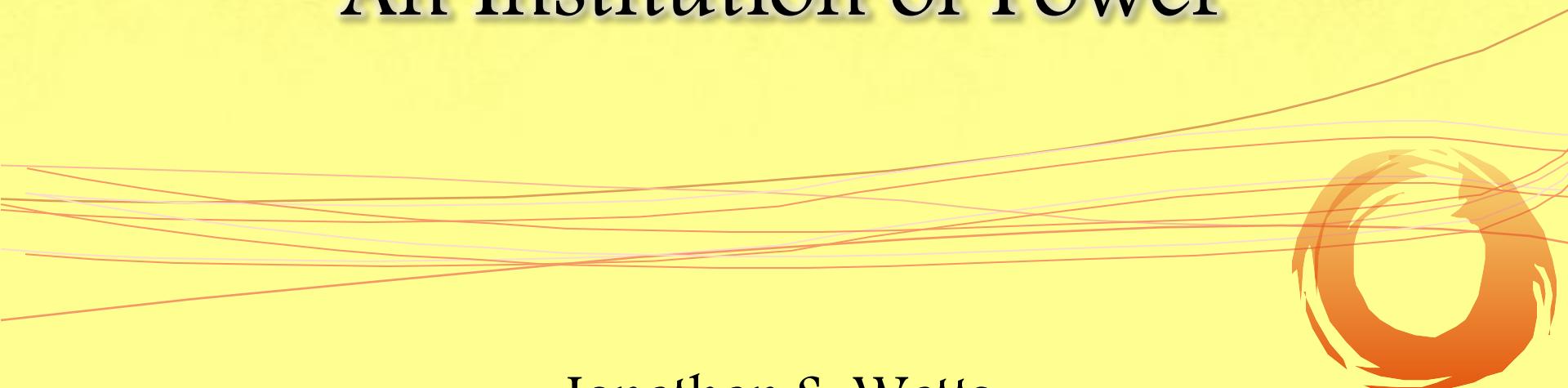


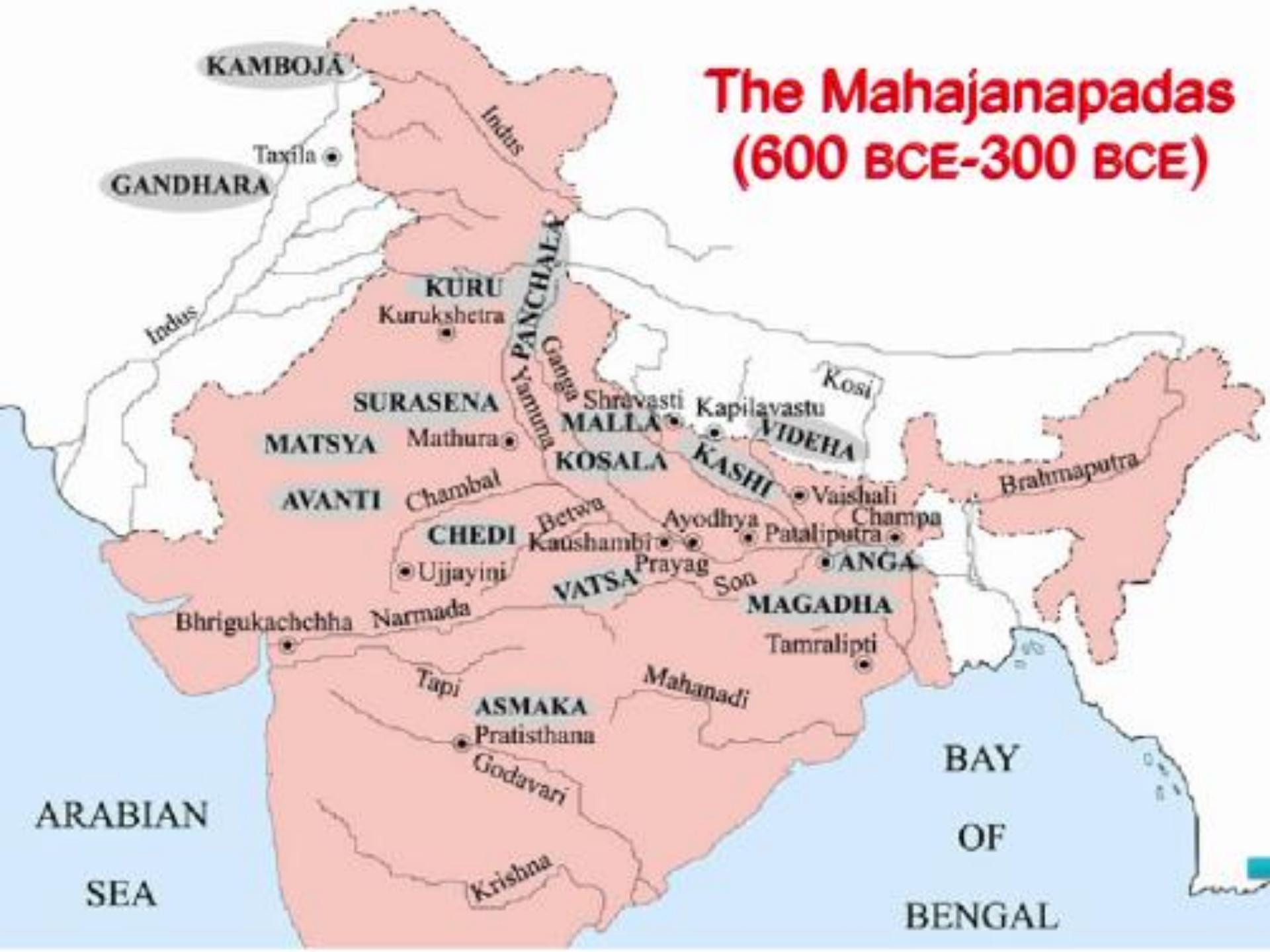
# Buddhist Sociology: A Community of Liberation A Culture of Diversity An Institution of Power



