FOREWORD

By the Hon’ble Dr. K. M. Munshi

This second volume, unlike the first, has been printed in India and published by the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, as the President of which I have planned and organised the publication of this series of ‘History and Culture of the Indian People’ in ten volumes. On account of printing difficulties in England, the arrangements with Messrs. George Allen and Unwin Ltd. were terminated by mutual agreement. Since the Bhavan as the sponsoring institution has undertaken the publication of the series, it has become unnecessary to interpose the Bharatiya Itihasa Samiti which, in fact, was a part of the Bhavan, between the sponsor and the publisher. It is hoped that under this arrangement further volumes will be published expeditiously.

This volume deals with the history and culture of India from the beginning of what is termed ‘The Historic Period’. It furnishes us with the basis for the structure of early Indian chronology like the dates of the death of Buddha, the rise of Chandragupta and the reign of Aśoka. Just as a dynastic treatment of history gives but an incorrect historical perspective, so, to some extent, does any treatment which arbitrarily cuts history into sections of time. The history of a people having a common culture, I believe, flows as a running stream through time, urged forward by the momentum of certain values and ideas and must be viewed as such. It is necessary, therefore, that I should give my reading of this section of the flowing stream. The attempt by its very nature would be open to the charge of over-simplification; but without such an attempt, the past would have no message and the future no direction.

I

Long before the dawn of the ‘Historic Period’, the land, as we know it now, had been formed. For millions of years, the Himālayas and the Hindu Kush had risen; mighty rivers had brought down deposits to form the rich alluvial belt of the Sindhu and the Gaṅgā; geographical determinants had been stabilized. Early man had wandered on the banks of some of the great rivers and disappeared.
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Over five thousand years ago, aboriginal dwellers generally lived in forests; some of them, however, were slowly driven to the valleys before the pressure of more civilised migrants. Then a numerically vast people, with a culture of which the Mohenjo-daro ruins are the physical relics and the base of the Tamil language perhaps the intellectual trace, over-spread the country.

In this land the Aryans, with their Nature Gods, their sacrifices, their cows and horses and their conquering zeal, came into conflict with the Dāsas and Dasyus. They were invincible; for they had what their forerunners had not—cultural cohesiveness, powerful social institutions like the patriarchate, and a faith in their superiority. These bonds were further strengthened by a race of intellectuals who sang in sacred chants, worshipped their Gods through varied sacrifices and pursued the quest of higher things. The cohesive force in this community was furnished by the basic idea of an all-pervading law—Ṛita—which sustained the universe and regulated the conduct of men; and the law was presided over by mighty god Asura—‘the Great’—Varuṇa.

Vast conflicts were waged by the Aryan tribes with the non-Aryans. During their victorious march through the country, the races mingled, customs and beliefs were adjusted, a new harmony was evolved. Despite the fusion, the collective consciousness that the Aryans—whether by descent or by adoption—were the elect and their ways God-ordained, and hence unalterable, persisted. ‘The Aryanisation of the entire world’ remained the inspiring urge.

An unshakable collective consciousness had already taken deep roots in the racial mind, when Vasishṭha and Viśvāmitra—participants in the Dāsarājña, the Battle of Ten Kings, the echoes of which are found in the Rigveda,—lived on the banks of the holy Sarasvatī; when Paraśurāma led the Aryans to the banks of the Narmadā; when Agastya and Lopāmudrā crossed the Vindhya and the seas; when Bharata, possibly the eponymous ancestor of the main tribes who fought in the Bhārata War, held sway and gave his name to the land.

The several centuries, from the Battle of Ten Kings to the Bhārata War (c. 1500 B.C.), the central theme in the Mahābhārata, were filled with incessant Aryan activities. The Aryans spread far and wide in the country. They opened up jungles, established large-scale settlements, and founded cities. Before the Bhārata War, the Aryan Tribes, ethnically mixed, had already established powerful kingdoms. Their culture had become a conscious instrument
of providing a social pattern based on a kind of traditional common law, elaborate rituals, a background of heroic tradition preserved in epic recitals, a powerful language and literature and a philosophy of thought and of life. The fundamental law *Rita*—now called Dharma—however, continued by the general acceptance of the people to be recognised as supreme; for *Esha Dharmaḥ Sanātanaḥ* in the *Manu-smṛiti* is an echo of an ancient, unalterable principle; this law was eternal. The race of rishis, Aryan intellectuals, multiplied. They founded their āśramas or hermitages all over North India; some pushed their way even to the trans-Vindhyān South. They settled in forests, preached Dharma; interpreted it afresh wherever necessary; laid down canons of conduct. They taught the fundamental values of Aryan culture wherever they went, their character and moral influence being their only source of power. They enriched literature, ethics and philosophy. The most aspiring of them continued in the quest of the ‘Absolute’, often in the wilderness or on mountain tops. With the growth of kingdoms, a section of these intellectuals, the Brāhmaṇas, became priests, ritualists, men of learning, ministers, even generals and social and political mentors. But at all times, the law prescribed that a true Brāhmaṇa should learn and teach, and not hanker after possessions; if he did, he fell from his high status. The kings were the protectors of the Dharma. They were invested with the right to conquer and destroy enemies, but there was no right to destroy what they willed. Their duty to protect the people was inalienable; if they failed to fulfil it, they forfeited the people’s allegiance.

