearer. The paintings of Ajantā and Bāgh show that they were often dyed or otherwise patterned with gay stripes and checks.

In most parts of India footwear was primarily used to protect the feet against the scorching earth of the Indian summer, but in the Himalayas felt boots of Central Asian pattern were worn.

On their heads men usually wore turbans, which were fastened in many elaborate patterns (pl. XIVb). In early times, at least on festive occasions, women wore large and complicated headdresses of a type not seen nowadays, but by the Gupta period they are usually depicted either bare-headed, or wearing head-veils or simple tiara-like headdresses. Orthodox brāhmaṇs shaved the whole head with the exception of the topknot, which was never cut, but with other classes both sexes usually allowed their hair to grow long. The most popular coiffure with women was a large bun at the nape of the neck, often ornamented with a fillet or string of jewels (pl. XXXVIc). The pigtail, most common at the present day, though attested in the Harappā culture and mentioned in literature, does not often appear in sculpture until the medieval period.

There is some controversy on the character of women's dress in ancient India. Throughout our period women are depicted in painting and sculpture as naked to the waist, while on the other hand the great physical modesty of modern Hindu womanhood is common knowledge. James Fergusson, one of the first serious students of ancient Indian sculpture, declared categorically that until the Muslim conquest Hindu women exposed their breasts in public without the least shame. This conclusion has, however, been controverted.

It is asserted that, like the Greeks and Romans, the Indian artist and sculptor followed a tradition of showing the female form in a state of semi-nakedness, when this had no counterpart in real life. The objection, however, is hardly valid. When portraying real life, rather than mythology or figure studies, the classical artist usually draped his women. In the early sculptures of Bhārhat and Sānci, on the other hand, there is scarcely a woman with covered breasts, even among the crowds in the very realistic reliefs of Indian city life. References to bodices in literature are numerous, and women with covered breasts do sometimes appear in painting and sculpture; but
in the Northern Plains and the hillier parts of the Deccan the weather is quite cool for several months of the year, and the use of bodices may have been due rather to climate than to modesty. In Kerala, where many old customs survived long, it was quite normal until comparatively recent times for women of the Nayyar caste to appear in public naked to the waist, and the same is true of the island of Bali, which adopted Hindu culture early in the Christian era. In some literary sources there are references to married women wearing veils, but there is no evidence that these were normally more than headcoverings, or that they concealed the form of the wearer. It is only in late medieval literature that clear expressions of the need of strict physical, as distinct from mental, modesty are found. Women in ancient India were considerably restricted in their activities, and a high standard of modesty was demanded of those of the higher classes (p. 180f); but it is clear that their ideas of propriety in dress were very different from those of their descendants.

If clothes were simple and few, ornaments were complex and many. Gold, silver and precious stones of every available kind were always in demand for personal adornment. Women wore jewelled ornaments on their foreheads, and along the partings of their hair. Earrings were worn by both sexes, and the ears were stretched by heavy and large ornaments, as is done by women in the Tamil country districts to this day. Ornate necklaces were worn, and wide girdles of linked gold with hanging ropes of pearls. Bangles and armlets were popular from the days of the Harappā Culture onwards, and anklets, often set with little tinkling bells, or with their hollows filled with rattling pebbles, were as popular then as now. Nose ornaments, without which Indian women of the older generation felt positively undressed, are nowhere mentioned or depicted, and their use can only have been widely adopted after the Muslim conquest. The few surviving pieces, and the representations of jewellery in sculpture and painting, show that the Indian jeweller attained very high standards in his art (pl. XLVIIa). It would seem that the early Indian, like his modern counterpart, would often save his money by investing it in jewellery for his wife and himself. Even the poorer people, who could not afford gold or gems, loaded themselves with ornaments of silver, brass, glass and painted pottery, and all classes adorned their hair, ears and necks with the beautiful flowers which India provides in abundance.

Cosmetics were used by both sexes. Chief among these was a paste made of finely ground dust of sandalwood, often coloured with lac and other dyes, which was smeared over the whole body or applied in patterns. It was believed to cool the skin in the hot season.
Collyrium or eye-salve (*aṅjana*), usually made of black powdered antimony, was very popular, and, as well as enhancing the beauty of the eye, was thought to prevent ophthalmia. Vermilion (*sindūra*), lac (*lākṣa*) and a yellow pigment called *gorocana* were used to mark the beauty-spot on the forehead (*tilaka*), which might often be large and ornate, and which is still popular with Indian ladies. The lips, the tips of the fingers and toes, and the palms and soles of the feet were often dyed red with lac. Though exposed parts of the body were often painted with complicated patterns there is no clear evidence of tattooing, which is popular nowadays in many parts of India.

**FOOD AND DRINK**

When Fa-hsien visited India in the early 5th century he reported that no respectable person ate meat, the consumption of which was confined to low castes. He probably exaggerated, but certainly by this time many Hindus of the higher classes were vegetarians. The growth of vegetarianism was of course linked with the doctrine of non-violence, which was already old at the time of Fa-hsien. It was known in the days of the Upaniṣads and was elaborated by Buddhism and Jainism, which were largely responsible for the gradual disappearance of the greater Vedic sacrifices at which large numbers of animals were killed and eaten. The reign of Aśoka is a landmark in the development of vegetarianism, for he encouraged it by his own example, and forbade outright the killing of many animals. But the *Arthatāstra* accepts meat-eating as quite normal, and lays down rules for the management of slaughterhouses and the maintenance of the purity of meat. It was only with the growth of Mahāyāna Buddhism and the new Hinduism that strict vegetarianism became widespread. Even then hunting and meat-eating were practised by the warrior class, and the tantric cults of the Middle Ages restored the practice of sacrifice and meat-eating in a new form. Medical texts, even of a late period, go so far as to recommend the use of both meat and alcohol in moderation, and do not forbid the eating of beef. It is doubtful if complete vegetarianism has ever been universal in any part of India, though in many regions it was and still is practised by most high-caste Hindus. With the prohibition of meat-eating some religious texts included that of eating garlic and onions, the objection to which arose for obvious reasons, and was never given a real religious basis; but it is doubtful if this ban ever had any great effect until a very late period, except on pious brāhmaṇas.

