7. India and Iran (Persia)

7.1 Indian Subcontinent and Iran

Excavated evidence has sufficiently proved that the trade and cultural relations between the Indian subcontinent and Iran have continued since the Harappan times. The empire of Elam, contemporary to the Harappan civilisation, existed in the southwest regions of Iran. It was culturally closer to Mesopotamia. Its capital was at 'Susa'. Hence, it was also known as 'Susiana'. Many dynasties ruled Iran at later dates but all of them maintained their capital at 'Susa'. The archaeological evidence found at Susa has confirmed the trade and cultural relations between Iran and the Harappan civilisation.

> **Visit the following website to see the map of the Iranian empire:**https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/3a/Persian_Empire%2C_490_BC.pnghttps://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Persian_Empire,_490_BC.png

The Iranian empire was established by Cyrus II (also known as Cyrus the Great) of the Achaemenid dynasty. He was from the tribe of 'Pars'. This tribe dwelt in the mountainous region in the northwest of Iran and adjacent to Afghanistan. This region was known by the tribe's name, 'Pars'. Even the main city of the region was known by the same name, 'Pars'. Greeks knew the city by the name, 'Persepolis'. The Iranian empire was known as 'Persian empire' because it originated in the Pars region.

Emperor Cyrus II had begun to build a new capital at 'Pasargade'. However, it did not get completed in his lifetime. His son, Cambyses II succeeded him. He moved back to Susa and re-established his capital there. Cambyses II had conquered Egypt.

Daryush I, who succeeded Cambyses II reinforced the fortification walls of Susa. He also built a massive palace and a hypostyle (many columned) hall known as 'Apadana'. He also built the city of 'Persepolis' in the style similar to Susa. He built a palace and apadana in Persepolis also.

Reconstructed picture of 'Apadana' at Susa
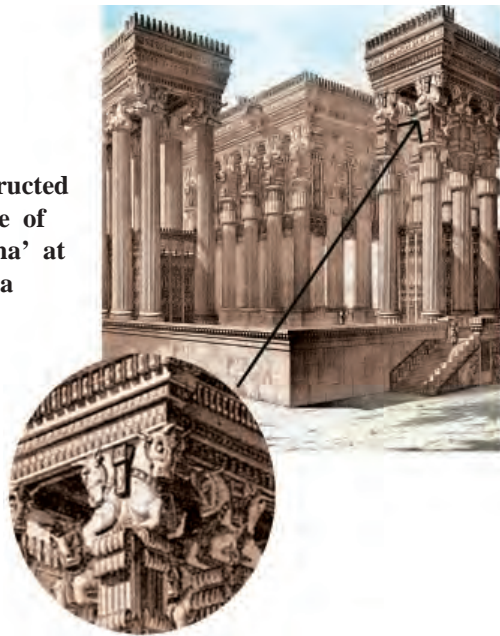
Geographically Iran is the region, which forms a link between the east and west of Asia. Naturally Iran held an important position in the trade and also in the cultural exchange between East Asia and West Asia.

The trade that was conducted from Asia and the Persian Gulf to Mesopotamia and Egypt expanded to Greece and Rome. The ancient routes used by caravans of merchants were provided with safety and security by the Persian emperors. They rebuilt some of the routes. Cyrus II and Daryush I developed the route beginning from Susa and reaching the Mediterranean Sea. This route is known as the 'Royal Road'. Some of the branches of the Royal Road linked the Indian subcontinent and Egypt. Alexander started from Macedonia on his expedition to India. He used the same route to reach India.

7.2 Conflict between the Iranian (Achaemenid) Empire and Greece

Greek historians have recorded the frequent battles between the Achaemenid empire and the city states in Greece. Among them the records of Herodotus are important. The Achaemenid emperors first conquered the kingdoms in West Asia and then the city states in Greece. Then also they continued to have intermittent battles. The rising of the Ionian Greeks against the Achaemenid rule is supposed to be significant.