Jonathan S. Watts  
Keio University  
Tokyo, Japan

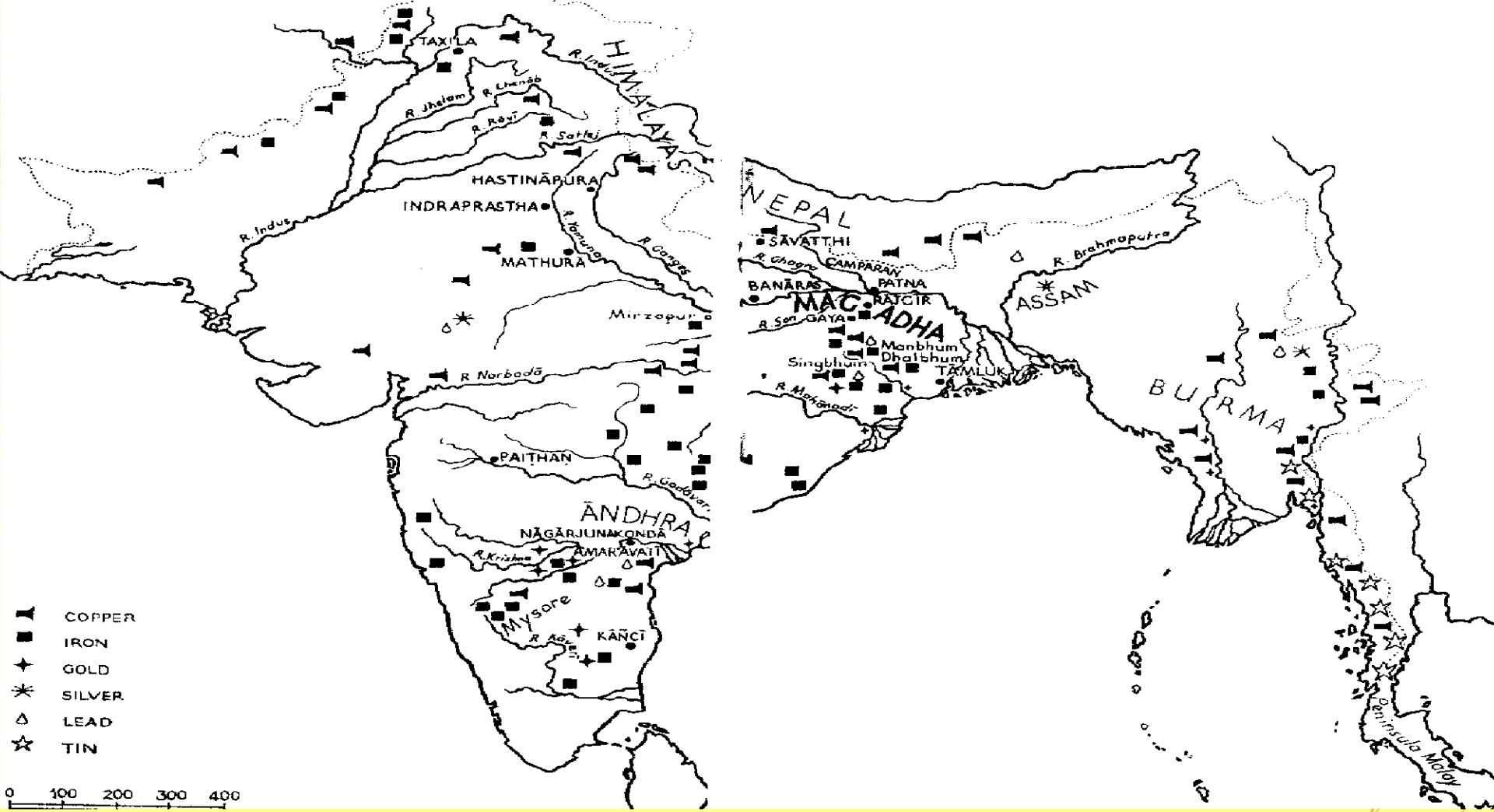


# The Mahajanapadas (600 BCE-300 BCE)



# India at the time of the Buddha: A Politics of Power





- ❖ Advent of the Iron Age in the 8th century BC, revolutions in human lifestyle and social organization
- ❖ Emergence of new towns and cities (Savatthi, Vesali, Patna, and Rajgir) along the trade route → into present-day Pakistan, Afghanistan, linking up with the Silk Road, and also to southern India.
- ❖ no common ritual or language but “common needs satisfied by reciprocal exchange”.
- ❖ a *civilizational process*, in that numerous peoples of different origins and cultural practices were being bonded together to create *qualitatively new economic, political, social, and cultural entities*.

# India at the time of the Buddha: A Culture of Diversity

- New social classes:
  1. property-owning, agrarian farmers
  2. urban-based merchants (setthi)

Vedic Brahmanism and its animal sacrifices (*yajña*) with the requisitioning of cattle and other animals without payment were an intolerable waste.
- economic dynamics ←→ new social ethic of freedom reciprocal exchange across geographical, ethnic, and class boundaries.
- New spiritualities rejecting ritual:  
Ajivikas (material karmic determinism), Jains (material karmic non-violence)
- The Buddha taught:
  - 1) intentional karmic non-violence based on causes and conditions  
against mysticism or lengthy speculation  
against the mythic legitimization of caste and patriarchy  
against the ritualism and waste of Vedic sacrifice (*yajña*)
  - 2) cosmopolitan and universal ethics  
Taught about good governance, poverty, & resource management
  - 3) communicated in an everyday language and plain style

# India at the time of the Buddha: Cosmic View Conditions Social Order?

- **The Brahman's ritualized karmic action:**

*Brahman* (absolute reality)/ *Atman* (eternal soul) => centralized source of creative power from which all emanates. Brahmans (priests) interpret and control that power in a hierarchical class/caste system => autocratic feudalism

