
POST-MAURYAN PERIOD

Following the downfall of the Mauryan Empire in the Second Century BC, the region of south Asia became a collage of regional powers India's north-western border again was left unguarded, attracting a series of invaders between 200 BC and 300 AD. The absence of any strong resistance paved the way for various foreigners to come to India one after the other. They were the (i) Indo-Greeks (Bactrians); (ii) Indo-Parthians (Pahlavas); (iii) Indo-Scythians (Sakas) and (iv) Kushans (Yu-chi tribe). As the Aryan had done, the invaders became 'Indianised' in the process of their conquest and settlement. Also, this period witnessed remarkable intellectual and artistic achievement inspired by cultural diffusion and syncretism. The Indo-Greeks, or the Bactrians, of the north-west contributed to the development of numismatics; they were followed by another group from the steppes of central Asia, the Shakas (or Scythians), who settled in western India. Yet another nomadic tribe, the Yuezhi, who were forced out of the Inner Asian steppes of Mongolia, drove the Shakas out of north-western India and established the Kushana Kingdom (first century BC to third century AD).

THE KUSHANS

The Kushans ruled in two dynasties—Kadaphises and Kanishkas, Kadaphises ruled from AD 50 to 78 and Kanishka's rule started from AD 78 onwards. The Kushanas were patrons of Gandharan art—a synthesis of Greek literature. The Indian style and Sanskrit a new era called Shaka in AD 78, and their calendar, which was formally recognised by India for civil purposes, starting on 22 March 1957, is still in use. Purushapura was their first capital and Mathura was their second capital.

The Kushana Kingdom controlled parts of Afghanistan and Iran, and in India its realm stretched from Purushapura (modern Peshawar, Pakistan) in the north-west, to Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh) in the east, and to Sanchi (Madhya Pradesh) in the south. For a short period, the kingdom reached still farther east to Pataliputra. The Kushana Kingdom was the crucible of trade among the Indian, Persian, Chinese and Roman Empires, and controlled a critical part of the legendary Silk Road.

The Kushans belonged to the Yu-chi tribe in central Asia, which later spread into the Kansu Province of Turkey. They were in constant fight with the Saka tribe in Tibet, on the Jaxartan River bank. The Sakas kept evading the Yu-chi rulers till they passed the northern passes and entered India.

The Yu-chi tribe consisted of five main sub-tribes with Ki-shung as the chief among them. The Ki-shung tribesmen later prospered and came to be called as Kushans.

Kushana Rulers**KADAPHISES I (TILL AD 68)**

The first ruler of the Kushans had great victories over the Greeks, Sakas and Parthians on the borders of India and captured the important region of Hindukush Mountains. He is known to have fought a decisive battle with Parthians in AD 48 at Gandhara and established the Kushan Empire in that region. During his rule, Kushans used the Kharosti script and Buddhism was their main religion.

**Other Notable Events in the
Post-Mauryan Era**

- **St Thomas** visited India to propagate

Christianity during the rule of Gondophernes of the Parthian Dynasty.

- The Indo-Bactrian or Indo Greek series of wars was fought during 200 BC, which established two Greek dynasties at north-western India.
- **King Menander** (or Milinda) is the most famous among the Bactrian rulers, as we find respectful mention of him by **Kshemendra** (eleventh century AD) in his **Avadanakal-palata**. Milinda's dialogue between the king of Saka la (Sialkat) and Nagasena (also known as Nagarjuna) is recorded in the Pali work **Milinda Panho** (Questions of Milinda). Eventually, Milinda was converted to Buddhism by Nagasena.
- The Indo-Greeks were the first rulers to issue gold coins in India and introduced features of Hellenistic art in the north-west frontier of India, which developed into the famous **Gandhara art**.
- The two schools of art that flourished during the Post-Mauryan era are—the **Gandhara School** (also known as the Greco-Buddhist School) and the Amravati school. The Gandhara School owed its origin to the Indo-Greek rulers and had patrons in the Sakas and the Kushanas (especially Kanishka) between the first and fifth century in the Gandhara region. The Amravati school was established in the lower valley of Krishna and Godavari during the second century BC, in the later Satavaham period its main centres were Amravati, Nagarjunakonda and Jaggayyapeta. It became an important Buddhist centre and the artists here mainly used white marble.