Of the peoples with whom the Aryans came in conflict, the most powerful were the Nāgas in the West and the Magadhas in the East. The Haihāyas, perhaps of mixed descent, broke the Nāga power in the West, and in their turn were broken by the Aryans under Paraśurāma. Later, when the Aryan tribe of Bharatas dominated the Madhyadeśa, the Magadhas aspired to hegemony; the break-up of the Magadha Kingdom is possibly symbolised by the death of Jarāsandha, its king, by Bhīma the Bhārata, who was assisted by Śri Kṛṣṇa. To the latter more than to anyone else, if *Mahābhārata* records facts, belongs the honour of being ‘the worshipful among men’, and the credit of achieving for his friends, the Pāṇḍavas, the overlordship over North India. Thus, a little before the Bhārata War the way was cleared for the Aryanisation of the eastern provinces.

Then came the Bhārata War (c. 1500 B.C.). All the kings in North India with their armies congregated in the Punjāb to partici-
pate in this fratricidal war between the members of the most influential royal house in Madhyadeśa. In a battle lasting for eighteen days, they mingled their blood and created for the first time an all-India consciousness. At the end, Yudhishtīra was acclaimed by the whole of North India as a Chakravartin.

This struggle left a tremendous impression on the collective consciousness of the people. Racial memory, through text, sermon, story and epic recital, was focussed on two great personalities of the time who became shining lights illumining the Indian mind for all time; Vyāsa, the learned and venerable Brāhmaṇa, the seer and ascetic, the saviour of the Vedas, and Śrī Kṛishṇa, the warrior and statesman, the ever-triumphant Kṣatriya, the Superman. One taught Dharma, the other upheld it.

From these memories sprang the Mahābhārata, destined to become the expression and the instrument of India’s will to unity and collective strength.

Between the Bhārata War (1500 B.C.) and the rise of Magadha (seventh century B.C.), when the dawn of recorded history begins, the social elements were fusing fast. Large kingdoms, like that of Janamejaya Pārīkṣita, had been founded and dissolved. Elaborate rituals, observed for years, had strengthened the sacerdotal class. Sacred literature had been assiduously developed. The quest of the Absolute was continued by ardent rishis.

From the Nature Gods of the Aryans, Indians had travelled very far. Their intellectual audacity had ranged over the meaning and purpose of life and expressed itself in the Upanishads. These aspirations moulded values, ideas and forms of discipline which percolated through religious teachings, and epic recitals and a well-regulated system of education. They were taught and learnt in a hundred schools of learning, moulding life in all its aspects, for they were the urge behind Dharma, which upheld life.

Long before the dawn of the ‘Historic Period’ a central idea was already becoming clear from a mass of incoherent urges which went under the generic name of Dharma. Man was not a struggling worm but a ‘self’, of an essence with a supraphysical destiny, which can only be attained by a mastery over the misery which was man’s lot on earth; this mastery, in its turn, can only be achieved by integrating personality by self-discipline so as to raise the ‘self’ above the flux of passing sense-experience. The discipline implied a double process, the relinquishment of the greed for life and the broadening
of the personal self into a universal self. The end of this discipline was variously named,—self-realisation (Siddhi), emancipation (Mukti, Moksha), freedom (Nirvāṇa), enlightenment (Jñāna), bliss (Ananda). In substance it was absolute integration of human personality (Kaivalya) freed from the limitations of attachment and fear.

Before this Age began, the Vedic cults had begun fading away and giving rise in turn to new and powerful religious currents. The first current was dominated by the resuscitation of a pre-Vedic God, Paśupati, honoured even in the days of the Sindhu Valley Civilization and accepted by the Brāhmaṇas as the great god ‘Īśāna’. Invested with the majesty which later generations saw in a godhead, he retained his original unsophisticated and loving character, but without losing the awesomeness which evoked terror in unlettered hearts in bygone ages.

The second was the emergence of a personal God, with many characteristics of the Vedic gods, individualised and yet universal, and surrounded by a halo of rich magnificence.

The quest of the Absolute which was pursued before the dawn of the ‘Historic Period’ had led to a great idea, which was to become predominant in Indian culture. The Absolute descended on earth in human form; the aspirant, by absolute surrender, attained Him. Nārāyaṇa, an ancient sage, who ‘became all beings’ had come to be worshipped as God Himself. Slowly as the Vedic God, Viṣṇu, attracted to Himself the characteristics of the other gods, the new conception of Avatāra identified Viṣṇu with the sage Nārāyaṇa. Similarly, Viśnu, who was till then just a hero, was accepted as God, descended on earth—Avatāra. Later, Nārāyaṇa, Viśnu and Viṣṇu, all three became Hari, the ‘Deity Eternal and Supreme Lord’, the Supreme Spirit; ‘Viśnu comprehending all’.