Cyrus II conquered Lydia, a Greek state to the north of Mediterranean Sea, around the mid of the 6th century B.C.E. As a result, the Ionian Greek city states under the Lydian rule, inevitably became part of the Achaemenid empire. The Greeks in Ionia had migrated to Anatolia, that is, the Asian part of the Turkey. It is also known as 'Asia Minor'.

During the reign of Daryush I all Ionian city states got together and rebelled against the Achaemenid rule. The rebellion was subdued completely after a struggle of five years by the Achaemenid army.

The effects of this unsuccessful rebellion are important for understanding the interrelationship between Greece and Persia in the ensuing period. The Ionian Greeks had received help from the states of 'Athens' and 'Eretria' in Greece. Hence, Daryush I attacked Athens. At this time the battle between Daryush I and Athens was fought on the grounds of Marathon near Athens. Therefore, it is known as the 'Battle of Marathon'. Daryush I was defeated in this battle.

Xerexes, the successor of Daryush I, tried once again to invade Greece. However, he was also defeated. Thereafter the conflict between the Achaemenids and the Greeks continued over a prolonged time. Ultimately, Athens and the confederacy of other Greek city states declared a war for independence against the Achaemenid rule in Greece. Neither of the two had a conclusive victory. In 449 B.C.E. a treaty was signed between the Greek confederacy and the Achaemenids.

As the effect of this prolonged conflict the Achaemenid rule grew weak. This was bound to reflect in the political and financial spheres. An impact of this conflict was to

manifest in the way of the invasion of Persia by Alexander III, the king of Macedonia, who was later regarded as the 'Conqueror of the World'.

Arrian was a Greek historian of the 1st century C.E. He wrote a book called 'Anabasis* of Alexander'. He has referred to the correspondence between Daryush III, the last Achaemenid emperor and Alexander. Daryush had written to Alexander about the release of his mother, wife and children. Alexander responded by reminding Daryush of the sorrow inflicted on the Greeks by the earlier invasions of the Achaemenid emperors. Alexander wrote that he had arrived in Russia by crossing the ocean, with the intention of punishing the aggressive Persians. Next, he accused Daryush of provocating the Greeks against him and he reminded Daryush that he was a defeated king. So Daryush was further snubbed that he should not behave as an equal to Alexander.

Anabasis* means to spur into action.

This correspondence is indicative of two things:

(1) The Greeks felt that their self-esteem was challenged.

(2) The Greeks now felt confident about their strength to conquer the Persians.

It may be said that these two factors inspired Alexander's expedition.

7.3 Iranian (Achaemenid) Empire and India

The Achaemenid emperors established the Persian empire by conquering smaller kingdoms in the northeast region of the Indian subcontinent and expanded their boundary up to Punjab. It was the same period when the Magadha empire was on the rise in India.

It becomes apparent from the inscriptions of the Achaemenid emperors and the records

By the way : The Greek historian Herodotus was born in 484 B.C.E., in Halicarnassus, a Greek city state. He began to write with the intention of tracing the history and causes of the battles between Greek city states and Achaemenid empire during 500-449 B.C.E. The book he wrote was named as 'Historia' (The Histories). He, at the outset of the book says, "Herodotus of Halicarnassus here displays his inquiry, so that human achievements may not become forgotten in time, and great and marvellous deeds – some displayed by Greeks, some by barbarians – may not be without their glory."

Herodotus was the first historian who collected information seeking answers to a particular question, and then to put it in a chronological order. While doing this he did not bring in notions like god, human destiny, etc. Later putting historical events in chronological sequence became an essential theme of history writing. This theme proved to be fundamental in the development of history writing as an independent discipline. Therefore, Herodotus is said to be the father of historiography.

kept by the Greek historians that Cyrus II had conquered the region of the Kabul basin (Gandhara). It was part of the Achaemenid empire. The river Vitasta (Jhelum) had formed its eastern boundary. Alexander crushed the Achaemenid empire and the region of Punjab which was the part of Achaemenid empire.

