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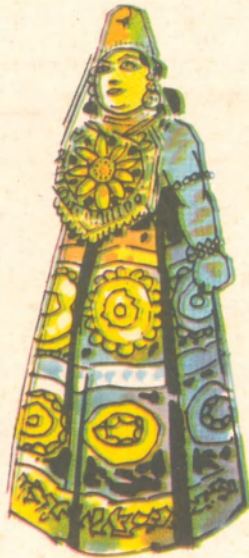
INDIA

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LET US KNOW **INDIA**

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SWARN KHANDPUR

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LET US KNOW
INDIA Book 6

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What kinds of forests are found in India?

India's forests can be divided into two main groups coniferous forests and non-



coniferous or broad-leaved forests, depending upon the type of trees found in them.

Conifers or trees with cones bear their seeds on the scales of their cones. They have long, thin, needle-like leaves which they keep all the year round. That is why conifers are called evergreen trees. *Deodar*, different kinds of pines, spruce and fir are all coniferous trees.

Coniferous forests contain many different species of trees and are found on the slopes of the Himalayas in all the northern states of India. Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Assam have extensive coniferous forests.

Broad-leaved trees bear their seeds within their fruit. They shed their old leaves in summer and come into new leaves in spring. Such trees are called deciduous trees. Teak, *sal* and sandalwood are all broad-leaved trees.

Broad-leaved forests are also made up of many species of trees and are found all over the country.

Besides these two main kinds of forests, there is another variety called tidal or swamp forests. Popularly known as mangrove forests, they are found in the estuaries of great rivers like the Ganga and the Mahanadi and in the regions washed by the high tide and salt water. The trees of these forests cannot live without salt water.

The type and quality of all forests are greatly influenced by the soil, climate and topography of the area in which they grow.

Which state has the maximum forested area?

Madhya Pradesh has the maximum forested area in India. Other forest-rich states

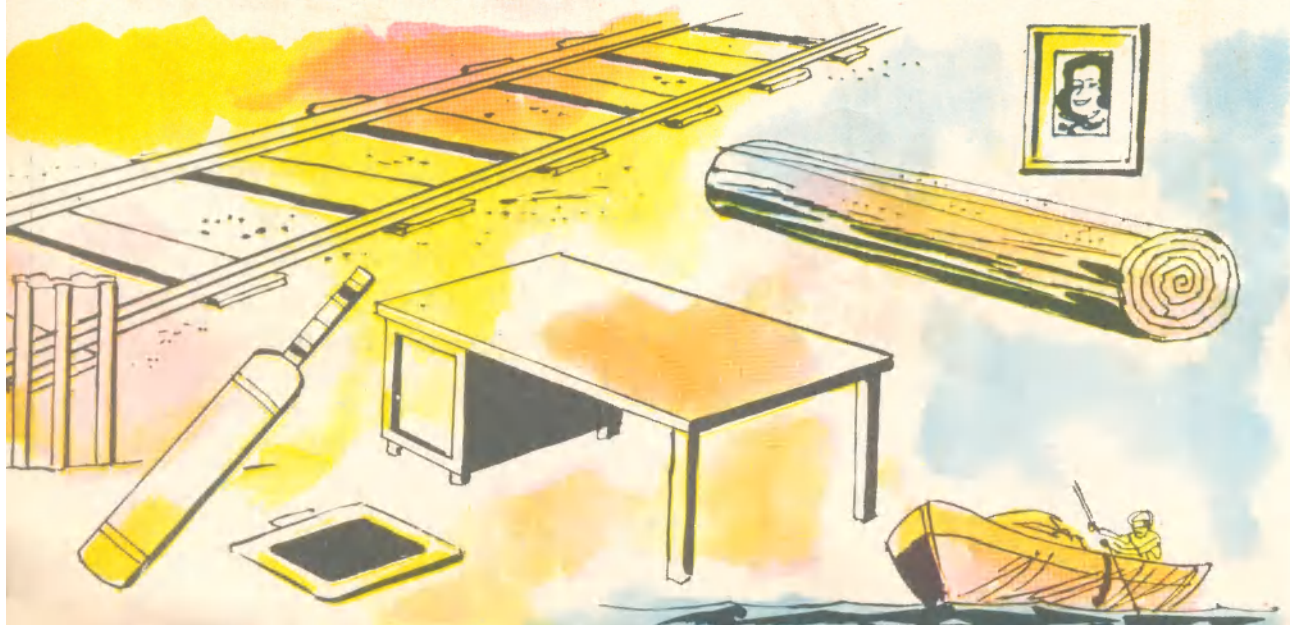
are Assam, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Orissa, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Haryana has the least area under forest.

Madhya Pradesh produces the largest quantity of teakwood in India.

What do forests produce?

From very early times, forests and forest products have been closely associated with men. Early man obtained almost everything from the forest — food, shelter, clothing, fire, tools and weapons.

Wood is the most important item of forest produce. It is used as timber or as firewood.