There are several references to the science of cookery (*śūpalāstra*), which was not disdained even by kings, but no ancient textbook on
cookery has survived. From passages in literature we know that ancient Indian cookery did not differ much from that of the present day. Meat and vegetables alike were seasoned in curries and eaten with rice, boiled or fried. With the curry and rice flat cakes of flour, the modern *chapāṭi*, were eaten, and water, milk, or curd were drunk. The favourite cooking medium was ghee, in which the food was fried and which was poured liberally over the dish; poorer folk often substituted for ghee the oil of sesamum or mustard. Certain foods very widespread in India nowadays are, however, 16th or 17th century importations, brought from America by the Portuguese. The most surprising of these is the chilli or red pepper, so characteristic of South Indian cooking. The brinjal or egg plant is another 17th century innovation, as are of course the potato and the sweet corn or maize. Fruit and sweetmeats of many kinds were as popular as they are today, but many of the Indian sweets eaten nowadays, such as the *jalebi*, are Muslim importations.

In modern Hinduism there is a strong taboo on the drinking of alcoholic beverages, and most of those who drink regularly are either very Westernized in their ways or of low caste. The moral objection to alcohol is very ancient, but it was long before the ban became widespread, except among brāhmans. Though Aśoka discouraged meat-eating his edicts say nothing about drinking, and it is therefore evident that he had no strong moral objections to it, though Buddhism counts the drinking of spirits as one of the five cardinal sins (p. 288). In Aśoka's day Buddhism was apparently more lax in this respect than it later became. The lawbooks condemned drinking, and Fa-hsien stated that respectable Indians did not drink, but drinking and drunkenness are so frequently mentioned in literature, especially in that of the Tamils, that it is clear that religious precept was not regularly followed in this particular. Only in the 12th century do we find Kumārapāla, the Jain king of Gujarāt, forbidding the production and sale of liquor throughout his kingdom.

The *Arthasastra* advises the manufacture of liquor in government controlled breweries, and gives several brief and cryptic recipes, which show that there were many alcoholic drinks, some of which are not popular nowadays; among these were rice beer (*medaka*), a sort of spiced beer made of flour (*prasanna*), wood-apple wine (*āśava*), *maireya*, a liquor made of raw sugar, the bark of the *megahīra* tree, and pepper, and mango wine (*sahakīrasura*). Wine from grapes was made in the North-West, and exported in small quantities to the rest of India. In the South, toddy, the fermented sap of the palmyra or coconut, was the staple alcoholic liquor, and is frequently mentioned in early Tamil literature.
The Arthasastra, perhaps reflecting Mauryan conditions, suggests the appointment of a "superintendent of liquor", not only to control the sale and consumption of alcoholic drinks but also to organize their manufacture. The text advises the stringent control of private brewing and of taverns. Tavern-keepers are to be instructed to make their establishments well-furnished and comfortable, and to prevent their patrons from over-indulgence; the text even suggests that they should indemnify customers for any loss sustained while under the influence of liquor, and pay a fine into the bargain. Unlike most other oriental traders tavern-keepers, according to the Arthasastra, were not to be allowed to build their premises close together, thus discouraging the ancient Indian equivalent of "pub-crawling"; the text also suggests the complete prohibition of the consumption of alcohol "off the premises". The taverns were often the haunts of criminals, and the king's spies were advised to keep a watchful eye on them. The Arthasastra evidently recognizes drinking as an evil which cannot be wholly forbidden, but which must be strictly controlled.

**ECONOMIC LIFE**

It has often been said that ancient Indian society was not an acquisitive one. Admittedly the brâhmans, who claimed moral and spiritual leadership, set themselves ideals of dignified austerity, but these ideals were not always followed in practice. A brâhman who attained a good local reputation for the efficient performance of sacrifices and domestic ceremonies might amass considerable wealth, and if patronized by a king he might become really rich. Corporations of such brâhmans often lived on the proceeds of large agricultural estates (agrahâra), transferred to them by kings, and there are accounts of brâhman landowners who enjoyed great wealth. Other brâhmans, not necessarily trained to teach the Vedas or to sacrifice, obtained high posts in government service, or even became wealthy by trade. We have seen (p. 171), according to the doctrine of the three aims of life, the place of wealth in the Hindu scheme of things was well established.

In most early Indian literature the world is viewed from the angle of the well-to-do. Poverty, it is more than once said, is living death; to serve another for one's keep is a dog's life, and not worthy of an Āryan. From the time of the Rg Veda, which contains many prayers for riches, worldly wealth was looked on as morally desirable for the ordinary man, and indeed essential to a full and civilized life. The ascetic who voluntarily abandoned his wealth performed an act of renunciation which entitled him to the utmost respect. Though by this renunciation he assured himself of spiritual advancement, and was well on the way to salvation (mokṣa), the fourth and ultimate aim
of existence, the ascetic's life was not that of the ordinary man, and the theoretical classification of the four stages of life (p. 159f) gave ample scope in the second stage to the householder, who was indeed encouraged to build up the family fortunes, and to spend part of them at least on the pleasures of the senses. Thus the ideals of ancient India, while not perhaps the same as those of the West, by no means excluded money-making. India had not only a class of luxury-loving and pleasure-seeking dilettanti, but also one of wealth-seeking merchants and prosperous craftsmen, who, if less respected than the brāhmans and warriors, had an honourable place in society.