The revenue received by the Achaemenid empire from its provinces (satrapies) in the Indian subcontinent was more than any other provinces. According to Herodotus, this revenue amounted to 360 talents* of gold

dust**. Accepting the possibility of exaggeration in this description, it clearly indicates that the revenue collected from the Indian states formed a major share of the Achaemenid treasury.

7.4 Political and Cultural Impact of the Iranian Contact

The Persian supremacy prevailed in the Indian subcontinent for at least two centuries. However, it had ended much before the advent of Alexander. Thinking of the impact left by the Persian contact in the period of two centuries, one thing can be noticed prominently. It is about the administrative system set by the Persian rulers. Every conquered region was annexed to their territory as a satrapy and a satrap (governor) was appointed as its chief administrator. This method was followed by Alexander and later by the Scythian (Saka) and Kushana rulers as well.

The Aramaic script came into use in the north-eastern regions of the Indian subcontinent, during the times of Achaemenid rule. Kharoshthi, an ancient Indian script evolved from this script. The Ashokan edicts in this region are inscribed in the Aramaic script. The method of installing royal edicts at vantage points seems to be borrowed from the examples of Achaemenid inscriptions.

Herodotus tells us that Daryush I had sent many explorers to gather information about the course of the river Sindhu and the Arabian Sea. Among them was 'Scylax of Karyanda', a Greek sailor from Ionia, who was well- known. He was the first Ionian Greek who stepped on the Indian land. Scylax began his exploration from the Sindhu and proceeded further by sailing around the coast of the Arabian Sea and then entering the Red Sea. He ended his journey at 'Suez', situated in the delta region of the Nile. It took two and half years for him to complete this journey.

The logbook of the journey of Scylax is known as 'Periplus of Scylax'. The original periplus is lost but we get to know about its contents from the writings of the Greek historians. This periplus was the first source of information of the Indian subcontinent to the western world, especially to the Greeks. Very soon after the completion of the expedition by Scylax, Daryush I conquered the region in the lower reach of the Sindhu.

Scylax had reported an already existing canal that linked the Nile and the Red Sea. It was dug by an Egyptian Pharoh. Daryush I revived that canal by digging it again. It opened a new water way for the transport between Persia and the Indian subcontinent.

This newly available route facilitated the trade between Achaemenid provinces in the north-western region of the Indian subcontinent and the regions of Sindh-Punjab. The ivory and the teak wood coming from India had great demand in the Persian markets. The inscription of Daryush I at Susa records the use of Indian ivory and teakwood for building the palace.

Herodotus has described the Indian soldiers in the Achaemenid army. According to it, Xerexes' army had soldiers from Gandhara, Sindh and Punjab, when he invaded Greece in 480 B.C.E. The soldiers from Gandhara were equipped with bows made of cane and spears with short shafts. They also had horses and chariots drawn by horses. The Indian soldiers from Sindh and Punjab used cotton clothes and used bows and arrows made of cane. They were expert archers. When Xerexes retreated from Greece, it was decided to keep a regiment posted

there. That regiment had Indian soldiers.

In the times before Cyrus II, the founder of Achaemenid empire, there was no coinage in use in Persia. The barter system prevailed to a large extent. Sometimes silver ingots of particular weight were used for exchanging commodities. Cyrus II had conquered the city state of Lydia, where use of coins was already in practice. Those coins were known as 'stater'. Cyrus issued coins similar to Lydian coins.

Daryush I issued coins with his own

Persian 'Siglos'

portrait on it. The Gold coins issued by him were known as 'Darik' and silver coins were known as 'Siglos'. A portrait of Daryush I, holding a bow and arrow can be seen on these coins. One 'Darik' was equivalent to 12 'Sigloi'* in value.

* *'Sigloi' is the plural of 'Siglos'.*

Along with the Achaemenid coins, coins from Greek satrapies also remained in circulation in Persia. Some satraps issued their own coins imitating Greek coins. These coins were cast in moulds. The obverse side of a coin usually carried the portrait of a king and the reverse side had a symbol punched on it.

It is possible that the ancient Indian punch marked coins were influenced by this technique of punching.

