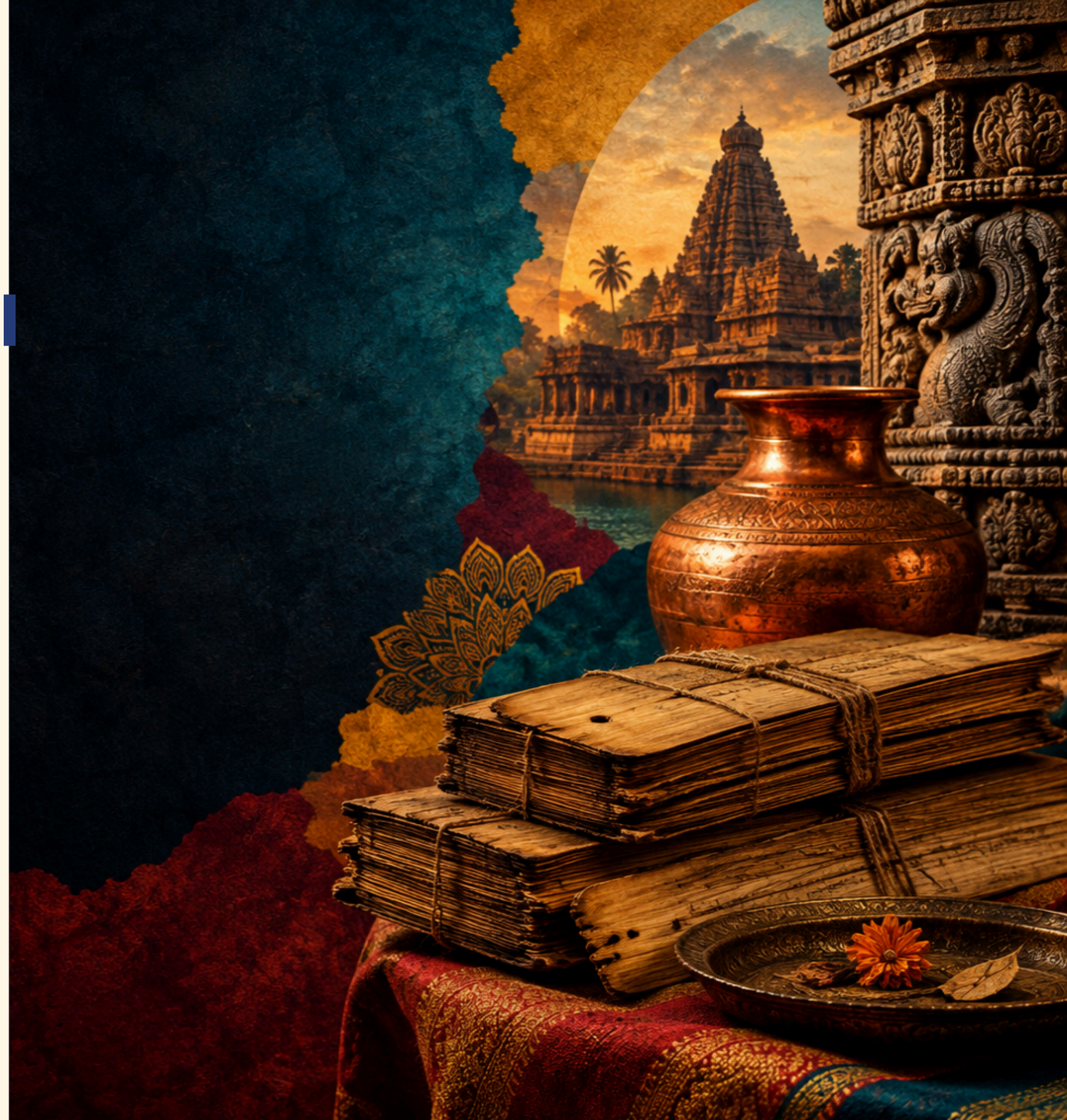
CLASS 9 · SOCIAL SCIENCE

Understanding Society: India and Beyond — Part I

CHAPTER 5

State and Society up to 1000 CE



The Big Questions

01

- How did society and state organise themselves before 1000 CE?
- How did states and societies emerge and spread across the subcontinent?
- How did dharma and the chakravarti samrāṭ create unity?
- How did social, administrative and occupational groups develop and connect culturally?