- **The Buddha's ethical karmic action:**

*An-atman* (no-self) => creative power exists everywhere in a semi-anarchic web of causes and conditions. Ethical karmic action is the way for all sentient beings to find harmony within this web through meditation, ethics, and wisdom. => egalitarian democracy

# Buddhist Social Ethics

The Buddha developed different sets of ethical norms to guide the maintenance of various communities that supported responsible communication through mutual respect, self-restraint, and the proper use of speech

- 1) Monastic *vinaya* (227 for men, 311 for women)
- 2) householder *panca-sila* (“5 virtues” of no killing, no stealing, no sexual misconduct, no lying, no abuse of intoxicants)
- 3) for an “ethical king” (*dhammarāja*)
- 4) republican congresses (the monastic *vinaya* were based on the rules which the Buddha learned from his own tribal republic)

# The Sangha: An Ideal of Community of 4 Groups

- The 4 Assemblies: ordained men & women, lay men & women
- A middle way between secularized popular religion focused on ritual karma (Brahmanism) & escapist spirituality of ascetic karma (Upanishadic yogis)
- A system of reciprocity based on giving (*dāna*) in which lay people provide monastics with material requisites and monastics offer instructions on the teachings and practice.

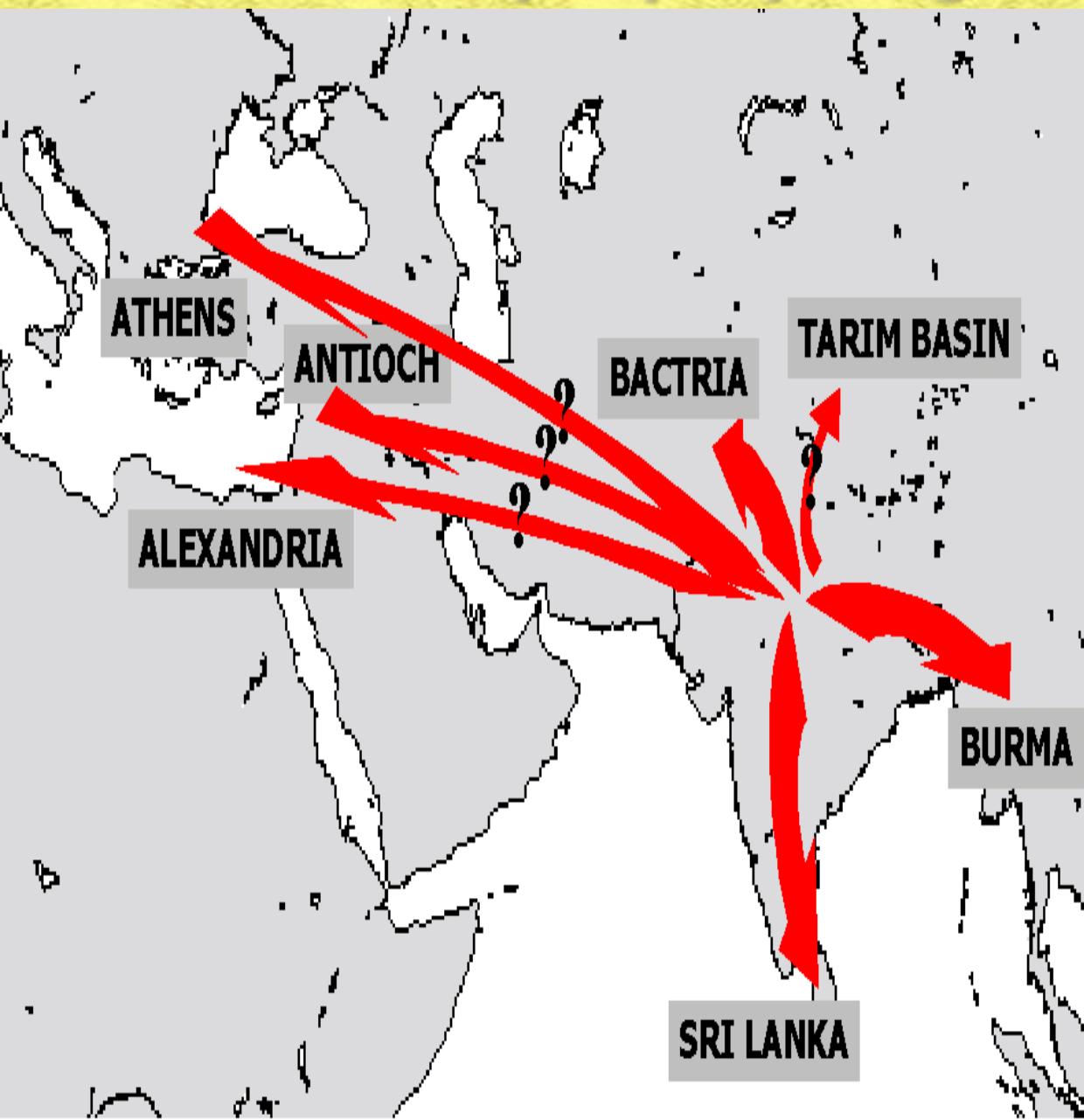
# India at the time of the Buddha: “Positive Disintegration”