KADAPHISESII (VIMA KADAPHISES) (AD 65-75)

He succeeded his father and went on to capture Punjab, the Ganges plains and the Banaras regions. Unlike his father he was a worshipper of Lord Shiva. Coins of his era describe him as Maheshwara or Emperor of the entire world. The abundance of gold and silver coins denotes the prosperity during his rule. Indians started to trade heavily with the Chinese. Greeks and Persians in silk, spices, gems and many other items.

KANISHKA (AD 78-120)

After the Kadaphises came Kanishka. Kanishka was their main ruler and well known for starting the Shaka era, which starts from ad 78. Inscriptions referring to him or to the Shaka (the era in which he supposedly began his reign in ad 78) are found over a vast area extending from the Oxus frontier of Afghanistan to Varanasi and Sanchi. He further captured Maghada and spread his empire in and beyond the western Himalayas, including Kashmir and Khotan in Sinkiang. Buddhist sources, to which we are indebted for much of this information, hail him as another Menander or Ashoka; he showered the sangha (the monastic community) with patronage, presided over the Fourth Buddhist Council and encouraged a new wave of missionary activity. He popularised Buddhism in China, Tibet, central Asia and other parts of the world. However, his coins had inscriptions of Greek, Persian and Hindu gods also, which showed that he respected other religions too. **Purushapura** (or Peshawar), his capital, still boasts the foundations of a truly colossal stupa. With a diameter of nearly 100 m and a reported height of 200 m, it must have been ranked as one

of the wonders of the world at that time, Mathura by the Jamuna served as his subsidiary capital as massive statues of Kadaphises and Kaniska were found in this region. He died while campaigning in Sinkiang, Kanishka's successors, many with names also ending in 'ishka' continued the Kushana rule for another century or more which later shrunk to become one of the many petty kingdoms in the north-west.

The Stupa at Sanchi

To honour Buddha, Ashoka had stupas (large hemispherical domes) built in Sanchi which is a village 46 km from Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh. Stupas are Buddhist religious monuments believed to shelter the relics of Buddha. The gateways or forans, to these stupas contain highly depreated scenes from the life of Buddha. In the second century BC, the Great Stupa was vandalised, possibly by Pushyamitra Sunga. But it has continuously been rebuilt and decorated since, then. Sir John Marshal letd the the restoration of the stupa architecture from 1912 to 1919

THE DECCAN AND THE SOUTH

During the Kushan Dynasty, an indigenous power, the Satavahana Kingdom (first century BC to third century ad), rose in the Deccan in southern India. The Satavahana, or Andhra Kingdom was considerably influenced by the Mauryan political model, though the power was decentralised in the hands of the local chieftains who used symbols of Vedic religion and upheld the varnashra-madharma. The rulers, however, were eclectic and patronised Buddhist monuments, such as those in Ellora (Maharashtra) and Amaravati (Andhra Pradesh). Thus, the Deccan served as a bridge through which politics, trade and religious ideas

could spread from the north to the south.. Farther south, the three ancient Tamil kingdoms— Chera (in the west), Chola (in the east), and Pandya (in the south)—frequently involved in internecine warfare to gain regional supremacy. They are mentioned in Greek and Ashokan sources as lying at the fringes of the Mauryan Empire. A corpus of ancient Tamil literature, known as Sangam (academy) works—including Tolkappilyam, a manual of Tamil grammar by Tolkappiyar—provides much useful information about their social life, Tamil is the oldest among the spoken and literary languages of South India and the earliest literature of this language is known as the Sangam literature. Tamil tradition tells us about three literary assemblies (Sangam) which met at Madurai under the Pandyan kings. The Sangam literature preserves folk memory about the society and life in South India between the third century bc and third century AD.

Dravidian social order was based on different ecological regions rather than on the Aryan Varna paradigm, though the Brahmins had a high status at a very early stage. Segments of society were characterised by matriarchy and matrilineal succession-which survived well into the nineteenth century--cross-cousin marriage and strong regional identity. Tribal chieftains emerged as kings as people moved from pastoralism towards agriculture. Agriculture was sustained by irrigation from rivers, small-scale tanks (as man-made ponds are called in India) and wells. There is also evidence of brisk maritime trade with Rome and south-east Asia.

Sangam literature

Sangam Literature is a primary source which is used to gain knowledge about the early history of the ancient Tamil region. Many ancient kings: and princes have a mention in ancient

Sangam poems and their existence have also been proved through archaeological evidences. The history of the southern kingdoms like the early Cholas, the Pandyas and the Cheras can be found through the Sangam literature.