The apocalypse in Canto XI of the Bhagavadgītā, which, following some scholars, I consider part of its original and pre-Buddhistic version, was of this ‘God of gods’, Sāśvata Dharmagoptā, The Protector of Eternal Dharma, born to re-establish Dharma, who over-shadowing all older gods, except perhaps Śiva, emerged as ‘God Himself’. Viśu, the hero of Mahābhārata and a deity of the Yādava cult, was identified with this earlier Viśu, possibly by the end of this period.

Social relations and the duties arising from them were integral parts of the Dharma. Nothing was a greater negation of Dharma
or a greater danger than social chaos and a sweeping denial of social duties. About the close of the Vedic period, as a result of racial and cultural adjustment, Varnāśrama Dharma was conceived as the divinely ordained social framework. Chāturvarṇya, the Four-fold Order of society, ensured to some extent the supremacy and purity of the Aryan way of life. In that age of tribal struggles and in later ages as well, it gave to society both solidarity and resilience. It envisaged: first, the division of society into two classes—(i) the dvijas, the twice-borns, those who conformed to the Aryan way of life; and (ii) the Śūdras, that is the Rest, the yet-to-be-reclaimed. The dvijas had three functional groups, the Brāhmaṇas, Kshatriyas and the Vaïśyas. Besides, a well-conducted individual life was divided into four states, viz., that of a student, a householder, a detached onlooker pursuing a high purpose, and lastly, an ascetic. Though often disregarded in practice, this aspect of Dharma shaped life, philosophy and institutions throughout the centuries that followed.

For such a planned social life stability was essential. Stability implied protection but without slavery. Power also was therefore conceived as moving and having its being within the framework of Dharma. Kingship was to be a religious trust. Rājadharma, Smṛiti and tradition, interpreted from time to time, were to regulate life. The learned and the pure, vowed to poverty, were to be the indispensable guides. The ambition and rapacity of kings were, therefore, controlled by a fundamental law, the bases of which were: first, the Smṛiti or tradition codified; second, Parishad, the Assembly of the learned, the interpreter. And lastly, a military overlord was considered necessary as the country grew larger, a Rājādhirāja or Chakravartin—the protector of Dharma. The last in reality was to come in the succeeding epoch.

II

During the dawn of the ‘Historic Period’, placed between the tenth and the seventh centuries before Christ, there was a mighty upheaval of the human spirit. Waves of intense activity passed over many lands where man had emerged from the Bronze Age. Zoroaster gave a new creed to Iran; Confucius and Lao-tse taught in China; Jews in their Babylonian captivity developed their tenacious faith in Jehova; Greece emerged as the pioneer of European culture, and her philosophers began tackling the problems of life; Rome was founded. At this time, a highly complex civilization and a noble culture had already been flourishing in India for centuries.
FOREWORD

The Age of Imperial Unity from the seventh century before Christ to A.D. 320, covered by this volume, falls into two distinct periods: (i) the period of organisation (seventh century before Christ to 150 B.C.) in which there was an aggressive upheaval of strength and spirit, an all-sided efflorescence, when the fabric of Indian culture was well and truly woven; and (ii) the period of international contacts and cultural expansion (150 B.C. to A.D. 320), during which the culture first assimilated the foreign elements and then reasserted its values with new vigour and intensity.

The first period was the age of Magadhan Imperialism; it saw the realization of the dream of centuries, the political unification of India under a Chakravartin. When the process began, the sixteen mahājanapadas were organised either into monarchies like Magadha and Avanti or republics like the Lichchhavis and the Yaudheyas, all struggling for survival, fighting each other, absorbing weaker states.

So far, there was India, the geographical unit, but as yet no India as a well-accepted unit of homogeneous life and culture. To Iran and the outside world, India represented an undefined territory across the Sindhu. Āryāvarta was a small part of Madhyadeśa. A distinct sense of unity had already been born in the popular mind. In the later injunction 'Declare Dharma wherever the black antelope flourishes,' there is an echo of the much earlier recognition of the territory in which Dharma prevailed and life was one; and it stretched from the boundaries of Iran to the boundaries of Assam. It included parts of the Deccan too. Here, Dharma was taught in centres established in ever-widening frontiers by Brāhmaṇas as priests, linguists and literary men, physicians, philosophers and ministers, and by large groups of wandering ascetics seeking and imparting the meaning of life. And inspired by the vast literature and tradition which had accreted to the story of the Bhārata War, men's minds were slowly being impressed with the dictum that wherever Dharma prevailed, there was Bhāratavarsha.

Magadha, now Aryanised for well nigh eight hundred years, was virile with the energy of unsophisticated power. Through a succession of powerful monarchs from 544 B.C. to 150 B.C., it gave the land of Dharma a series of Chakravartins, who made of India a single unit, 'alike the ideal and despair of later ages' as Dr. Majumdar aptly puts it, and willed into being its collective consciousness.
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Bimbisāra (544-493 B.C.) the first of these Chakravartins, by conquest and matrimonial alliances, enlarged his influence and power. Ajātaśatru (493-462 B.C.) the strong and implacable, crushed the great republic of Lichchhavi after sixteen years of struggle, vanquished Kosala and annexed Kāśi.