- “positive disintegration”: a growth in
  1. diversification and differentiation (social classes and spiritual movements) as well as
  2. integration and consolidation (economic expansion and administrative and political consolidation).
- Reciprocal exchange: in economic trade and in the Buddha’s vision a civilizational movement based on combining 1) individual cultivation with 2) social ethics based on non-violent communication.
- both differentiating and integrating  
the religious and the secular  
the personal and the social

Monks forbidden to be involved in political or economic affairs BUT  
Established systems of Buddhist ethics for both  
monarchies and republics  
merchants and capitalists

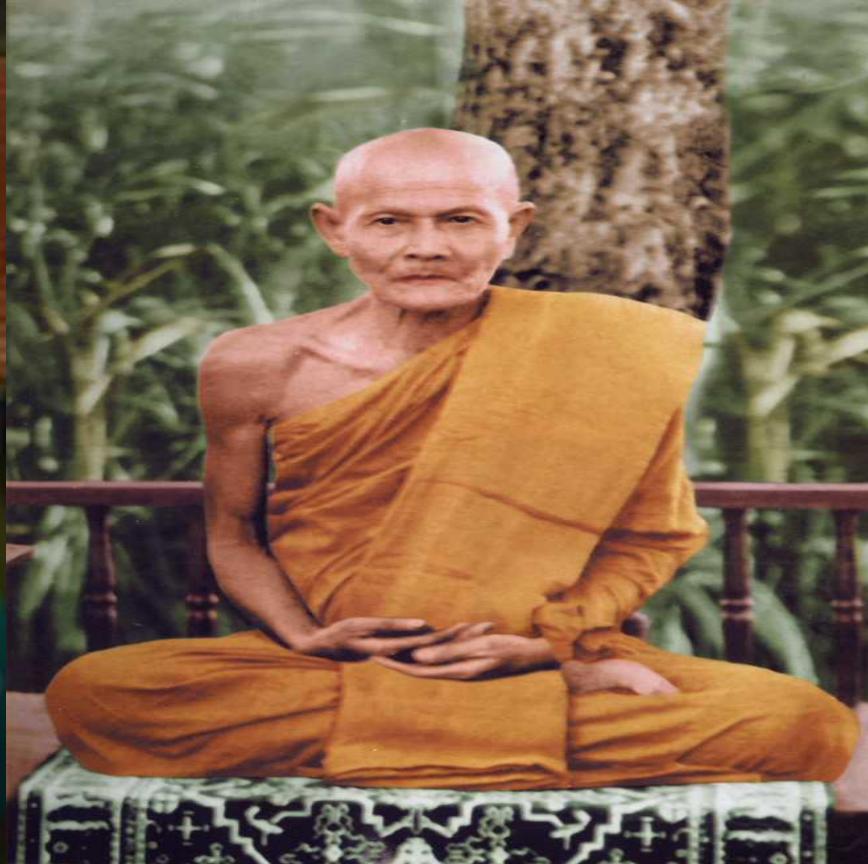
# The Reign of Ashoka (r. 270–232 B.C.)