In the times that preceded emperor Cyrus' reign, the practice of building huge public monuments did not exist in Persia. Hence, there was no existing Persian architectural style to follow while creating the magnificent palaces and sculptures in

Susa and Persepolis. For that purpose, emperor Cyrus got Greek architects and sculptors from the Greek settlements in Asia minor under his rule.

Columns at Persepolis

Persepolis was razed completely by Alexander after conquering Persia. It was the end of the Persian Empire. The architects, sculptors and other artisans lost the royal patronage. They had to move out in search of work. They migrated to India. They received royal patronage in the court of emperor Ashoka. Their style is reflected in the stone pillars erected by empror Ashoka. Thus, the sculptural art in ancient India has its roots in the Persian; and acordingly in the Greek sculptural style.

7.5 Taxila

Mahabharata mentions King Takshaka as the king of 'Naga' people. Taxila was the capital of King Takshaka. The archaeological evidence confirm that Taxila has a hoary past. It was the capital of Gandhara mahajanapada.

The archaeological remains of this city are strewn over a large area that comprises 18 archaeological sites. They are enlisted as the World Cultural Heritage. It is situated on the Grand Trunk Road, 30 kilometres away from Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan.

Evidence of prehistoric people using microliths have been found at Taxila and in

some caves in its vicinity. The neolithic village at Taxila was settled around 3500 B.C.E. Its remains have been found at a site called 'Sarai-Khola'.

Taxila was ruled by King Ambhi at the time of Alexander's advent. He welcomed Alexander and presented gifts to him. The Greek historians accompanying Alexander described Taxila as a "city full of hustle bustle of people, prosperous and the one that was under a well-established administration."

Some information about Taxila can be gathered from the Buddhist literature and from the writings of the Greek historians. There were several learned individuals (*Acharyas*) staying in Taxila. Many students from various regions of the Indian subcontinent were attracted to Taxila because of the fame of the *acharyas*. Thus, Taxila had become a great centre of education. Thereby it had assumed the magnitude of a natural university. However, the king and his administration at Taxila did not interfere in the decisions of an individual acharya as to the nature of his method of teaching, the subjects to be taught by him or the nature of the syllabi. The duration of a course was dependent on individual student's intellectual capacity to learn. There was no formal system of examinations. Rather success in examination was not perceived as the test of real knowledge. It was the acharya who decided the level of maturity of his students.

Among the subjects taught at Taxila included, Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda, ancillary branches of the Vedas (*Vedangas*), Ancient Traditions and Ethics, Philosophy, Mathematics, Music, Medicine, Puran Texts, History, Weaponry, Poetry, etc.

Acharya Chanakya is believed to have taken Chandragupta Maurya to Taxila for education when he was young. Chanakya himself hailed from Taxila. After becoming the emperor of Magadha, Chadragupta established a regional capital at Taxila.

During the reign of Ashoka Maurya Taxila became an important centre of learning of Buddhist tradition. Taxila did not lose its importance even when the land suffered from the invasions of Greeks, Shakas and Kushanas. However, in the 5th century C.E. the glory of Taxila gradually waned under the pressure of Huna invasions.

7.6 Advent of Alexander

Alexander invaded the Indian subcontinent and conquered some kingdoms from Afghanistan to Sindh-Punjab. He, however, could not establish his rule there for a long time. The information of his advent primarily comes from the Greek

historians like Arrian, Curtis, Diodorus, Plutarch and Justin.

At the time of Alexander's advent the Achaemenid rule in Sindh-Punjab and Afghanistan had weakened and a number of small kingdoms had come into existence. The political strife stopped them from uniting to resist Alexander's invasion.

Alexander became the king of Macedonia in 334 B.C.E. He defeated emperor Daryush III in 331 B.C.E. Thereafter he marched up to 'Shistan' province of Iran and from there he turned toward Kabul. After conquering the region around Kabul, he reached the foothills of Hindukush mountains. Then he camped at a place called Nicaea, situated on Uttarapatha. Ambhi welcomed Alexander and sought friendship with him. Another king whose name was Sisikottas (Shashigupta) surrendered to Alexander. However, not all Indian kings surrendered to Alexander so easily. Many fought with Alexander with great valour. Alexander conquered almost all kingdoms in Kabul, Sindh and Punjab.