QUESTIONS

Understanding Society and State

02

- Society: relationships shaped by territory, culture and belonging.
- Families, households, marriage and customs form structural units.
- Customs and practices mainly regulate society.
- A State is an organised political system based on rules and laws.
- It defines rights and duties and builds institutions for law and order.

UNDERSTANDING SOCIETY

Sources for Early Indian History

03

- Archaeology helps us understand the past.
- Literature adds social, political, cultural and moral detail.
- The Rig Veda is among the earliest literary sources.
- Vedic literature remained oral for centuries before being written.
- The Rig Veda arose in the north-west; both cultures knew copper.

SOURCES
EARLY

Broad Timeline

04

- 2000–500 BCE · Vedic period
- 1500–300 BCE · Upanishads
- 600–300 BCE · Mahajanapadas
- 600–300 BCE · Gautama Buddha and Mahavira
- 321 BCE · Foundation of the Mauryan Empire
- Kin-based polities grew into janapadas, empires and regional kingdoms.

BROAD TIMELINE

The Vedic Period

05

- The Vedas are the earliest known corpus of Indian literature.
- Four Vedas: Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva.
- They preserved religious, social and philosophical knowledge.
- They also reveal early political organisation.

VEDIC PERIOD

The Rig Veda

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- The earliest Veda, with 1,028 hymns called suktas.
- Hymns praise deities and reflect on creation, birth and death.
- They include some of the world’s oldest surviving poetry.
- The text illuminates early Vedic society and polity.

THE RIG VEDA

Other Vedas

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- Yajur Veda · performance of yajñas, with prose explanations.
- Sama Veda · hymns arranged for musical recitation.
- Its chanting tradition contributed to the seven svaras.
- Atharva Veda · hymns against evil and references to ailments.

OTHER VEDAS

Parts of Each Veda

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- Samhita · hymns for invoking deities and making offerings.
- Brahmana · prose explanations of rituals.
- Aranyaka · philosophical reflections of forest sages.
- Upanishad · ideas about Atman and Brahman.
- Brahman is a concept; Brahmanas are texts; Brahmins name a varna.

PARTS

From Jana to Janapada

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- Early Vedic organisation was kin-based.
- Kula · family or household.
- Jana · people or tribe.
- Larger, territory-based settlements became janapadas.
- Powerful janapadas developed into mahajanapadas.

JANAPADA

Mahajanapadas and New Political Forms

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- Rose between 600 BCE and 300 BCE as larger territorial states.
- They had capitals, armies, administration and taxation.
- Some were monarchies; others were gana-sanghas.
- The period also saw Gautama Buddha and Mahavira.

MAHAJANAPADAS POLITICAL

Kingship and Governance

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- Kings were expected to protect people and maintain order.
- Governance joined responsibility with ethical conduct.
- The ruler’s duty was connected with dharma.
- Councils and advisers supported the king.
- Political power became more structured and institutional.

KINGSHIP
GOVERNANCE

The Idea of Dharma

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- Dharma means right conduct and duties.
- It guided individuals, society and rulers.
- It was linked with justice, harmony and social order.
- Rulers were expected to govern according to dharma.
- It created shared values across diverse communities.

DHARMA

Chakravarti Samrāṭ

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- An ideal universal ruler.
- Political authority was joined with ethical rule.
- The idea envisioned the subcontinent as one political entity.
- It supported unity, order and responsible governance.

CHAKRAVARTI SAMRAṬ

Mauryan Empire

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- Founded by Chandragupta Maurya in 321 BCE.
- One of the earliest large empires in the subcontinent.
- Organised administration was essential.
- Officials, provinces, roads, revenue and communication supported rule.
- A major stage in state formation.