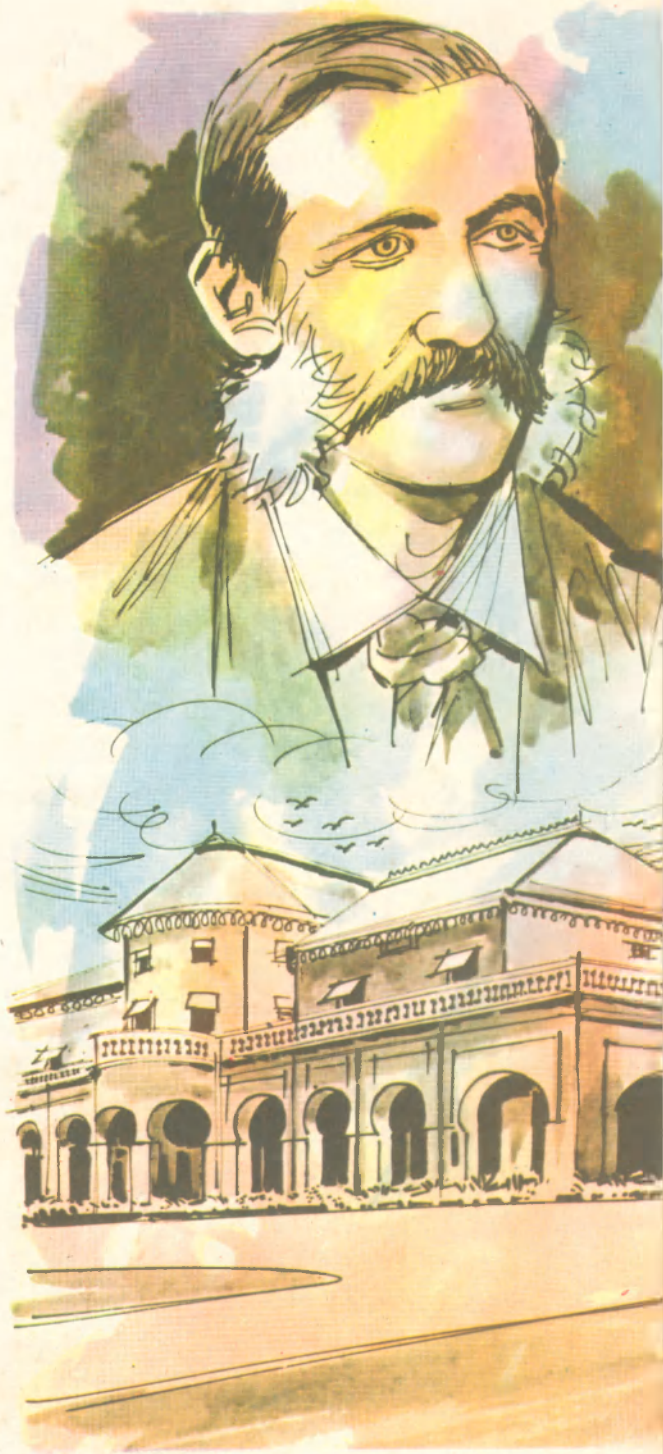
Other forest products, called minor forest products, include bamboos, canes, gums, resins, dyes, lac, fibres and medicinal plants.

In the last hundred years, many industries using forest produce have been established. Among these boat building, aircraft production, and manufacture of sports goods, pencils, matches, plywood and paper are of special importance. However, the bulk of the timber is used for making railway sleepers.

What is forestry?

Forestry is the study and practice of planting, tending and managing forests on scientific lines. Silviculture is another word for it.

In India, forestry is about a hundred years old. The credit for its development goes to Sir Dietrich Brandis. As the first Inspector-General of Forests, he created a forest department and started forest research and education in the country.



Where is the Forest Research Institute?

The Forest Research Institute is located at Dehra Dun. It is the main centre for research in forestry and the scientific development of forest produce.

The Institute has four forestry colleges — two at Dehra Dun and one each at Coimbatore and Kuescong (West Bengal), where advanced education in forestry is imparted.

There are also lower level schools in each state for training foresters and forest guards.

How are floods caused?

Every year, during the monsoon large tracts of land — more particularly from Assam to Punjab — are devastated by floods. Many of these areas are inundated not once but repeatedly.

One of the major causes of floods is the general neglect of forests and indiscriminate felling of trees, particularly

in the foot-hills of the Himalayas. As a result, the soil can no longer be held together. Trees break the force of heavy rain and let the water drip gently down their leaves and branches, to be absorbed slowly in the ground. But on deforested slopes, the rain water rushes swiftly, carrying away with it the precious top soil. It is estimated that over sixty thousand million tonnes of top soil are washed away every year in this manner, whereas it takes nature five hundred to a thousand years to build just one inch of this soil. When this happens the land hardens and life goes out of it. This is known as soil erosion. Such a land can neither absorb water nor retain any moisture and nothing can grow on it.

When the soil carried away by the rushing waters reaches the plains, it silts up the rivers, raising their beds. This reduces the water-carrying capacity of the rivers, forcing them to rise and spill over their banks, thus causing floods.

Floods wreak great havoc

on life and property. When they come they submerge fields and homes, carrying away crops and cattle. And when they recede they leave behind a trail of disease, destitution and death.

Which river is known as 'the river of sorrow'?

The Kosi is known as 'the river of sorrow'. This wayward river spells large-scale disaster to the people of North Bihar every year.

One of the largest tributaries of the Ganga, the Kosi rises in the Central Himalayas. During the monsoon, this snow-fed river rushes

down, tearing away the soil and carrying with it heavy loads of silt. In the plains, the silt settles down, raising the river bed and causing floods. Moreover, this turbulent river has changed its course several times. In the last 130 years it has moved nearly 112 km from east to west.

Where is the Thar Desert?

The Thar Desert, also known as the Great Indian Desert, lies across western India and Pakistan. It stretches from the west of the Aravalli hills to the Indus basin. Of the eleven famous deserts in the world, the Thar



Desert is the seventh largest in area. The largest is the Sahara Desert of Africa while the smallest is found in Chile and Peru.

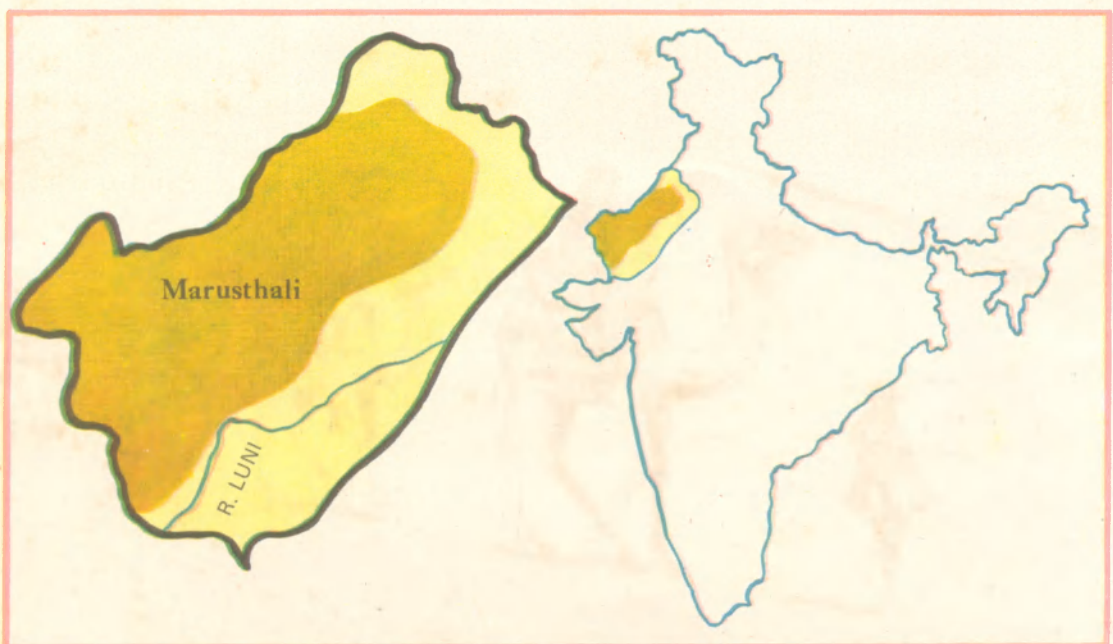
The word 'desert' comes from the Latin term meaning 'abandoned'. The popular image of a desert is a vast expanse of sand — barren, waterless, endless, scorchingly hot — where just a few thorny trees and dry shrubs grow, and where weary caravans trudge along in the sand.