As an ancient academy, the Sangam met after a fixed interval in the city of Madurai under the able aegis of the Pandya kings which also helped Tamil poets and authors. According to an estimate, this period lasted between 100 BCE and 300 BCE.

The period of Sangam literature deals with war, governance, love, trade, etc. which also has the oldest expanded Tamil literature.

But a great part of the Tamil literature related to the Sangam period had been lost. The presently available literature from the Sangam period is just a shade of the rich wealth produced during this golden age of Tamil Civilization.

In the Sangam literature the Tamil language had become a strong medium of literary expression. Because of the expansion of the Tamil language social life could easily be portrayed in literature.

Many archaeologists who were involved in examining the Chera inscription found in south-western Tamil Nadu have disclosed name of three generations of rulers from the Chera clan. These names are also found in some of the Sangam anthology Pathiruppathu'. Palaeographic analysis of the inscriptions has revealed its age to be within the first two centuries of the common era.

The Sangam age ended around the third Century CE with the invasion of Kalabhras from the north.

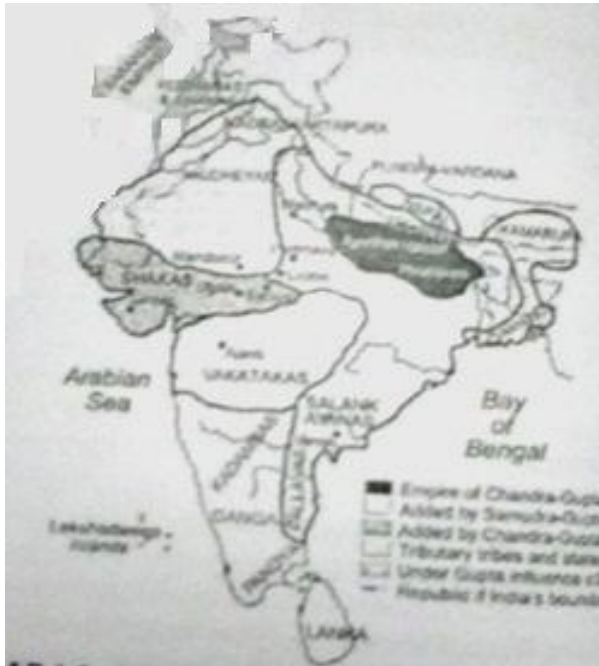
has two systems of dating, one the familiar Gregorian calendar of BC-AD and other based on the Shaka era, which is reckoned to have begun in AD 78. Although called Shaka (father than Kushana), this era is supposed by many to correspond with the Kanishka era. Others have tried to match Kanishka with another Indian era, the Vikrama, which began in 58 BC. This seems much too early. On the other hand, the latest scholarship, based on numismatic correlations between Kushana and Roman coins, pushes Kanishka's accession way forward to about AD 128.

Discoveries of Roman gold coins in various sites attest to extensive South Indian links with the outside world. As with Patalliputra in the north east and Taxila in the north-west (in Pakistan), the city of Madurai, the Pandyan capital (in Tamil Nadu), was the centre of intellectual and literary activities. Under royal patronage, poets and bards assembled at successive concourses and composed anthologies of poems, most of which have been lost. By the end of the first century BC, South Asia was criss-crossed by overland trade routes, which facilitated the movements of Buddhist and Jain missionaries and other travellers and opened the area to a synthesis of many cultures.



Two Calendars in India

Today's Indian Republic, apart from having two names for the country (India and Bharat),



MAP 1.8 Kingdoms in India

★ Some Notable Kingdoms of the Post-Mauryan Period

- (i) **Sungas** Pushyamitra Sunga, a staunch Brahmin, captured the throne after assassinating the last Mauryan king Brahadratha in 184 BC. He performed two famous Ashvamedha yajnas to promote orthodox Brahminical faith during his rule. The last Sunga king was assassinated by his Brahmin Minister Vasudeva Kanva.
- (ii) **Kanvas** Founded by Vasudeva, the Kanva Dynasty survived till 28 BC after succeeding the Sungas. The four main rulers of the Kanva Dynasty were Vasudeva, Bhumimitra, Narayana and Susman. The last Kanva king was deposed by Satavahans.
- (iii) **Satavahans** The first ruler, Simuka, destroyed the Sungas power and made Pratisthana the capital, on the banks of

Godavari. They fought often with the Sakas, till Gautamiputra Satakarni (AD 106-130) destroyed the power of the Sakas and many other Kshatriya rulers to establish Satavahan rule in the Deccan and central India (also identified as Andhras). The dynasty came to an end by the middle of the third century AD and its last ruler was Shri Yajna Satakarni.