Though the basis of ancient Indian industry was at all times the individual craftsman, aided chiefly by members of his own family, larger manufactories, worked chiefly by hired labour, were by no means unknown. The Mauryan state owned not only spinning and weaving workshops (p. 181f), but also shops for the manufacture of weapons and other military supplies, employing salaried craftsmen. The larger mines were also owned and worked by the state. But though the economic order approximated to a sort of state socialism, in the time of the Mauryas, it always left scope for the individual producer and distributor. We read here and there of private producers who had far transcended the status of the small home craftsman, and who manufactured on a large scale for a wide market. Thus an early Jaina text tells of a wealthy potter named Saddālaputta who owned 500 potters' workshops and a fleet of boats which distributed his wares throughout the Gangā valley; there are a few other references which confirm that large scale production for a wide market was not unknown in ancient India, though such industrialists as Saddālaputta were no doubt comparatively rare.

A form of industrial organization on a larger scale than the individual craftsman, and probably more common than the entrepreneur, was the workmen's co-operative group, perhaps comparable to the pre-revolutionary Russian artel; such groups are mentioned in the Pāli Jātaka stories and elsewhere as carrying out large scale enterprises such as the building of temples and houses. Their existence tended to encourage division of labour; thus one man would fashion the shaft of an arrow, a second would fix the flights, and a third would make and fix the point. Rules are laid down in the lawbooks for the punishment of breach of contract by such co-operatives or their individual members.

Much of the work of the craftsman was sold at the door of his workshop direct to the purchaser. Normally each craft or trade was concentrated in a separate street or bazaar, where the craftsman had his workshop, stall and home. The testimony of Megasthenes, corro-
bored by the *Arthaśāstra*, shows that in Mauryan times prices were regulated by market officials. The latter text suggests that, as a further effort at maintaining a just price, government officers should buy on the open market when any staple commodity was cheap and plentiful, and release stocks from government stores when it was in short supply, thus bringing down the price and making a profit for the king into the bargain. We have no definite evidence that this idea was ever put into effect, but it is striking that ancient Indian political theorists anticipated by over 2,000 years the plans put forward by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations for maintaining a stable level of prices of staple commodities on a world-wide scale.

**GUILDS**

As well as the state, another element did much to control prices and standards of work. This was the guild (*śreni*), a form of industrial and mercantile organization which played as big a part in the economy of ancient India as it did in that of most other ancient or medieval civilizations. There are faint and uncertain references to some sort of guild organization even in Vedic literature, and by the time of the composition of the Buddhist scriptures guilds certainly existed in every important Indian town, and embraced almost all trades and industries—we even read of a guild of thieves.

The guild united both the craftsmen’s co-operatives and the individual workmen of a given trade into a single corporate body. It fixed rules of work and wages, and standards and prices for the commodities in which its members dealt, and its regulations had the force of law and were upheld by the king and government. Over its own members the guild had judicial rights, which were recognized by the state. A guild court could, like a caste council, expel a refractory member, a penalty which would virtually preclude him from practising his ancestral trade and reduce him to beggary. We read in Buddhist literature of guild courts settling quarrels between members and their wives, and the rules of the Buddhist order lay down that a married woman may not be ordained a nun without the consent of her husband and his guild. Thus the guild had power not only over the economic, but also over the social life of its members. It acted as guardian of their widows and orphans, and as their insurance against sickness. Its powers and functions in this respect were very similar to those of caste councils in more recent times, and, though some authorities would disagree with us, we cannot but conclude that the guilds played an important part in the evolution of trade castes.

The guild was headed by a chief, usually called the "Elder"
(jyeṣṭhaka, in Pāli jāṭhaka), who was assisted by a small council of senior members. The office of Elder was usually hereditary and held by one of the richest members of the guild. In the Pāli scriptures the Elder is invariably described as a very wealthy man, often with much influence at the palace, and counselling the king himself. The guilds had a corporate life, symbolized, as in medieval Europe, by the possession of banners, and also of chaurīs, * the ceremonial yak's tail fly-whisks which were insignia of nobility. These and other emblems were sometimes granted by royal charter, and were carried in local religious processions by the guildsmen. Some guilds, again like those of medieval Europe, had their own militias, which served as auxiliaries of the king's armies in time of need (p. 129).

All over India are to be found inscriptions recording the donations of guilds to religious causes of all kinds, the most famous being that of the Mandasor silk-weavers, to whom we have already referred. The guilds must have had considerable funds to make such large donations, and no doubt their members paid regular subscriptions which were augmented by fines levied on those who transgressed the guild law. There are references in the legal literature to guilds acting as bankers, accepting deposits, and lending money at interest to merchants and others. They would often act as trustees of religious endowments; the pious would pay a sum of money to a guild, on condition that it would maintain a perpetual lamp in a temple or provide new robes annually for the monks of a Buddhist monastery. Inscriptions recording such acts of benevolence are quite numerous, and no doubt the guilds, while duly carrying out their part of the agreement, profited from such transactions.

The corporate spirit of the guild gave the better type of craftsman and merchant a degree of self-respect which he would not otherwise have found. There is more than one record of riots and affrays between different guilds and trade groups; this was specially the case in the medieval Deccan, where guild and caste often overlapped in function or were virtually synonymous, and the strange division of right and left hand castes led to much friction (p. 151). The fact that more than one guild of the same craft is occasionally recorded in the same place suggests that guilds sometimes broke up.