This period is lit up by the personality of two great reformers, Buddha and Mahāvīra. Both were Kshatriyas; both organised wandering ascetics; both ignored God and denied the Vedas; and while admitting the fourfold order of society, both led a revolt against the superiority of Brāhmaṇas over the Kshatriyas and derided the four stages of life, stressing only the life of an ascetic.

Buddha's was a flaming personality; and a vast canonical literature has presented to posterity its faithful portraiture. But he was not a solitary peak of greatness and grandeur in an arid desert. Sāṅkhya and Yoga, the Upanishads, were the sources of his inspiration; the goal of integrated personality by the conquest of human weaknesses, the gospel of freedom from misery and even the theory of Karma were borrowed by him from contemporary religious thought and merely systematised. He was undoubtedly the product of Aryan culture and represented the ascetic orders against the social ideals of those who took life as a whole. The lure of renunciation or other-worldliness was very much in the air at the time.

He proclaimed the supremacy of Dharma; but stressed only the pre-eminence of the positive, heart-moving message of universal compassion, which was already an integral part of it. He assumed the role of wielding the Dharma-chakra as a Chakravartin of the world. Buddhism was not a church standing apart as in later times; it was a protestant movement within the fold of Dharma; its ready sympathy for suffering was its refreshing attraction. The large majority of the people followed their ancestral creed and culture, only their interpreters being influenced by the leaders of the new revolt. Aśoka alone appears to have been deeply influenced by Buddha's teachings; but the attempt of Buddhists to make of him a bhikkhu is a patent exaggeration. Within a few years of Aśoka's death, under Pushyamitra, the old cultural forces are found in full vigour all over the country.

Buddha, in spite of his heterodoxy, however, left a lasting influence on Dharma. First he was revered as an ascetic reformer; in the process of general acceptance by the masses, he became a divinity. Vāsudeva Kṛishṇa was 'Śāśvata Dharmagoptā', the Protector of Eternal Dharma; Buddha also proclaimed the Dharma and
asked people to surrender themselves to it. Śri Krishṇa of the Mahābhārata wielded no sceptre and yet was worshipped by the rulers of the day as the ‘worshipful among men’. Buddha assumed without royalty the role of a Chakravartin ruling by Dharma.

Buddha made no break in cultural continuity. By his influence the older creeds were revitalised and purified; at the same time Buddhism had to develop its Mahāyāna aspect to win the people’s hearts. Later still, the process of absorption was completed when Buddha became an avatāra of Vishṇu, and Mahāyāna Buddhism was absorbed in Vaishṇavism and Śaivism.

Buddha made little impression on the power and strength of contemporary Magadha. Its rulers upheld the Dharma as prevalent and went on enlarging their empire.

Śiśunāga (430 B.C.) and his successors followed Bimbisāra and Ajātashatru, and annexed Kosala, Avanti and other important states in North India to Magadha.

Mahāpadma Nanda (364 B.C.) inherited the power of Magadha, but disowned the supremacy of Dharma. By destroying Aryan kings he earned the appellation of a ‘Second Paraśurāma’. Ruthless, miserly, regardless of the sacred tradition or Dharma though he was, he was the first great historical emperor of North India. But hated or despised by his people, he sat on a volcano. Old values were breaking up completely. Kshatriyas of high birth repudiated the Brāhmaṇas and founded sects, Śūdras established an empire on the ruins of Kshatriya kingdoms, while the ancient culture and its protagonists, re-integrated and possessed of fresh vigour, were waiting round the corner.

III

Since the days of Cyrus (558-530 B.C.) parts of India to the west of the Sindhu and some parts of the Punjāb off and on formed part of the Achaemenian empire. During Mahāpadma’s time in 326 B.C. Alexander, the Macedonian, with his thundering legions, entered North-West India, the erstwhile satrapy of the Iranian empire. In a few months, however, he retreated from India. He could neither face the Nanda empire nor leave any impression on the people. The Indians fought him heroically; yielded for the time being only to the superior military organisation of the Macedonians; and soon after under Chandragupta drove out the Greeks from the Punjāb in a brilliant war of liberation. The successful war against
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the Greeks awoke Chandragupta (324-300 B.C.) to a consciousness of his strength. To Chandragupta and to his master, the Brāhmaṇa Chāṇakya, we owe a gorgeous phenomenon—a swift war of liberation; a vast empire; India politically and administratively unified; the re-establishment of Dharma as the supreme law; and the organisation of life on which was founded the invulnerable culture-consciousness of Indians in succeeding ages. Consolidating his position in the Punjàb, and inspired by his teacher Chāṇakya, Chandragupta marched on Pātaliputra; killed Dhana Nanda, assumed the sovereignty of Magadha; vanquished Seleucus, the Greek, who was moving towards India to recapture Alexander's lost possessions; and started on a career of becoming the architect of an all-India empire. For the first time the writ of one emperor ran in the country through a hierarchy of centrally appointed officers.

