

EARLY BUDDHISM

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Early Buddhism by T. W. Rhys Davids

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

The Sâkiya Clan.—The founder of Buddhism was born about 560 B.C. at Kapila-vastu, the principal town in the territory of the Sâkiya clan, situate about one hundred miles nearly due north of Benares.

At that time the Aryan settlers along the lower slopes of the Himâlaya range, and down the valley of the Ganges, had reached a stage of political and social evolution very similar to that reached about the same time in Greece. The country was politically split up into small communities, usually governed under republican institutions, some more aristocratic, some more democratic in character. But in four or five of these republics tyrants had succeeded in enforcing their power over their compatriots, and an irresistible tendency was leading to the absorption of all the small republics

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in the neighbouring larger kingdoms. Thus the Sâkiya clan was already under the suzerainty of the adjoining kingdom of Kosala.

Kosala.—The exact boundaries of Kosala at that time are not known; but it must have included nearly all of the present United Provinces, together with a large portion of Nepal. Its capital, Sâvatthi, lay in the mountains, in what is now Nepal. Benares, formerly an independent state, was already incorporated under the rising power of this important kingdom, which must have been three hundred miles in length from north to south, and about the same in breadth from west to east—nearly twice the size of England. The supremacy of this warlike clan of mountaineers, and the peace preserved throughout the wide extent of their domain, were the main political factors of the time. And the issue of the struggle, then already in progress, between Kosala and Magadha, its neighbour on the south-east, was about to decide the fate of the great continent of India through the following centuries.

Language of Kosala.—Two points are especially worthy of notice in this connection. In the first place, the language of Kosala, owing to the influence of the court, the army, and the officials