TECHNICAL ACHIEVEMENT

At all times the work of the Indian craftsman, however primitive and simple his tools, has been admired for its delicacy and skill, and the technical achievement of ancient India was far from negligible.

* The usual Hindi word. In Sanskrit cāmare.
Her spinners and weavers could produce semi-transparent silks and muslins of extreme thinness, which are clearly depicted in sculpture (pl. XXVb), and which were much in demand in the Roman Empire. Unlike ancient Greece and medieval China, India developed no true ceramic art; indeed from the aesthetic point of view no pottery of historical times is as good as the simply patterned but well designed wares of the prehistoric North-West (fig. iv); but the bright hard polish of the type of pottery usually called “northern black polished ware” is a very creditable technical achievement. In the working of stone on a large scale India’s skill is attested by the enormous monolithic columns of the Mauryan period. Many of these bear Aśoka’s inscriptions, but it is not certain that they were made and erected by him; some may have existed before his time. All are made of sandstone from the same quarry at Chunār, about twenty-five miles south-west of Vārāṇasī. Some thirty columns have been found in many parts of Northern India, from Sāncī in the south to the

Fig. xvi.—Carting a Pillar (from an engraved sketch on the wall of the medieval fortress of Raichur, in Mysore). (Reproduced by permission of the Archæological Department, Government of India)

Nepālese Tarāî in the north. Their sculptured capitals are great as works of art, but as evidence of Indian technological achievement the columns are even more significant. Weighing as much as fifty tons and measuring some forty feet, they were carved from single blocks of stone, given a polish of wonderful hardness and lustre, and often transported many hundreds of miles to their present positions. The process of their manufacture, polishing and transport has not yet been fully explained, and the secret was apparently lost soon after the Mauryan period, when the school of craftsmen who worked the Chunār sandstone vanished. Though many fine examples of later stone carving have come down to us, some much more impressive artistically than the Mauryan columns, it is doubtful whether India ever again showed such complete mastery of the handling of enormous pieces of stone.

The Iron Pillar of Meharaulī, near Delhi, is even more remarkable, though of little artistic value and less immediately impressive than the Mauryan columns. It is a memorial to a king called
Candra, who was probably Candra Gupta II (c. 376–415), and it now stands not far from the famous Qutb Minar, one of the greatest monuments of Muslim India, though it was originally erected on a hill near Ambālā. It is over twenty-three feet high, and consists of a single piece of iron, of a size and weight which could not have been produced by the best European ironfounders until about one hundred years ago. As with the Mauryan columns we have no clear evidence of how it was made, but it must have demanded immense care and labour, and great technical proficiency in preparing and heating the metal. The metallurgical skill of ancient India is further attested by the fact that this pillar, though it has weathered the torrential rains of over 1,500 monsoons, shows no sign of rusting. This is not due to the fact that the Indians had discovered some form of stainless steel alloy, for the column is of iron almost chemically pure. Several suggestions have been put forward to account for the remarkable durability of the Iron Pillar, but no wholly satisfactory explanation has been given. The theory, confidently proposed in a scientific journal,27 that the dry atmosphere of Delhi is a sufficient cause is quite inadequate, for Delhi is very humid during the rainy season, when ordinary iron quickly rusts. Since the process of oxidization demands a catalyst, it may be the great purity of the metal which has preserved the Iron Pillar so long, as another memorial to India’s technical skill.

TRADE AND FINANCE

A money economy only existed in India from the days of the Buddha. That coinage was introduced from the west cannot be proved with certainty, but the earliest clear references to coined money are found in texts looking back to a period shortly after the foundation of the Achaemenid Empire in Persia; this was the first great empire to mint an official coinage, and for a time it controlled the Panjāb. The Babylonians and Assyrians managed with unstamped silver shekels, but the Achaemenid emperors adopted stamped coinage from Lydia and the Greek cities of Asia Minor, which had already employed it for a century or two. If India did not learn the use of coinage from the Persians she invented it independently, but the coincidence is too striking to make this seem probable, especially as one of the earliest Indian words for a coin, karsa (also a small weight) is of Persian origin.

The oldest Indian coinage* consisted of flat pieces of silver or bronze, of irregular shape but fairly accurate in weight. They bore

* For further information on coinage see Appendix, p. 508f.
no inscriptions but a number of punch-marks, the significance of which is not finally established, but which probably included the emblems of kings who minted the coins, and control marks of local officials and merchants. Inscribed coins were not regularly minted in India until the 2nd century B.C., and though literary evidence suggests that gold coinage may have existed earlier the oldest surviving gold coins, other than one or two very rare specimens, are those of Vima Kadphises of the 1st century A.D. As well as the three usual metals, coins of nickel were minted by some of the Greco-Bactrian kings, while the Sātavāhanas of the Deccan made coins of lead, and various alloys are attested. Small purchases were regularly paid for in cowry-shells (parītaka), which remained the chief currency of the poor in many parts of India until recent times.

The concept of legal tender never seems to have taken root in Hindu India, and coins were often current far beyond the borders of the kingdoms which minted them. Some important dynasties, such as the Pālas of Bengal, did not regularly mint coins but relied on those of other states. Coins circulated less rapidly than they do nowadays, and might be current for centuries; thus the *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*, a Greek text of the end of the 1st century A.D., notices that the coins of Menander, who ruled in the Panjāb at least two centuries earlier, were current in the port of Bārygaza (Bhīrgukaccha, the modern Broach, at the mouth of the Nar- madā), which was probably at least 500 miles from Menander’s kingdom. Foreign currency circulated freely. In the North-West, Athenian drachms, as well as local imitations, were current before the invasion of Alexander, and Achaemenid, Seleucid, Parthian, Roman, Sāsānian and Islāmic coins were used at different periods. In the South numerous hoards of Roman imperial coins have been found.