inheritor of the Mauryan Dynasty of Maghada



# Ashokan Statecraft : Model of “Positive Disintegration”

- new form of statecraft: *Arthaśāstra* → *Dharma Vijaya* “Conquest through Morality” as the way to integrate progressively more diverse groups of people into one civilization:
  - 1) public works: hospitals, pharmacies, & free medical care, resting places & wells for travelers
  - 2) environmental edicts: limit destruction of forests & wilderness for commercial use
  - 3) Rituals & superstitions → ethical tenets: banned the *yajña* & fire (*agni*) sacrifices
  - 4) new class of minister: *dharma-mahāmātra* (“minister of morality”) to examine complaints of law-abiding groups and their beliefs.
  - 5) tolerance of other faiths & donations to all legitimate religious communities
  - 6) *Dharma vijaya*: used non-Buddhist terms in Aramaic and Greek inscriptions in northwest parts of the empire to communicate civilizational ethics (dharma = “good conduct” not Buddha’s teaching)



- Growth of great monasteries by patronage from political and economic elites
- Played significant role in transnational trade: located along the trade routes, serving as rest stops, supply houses, banking houses, and venues to sell goods.
- Integration of monk splits:
  - 1) Meditation monks (*vipassanā dhura*): tried to maintain the original and more ascetic style of the wandering monk, Nirvana is attainable, but only by secluded asceticism
  - 2) Scholar monks (*gantipa dhura*): lived in large monasteries, Nirvana becomes something for another lifetime.

Both became less connected to the laity and the dynamic balance of reciprocal *dana*.