Where is Marusthali?

Marusthali, meaning a dry sandy region, is another name for that part of the Great

Indian Desert which lies in Indian territory. It comprises the drier plains of the Punjab and the arid plains of Rajasthan, covering an area of 175,000 sq km. The Aravalli range marks its eastern boundaries. In the south it extends upto the Great Rann of Kutch.

Long, long ago, Marusthali, in fact the whole of the Thar Desert, was under the sea. The sea-shells which are still found in the sands of its barren surface are a reminder of those days. After it emerged from the sea, it was watered by large rivers. A ploughed field excavated at Kalibangan in Rajasthan testifies that a prosperous civilization had flourished here about



5,000 years ago. But then, about a thousand years ago, there came a marked change in the climatic conditions of the region. The rivers dried up and the lush green plains turned into an arid desert.

Man too has contributed his share in converting the region into a desert by thoughtlessly destroying forests and other natural resources.

Which river flows in Marusthali?

The Luni or 'the salt river' is the only river that flows in Marusthali. It rises in the Nag hills, about five km south-west of Ajmer. It then flows westwards for 450 km before entering the Rann of Kutch.

The water of the river is sweet in the earlier part of its course, but then it turns brackish and by the time it reaches its mouth the water is quite salty, because of which the river is called Luni.

The Luni has only one tributary, the Sukri. But it also receives the water of

short streams flowing down the western slope of the Aravalli hills.

In Marusthali, the shortage of water is so acute that a dam has been built near Bilara to hold the water even of the Luni. A reservoir known as the Jaswant Sagar has been constructed to provide water for irrigation.

Is any vegetation found in the desert?

It may sound strange but some kind of vegetation does grow in the desert. This vegetation includes certain kind of grasses like *sawan*, plants and shrubs like *bui*, *ker* and *jal*, and trees like the *khejri* and the *babul*.

In most other deserts of the world, the rainy season fails to bring about any change in the landscape. But the Indian Desert assumes a pleasing cloak in the monsoon, even though it lasts for a short time only.

Desert vegetation has a shallow root system so that moisture can be absorbed

quickly from the top soil. The seeds of desert plants can withstand extreme temperatures — they lie buried under the sand during the summer season and sprout with the first showers of the monsoon.

Desert vegetation makes excellent fodder for camels and herds of cattle. They are reared with loving care and are the chief means of livelihood of the people.

Does the Desert harbour animal life?

Contrary to popular belief, the Indian Desert harbours a rich variety of animal life. This life becomes active in the evening when the sun has exhausted its fiery heat and the howling winds have calmed down to a soothing breeze.

Among the many kinds of lizards that abound in the Desert, the skink is perhaps the most interesting. This limbless creature wriggles about under the sand. That is why it is called *Rig Mahi* in Persian, which means a sand

fish.

Another attractive little lizard found in the Desert is the toad, *agama*. A very colourful lizard, it has blue, green, yellow, crimson, red and black spots on its brownish-grey body. It feasts on ants. When in danger, it buries itself in loose sand.

Among the many kinds of snakes found in the Desert, the saw-scaled viper is the



most common. It is a poisonous snake and the most dreaded.

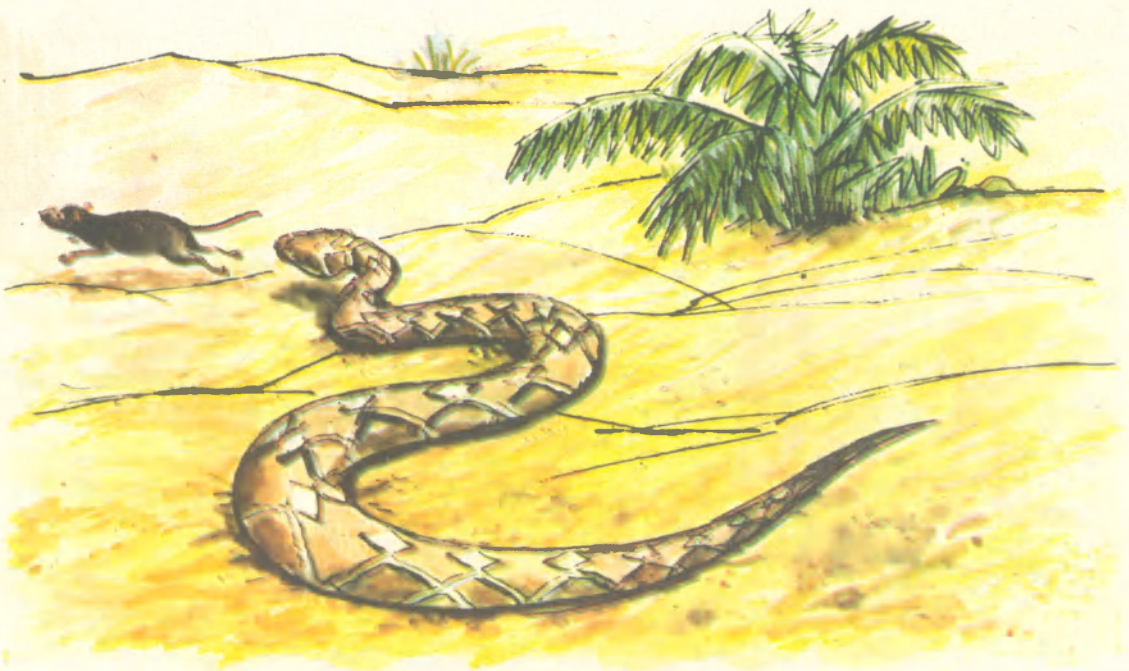
About half a metre long, the viper has pale brown patches on its body which make it invisible on the greyish-yellow sand. It lies crouched in small pits. On hearing footsteps it lets out a series of warning notes by exhaling loudly. Then, forming itself into a figure of eight, it produces a typical sound by rubbing its saw-scales against each other. If one is still careless and ignores its warning notes, it springs forward and bites. Neither man nor beast then has the slightest chance of escape.