Aśoka (273-236 B.C.), the grandson of Chandragupta, styled 'the beloved of the gods' and 'of lovable appearance,' succeeded to the throne of Pātaliputra by winning a fratricidal war. Nine years after his accession he rounded off the empire which he inherited from his grandfather by annexing Kaliṅga.

The Kaliṅga war brought to the emperor a violent reaction, no doubt under the influence of Buddha's teachings. He regretted the vast numbers of men killed or taken prisoner; he bemoaned the lot of pious men and women to whom befell 'personal violence, death or banishment from loved ones'; and he eschewed for ever war as an instrument of governance. 'If any one does him wrong, the "beloved of the gods" must bear all that can be borne.' He embarked on a career of Dharma Vijaya, conquest through Dharma. He set up a network of missions to preach Dharma; declared that all men were his children; 'and what little effort I make,—What is it for?—(in order) that I may be free from debt to the creatures, that I may render some happy here and that they may gain heaven in the next world', said he. The Emperor constituted himself as the guardian of the moral and material welfare of the world. From Afghānistān to Mysore and Kurnool District, and from Saurāshṭra to the boundaries of Assam, the Dharma-Chakra was proclaimed. Dharma-Mahāmātras were in charge of Dharma; a Strī-Adhyaksha-Mahāmātra looked after women; other officers were in charge of cattle and birds. Ordinances proclaiming the importance of family as the basis of morality, liberality and charity towards all, the toleration of all religious sects, the sanctity of all life and the organisation of international relation for enduring peace, were promulgated.
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Aśoka was the first founder of a welfare state, not a godless state, but a state permeated by a broad-minded approach to all religions. He insisted, as his inscriptions show, that all religions were to be respected; that criticism of religion was to be forborne; that the divinity of all religious truths was to be recognised; that religions of all sects were to be studied. No higher gospel of tolerance has been propounded since the dawn of the world and no greater harm has been produced than by its neglect. And in pursuance of his tolerant policy he did not try to subvert social order or the religious belief in the interest of the teachings of Buddha which had so impressed him.

The material achievements of the Mauryan era and particularly of the reign of Aśoka were in no way less important. Stone was substituted for wood in important structures. Art assumed a form and grandeur not known before; engineering reached a high level of perfection. The royal palace of Pātaliputra was recognised by posterity as ‘the work of superhuman hands.’ Great cities grew up; gigantic stūpas and cave chaityas were carved out of massive stone, expressing power and majesty. The Mauryan column is a piece of precision, accuracy and power unsurpassed even in ancient Athens; one of them, later, required 8,400 men pulling a 42-wheeled cart for transport. The sculptures like the Sārnāth lion or the Dhauli elephant or the Rāmpurwā bull exhibited living naturalism. Irrigation projects like the well-known Sudarśana lake were carried out with enduring thoroughness.

But welfare states, which eschew armed coercion of recalcitrant elements, are not known to survive. As soon as Aśoka, ‘the greatest of kings’, as H. G. Wells called him, died, his Buddhistic leanings and pacifist policy evoked open resistance. Due to lack of a vigorous military policy, the outlying provinces rose in revolt. The Greeks invaded India and advanced into the country up to Ayodhyā and Chitor. Further disintegration was halted only when Pushyamitra (187-151 B.C.), the Brāhmaṇa minister of Śuṅga dynasty, took over what was left of the empire.

Pushyamitra and his successor carried forward the pre-Aśokan tradition of Magadha. Dharma Vijaya was no longer to be achieved by abjuring war but by building up military strength; politics became real. The Śuṅgas maintained their hold over a vast part of North India, vanquished Greek invaders and were respected by foreign kings. They fostered a revival of art, literature and architecture. In Madhyadeśa and among the wise and the intellectual,
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the ascetic outlook lost its attraction; Dharma was strengthened; the authority of the Smṛiti law was completely restored. The new wave of collective enthusiasm found its expression in a combative attitude against Buddhism in a search for a fuller and richer life; in the cult of Kārttikeya, the god of war; in the resurgence of Bhāgavata cult; and in the unchallenged supremacy of Vāsudeva Krīṣṇa in the Hindu Pantheon.

IV

The second period from 150 B.C. to A.D. 320 divides itself into two epochs. The first era saw the rise of the North-West and Western India and the adjoining regions of Madhyadeśa as an empire under foreign conquerors. The foreign Kushāna power, which held sway over nearly the whole of North India as also considerable territories beyond as far as Central Asia, shifted the centre of political gravity from Pāṭaliputra to Peshāwar. In the second period, Indian powers inspired by a giant wave of resistance, overthrew foreign rule and influenced and re-established the Dharma; though called Sanātana it was in fact a renaissant Order, which, while it retained the fundamental values of Aryan Culture including the social pattern, had a new meaning, content and modes of expression.

During this period, Buddhism was evidently influential in the North-West. Its freedom from the rigid rules of social conduct had an appeal for the foreigners, who soon came under its heterodox but humanistic influence. But, once the resistant mind was softened, the varied richness of Sanātana Dharma and its social inhibitions which provided every fresh group with qualified autonomy, a secure place in the social framework, were found irresistible.