RELIGIOUS SECTS OF POST-MAURYAN AND THE GUPTA PERIOD

Bhagavatism

During the post-Mauryan period, certain religious beliefs and sects beyond the orthodox Vedic religion started evolving, which soon became popular. These religious sects did not believe in the mechanical methodology of worship as prescribed in the Vedas. The new theistic religions stressed on the idea of a supreme God conceived as Vishnu, Shiva, Shakti or some other form. Only His grace or Prasad could make the salvation. Salvation could only be attained by Bhakti. Bhakti involved intense love, and devotion resulting into complete surrender of the self before the Almighty. One of the main representatives of this new system was Bhagavatism. It emphasised on the idea of a supreme God, God of Gods, called Hari and later on as Vasudeva. It stressed on the necessity of worshipping Him with devotion. It first became popular in the region of Mathura. By the second century BC, the new sect had expanded far beyond the limits of Mathura. Inscriptions regarding the worship of Vasudeva are discovered in Maharashtra, Rajasthan and central India. The Besnagar pillar inscription shows that a Greek ambassador of

King Antialcidas, known as Heliodora (Heliodorus), a resident of Taxila, styled himself a Bhagavata, and built a Garudadhvaja in honour of Vasudeva at Besnagar, the site of ancient Vidisa.

The re-union of Bhagavatism with orthodox Brahmanism made sure that the former establishes a permanent position, and gave an entirely new turn to the latter. From this point, Bhagavatism, or Vaishnavism, provided airing with Saivism, the main platform to the orthodox religion in its rivalry with Buddhism. It was primarily because of its impact that the worship of images, which had been unknown in the Vedic period, slowly became prominent in the Brahmanical religion. There is no doubt that the sacrificial ceremonies given in the Vedas did survive; however, gradually their prominence declined. Along with the emergence of religions of non-theistic religions, creeds of a definitely theistic character began evolving. The central figures around which they developed were not basically Vedic deities but belonged to some unorthodox sources. Pre-Vedic and post Vedic folk elements were most prominent in their emergence. The most prominent factor that inspired these theistic movement* was Bhakti. This motivation resulted into the evolution of various religious sects such as Vaishnavism, Saivism and Saktism. All these were regarded as the components of orthodox Brahmanism.

Vaishnavism and Vaishnava Cults

The emergence and evolution of Vaishnavism was closely associated with that of Bhagavatism. Vaishnavism, which originated during the pre-Gupta period, started capturing and absorbing Bhagavatism during the Gupta period. This process was completed by the end of the late Gupta period. Vaishnavism was the name that was mostly used to designate Bhagavatism from this period onwards. It

indicated the predominance of the later Vedic Vishnu element in it, which stressed on the concept of incarnations. The concept of incarnation facilitated the inclusion of many divinities into Vaishnavism. It made progress during the epic period and is mentioned in the Puranas.

BHAGAVATA AND

PANCHARATRA: The Bhagavata and the Pancharatra were Vaishnava cults. In the beginning, the two cults were different. The Panchuratras worshipped the deified sage Narayana while the Bhagavatas worshipped the deified hero Vasudeva. Later, the two sects were later merged in an endeavour to identify Narayana and Vasudeva. The Bhagavata is a theistic cult which emerged many centuries before the Christian era. It is mainly based on the Bhagavad Gita. However, with the passage of time, Bhagavata Purana and Vishnu Purana became its principal texts. When the Bhagavata cult was at the height of its prominence during the second century AD, it came to be popularly known as the Pancharatra Agama. The term means five nights, but its relevance is still unknown. The following of Bhagavatism by the Rajput kings further led to the spread of Bhagvatism across North India. In the southern parts of India, in the Tamil land, the Bhagavata movement was spread mainly by the 12 Alvars. They lived from the eighth to the early ninth century. The history of Vaishnavism from the post-Gupta period till the first decade of the thirteenth century AD is mostly associated with South India. Vaishnava saints, who were popular as Alvars, spread the lesson of one-soul, loving adoration for Vishnu, and their songs composed in Tamil were named as Prabhandhas. The most famous Alvars are Namm Alvar and Tirumallsai Alvar. The Dasavataras of Vishnu have also been worshipped for definite purposes. The ten

incarnations of Vishnu are Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, Narsimha, Vamana, Parsuram, Rama, Krishna, Buddha and Kalkin. It was in the Matsyapurana that the first mention of these dasavturs was made.