# Development of “Popular Buddhism”

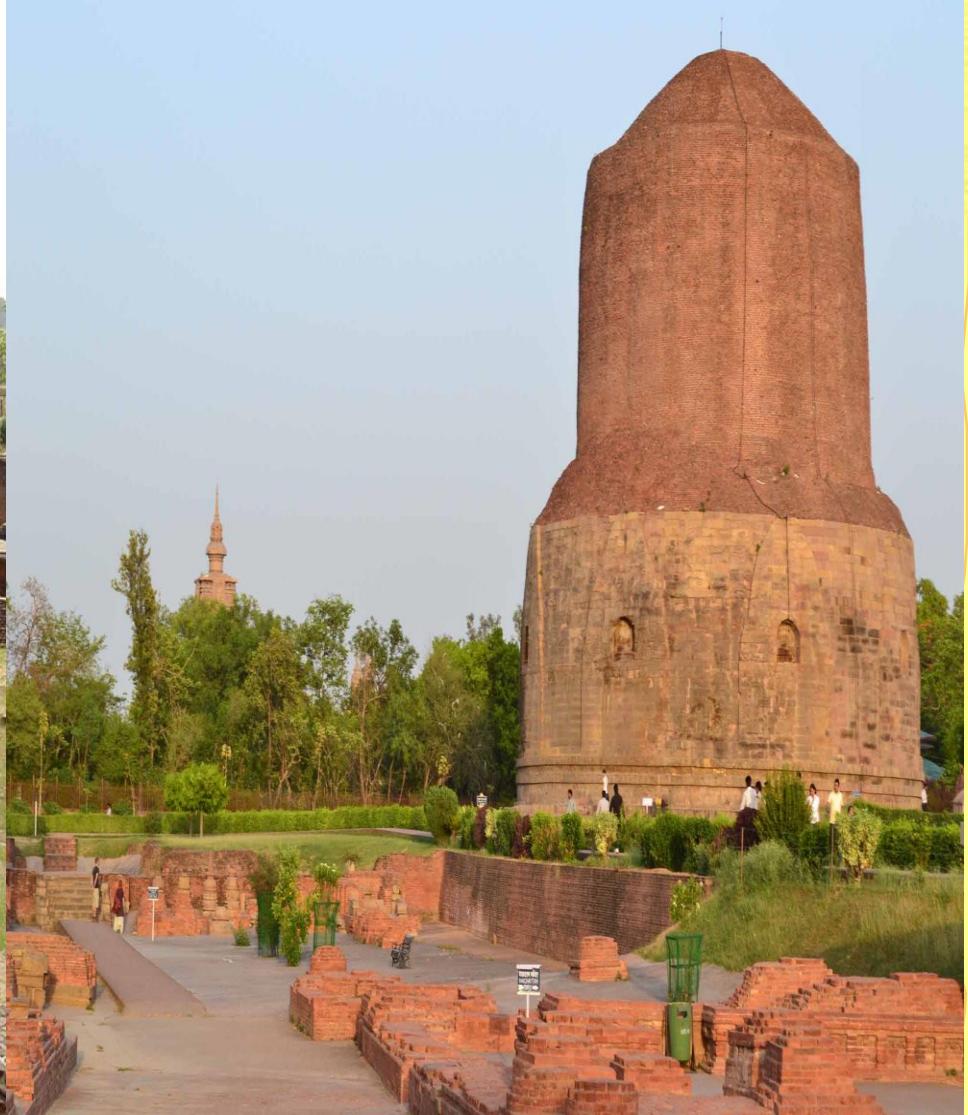
- As the monk became less accessible, he became more stereotyped or mythical
  - 1) myth of the monk’s sacred poverty:
    - ◆ More spiritual power of monk through ascetic poverty (*sīla*) → more merit (*puñña*) for lay person through donations (*dāna*) →
      - ◆ ethical karma → ritualized Brahmanistic karma for a better rebirth
      - ◆ Political and economic elites legitimatized their power
    - 2) The myth of the monk as a “world renouncer”
      - ◆ monk *should be* unconcerned with mundane social matters, especially political ones.
      - ◆ Sangha = ideal community & repository of society’s moral values
      - ◆ needs protection & regulation for continued prosperity of nation by political elite, especially the monarch.