On the banks of Jhelum Alexander and King Porus confronted each other and there was a fierce battle between them. Porus was defeated but Alexander and his army was greatly influenced by his valour. The Greeks were unfamiliar to the use of elephants in warfare. To penetrate the file of elephants proved to be a great challenge for them. The Greek historians have unanimously praised the skill of Porus in warfare and also his courage.

After the confrontation with Porus, Alexander reached Nysa, a Greek settlement. People of Nysa resisted Alexander in the beginning but later they welcomed him. Thereafter, Alexander proceeded in the direction of Chenab and Ravi. He conquered the kingdoms on the way and reached the banks of Beas. By that time Alexander's soldiers had lost spirit and they refused to march forward. Alexander was forced to return.

Before setting on the return journey Alexander handed over the regions in Punjab to Porus and those in Sindh to Ambhi. He handed over the kingdom of Kashmir to Abhisara, the king of Varanavati. On his way back he defeated Shibis and Mallas, etc. In rest of the regions he appointed Greek satraps. In 325 B.C.E. Alexander died at Babylon, while he was on his way back to Greece.

For Additional Information : The highway linking the regions from Bihar to Afghanistan is known as 'Grand Trunk Road' in modern days. It was in use as a trade route even during the times of Gautama Buddha. It was known as 'Uttarapatha' in those days. Its starting point was at the port city of 'Tamralipti' in Bengal; known as Tamluk today. It ended at Taxila. Emperor Chandragupta Maurya established this highway in a well planned way. It was about 3200 kilometres in length.

Emperor Ashoka provided many essential amenities for the merchants and travellers on this highway, such as planting trees on both sides of the road, sarais for overnight stay, etc. He erected pillar edicts at vantange points on this highway.

At a later period Shershah Sur and Emperor Akbar rebuilt this highway. In the British period a new metalled road running parallel to Grand Trunk Road was built from Kolkata to Peshawar. This road is still in use.

In modern times the highway starts from Bangla Desh and from Hawrah it proceeds to West Bengal, thereafter it goes to Delhi and to Amritsar, from there to Lahore and Peshawar and in the end to Kabul.

Alexander's invasion of India did not have far reaching impact on the political scenario of India. In a very short period after his death Chandragupta Maurya established his vast empire from Bihar to Afghanistan. It was the beginning of a new era in the Indian history.

<div align="center">Exercise</div>

Q.1 (A) Choose the correct alternative and write the complete sentences.

(1) The Greek historian .... is said to be the father of modern historiography.
(a) Herodotus   (b) Alexander
(c) Scylax   (d) Daryush

(2) Taxila was ruled by King .... at the time of Alexander's advent.
(a) Chandragupta (b) Ambhi
(c) Porus   (d) Shashigupta

(B) Find the incorrect pair from set B and write the correct ones.

Set 'A'	Set 'B'
(1) Persopolis	City built by Daryush I
(2) Halicarnassus	Herodotus was born here
(3) Taxila	Centre of knowledge and education
(4) Nysa	Persian settlement

(C) Write the names -
(1) Last emperor of Achaemenid empire-
(2) Name of the coins issued by Daryush I -

Q.2 Explain the statements with reasons.
(1) Alexander invaded Persia.
(2) Alexanders' invasion of India did not have for reaching impact on the political scenario of India.

Q.3 State your opinion.
(1) Herodotus is said to be the father of modern history writing.
(2) Ancient Taxila was the centre of knowledge and education.

Q.4 Answer the following questions in detail.
(1) Describe the political and cultural effects of Achemenid rule on India.
(2) Describe Alexander's invasion of India.

Activity

Collect additional information about the palace at Persepolis and Apadana at Susa with the help of internet.

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