Though there is no evidence of a highly organized financial machinery of cheques, drafts and letters of credit, usury was widespread, and moneymaking, except by brāhmaṇs, did not incur the reprobation of Hindu moralists, as it did that of medieval Christianity and Islām. Even in the *Rg Veda* we read of indebtedness (p. 406), and the earliest Dharma Śūtras lay down rates of interest and regulations governing debts and mortgages. The just rate of interest is generally given as 1½ per cent. per month, or fifteen per cent. per year. Later commentators interpret this as applying only to secured loans, and in practice rates of interest were often much higher. *Manu* and some other lawgivers lay down a sliding scale of interest for unsecured loans, according to the class of the debtor: brāhmaṇs 24 per cent., kṣatriyas 36 per cent., vaishyas 48 per cent., and śūdras 60 per cent. per year. The *Arthaśāstra* gives, beside the “just
rate”, three other rates of interest, inadequately defined, but apparently applicable to short-term loans for commercial ventures: the normal commercial rate, 5 per cent. per month; the rate for merchants travelling through forests (overland caravan traders), 10 per cent. per month; and the rate for seafaring merchants, 20 per cent. per month. These enormous rates of interest, 60, 120, and 240 per cent. per year respectively, are measures of both the profit and the risk of ancient Indian commerce.

Humane regulations on indebtedness are laid down in the Arthaśāstra and some other legal texts. Interest payments should cease when the total interest paid equals the principal. Loans advanced on securities used by the creditor for his own profit (e.g. beasts of burden) should be free of interest. Husbands are responsible for their wives’ debts, but not wives for those of their husbands. But the later lawbooks provide many escape clauses and sometimes completely set aside these earlier injunctions. Debtors might be imprisoned, or enslaved by their creditors until they had worked off their debts. We read of debtors, dogged everywhere by their creditors, at last committing suicide in desperation. The immense expense of the family ceremonials of Hinduism, periodic dearth, the dowering of daughters, and many other factors, worked then as now to drive the less fortunate into debt, and, then as now, the Indian creditor might be a hard man.

We have seen that trade guilds acted as bankers, both receiving deposits and issuing loans. The king or his local officer might make loans to peasants to relieve dearth, or to encourage the cultivation of waste lands and the development of irrigation. The larger temples also sometimes served as bankers, and in the South the village communes occasionally made loans to peasants. There were many professional bankers and moneylenders, however, the śresthins (in Pāli, setṭhi).*

The śresthin was not merely a moneylender or banker, but usually a merchant as well. At all times until the coming of the Europeans banking in India was a by-product of trading, and most śresthins had other sources of income besides moneylending. They appear as leading members of guilds, often fabulously wealthy. Though the craftsman frequently sold his wares direct to the consumer the peasants’ surplus products were largely in the hands of middlemen, and a class of large merchants, as distinct from small traders and peddlars, existed at least from the time of the Buddha. In the Jātaka stories we read of śresthins cornering grain, and buying at their own price the pro-

* The word literally means “chief”. It has survived in the North Indian seth and the Dravidian chetti or setli.
ucts of craftsmen who are virtually their employees. The term śreṣṭhin seems sometimes to have been a title of honour, held only by merchants of wealth and consequence. In the Buddhist scriptures we read of chief śreṣṭhins, honoured by kings, and with places in the royal councils. Under the Guptas the chief banker or śreṣṭhin was sometimes a member of the local advisory council which aided the district officer in controlling local affairs (p. 104).

Though in early literature and inscriptions the śreṣṭis or guilds seem to have been chiefly organizations of producers, there were also guilds or companies of merchants. Such merchant corporations became very important in the medieval Deccan, and had branches in many cities. One such was the Viravalaśīgarr, freely translated “the Company of Gentlemen Merchants”, which had members in every important city of the Peninsula and was controlled by a central council at Aihole, in Mysore. The company known as Manigrāma functioned not only in Southern India but also in Ceylon, where it hired out its mercenaries to the Sinhalese kings.

Co-operative ventures both in production and distribution were well known in Hindu India, but they were normally carried out by temporary associations of craftsmen and merchants, and these merchant companies were in no way comparable to the modern joint stock company. These bodies may from time to time have undertaken corporate ventures, but the normal function of the mercantile companies was not trading itself, but protecting, furthering and regulating the activities of their members. Overland caravans, though consisting of carts and pack animals owned and led by individual merchants, would be organized and controlled by officers of the company and guarded by the company’s mercenaries. They played a similar part in maritime trade, and probably owned warehouses and “factories”, where their members might store their wares in safety. Members travelling to strange cities would receive help from officers of the local branch, and, like the craft guilds, the mercantile companies no doubt helped members who fell on hard times, prevented adulteration, undercutting and other malpractices, and represented their members at the king’s court.

CARAVANS AND TRADE-ROUTES

By the time of the Buddha recognized trade-routes covered most of Northern India, and by Mauryan times similar routes existed in the Peninsula. Among the chief of these was one which ran from the Gangā port of Tāmrālipīṭḥ, not far from the modern Calcutta, up the river to the old city of Campā, and thence through Pāṭaliputra and
Vārāṇasī to Kauśāmbī, whence a branch went to the port of Bhṛgu-
kaccha on the mouth of the Narmadā by way of Vidiśā and Ujjainī. From Kauśāmbī the main trunk road passed along the south bank of the Yamunā to Mathurā, from which a branch crossed the modern Rājasthān and the Thar Desert to the port of Patala, near the mouth of the Indus. The main route passed on by the modern Delhi and crossed the five rivers of the Panjāb by way of Śākala (Śālīkot) to the north-western city of Takṣaśilā, whence it continued up the Kābul Valley and on into Central Asia. The great cities to the north of the Gangā and Yamunā were linked to the trunk route by recognized branch roads. Though its course has varied somewhat through the centuries this has always been the main artery of Northern India. The Mauryan emperors cared for this great road, which was marked with milestones and provided with wells and rest-houses at regular intervals.