All desert snakes lay eggs but the female viper gives birth to 3 to 11 young ones.

The viper feeds on insects, toads and small rodents.

Talking of rodents, the Desert simply abounds in field rodents. Nearly 25 species have their home here, and their total number is anybody's guess.

The Desert is the home of the camel and other animals that can go without water for long periods. The *chinkara*, the black buck, the *chowsingh* (four-horned antelope) and the *nilgai* or blue bull are some of the animals that have made the Desert their home.



Which is the largest salt-water lake in India?

The Sambhar Lake in Rajasthan is the largest salt-water lake in India. It is about 60 km west of Jaipur.

The underground water in western Rajasthan is salty. The few lakes which exist in the region get encrusted with brine in summer when the water dries up. It is from the brine of these lakes that salt is made. The Sambhar Lake

yields the maximum amount of salt.

Which place gets the least rainfall in India?

The Jaisalmer district of Rajasthan, which lies in the extreme west of Marusthali, is the driest zone in the country. It gets an average of only 5 cm of rainfall in a year. Often, it does not rain there at all.



Who was 'Devanampiya Piyadasi Raja'?

The Mauryan king Ashoka is referred to as *Devanampiya* 'beloved of the gods', *Piyadasi* 'one of pleasing appearance', *Raja* 'king'.

Until about a hundred years ago, the name *Devanampiya Piyadasi Raja* had kept puzzling India's historians. They did not know to which king the name referred. Neither the known inscriptions on rocks and pillars nor any literary texts identified Ashoka with this name. It was only after the discovery of the inscriptions at Maski in Karna-

taka State that it became evident that *Devanampiya Piyadasi Raja* was another name for Ashoka.

Where was Kalinga?

Kalinga, on the east coast of India, is modern Orissa. During Ashoka's time, the kingdom of Kalinga lay between the rivers Mahanadi and Godavari. It roughly comprised the modern districts of Puri and Ganjam as well as parts of the Cuttack district of Orissa. A part of present-day Andhra Pradesh was also included in it.



Kalinga was a powerful kingdom and it controlled the routes to South India both by land and sea.

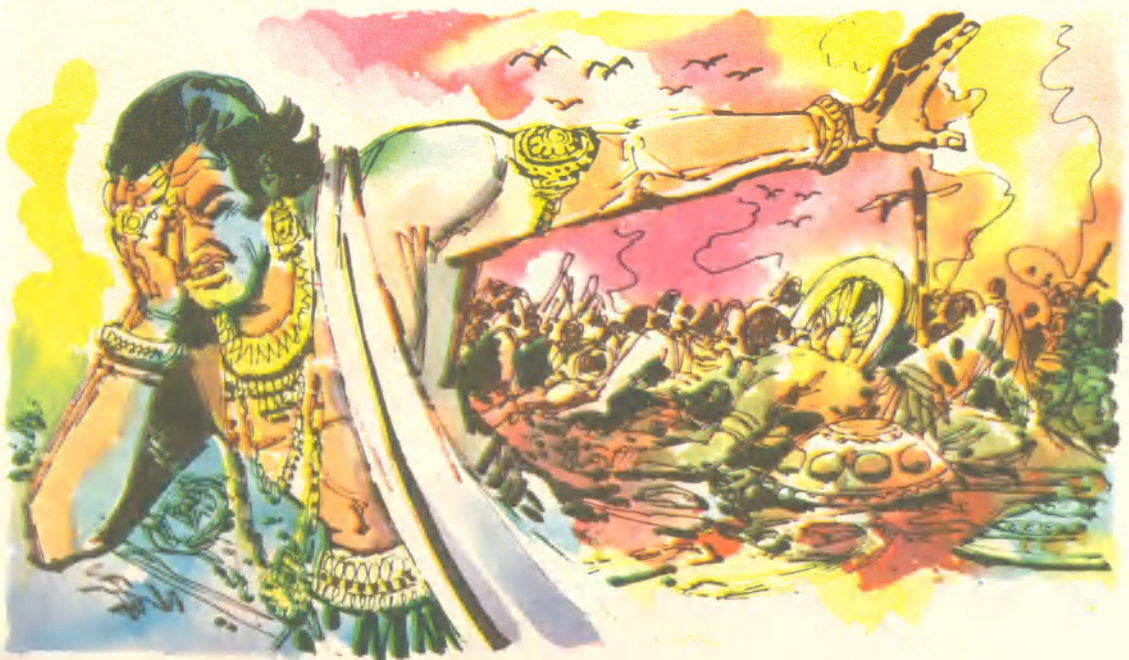
What was the most decisive event in Ashoka's life?

The Kalinga war was the most decisive event in Ashoka's life. It proved to be the last war of his life, although he continued to rule for nearly thirty years after the event.

Some eight years after his coronation, Ashoka went to war with the Kalingans in order to make their kingdom a part of the Mauryan empire. The Kalingans resisted the attack but were utterly routed. In Ashoka's own words,

"150,000 were captured; 100,000 were slain and many times that number died" The horrors of war and the miseries it caused to the people filled the king with remorse. The wanton loss of human life changed his own life completely. In one of his inscriptions, Ashoka says, "Today, if a hundredth or a thousandth part of those who suffered in Kalinga were to be killed, to die or be taken captive, it would be very grievous to me"

Ashoka gave up the idea of war in future. Instead, he decided on 'conquest through *Dhamma* (*Dharma*) or piety'. In place of military conquest, he decided to conquer men's hearts. He became a member



of the Buddhist Order and dedicated himself to the service of all creatures.

What was Ashoka's 'Dhamma'?

The word *Dhamma* stands for the Sanskrit word *Dharma* meaning piety or righteousness.