While the Bactrian Greeks and Parthian rulers quarrelled among themselves, the people led their own lives; the social pattern accepted as of divine origin, persistently reorganised social groups; the orthodox cults, revivified by a resistance to heterodoxy, were active. In the end, social and religious tenacity developed a mighty absorptive power.

The power and influence of these cults can easily be traced in Kadphises I, the first Kushāna king, who was a Buddhist; in his son Kadphises II, who was a Śaivite; in Kanishka, the founder of the Kushāna Empire (A.D. 78-101), who was a devout Buddhist; and his son or successor who was a Bhāgavata.

By the middle of the second century of the Christian era, the Kushāna imperial power disintegrated. Western and Central India
threw off its yoke. Many Governors of Provinces declared independence. The tribes which in Alexander's time lived in the Punjāb had slowly moved southwards, possibly under pressure of fresh arrivals. They had retained their autonomy and independence, yet submitted occasionally to the might of some powerful conqueror. When the empire of the Kushāṇas grew weak, the tribal states like those of Arjunāyanas, Uddehikas, Mālavas, Śībis, Rājanyas and Yaudheyas became independent. The Śaka Sattraps ruled considerable parts of Western India as independent rulers and so did the Abhīras.

In North-West India where the 'contemptible and fierce' foreigners held sway, cultural purity was more than diluted and in consequence, there was absence of a collective consciousness dominated by Aryan values. The focus of Aryan culture had shifted southwards. The royal Nāga houses, descended from serpent-worshipping, pre-historic non-Aryan tribes which had bowed before conquerors but never submitted, rose to power as the protagonists of resurgent Dharma. The confederacy including the Bhāraśivas ruled over considerable parts of North India. Their guardian god, Siva, became the great national deity, and they revived epic glory by performing Āsvamedha sacrifices to celebrate their suzerainty.

The Andhras were an equally ancient tribe who once lived on the southern fringes of North India. The last king of the Kāṇvāyana dynasty of Magadha was, by about 30 B.C., overthrown by the Andhra king Simuka of the Sātavāhana dynasty, which claimed Brahmanical descent. Their strength grew in a hundred years. Gautamīputra (A.D. 106-130) extended his sway from Ujjain to the Krishnā and from sea to sea, claiming suzerainty over the whole trans-Vindhyan India. He vanquished the Scythians, the Indo-Greeks and the Parthians; and his descendant, Yajñāśri, eliminated the Śakas from Western India and Saurāshṭra completely. Dharma was vindicated and re-established wherever the Andhras held sway.

About the same time, Kaliṅga (Orissa), under the great conqueror Kharavela, developed a crusading spirit and played a great part in diffusing Indian culture in the lands beyond the seas.

In the Vindhya region arose Vindhyaśakti, a name mentioned with great respect in the Purāṇas. His son Pravīra allied himself with the Bhāraśiva Nāgas, who had founded an imperial power on the ruins of the Sātavāhana Empire. Riding on the wave of a resurgent neo-Hinduism, he extended his sway from Bundelkhand to the Krishnā in the South.
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In the south of the Kṛishṇa, the three kingdoms—Chola, Pāṇḍya and Chera, had accepted the culture of the North. Ceylon, which had generally friendly relations with India, was already colonised about the time Buddha attained Nirvāṇa (483 B.C.). At one time, the Chola conqueror Karikāla had invaded the island. But at the close of the epoch, India and Ceylon had been united by intimate bonds.

With the foreign rulers vanquished and foreigners absorbed, the country was ripe for a mighty national revival—military, political and religious.

V

During the whole period, there were several outstanding achievements in the different spheres of life—political, religious, philosophical, literary and artistic. The political unity under Magadha produced a consciousness of solidarity which laid the foundation of the fundamental unity of India. The Mauryan administrative system, the political theories of Kauṭilya, the social system of Manu, in one form or the other, endured in some or the other part of India till the advent of the British. The Aryan, Dravidian and the aboriginals intermarried at all levels. Collective consciousness was created by common tradition, the growing supremacy of Sanskrit, the social pattern of Chāturvarṇya and the epic greatness which flowed from the memory of the Mahābhārata War.

This period produced celebrated poets and scholars like Aśvaghosha, the famous Buddhist poet and author of Sāriputra-prakaraṇa; Pāṇini, the renowned grammarian, who stabilised Sanskrit and indirectly influenced the growth of the languages of India; Ḥatyāyana; Patañjali, the grammarian who stylised Sanskrit; Bhāsa, the dramatist; Bharata, the dramaturgist; and Manu, Yājñavalkya, Nārada and Bṛhaspati, the authors of Smṛitis, the sacred texts. Above all, it was the age of the Mahābhārata, which has ever remained for India the ‘Book of Life’, and Rāmāyaṇa, the noblest epic in the world’s literature.