The main route to the South went from Ujjainī to the city of Pratiśṭhāna, in the N.-W. Deccan, the capital of the Śātavāhana em-
pire around the beginning of the Christian era. Thence it passed across the Deccan Plateau to the lower Krishnā, and went on to the great southern cities of Kāncī (Conjeeveram) and Madurai. A network of roads developed early in the Christian era from this old route, linking all the more important cities of the Peninsula. Contact between North and South by way of the east does not at first seem to have been close or frequent, but routes from Pāṭaliputra to Orissā must have existed before the Mauryan period. In the more unsettled times after the Mauryas the wild uncivilized forests of Central India much discouraged travel, and the western route was the most important until at least the Gupta period.

The larger rivers crossed en route by these roads were not bridged. Indian engineering, though very competent in many respects, seems never to have mastered the art of bridging a wide river; but regular ferry services, in Mauryan times regulated by the State, were maintained at every important crossing.

Seventeenth century European visitors to the Mughal Empire were impressed by the badness of the roads, which were atrocious even by the low Western standards of the time. As road builders the Indians never equalled the Romans, but the references in Aśoka’s inscriptions, the Arthaśāstra and elsewhere, show that under more energetic governments roads were well maintained, and conditions under the Mughals may not have been typical of earlier times.

In the rainy season, roughly corresponding to the European sum-
mer, the roads were practically impassable; rivers in spate could not be ferried, and all travelling ceased; even the thousands of wandering
religious mendicants, who walked the length and breadth of India from one shrine to another, would settle down until the rains had passed, in the precincts of a temple, the outhouse of a kindly patron, or a cave near a village. But at other times of the year, especially in the cool, bright winter, when the weather of Northern India resembles a rainless late May in England, long caravans of rumbling bullock carts and pack animals—oxen, asses, mules and camels—travelled the dusty roads.

The roads were dangerous to the merchant-caravans. Many of the trade routes linking centres of civilization passed through dense jungle, and over hills where wild tribes dwelt. There were whole villages of professional robbers, ready at all times to waylay the merchant. Other dangers were incurred from wild beasts—tigers, elephants and snakes in particular—and the remoter parts of the country were the reputed haunts of demons of many malevolent kinds. In these circumstances merchants preferred to share their perils together, and we read of as many as 500 men travelling in caravan. Pāli literature tells of bands of professional caravan guards, who would undertake to give guidance and safe conduct over a specified route, and who seem to have been a regular feature of the caravan trade, at least where the merchant corporations did not provide their own guards. If the Arthasastra’s instructions on the duties of the antapāla (p. 109) have any relation to facts it would seem that the Mauryan kings did much to safeguard the roads, and the same is true of many other important dynasties; but the danger that beset caravans from thieves is attested by many stories, and by the enormous rate of interest which the Arthasastra permits on loans to finance long-distance trading ventures.

The caravan leader (sārthapāha) was an important figure in the commercial community, and the Gupta copper-plates of Northern Bengal (p. 104) show that the chief caravan leader of a locality might occupy an important place on the district council. Another figure associated with the caravan trade was the land-pilot (in Pāli, thala-hiyyāmahaka), whose existence is attested in the Pāli scriptures; he guided caravans through deserts and waste places, steering by the stars.

The major rivers were used to carry both goods and passengers in vessels large and small. The Gangā served as the artery of the Great Plain, but the Indus and the rivers of the Deccan were also important as trade routes. Like the land routes they were full of dangers: river pirates were numerous, while in some rivers sand-banks and in others submerged rocks were a peril to the navigators.

Luxury articles formed the chief objects of long-distance trade—
spices, sandalwood, gold and gems from the South, silks and muslins from Bengal and Vārānasi, musk, saffron and yaks’ tails from the Hills; but these were not the only merchandise of the caravans. Many regions had to import metal. The chief source of iron in India was South Bihār, and control of the route from the iron producing areas around the modern Rānchī to the Gangā may well have been one of the chief factors in the early rise of Magadhan power. Copper was mined and smelted in various parts of the Deccan, in Rājasthān, and in the Western Himālayas. Salt, an absolute necessity in a hot climate, was imported from the sea coast, and from various rock-salt deposits, notably in the Salt Range in the Panjāb. Certain foodstuffs were articles of long-distance commerce: sugar was carried to cooler and dryer regions where the cane would not grow well, and rice was exported as a luxury food to parts of the North-West.

**SEA-TRADE AND OVERSEAS CONTACTS**

Whether or not the Āryans of the Řg. Vedic period knew the sea, by the time of the Buddha or soon after Indian sailors had probably circumnavigated the sub-continent, and perhaps made the first contacts with Burma, Malaya and the islands of Indonesia. In the early centuries of the Christian era maritime trade became most vigorous, especially with the West, where the Roman Empire demanded the luxuries of the East in great quantities. With the fall of the Roman Empire the trade with the West declined somewhat, though it was maintained by the Arabs, and improved gradually with the rising material standards of medieval Europe. Before the time of the Guptas contact was made by sea between South India and China, and as trade with the West declined that with China increased, the Chinese demand for Indian spices, jewels, perfumes, and other luxury commodities continuing down to the present day.