Ashoka's *Dhamma* was a code of morals to elevate the character and personality of man. "A man should behave towards others as he would wish them to behave towards himself."

The *Dhamma* was not defined in terms of rules and regulations. It was simple and included concepts such as obedience to parents and teachers, kindness to all, non-injury to men and animals, truthfulness, charity and similar other precepts. It aimed at a peaceful and virtuous life.

Ashoka himself undertook tours to propagate *Dhamma* among his people. He visited the aged who deserved respect and made generous donations to the poor and the needy. "All

men are my children," said Ashoka, "and just as I desire for my children that they may enjoy every kind of prosperity and happiness, so also I desire the same for all men."

What are edicts?

Edicts are royal proclamations issued to the general public. Ashoka was the first Indian king to issue edicts.



They proclaimed his ideas on various subjects such as religion, government and social behaviour.

Ashoka had these edicts engraved on rocks and specially erected pillars at places where people could read them easily. In one of his edicts, Ashoka explains his reason for issuing the edicts. "This record has been caused to be written by me on stone so that people may act according to *Dhamma* and that it may endure for a long time"

Some of Ashoka's edicts have been found in Bodh Gaya, Amaravati, Bharhut, Sanchi, Sarnath, Mathura and as far north as Nepal Tarai.

What is epigraphy?

Epigraphy is the study of inscriptions, especially old ones.

Usually inscriptions are engraved on metal or stone so that they can withstand the ravages of time. But other materials, such as clay, crystal and ivory, have also been used. Inscriptions are very



useful to historians because they supply the most authentic data. Ashoka's inscriptions on stone and metal are the earliest epigraphic records.

Which is the earliest Indian script?

The *Brahmi* script is the earliest known Indian script.

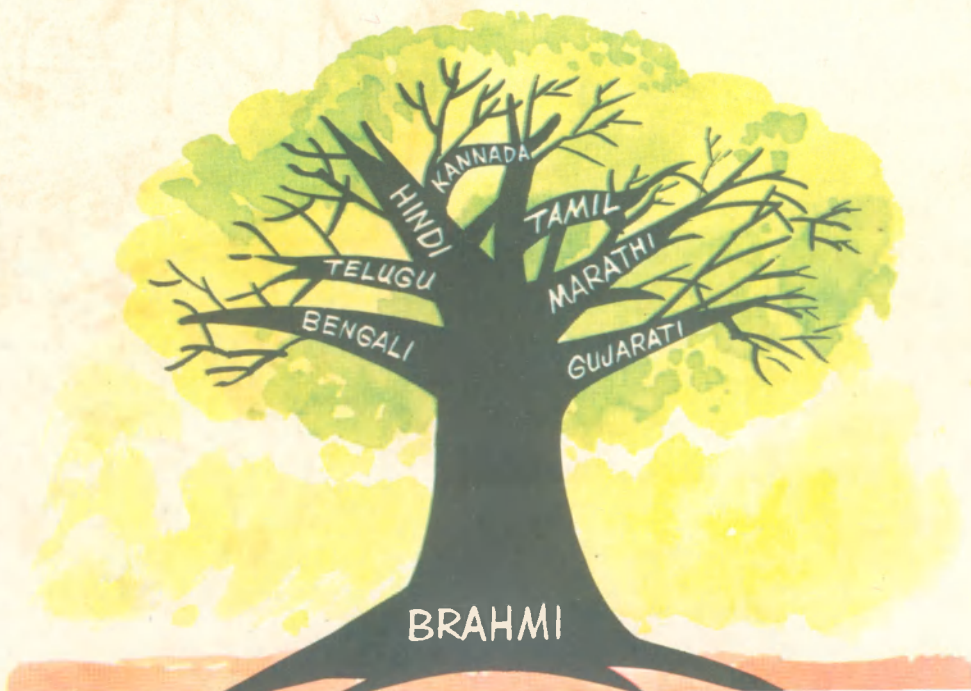
Although the Harappans had a script of their own, it has not been deciphered so far. And from the time of the fall of the Harappa culture to the middle of the 3rd century B.C., no written material has been found. Ashoka's inscriptions in the *Brahmi* script are the earliest written records of India.

During Ashoka's time, the *Brahmi* script had distinctive characters, some of which might have been evolved out of the Harappa symbols. At first the *Brahmi* script was written from right to left, but later on it came to be written from left to right.

From the *Brahmi* alphabet have been derived, by slow evolution through the ages, all the alphabets of Indian scripts.

What is Prakrit?

The word *Prakrit* means natural or unartificial. It is the opposite of the word *Sanskrit*, which means purified. Prakrit therefore connotes



the vernacular dialect in common use and not the highly developed literary language of the few.

Sanskrit was the language of the Aryans. As they spread through different parts of India, Sanskrit could not remain the only medium of expression among all classes of society. Moreover, because of its strict rules of grammar and difficult pronunciation, Sanskrit gradually became the language of the brahmins and the learned few. The common people spoke Prakrit, which was much simpler than Sanskrit both in pronunciation and grammar.

There were several Prakrit dialects varying from region to region. The Prakrit spoken in Magadha was called Magadhi. In the western part of Uttar Pradesh, it was known as Sauraseni. Pali was the earliest form of Prakrit. All Buddhist sacred books are written in Pali. Apabhramsa was used by Jain writers of Gujarat and Rajasthan.

By the end of the tenth century, all the Prakrits were

standardised, from which emerged the various modern vernacular languages. For example, Hindi is based on the Prakrit Ardhamagadhi, which was spoken in Oudh (Avadh).

How did Ashoka protect wild life?

After the Kalinga war, Ashoka made *Ahimsa* or non-



violence an important principle of his life. He gave up hunting, the favourite pastime of kings. He abolished all public sports which resulted in the death of animals and birds. Even religious sacrifices were stopped.