The Mahābhārata was never a single book. It had been growing into a wide literature of epic heroism; of legends of kings and rishis, sacred rivers and holy places; of wise lessons in practical wisdom and philosophic thought; of theories of society and politics; of man’s efforts to attain the divine. The war it described was a mighty occasion; every royal house found in it heroes whom they claimed as ancestors, whether real or adopted. As the Mahābhārata grew into
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a ‘scripture of a lakh of verses’ the Gītā became the greatest of scriptures.

The Bhārata War had been fought about 1500 B.C. Since then, the work growing with every generation had permeated the collective consciousness of the race and has ever remained its principal formative influence.

In the thousand years under review, the social code, prescribed by the Dharma Sūtras, came to be harmonised and elaborated into the Smṛitis. While they gave continuity to social order, they absorbed or altered usages to make them suitable to changing conditions. Manu-smṛiti, the oldest work of this class and the most well-known, is respected even today all over India. Reputed to be of divine origin and considered to be the source of law from time immemorial, it proclaimed; ‘Esha Dharmah Sanātanaḥ’, the Law Eternal, the fundamental law of social relations. Yājñavalkya systematised it, and his work continues to be the authoritative text even today. This basic conception of eternal law which prescribed social institutions, laid down a code of social conduct; while it made society slow-moving, it prevented chaos; while foreigners were after some time absorbed and their ways adopted, it provided a firm foundation to social institutions and ensured the continuity of cultural values.

But the castes were by no means static. New sub-castes were brought into the framework by absorption, fusion or sub-division: many of them rose or fell in status.

The Brāhmaṇa was the head of the hierarchy, but a Śūdra could become a Brāhmaṇa and a Brāhmaṇa devoid of his culture could sink into a Śūdra. In those as in later days, neither Brāhmaṇas nor Kṣatriyas stuck, one and all, to their prescribed functions. A Brāhmaṇa sometimes did the job of a soil-digger, a hunter or a menial, a wagon-driver and also a snake-charmer; a Kṣatriya was a potter; a Vaiśya a tailor. Yet Chāturvarṇya retained the character of a divine pattern of life and influenced organisation and law, custom and social philosophy. Under the Smṛitis, caste was not merely an inter-connubium group; its function had a purpose, an ethical and religious motive of uplifting the individual and making him fit for his ultimate destiny. Individuality drew its significance from the service it rendered to the group as a whole, and, therefore, group duties were emphasized.

Because of Chāturvarṇya, social control was not concentrated in one body, nor subordinated to the State. Control was distribu-
ed among a variety of autonomous groups or associations within a great cohesive framework. Arjuna expressed the dominant mood when he expressed his dread of chaos, the destruction of Varāṣārāma. *Arthaśāstra* set its face against renunciation of the world by making it dependent on State permission. This sweeping movement against other-worldliness and social instability found expression in the religious movements of which Vishṇu with his spouse Lakṣmī, Vāsudeva Krishṇa with his brother Baladeva, and Śiva and the members of his family, were the central deities.

At the mass level, minor divinities continued to be worshipped as ever. Śrī or Lakṣmī, an ancient Goddess, was, after many transformations, worshipped as the Goddess of fortune, just as Sarasvatī, the sacred Vedic river, came to be worshipped ultimately as the national Goddess of learning. The Vedic fire worship in a simplified form was part of every ritual. The pre-historic worship of the snakes, popular in the Sindhu Valley and the days of *Yajurveda* and *Atharvaveda*, was another national cult which found an honoured place in every new religious movement. Perhaps the rise of the Nāga power gave this cult a fresh stimulus. Trees were again divinities and living shrines universally worshipped from the Sindhu Valley civilization onwards. Later, they were semi-divine symbols associated with great religious figures, as in the case of the Bodhi Tree and the Tulsi plant. The Vedic belief that Gandharvas and Apsarases lived in trees was replaced by the universal belief that they were divinities themselves.

Intellectual audacity continued to search for higher truths but the problems of knowledge and reality were unchanged. The central idea of human destiny before all the aspiring speculative minds remained the same. Life was full of ills; escape from it was the highest good; this escape could only be secured by meditation on the highest truth; and the highest truth was reached by *bhakti* or *yoga* and the conquest of human limitations like attachment, wrath and fear.

The old menace of renunciation and other-worldliness was met by a new powerful gospel of living in the present; it proclaimed that man can attain his destiny—self-realization, integration or freedom—not in a forest or a cave but in the battle-field of life. In this way, the *Bhagavadgītā*, finally put into its present shape a century or two before the commencement of this period, was accepted not merely as a gospel of life but as a triumphant message that the highest destiny of man can be fulfilled only in the performance of the duties of life.
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Literary tradition continuously accepted by the elite and providing continuity of aesthetic outlook provides one of the greatest forces of creating and maintaining collective consciousness in a people. The Drama and the Kāvyā in Sanskrit literature, traceable to the Rigveda and the Mahābhārata, provided this cohesive force. Rāmāyana was accepted as the formal epic, par excellence. Religious and philosophic literature grew in depth and richness. The vast mass of the canonical texts of the Buddhists was again a literature in itself. Folk stories were collected and composed and provided entertainment to people of all grades throughout the country.