Certain over-enthusiastic Indian scholars have perhaps made too much of the achievements of ancient Indian seafarers, which cannot compare with those of the Vikings, or of some other early maritime peoples. Much of the merchandise exported from India was carried in foreign bottoms, and though Indian literature mentions ships taking 1,000 passengers this seems an exaggeration. The largest Indian ship known to Pliny, who obtained some accurate information about the maritime trade of the Indian Ocean, measured 5,000 amphorae, or only seventy-five tons. In the 5th century Fa-hsien, who had no reason not to tell the truth in this respect, travelled from Ceylon to Java in a ship carrying 200 people, which is the largest
complement of passengers and crew attested in a reliable source relating to early India. The few illustrations of ships surviving from this period give little impression of size, though one, at Ajanta, is of a three-master (fig. xvii); and the vessels so vigorously and realistically depicted on the friezes of the great Buddhist temple of Borobudur in Java all seem comparatively small, the largest containing only fifteen people. All have steadying outriggers, like the fishing boats of present-day South India and Ceylon, and all are steered by large oars—the rudder was unknown in our period.

Normally the timbers of ancient Indian ships were not nailed or riveted, but lashed together; this was done to avoid the imaginary danger of magnetic rocks, for the technique of nailing a ship's timbers was certainly known in India in the medieval period. In fact sewn or lashed timbers were more resilient than nailed ones, and could stand

![Fig. xvii.—A ship, c. 6th century, A.D. (From Cave II Ajanta). (By permission of the Oxford University Press)](image-url)

up better to the fierce storms of the monsoon period and the many coral reefs of the Indian Ocean.

An early Jātaka story tells of ships sailing from the port of Bharukaccha to a place called Baveru, which must be Babylon. The Pāli Questions of Milinda, probably of the 1st century A.D., mentions the possibility of a merchant sailing to Alexandria, Burma, Malaya or China. A story of the 6th or 7th century tells of a merchant's son who sailed to "the Island of the Black Yavanas," which must surely be Madagascar or Zanzibar. These records indicate the known limits of Indian seafaring.
The chief ports of ancient India were on the West Coast—Bṛhgūkača, already mentioned, Supāra, not far from the modern Bombay, and Patala, on the Indus delta. Hence coastal shipping plied to the South and to Ceylon. There is evidence that the direct route across the Indian Ocean from the Red Sea was used, at least occasionally, in pre-Christian times, but most ships sailing to India would follow the coastline. With the growth of commerce in the first century A.D., however, it became usual for ships to cross the Indian Ocean, taking advantage of the monsoon winds. In the East the Gangā Basin was served by the river port of Campā, from which ships sailed down to the sea and coasted to the South and Ceylon. By Mauryan times, with the eastward expansion of Āryan culture, Tāmraliptī became the main seaport of the Gangā basin, and Campā lost its importance. From Tāmraliptī ships not only sailed to Ceylon, but, probably from before the beginning of the Christian era, to South-East Asia and Indonesia.

The merchants and seamen of Roman Egypt knew India well, and there survives a remarkable seaman’s guide, compiled in Greek by an anonymous author towards the end of the 1st century A.D., *The Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*. From the *Periplus*, Ptolemy’s *Geography*, of the following century, and the early Tamil poems which look back to this period, we learn much of the trade of the Tamil lands. Here many flourishing ports are mentioned, the three chief ones being Mušīri, known to the Greeks as Musiris, in the Čera country (Kerala), Korkai, in the land of the Pāṇḍyas, not far from the modern Tuticorin, and Kāvirippaṭṭīnām, the chief port of the Cōla country, at the mouth of the Kāvīrī.

The Tamil kings did much to develop their harbours and encourage sea-trade. We read of lighthouses, and wharves where “the beautiful great ships of the Yavanas” discharged their merchandise to be examined by customs officials, stamped with the king’s seal, and stored in warehouses. Kāvirippaṭṭīnām, now a decaying fishing village silted up by the river mud, had an artificial harbour, built, according to a late Sinhalese source, by soldiers captured by the great King Karikālan in a raid on Ceylon.33

At this time Socotra had a considerable Indian colony, and the name of the island may be of Indian origin.* Indian merchants were met by Dion Chrysostom in Alexandria. One such merchant, crossing the desert from the Red Sea to the Nile on his way to Alexandria, left a brief inscription in a temple at Redesiye; “Sophon the Indian does homage to Pan for a good journey”33. “Sophon” probably

* *Sukhālāra-dīva*, “The Most Pleasant Island”, the landfall for ships crossing the Indian Ocean.
represents some such Indian name as Subhānu, and Pan was no doubt identified in the merchant’s mind with Kṛṣṇa, who was also a god of flocks and herds, and played a rustic flute. It is evident that the author of this inscription was much Hellenized.

As well as merchants, we read of Indian fortune-tellers, conjurors and prostitutes in Rome, while mahouts often accompanied their elephants to the West. There are records of several embassies from Indian kings to the Cæsars. The earliest of these is said by Strabo to have been sent by the king of the Pāṇḍyas, and was met by Augustus at Athens about 20 B.C. This mission included an ascetic called Zarmanochegas (Skt. Sramaṇācārya), who, growing tired of a life of earthly bondage, burnt himself to death at Athens. It has been suggested that when St. Paul wrote “though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing”, he had in mind this incident of some sixty or seventy years earlier, of which he had heard from his Athenian colleagues. The theory is of course fanciful, but not wholly impossible. Later embassies are recorded as having been sent to Claudius (from Ceylon), Trajan, Antoninus Pius, Julian the Apostate and Justinian. The latter emperor of Constantinople had an Indian cook.