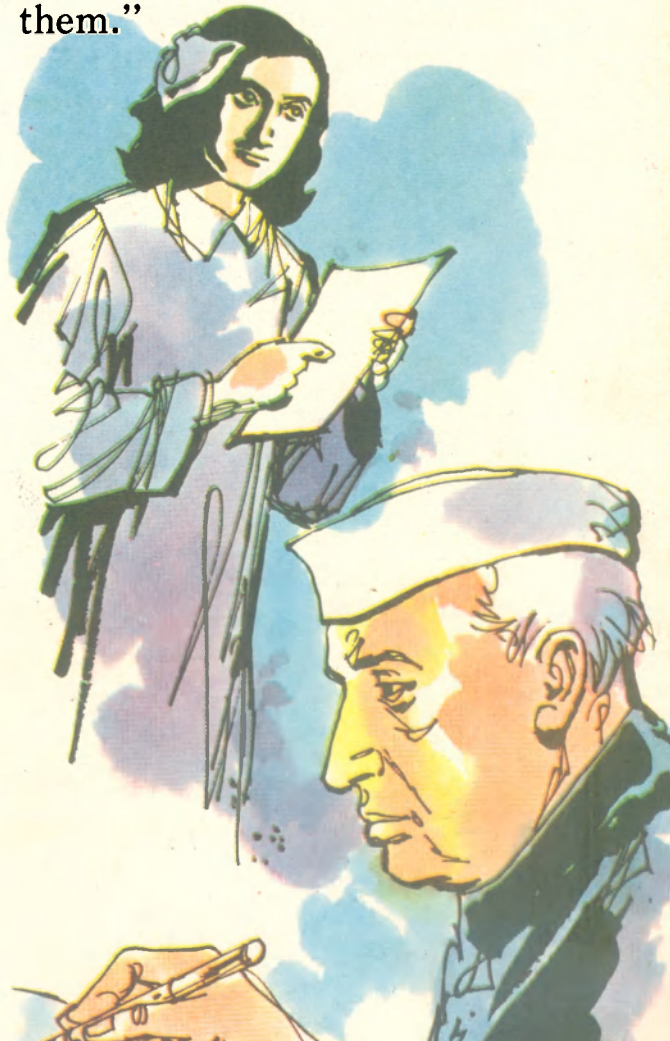
Formerly, peacocks and deer used to be slaughtered every day in the royal kitchens. This practice was stopped. Ashoka also forbade the killing of parrots, wild geese, bats, tortoises, squirrels, porcupines, lizards, pigeons and all four-footed animals which were neither used by man nor eaten by him.

He forbade the catching and selling of fish on certain days. On holy days, horses could not be branded because in branding, marks or designs are made with a piece of burning wood or red-hot iron, which cause suffering to animals.

Ashoka paid special attention to the comfort of travellers. As he says in one edict, "I have had banyan trees planted on roads to give shade to men and beasts. I have had

mango groves planted, wells dug and rest-houses built every nine miles for the use of beasts and men."

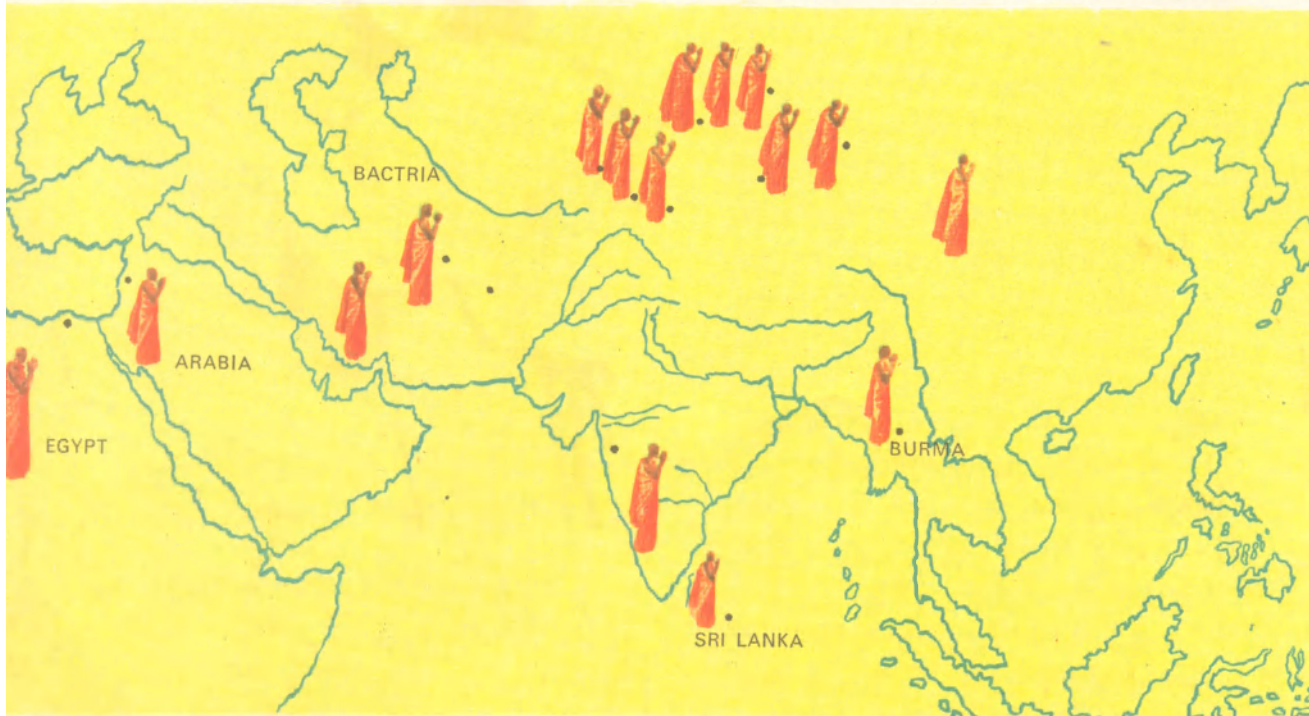
In a letter written to his daughter, Indira Gandhi, now the Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru had said, "The memory of Ashoka lives over the whole continent of Asia. His edicts still speak to us in a language we can understand and appreciate. And we can still learn much from them."



How did Ashoka become a world conqueror?

Although after the Kalin-ga war, the swords were sheathed and the drums of war were silenced for the Maur-yan soldiers, Ashoka proved himself to be a unique world conqueror. He achieved this not through wars but through the peaceful conversion of people to Buddhism. His was a complete victory—a victory of hearts and minds.

In one of the edicts, Ashoka himself mentions the countries where he achieved such conquests. His mission-aries and messengers not only travelled within his own em-pire but also went to far-flung areas beyond it : Sri Lanka, Burma, and the five kingdoms of central Asia—Syria, Egypt, Macedonia, Cyrene and Epi-rus. Thus, with his *Dharma-vijaya* or conquest by piety, Ashoka conquered nearly the whole of Asia, including the



great countries of China and Japan. While Buddhism became a world religion through his efforts, Ashoka himself proved to be greater than any king or conqueror and came to be known as Samrat Ashoka.