# Decline of Buddhism in India

Ruins of Nalanda University



Ruins of the Dhamek Stupa in Sarnath



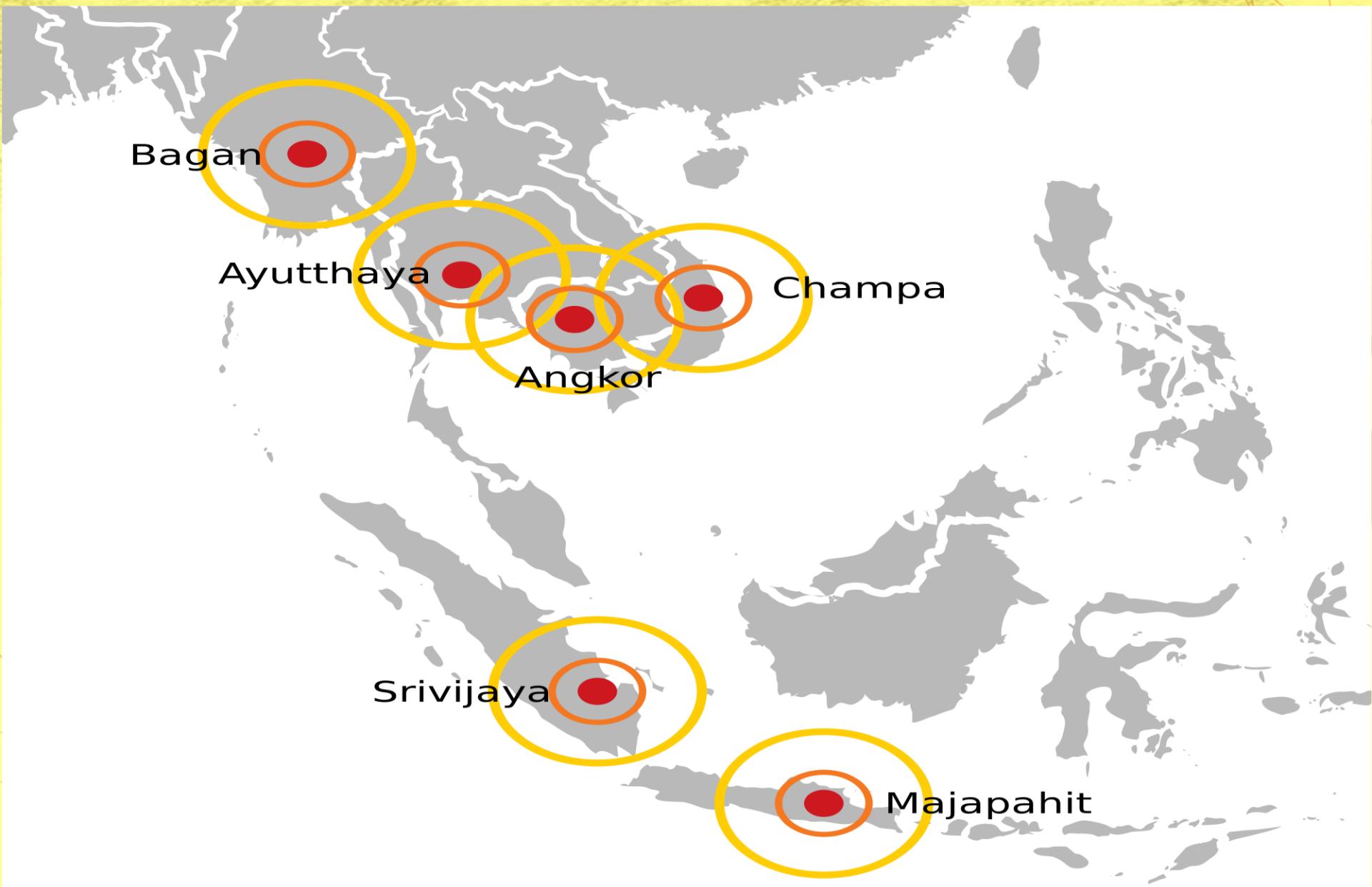


### Legend:

- Important Buddhist sites
- Heartland of Buddhism, Ganges valley, India 6th to 4th Century BCE
- Buddhist majority realm
- Historical realm of Buddhist expansion
- Mahayana
- Theravada
- Vajrayana-Tantric



# Galactic Polities: Decentralized Power



# Small is Beautiful: Integration of Monastic & Lay Life through Reciprocal *Dana*



# Institutionalized Buddhism: Power, Class, Patriarchy

- Buddha's vision: delicate balance between religion, state, and market
- Institutionalized Buddhism: Monarch is a god-king (*devarāja*) who protects Buddhism, while social elites make large donations to the temple. Power is sacralized and legitimized.
- Case Study: Sri Lanka
  - 1) By 2<sup>nd</sup> cent. CE, monasteries have large tracts of land receiving all produce and profit, worked by female and male servants or slaves.
  - 2) By 10<sup>th</sup> cent., some monks received special salaries, attendants, and other expenses, usually according to the rank and status of their families
  - 3) Monarchs became directly involved in the Sangha, making appointments to high ranks, adjudicating conflicts over incumbencies, and regularly purging the order of rogue elements.
  - 4) Vedic culture permeated the Sangha, which developed rules against the ordination of low-caste persons and eventually developed entire orders associated with single castes
  - 5) Between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, the order of nuns (*bhikkhuni*) died out and became forbidden to re-establish