The major distinction between those who accepted the Vedas and those who rejected them tended to be narrowed down during this period. At the end of this period, the Vedas, as the ultimate source of all knowledge and truth, won.

VI

The post-Mauryan art gave up the motive of impressing people with power and grandeur; it became natural. The Kushāṇa art of the North-West, exemplified in the art of Gandhāra particularly, was however, a colourless imitation of Greek art. Elsewhere, art was the expression of the popular impulse towards beauty. Isolated objects were bound in one harmonious stream of life and scrupulous exhaustiveness became the main characteristic of the technique. Elephants, deers, antelopes, lotus-creepers, trees and plants added to the beauty and by displaying naturalness, provided the background. The human figure, in every conceivable position and attitude, was the principal object. The body was no longer an integration of limbs; it was portrayed as a living entity; in the hands of the Sāncḥī artists, it expressed both freedom and joy. The human figure of Yaksha at Sāncḥī expresses a free, proud, stately and heroic man. Later, this figure was perhaps transformed by the devout artist into the Bodhisattva of Mathurā; the figure and expression were impressed with not only beauty but a spirit of calm transcending physical attractiveness. But art which painted the legendary cycle of Buddha’s life aimed at no sublimation or ethical perfection. The Yakshiṅīs as Vṛikshakās and dancing girls with well-developed breasts and hips were carved with infinite love and grace, exhibiting a pagan love of life; their almost living flesh glows with sheer sensuousness; their lineaments express the delicate shades of violent passion or thrilling emotion.

Painting, long in vogue, reached a very high level, as in the Ajaṅṭā frescoes. Terracotta and pottery were also a medium of high
art. India had from the earliest times given rise to guilds of master craftsmen in gold and jewellery, in carpentry and ivory carving.

The family, as a fundamental unit, continued to be accepted as the foundation of social structure. The ideal of a devoted wife was held up as the highest value and in spite of widespread lapses, it was indissolubly connected with the sanctity of the family. Women enjoyed a high status in life, though not the same as in the Vedic or epic days; perhaps the narrow outlook of the less advanced communities was corrupting the circles of the cultured. Some women were students of sacred texts and philosophies; some were teachers; others studied till they married; and yet others were trained in fine arts. The lure of renunciation also attracted women and many high born ladies renounced the world in search of salvation. Women rode horses, drove chariots, wielded weapons and some queens acted as regents. About the beginning of the Christian era, however,—perhaps it was under the influence of the foreigners—the spiritual disenfranchisement of women began. Rituals came to be performed for them without the Vedic mantras; Vedic sacrifices were tabooed to the wife. Widow-remarriage and divorce were discouraged. On the other hand, Kauṭilya, in matters of divorce, places man and woman on equal footing. Nārada prescribes punishment for the husband who leaves his wife. Manu in his original version even favours the levirate. But as people with lax morals came into the social framework on account of the expanding frontiers of Dharma, the marital tie assumed great sanctity, and in later verses Manu condemns levirate. Heterae were a highly respected class. Āmrapāli, the mistress of Bimbisāra and later a disciple of Buddha, had a high status in society resembling that of Aspasia in ancient Athens.

The foreigners introduced a sort of trousers, over-coats and blouses. Stitched cloth came into fashion. Even shoes of white leather were in demand; the soles were made extra thick to make the wearer look taller! The people adorned themselves with ornaments and elaborate dresses; with garlands, scents, perfumes and unguents. The body was painted too. Vermilion was placed in the middle of the hair by ladies as they do now in Bengal. Beards and heads were shaved. Houses were furnished with screens, curtains, cup-boards, chairs and sofas with or without arms. Mats, of course, were there and so were bedsteads. Couches were covered with canopies; divans were in fashion too and so were sun-shades, mosquito-curtains, filters, mosquito-fans, flower-stands, and fly-whisks. In spite of Jainism and Buddhism, fish and meat, not ex-
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cluding beef, were consumed extensively by the people. Fruit juice and juice of herbs and of course various kinds of liquor were freely taken. Singing, dancing and dramatic performances, entertainment by buffoons, mimics, rope-dancers, jugglers and wandering bards entertained the people. Gardening was a favourite pastime. Hunting, chariot-races, archery contests, wrestling, boxing, shooting marbles with fingers and ploughing with mimic ploughs were the common enjoyments of life.

Though India's contact with the outside world was established since prehistoric and proto-historic times, it was during this age that we find definite expansion of Indian culture and influence in Central and South-East Asia and the Pacific Islands. After Asoka's missionary activity, it was through the Kushānas that Indian culture and religion penetrated Central Asia. Colonization became popular. From the southern and eastern ports, however, emanated wave after wave of enterprising colonisers whose efforts resulted not only in influencing cultural and religious fields but also in establishing Hindu kingdoms in Annam, Fu-nan and other places.

With the rise of Vindhyaśakti of Puranic fame, this Age ends, and a new age begins—the Classical Age of the Guptas—taking India a stage higher in many respects.

VII

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