Who was King Menander?

King Menander was one of the Greek rulers whose forefathers had founded independent kingdoms in Afghanistan after Alexander's departure from India. When the Mauryan empire began to fall apart after Ashoka's death, these Greek rulers conquered parts of the Punjab. About thirty such rulers reigned over the north-western frontier of India and are known to history as the Indo-Greek kings.

Menander was one of the most powerful Indo-Greek kings. His rule extended from Kabul in the west to Mathura in the east, with his capital at Sakala (Sialkot, now in Pakistan). He came under the influence of Buddhism. His dialogue with a Buddhist monk has become famous in Buddhist literature

as *Miliandapanha* or 'Questions of Milianda' (Menander).

Who were the Sakas?

The Sakas were a tribe of Central Asia. Driven from their homeland by another nomadic tribe, they occupied Bactria. From there they migrated towards the south and east. Several bands of the Sakas entered India through the Bolan Pass and set up new kingdoms. They called themselves 'Satraps', which is the Sanskritised form of a Persian word meaning 'provincial governors'. Two of these Satraps had their separate capitals at Taxila and Mathura respectively. They are known as the Northern Satraps. The other Satraps, called the Western Satraps, settled down in Kathiawar and Malwa.

Where are the earliest Sanskrit inscriptions found?

The earliest dated record in Sanskrit is that of Rudradaman, the greatest ruler of

the Western Satraps. This inscription is engraved on a rock on the Junagadh hill in Kathiawar and is dated 150 A.D. You will recall that the inscriptions of Ashoka were in *Brahmi* and not in Sanskrit.

What is 'Sakabda'?

The term *Sakabda* means 'the Saka Era', which was founded by a Saka king.

The National Calendar of India is based on the Saka Era. The Saka year begins with the month of *Chaitra* which falls in March-April. The names of the other months are *Vaisakha*,

Jyesta, *Asada*, *Sravan*, *Bhadra*, *Asvina*, *Kartika*, *Agrahayana*, *Pausa*, *Magha*, and *Phalgun*.

In order to make the National Calendar coincide with the Gregorian Calendar, which is used by nations all over the world, it was decided that *Chaitra* 1 should always fall on March 22 in a normal year and on March 21 in a leap year.

The National Calendar came into force on March 22, 1957. Its corresponding date was *Chaitra* 1, 1879 Saka. The Saka Era is seventy-eight years behind the Christian Era.

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1957

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Where is Pokharan? How has it become famous?

Pokharan is situated in the heart of the Great Indian Desert. It is 106 km from the town of Jaisalmer and 150 km from the India-Pakistan border.

Pokharan literally means 'the land of five salt marshes'—*Pokh* means 'five' and 'rann' means 'salt marshes'. Salt extracted in the Pokharan sub-division is the best of its kind in Rajasthan.

Pokharan suddenly shot into world fame on May 18, 1974 when India exploded its first underground nuclear device there. This was a unique experiment to pave the way for the use of nuclear devices for peaceful purposes in the country.

Normally an explosion breaks the earth around the device but India's 'implosion', which technically means 'inward explosion', took place 100 km below the surface of the earth. As a result, there were no mushroom clouds nor did any fearsome balls of fire

rise to the sky. The soft sandy soil effectively sealed all the vents of radioactive gases, so that no animal or human life was destroyed, except for a solitary crow.

After the explosion, a crater of 150 metres in diameter was formed in the ground.

India expects to utilise this nuclear technology for the mining of ores, the recovery of oil and gas, and the construction of harbours and canals.



What is a camel corps?

A camel corps is a military unit mounted on camels for service in the desert.

The camel is called the 'ship of the desert'. It can survive without water for long periods. It provides the only means of transport in a terrain which is difficult even for a Land-Rover. That is why many desert countries maintain a camel corps as an important unit of their defence forces.

The Indian army also had the camel corps as one of its defence units but it was disbanded in 1975. The history of the camel corps in the country goes back to 1465 when a unit of this type was raised for the first time by the Maharaja of Bikaner. It was christened the Bikaner Risala

(mounted soldiers).

During the British rule in India, the unit was reorganised. It was accepted as Imperial Service Troops and was given the name of the Bikaner Ganga Risala. It rendered great service in many overseas expeditions.

After the partition of the country, the Maharaja of Jaisalmer raised another camel corps—the Jaisalmer Risala—to protect the long western border of India, which runs for many miles through the Thar Desert and the inhospitable regions of the Rann of Kutch.

In 1951, the Government of India amalgamated the Bikaner Ganga Risala and the Jaisalmer Risala and gave the resulting unit a new name the Ganga Jaisalmer Risala.



The Camel Corps used to participate in the Republic Day parade on January 26 every year. With the sounding of the last post for the camel corps on January 26, 1975, a unique comradeship between man and animal has ended.

What is a camel jamboree?

A camel jamboree is a gathering where camels are made to perform various feats. Such a jamboree is held in November every year at Pushkar, which is about 11 km west of Ajmer in Rajasthan.

The first event of the day starts with camel racing. In a

huge sandy arena, encircled by jam-packed earthen grandstands, camels are made to run. Camels are surprisingly fleet of foot. Amidst shouts and cheers, they come lumbering into the arena with their riders standing precariously on the backs of their mounts.

Camel racing is followed by a kind of musical chairs for camels. Pairs of long bamboo poles, with coloured flags fluttering aloft, are fixed in the sand at short distances, forming a large circle. When the music starts, the camels trot round and round the ring. As the music stops, each camel-rider rushes for the



nearest pole and manoeuvres his mount's head in between the poles. After each round, one set of poles is removed. Those who do not reach the poles have to get out of the game until only the lone winner is left.

But the most popular of the camel events is the 'loaded camel'. This is a sort of weight-lifting contest for camels. The idea is to see how many men a camel can lift. Man after man clambers on to the camel's back. The space being limited, they have to cling together tightly. When the camel rises unsteadily, many of them slip and fall off. The camel which gets

up with the largest number of men on its back gets the prize.

What are Capital Pillars?