Saivism and Saive Cults

Saivism originated during the very ancient past. In Vedic tradition, Rudra is regarded as the Vedic counterpart of Pasupati Mahadeva. Many grammarians who belonged to post-Vedic period provide an idea about the development of Saivism as a religious movement. Panini, for instance, mentions about a group of Shiva worshippers of his era. Patanjali also refers about a group of Shiva worshippers as Shiva Bhagavatas in his Mahabhasya, Patanjali briefly describes about the peculiar methodology of rituals of these worshippers. This reminds us of the severe religious practices that have been mentioned in the Pasupata Sutras. Shiva is globally worshipped in the form of the phallus (linga), the source of appearance and life, which involves the seeds of degeneration and death. The female generative organ (yoni) represents Siva's Shakti, the representation of his cosmic power. When come together, the linga and yoni indicate the two prominent generative concepts of the universe. A few Puratias recognise the entire creation with Shiva through the concept of his five faces—Isana, Tatpurushar Aghora, Vamadeva and Sadyojata. Shiva's five faces are represented by the rulers of the five directions, the four points of the compass and the zenith, forming the totality of spatial expansion. Saivism expanded during the Gupta period. In South India, the Pallava king **Mahendravarman I** was initially a Jaina and later he became a follower of Saivism. Royal patronage increased the reputation of Saivism. The mystical and devotional songs composedly

the 63 Saiva Nayanars also popularised it. Just as vaishnavism, Saivism in South India prospered initially through the endeavours of Saiva saints also known as the Nayanars. Their poetry in Tamil was known as Tevaram. There were 63 Nayanars. **Tirujnana, Sambandhar** and **Tirunavukkarasu** are the most famous of them. The emotional Saivism that the Nayanars preached was complemented by several Saiva intellectuals who were related to different forms of Saiva movements such as Agamanta, Suddha and Virasaiva. The Agamantas based their idehs, primarily on the 28 agamas that describe different forms of Shiva. **Aghora Sivacharya** was one of most popular exponents. The Suddhasaivas followed the teachings of **Ramanuja** and **Srikanta Sivacharya** was their famous follower. The Virasaivas or Lingayats were led by **Basava**. Basava used his political authority and position in boosting the movement which was both a social and religious reform movement. These people were also influenced by the teachings of Ramanuja.

Kanishka's Nationality

Different historians give different theories regarding Kanishka's nationality. It is widely believed that he was Yuch-chi origin. It is believed that the Uych-chi, was a Mangoloid nomadic tribe of central Asia. During the second century BC, they were forced out by their more powerful neighbours, the Hiung-nu. They had to migrate westwards, and in the course of their migration, they conquered the Wu-sun tribe and their region of the Ili River basi. At his branch (Siao-yueh-chi) migrated southwards and settled down along the Tibetan border. The major branch (Tayuehchi) proceeded westwards. The defeated the Sakas, and settled down in their conquered terretitory. They were forced out from his region once

again by the son of the dead Wu-sun chieftain. Marching ahead, they eventually occupied Bactria and Sogdiana. By about the first century BC, they gave up their nomadic culture and embraced a settled life. Here, they bifurcated into five groups. The Kushanas (Kueishuang) one of those tribes, overpowered the others and unified the whole tribe under Kadphises I (Kujula Kadphises). He conquered some regions of North West India. His son Kadphises II (Wima Kadphises) was able to capture further Indian Territory. Kanishka, whose association with Kadphises II is unknown, is believed to have succeeded him.

PASUPATA

Pasupata is probably the earliest known Saiva cult. The cult flourished in Orissa and in Western India from the seventh to the eleventh centuries. The founder of the Pasupata cult was **Lakulisa**, said to be an incarnation of Shiva. Lakulisa's special emblem was a club (lakuta) which sometimes symbolises the phallus. He is usually depicted naked and ithyphallic. The latter state does not signify sexual excitement but sexual restraint by means of yogic techniques. The cult's main text is the Pasupata Sutra attributed to Lakulisa. It is primarily concerned with ritual and discipline. According to a thirteenth century inscription, Lakulisa had four chief disciples who founded four sub-sects. A number of Pasupata temples were established in northern India from about the sixth century onwards, but by eleventh century the movement was in decline. The Pasupata doctrine was dualistic in nature. Pasu (the individual soul) was eternally existing with the pad (the supreme soul), and the attainment of (end of misery) was through the performance of yoga and (means). This vidhi consisted of various senseless and unsocial acts (or extreme acts). The Kapalikas

and the Kalamukhas were undoubtedly offshoots of the Pasupata sect and there is enough epigraphic evidence to show that these were already flourishing in the Gupta period. Other extreme sects of Saivism are the Aghoris (successors of Kapalikas) and the Gorakhnathis.

