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India's Ancient Past

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NCERT Class 11

State Structure and the Varna System in the Age of the Buddha



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I am Aartee Mishra

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Army and Taxation

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- The real increase in state power is indicated by the formation of a large professional army. At the time of Alexander's invasion, the Nanda ruler of Magadha maintained 20,000 cavalrymen, 200,000 infantry, 2000 four-horse chariots, and about 6000 elephants.
- The horse-chariots were losing their importance not only in north-east India but also in the north-west, where they had been introduced by the Vedic people.
- Very few elephants were maintained by the rulers of the states in north-west India, though some of them maintained as many horses as did the Magadhan king. The possession of numerous elephants gave an edge to the Magadhan princes.
- The large, long-service army had to be fed by the state exchequer. We are told that the Nandas possessed enormous wealth which must have enabled them to maintain the army, but we have no idea of the special measures they adopted to raise taxes, though the fiscal system was well-established.

Army and Taxation

- Bali, a voluntary payment made by the tribesmen to their chiefs in Vedic times, became a compulsory payment to be made by the peasants in the age of the Buddha, and officers called balisadhakas were appointed to collect it.
- It appears that one-sixth of the produce was collected as tax by the king from the peasant. Taxes were assessed and collected by the royal agents with the help of village headmen.
- The advent of writing may have helped in the assessment and collection of taxes. The discovery of many hoards of punch-marked coins suggests that payment was made in both cash and kind.
- In north-eastern India, payment was made in paddy. In addition to these taxes, the peasants were subjected to forced labour for royal work.
- The Jatakas state that sometimes peasants left the country of the king in order to escape the oppressive burden of taxes. Artisans and traders too had to pay taxes.
- Artisans were made to work for a day in a month for the king, and the traders had to pay customs on the sale of their commodities.

Army and Taxation

- The tolls were collected by officers known as shaulkika or shulkadhyaksha. The territorial kings discarded the sabha and samiti. Popular tribal assemblies had virtually disappeared in post-Vedic times.
- They dwindled and disappeared as tribes disintegrated into varnas and lost their identity. Their place was taken by varna and caste groups, and therefore caste laws and customs were given due weight by the writers of the law-books.
- Popular assemblies were able to succeed only in small kingdoms where members of the tribe could easily be summoned, as may have been the case in the Vedic period.
- With the emergence of the large states of Koshala and Magadha, it was not possible to hold large assemblies attended by people belonging to the different social classes and different parts of the empire, and the very difficulty of communications made regular meetings impossible.
- They were replaced by a small body called parishad consisting exclusively of the brahmanas. Even during this period, assemblies existed, but this was not

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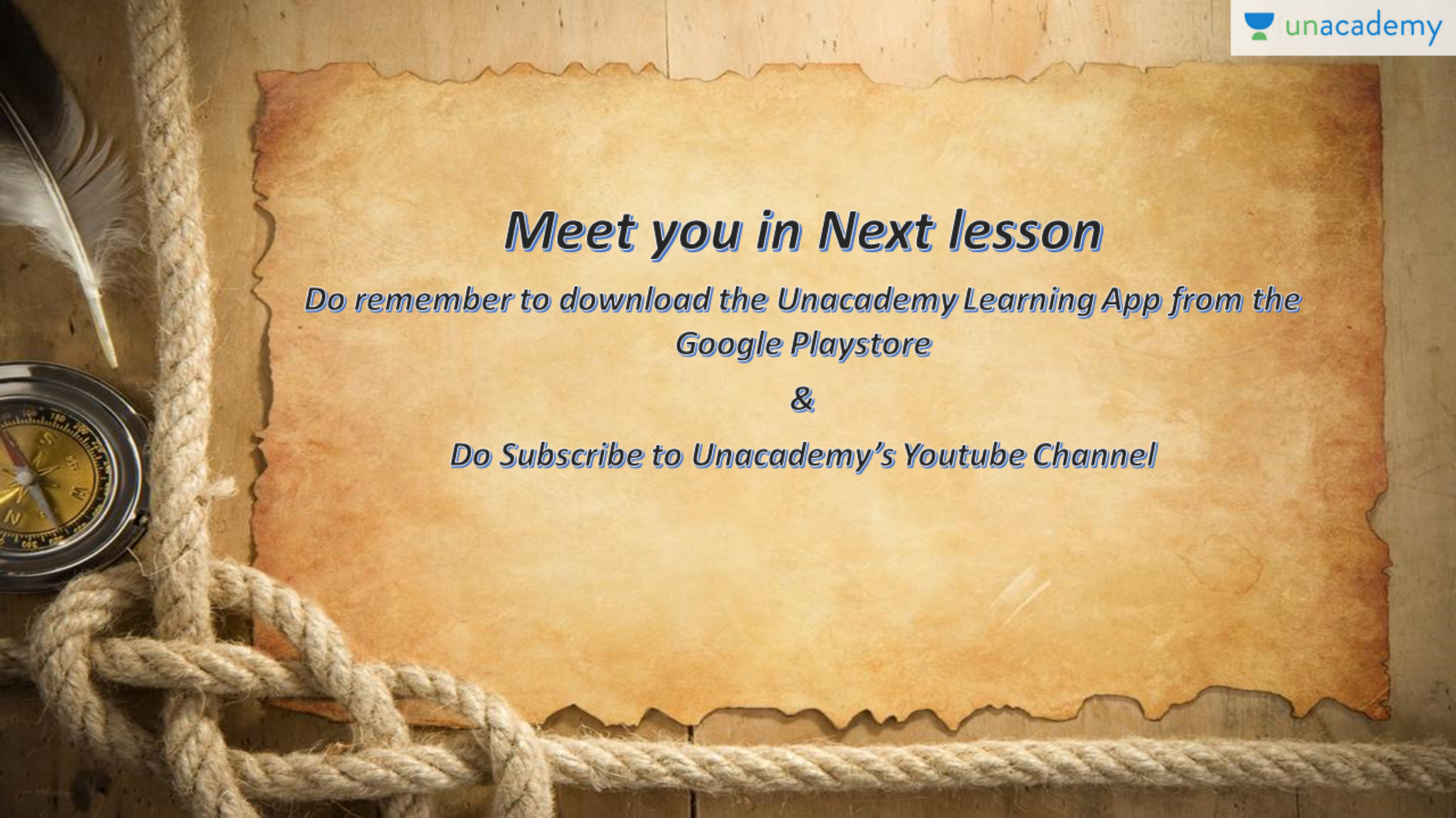
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