Capital Pillars are stone pillars erected by Emperor Ashoka to inscribe his edicts. They are so called because each pillar is crowned with a capital.

The pillars are chiselled out of grey sandstone found in the quarries of the Chunar hills near Varanasi. They are monolithic — that is, made from a single block of stone — exquisitely carved and highly polished.



Each pillar consists of two parts—the shaft and the capital. The shaft is massive and circular in shape. Some of the shafts exceed 9 metres in height. The heaviest among them weighs about 50 tons. On the shafts Ashoka's edicts are engraved in beautifully cut letters.

The capital has three parts—an inverted bell-shaped lotus, an abacus and a crowning figure. The crowning figure is usually in the form of animals such as elephants or bulls or lions. All these figures are exquisitely carved, representing the perfection of the stone-cutters' art.

More than thirty Capital Pillars of Ashoka still exist in various parts of India.

What is the National Emblem of India?

The National Emblem of India is an adaptation from the capital of Ashoka's pillar at Sarnath, near Varanasi. This pillar was built at the spot where the Buddha delivered his first sermon. The



सत्यमेव जयते

capital of this pillar now lies in the Sarnath Archaeological Museum.

In the original capital, there are four lions, standing back to back, mounted on an abacus. On the frieze of the abacus are carved an elephant, a galloping horse, a bull and a lion, each separated by *chakras* (wheels). There are only three lions in the National Emblem, the fourth being hidden from view. The *chakra* appears in the centre of the abacus.

The words *Satyameva Jayate*, meaning 'Truth alone triumphs', are inscribed below the Emblem. They are written in the Devanagari script and are taken from one of the *Upanishads*. All seals and stationery of the Government of India bear the National Emblem. The National Emblem represents symbolically certain ideas and values dear to India.

Who are the nomads of Marusthali?

Nomads are wandering people, roaming from place to place. They have no set-

tled homes and are always on the move 'lock, stock and barrel', in their animal-drawn carts.

Bands of nomads roam in the shifting dunes of Marusthali. As there has been no census of their population, their exact number is not known, but it is estimated that they may number around 1,50,000.

The Marusthali nomads can be classified into four groups — pastoral, traders, craftsmen and those following miscellaneous occupations.

The first group of nomads, such as the Raikas, keep large herds of camels



and flocks of sheep and goats. They settle down in one place only during the monsoon when they may also cultivate small plots of land. After the rains they set out again in search of grass and water for their animals.

The second group, such as the Banjaras, are small traders who sell beads, bangles and trinkets to village women, or trade in grinding wheels, clay pipes and salt. Some of them use donkeys or bullocks as their pack animals.

The third group specialise in certain crafts. The best known among them are

the Gadia Lohars (blacksmiths). They set up camps for a few days near a village, make and mend iron and steel implements for the local farmers and then pack up to be on the move again. A Gadia Lohar's bullock-cart is brass-studded and colourfully decorated. In addition to containing their few personal belongings, the cart is fitted out as a full smithy.

The fourth group roam about and earn their living by performing acrobatic feats and acts of jugglery. Some of them are snake-charmers and puppeteers.



What are puppets?

Puppets are small figures of human beings or animals, with jointed limbs, usually moved by the performer from above by means of wires or strings.

Puppets are made of various materials. They can be of cloth, wood, clay, leather or cardboard. Their manipulation is a specialised art and a skilful puppeteer can create a powerful impact.

Puppets can neither move nor speak on their own, yet the performer's art can make them sing or dance, love and fight, ride horses, camels or elephants and do almost anything that human beings can do.

What is puppetry?

Puppetry is the art of producing puppet shows.

A puppet show is perhaps the oldest form of theatre. Through music, dance, dialogue and action packed sequences, it depicts age-old legends, epics, folklore and history.

Puppetry in India is an ancient art. Buddhist and Jain literatures provide evidence of the existence of puppet shows and even contain descriptions of how puppets were manipulated. In Sanskrit plays there is always a character playing the role of *Sutradhara*, meaning 'holder or puller of strings'. This idea seems to have been derived from the puppet play in which the



puppeteer holding the strings can control the movements of his puppets. This is also the origin of the phrase 'to be a puppet in someone's hands'.

In the past, troupes of puppeteers went from village to village and entertained large crowds. The advent of the cinema has no doubt lessened interest in puppet shows, but the art is being actively revived.

How are puppets manipulated?

There are three well-known ways in which puppets are usually manipulated. They may be animated by means of strings tied to them and pulled from the top. Such puppets are called string puppets. Some puppets are moved by means of sticks and rods from

underneath the platform on which the play is staged. These are rod puppets. In the third type, called the glove puppets, the puppeteer manipulates the puppets by hand. The puppets have a cloth body with a hollow head and are fitted on the performer's hands.

There is yet another type of puppet show with its own technique. The puppets are projected on a small screen and manipulated from behind it with two sticks. Strong lamps are arranged so that the size, position and angle of the puppets change with the distance of the light. Such puppets are called shadow puppets.

Each region in India has its own favourite technique and local name for the puppet show.



What are 'kathputlis'?

The string puppets of Rajasthan are called *kathputlis*. They are the oldest type of existing puppets.

In the desert part of Rajasthan live a nomadic tribe — the Bhats. They are the *putliwalas* (puppeteers) of northern India. After the rainy season, when the harvest has been gathered, the Bhat families leave their villages and travel all over the country giving *kathputli* shows. In these shows they usually depict the life stories of Rajput heroes like Amar Singh Rathor of Marwar and Rana Pratap.

Usually, a family manages its own show which is held at night on a small stage. Facing the audience is the main curtain; behind it is the stage with the *kathputlis* and, at a little distance

behind it, is the backdrop. The men of the household stand behind the backdrop and manipulate the strings attached to the *kathputlis*. The women, sitting in front of the stage, sing and play on the drum at appropriate moments. The puppet-like voice is provided by the *putliwala* himself who chirps and whimpers and squeals with the help of a whistle-like device made of bamboo. Anger, laughter, pathos are all beautifully expressed.

The *kathputlis* of Rajasthan are made of stuffed rags and cloth. The head, however, is of wood — hence the name *kathputli* (*kath* means wood and *putli* means doll.) They do not have legs; instead, they have long trailing skirts or robes.

Kathputli is one of India's time-honoured and popular forms of folk arts.



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