In contrast to the above-mentioned extreme forms some moderate forms of Saivism also appeared in northern and central India in the early medieval period. In Kashmir, two moderate schools of Saivism were founded. Vasugupta founded the Pratyabhijana School, and his pupils. Kallata and Somananda founded the Spandasastra School. All these teachings were systematised by **Abinava Gupta** who founded a new monistic system, called the Trika. Another moderate Saiva sect, known as Matron flourished at the same time in central India and little later in some parts of the Deccan. Epigraphic evidence from central India shows that many of the Mattanmayura Acharyas were preceptors of the Kalachuri-Chedi kings

KAPALIKAS AND KALAMUKHAS

These are two extreme Tantric cults, which flourished, from about the tenth to thirteenth century mainly in Karnataka. They were probably offshoots of the Pasupata movement. They reduced the diversity of creation into two elements—the Lord and creator and the creation that emanated from him.

According to a few inscriptions and literary references, the Kapalikas originated in about the sixth century in the Deccan or South India. By the eighth century, they began to spread northwards; but by the fourteenth century they had almost died out, their decline being hastened by the rise of the popular Lingayat movement, or perhaps they merged with other Saivite Tantric orders such as the Kanphatas and the Aghoris.

The Kapalikas (skull-bearers) were adherents of (an ancient ascetic order centred on the worship of the terrifying aspects of Shiva, namely, Mahakala Kapalabhrit (he who carries a skull) and Bhairava. They were pre-occupied with magical practices and attaining the 'perfections' (siddhis).

All social and religious conventions were deliberately flouted. They ate meat, drank intoxicants and practised ritual sexual union as a means of achieving consubstantiality with Shiva. The devotees ate from bowls fashioned from human skull and worshipped Shiva. They would carry a triple staff, pot and a small staff with a skull-shaped top.

The Kalamukhas flourished in the Karnataka area from about the eleventh to thirteenth century. They drank from cups fashioned from human skull as a reminder of man's ephemeral nature and smeared their bodies with the ashes of cremated corpses.

AGHORIS

This was a Tantric movement, now extinct, and said to have consisted of two branches—the pure (suddha) and dirty (malin). Aghoris were the successors of the Kapalika cult. Neither religious nor caste distinctions were allowed, nor was image-worship and all adherents required to be celibate. Cannibalism, animal sacrifices and other cruel rites were practised. All kinds of refuse were eaten. AS excrement is seen to fertilise the soil, so eating it was thought to 'fertilise' the mind and render it capable of every kind of meditation. The Aghoris led the wandering life of vagabonds. Each guru was accompanied by a dog, as was Shiva in his Bhairava aspect.

VIRASAIVAS Virsaiva is a South, Indian devotional cult, also called the Lingayat cult. It

was based on non-dualism, Visishtadvaita. **Basava** was the founder or more probably the systematiser of the movement. At 16, he left home and went to the pilgrimage town of Sangama, where he worked to reform Saivism, to over-come caste distinctions and to tight the ban on the remarriage of widows; Later, he became a minister of the usurper King Bijjala who reigned at Kalyani. While serving the king, he converted a number of Jainas to his cult. But his unorthodox views caused tension between the king and his subjects and he left the king's service. After Basava's death in AD 1168, the members of his sect were persecuted, but today the movement has many followers, mostly in Karnataka and Andhra-Pradesh.

Tantrism

Tantrism is a kind of sacramental ritualism, in which there are a number of esoteric and magical aspects. Mantras, yantras and yogic techniques are employed in Tantrism. Tantrism is also involved in Jainism, Mahayana Buddhism, Saivism, Vaishnavism and Saktism. The term Tantrism has been taken from the sacred texts known as Tantras. The earliest works on tantras were written during the Gupta period. Tantrists consider Tantras as authoritative as the Vedas and therefore are known as the Fifth Veda, yantras; geometric symbolic patterns have a lot of great religious significance. They are considered the concrete personal expression of the unapproachable divine. Yantras act in the visible sphere just as mantras act in the audible sphere. Through yantras, the followers are able to participate ritually in the powers of the universe. The most popular is the sriyantra involving many interlocking triangles with a central point symbolising the eternal.

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