The main requirements of the West were spices, perfumes, jewels and fine textiles, but lesser luxuries, such as sugar, rice and ghee were also exported, as well as ivory, both raw and worked. A finely carved ivory statuette of a goddess or yakṣi has been found in the ruins of Herculaneum (pl. XLvb). Indian iron was much esteemed for its purity and hardness, and dyestuffs such as lac and indigo were also in demand. Another requirement was live animals and birds; elephants, lions, tigers and buffaloes were exported from India in appreciable numbers for the wild beast shows of Roman emperors and provincial governors, though these larger beasts went mainly overland through the desert trading city of Palmyra; smaller animals and birds, such as monkeys, parrots and peacocks, found their way to Rome in even larger quantities as pets of wealthy Roman ladies. The Emperor Claudius even succeeded in obtaining from India a specimen of the fabulous phoenix, probably a golden pheasant, one of the loveliest of India’s birds.

In return for her exports India wanted little but gold. Pottery and glassware from the West found their way to India, and many sherds of Arretine and other wares, mass-produced in Western factories, have been found in the remains of a trading station at Arikamedu, near Pondicherry. There was some demand for wine, and the Western traders also brought tin, lead, coral and slave-girls. But the balance of trade was very unfavourable to the West, and resulted in
a serious drain of gold from the Roman Empire. This was recognized by Pliny, who, inveighing against the degenerate habits of his day, computed the annual drain to the East as 100 million sesterces, "so dearly do we pay for our luxury and our women". The drain of gold to the East was an important cause of the financial difficulties in the Roman Empire from the reign of Nero onwards. Not only gold, but coinage of all types was exported to India; Roman coins have been found in such quantities in many parts of the Peninsula and Ceylon that they must have circulated there as a regular currency.

There is good evidence that subjects of the Roman Empire, if not actual Romans, settled in India. There is mention of a temple of the Emperor Augustus at Musiris but this is probably a mistake, caused by the similarity of the name of the Roman emperor to that of Agastya, the legendary sage (ṛṣi) who is said to have brought Āryan culture to South India (p. 320). Early Tamil literature contains several references to the Yavanas, who were employed as bodyguards by Tamil kings, or as engineers, valued for their knowledge of siege-craft and the construction of war-engines. While the term Yavana was often used very vaguely, and, from its original meaning of "a Greek", came to be applied to any Westerner, it is by no means impossible that the Yavanas of South India included fugitives from the Roman legions in their number.

Contacts between India and the West are testified in language. Even a few Hebrew words are believed by some to be of Indian origin—notably koph, "monkey" (Skt. kāpi) and tukki, "peacock", (Tamil togai). Though the details of the Book of Kings may not be historically accurate the statement that the navy of Tharshish brought to King Solomon gold and silver, ivory, apes and peacocks shows that the Hebrews received commodities from India at an early period. It has been suggested that the land of Ophir, from which King Hiram of Tyre brought gold, precious stones and "almug" trees to Solomon, was Supāra, the ancient port near Bombay; this suggestion is strengthened by the fact that in the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament, the word occurs as Σωφόρος; the almug trees may have been sandal, one of the Sanskrit words for which is valguka, from which the Hebrew word may be derived. Indian loan-words in Greek and Latin are nearly all of articles of trade: precious stones, such as ἀργυρός, emerald (Skt. marakata) * and βῆρυλλος, beryl (Skt. vai- 
durya) *; spices, such as ἴριξθερίς, ginger (Skt. ṇrigavera) and ἁπερί, pepper (Skt. pippali); foodstuffs, such as σάκχαρον, sugar (Skt. šarkara) and δρυσά rice (Tamil arisi); and καρπάς, cotton (Skt. karpāsa) as well as several others. Dubious is the suggested etymology

* These two words are perhaps borrowed from a common Middle Eastern source.
of the word ἐλέφας, elephant, from the Sanskrit ibha, meaning elephant, with the Semitic definite article al or el prefixed.

Greek loan-words in Sanskrit include several connected with mathematics and astronomy, of which some are common, and have passed into the vernaculars of India: kordā, an hour (ὥρα), kendāra, centre (κέντρον) and koṇa, angle (γωνία); two coins, dramma (δραμμα) and dīnāra (from the Latin denarius, through the Greek); and two words connected with war, surāṅga, a mine (p. 135), and kampana, a camp (a rare word used in Kashmir, and borrowed from Latin through Greek); of words connected with writing mela, ink (μέλα), and kalama, pen (κάλαμος) are certain borrowings, though there are synonyms of purely Indian origin for both these words. The derivation of pustaka, book, from the Greek ποστάκιον is no longer supported by competent authorities.

The Chinese in the Middle Ages demanded many of the same commodities as the Westerners, but they had more to offer in exchange. Though the Indians made splendid silks and muslins of their own they were ready to buy the stuffs of China, and Chinese porcelain found a market in South India and Ceylon, as did the pottery of the Muslim World, numerous sherds of which have been found.

Though maritime trade did not cease it became more and more the affair of foreign merchants. Indians never wholly abandoned the sea, but by the time of the Muslim invasion travel to foreign lands was believed to bring grave impurity upon members of the upper classes, and this, according to some authorities, could never be expunged. This religious objection to sea travel was a measure of the growing fear of and distaste for the sea, which in some degree existed at all times. Though Indian mariners were resourceful and by no means lacking in courage, sailing the sea was always depicted as hateful and desperately perilous. By the Middle Ages the Arabs and Chinese had outstripped the Indians in the art of ship construction, and it became more profitable for the merchant to sell his wares to foreign middlemen than to take them abroad himself. The Muslim invasions encouraged xenophobia, and the people who had planted their colonies from Socotra to Borneo became, with religious sanction, a nation of landlubbers.