MAURYAN EMPIRE

Saptāṅga Theory of the State

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- **Kauṭilya described seven limbs of the State:**
- King · ministers · territory and people · fort
- Treasury · army · allies
- All seven supported a strong and stable State.

SAPTĀṄGA THEORY

Gupta and Regional Powers

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- Several regional powers emerged after the Mauryas.
- The Guptas formed an important northern empire.
- Regions developed their own political systems.
- Kingdoms interacted through trade, culture, warfare and alliances.
- Political life remained diverse.

GUPTA
REGIONAL

Southern India and the Cholas

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- Southern India had important early political traditions.
- The Cholas emerged as a major imperial power.
- Administration included local and village institutions.
- Villages played an important role in decision-making.
- Southern kingdoms enriched political, economic and cultural life.

SOUTHERN INDIA

Social Structure: Varna and Jati

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- Society developed many social and occupational groups.
- Varna was a broad framework of classification.
- Jati linked groups with occupation, locality and community.
- Groups changed and developed over time.
- Customs and practices were highly diverse.

SOCIAL STRUCTURE:

Family, Gotra and Ashrama

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- Family and household were important social units.
- Marriage and kinship connected people.
- Gotra was associated with lineage.
- Ashrama described stages of life.
- These institutions organised social responsibilities.

FAMILY, GOTRA

Women in Society

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- Women participated in family, social, religious and cultural life.
- Status and roles varied by time, region and social group.
- Literary sources record women’s lives and contributions.
- Practices were not uniform across the subcontinent.

WOMEN SOCIETY

Religious Life

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- Religious life included ritual, yajña, inquiry and worship.
- The Upanishads explored the self and the universe.
- Buddhism and Jainism offered important new paths.
- Traditions shaped ethical and cultural life.
- Different traditions interacted and evolved.

RELIGIOUS

Bhakti Tradition

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- Bhakti emphasised devotion to a chosen deity.
- It encouraged personal and emotional connection with the divine.
- Traditions grew in different regions.
- Alvars and Nayanmars were important southern devotional saints.
- Bhakti enriched religious and cultural expression.

BHAKTI TRADITION

Quest for Knowledge

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- India developed rich traditions of learning.
- Education often followed the guru–shishya tradition.
- Gurukulas supported teaching and learning.
- Knowledge included philosophy, language, science, arts and ethics.
- Oral and written traditions preserved learning.

QUEST KNOWLEDGE

Centres of Learning

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- Takshashila · Nalanda · Vallabhi · Vikramshila
- Students and teachers gathered for advanced learning.
- These centres enriched intellectual and cultural life.
- Knowledge traditions connected different regions.

CENTRES LEARNING

Agriculture and Revenue

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- Agriculture was the main economic base.
- Land and produce were important resources.
- States collected revenue for administration.
- Irrigation supported agriculture in many regions.
- Villages formed the base of economic life.

AGRICULTURE
REVENUE

Trade and Trade Routes

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- Trade linked regions across the subcontinent.
- Traders used land and sea routes.
- Ports connected India with other parts of the world.
- Trade encouraged cultural contact and exchange.
- Goods, ideas and artistic practices moved across regions.

TRADE
TRADE

Guilds, Crafts and Industries

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- Guilds organised merchants and craftspeople.
- They supported production, trade and occupations.
- Craftspeople served local and distant markets.
- Economic groups helped towns and trade networks grow.
- Occupation became central to social organisation.

GUILDS, CRAFTS

Key Developments up to 1000 CE

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- Kin groups developed into territory-based states.
- Janapadas and mahajanapadas led to larger formations.
- Mauryas, Guptas and Cholas shaped administration.
- Dharma linked ethics with social and political duties.
- Varna, jati, family, occupation and trade shaped society.
- Knowledge, religions and culture connected the subcontinent.

DEVELOPMENTS

Summary

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- State and society changed greatly from the Vedic age to 1000 CE.
- Political systems grew larger, organised and diverse.
- Social institutions structured everyday life.
- Trade, education, religion and culture connected regions.
- Enduring traditions of governance, knowledge and cultural unity emerged.

SUMMARY