

CHAPTER XV

EDUCATION AND CULTURE

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Naimisharanya, which lies in this district, finds mention in the *Ramayana* of Valmiki, but the reference to this place in the Uttara-kanda, chapter 92, verse 5, sheds little light on the system of education in vogue in those days. The *Mahabharata* is more informative. It opens with a reference to Naimisharanya, where a twelve-year sacrifice was performed by Shaunaka,¹ the *kulapati* or presiding personality of the place (which was "a forest like a University").² Shaunaka attracted to Naimisharanya "a vast concourse of learned men" by performing this sacrifice of which "the most essential accompaniment was the discourses and disputations on religious, philosophical and scientific topics".³ Here Ugrashrava Sauti, another personality, recited the whole of the *Mahabharata*.⁴ The *Puranas* also mention Naimisharanya as being the abode of 26,000 rishis and their innumerable disciples who spent their time in performing *ashitanga* (eight-fold) yoga, in seeking knowledge of the Supreme Being, reciting religious stories, discoursing upon the means of attaining salvation, developing the spirit of enquiry and learning and finding out how life should be lived.⁵

No further details are forthcoming regarding the way in which education was imparted in those days except for the tradition that rishis generally taught in an *ashram* or hermitage, and learned Brahmanas, who lived as householders, taught at home. There were no government institutions as there are today.

During the mediaeval period education was more or less conducted by religious teachers and institutions. The Muslims had their *maktabs* and *khonqahs* (monasteries) where *maulvis* taught : the Hindus received their education in the *pathshalas* which were run mostly by Brahmanas. Such teachers were generally supported by voluntary contributions which were usually in kind. Later, in the Mughal period, Laharpur and Khairabad gained importance as centres of Muslim learning. During the reign of Humayun, Shah Abdul Rahman Janbaz Qalandar, a celebrated divine, is said to have founded a school in Laharpur, which flourished and attracted students from far-off places. The curriculum covered a wide range of

¹ *Mahabharata*—(Gita Press), Adi Parva, Ch. 1, v. 1

² Mookerji, R. K.: *Ancient Indian Education*, pp. 333-334

³ *Ibid.* pp. 333-334

⁴ *Mahabharata*, Adi Parva, Ch. 1, vv. 9—25

⁵ *Skanda Purana*, [Shri Venkateshwar (Steam) Press, Samvat 1966], Brahma Khançr, Ch. 1, vv. 1—9.

