

UNIT

4

Intellectual Awakening and Socio-Political Changes

Learning Objectives

- To understand the transition of society from 6th century to 2nd century BC (BCE)
- To familiarise ourselves with the essence of new religious faiths: Buddhism, Jainism and Ajivika in India, Zoroastrianism in Persia, and Confucianism and Taoism in China
- To become aware of the circumstances that led to the formation of states with a focus on Magadha Empire
- To understand the socio-political changes of the pre-Mauryan and Mauryan states



Introduction

A new civilisation began to develop in northern India, with the revival of trade and urbanization during the sixth century BC (BCE). In this period of major political and social changes in north India, Buddha and Mahavira were born. In the century following their death, Buddhism and Jainism took root as major religions in India. This meant that new religious orders were coming up with many followers, propagating new beliefs and philosophies. Similarly Zoroastrianism in Persia and Confucianism and Taoism in China became popular during this period.

4.1 Religion in the Sixth Century BC (BCE)

The new civilisations that emerged in the new Iron Age had certain common features. They were characterised by the proliferation of new crafts, growth of long-distance trade, building of cities and towns, rise of universalistic religions and evolution of a code of conduct. Sixth century BC (BCE) was, therefore, a period of exceptional development

in all spheres of life such as material, cultural and intellectual. About this time, we find that a number of prominent men, great thinkers and founders of new religions lived, making it a period of great historical importance. Philosophical and religious thinkers such as Confucius in China, Zoroaster in Iran and Mahavira and Buddha in India gained popularity in sixth century BC (BCE).

4.2 Confucianism and Taoism

In the sixth century BC (BCE), two great thinkers were born in China: Confucius and Lao-Tse. They laid down the systems of morals and social behaviour for individuals and communities. But after their death, temples were built in their memory and the philosophy they taught was developed into a religion. Known as Confucianism and Taoism respectively, their books were held in great reverence in China. Confucianism exerted a big influence on not only the political class of China but also on the common people.