
Chapter-02

Kings, Farmers and Towns

Several developments in different parts of the subcontinent (India) the long span of 1500 following the end of Harappan Civilization:

- Rigveda was composed along the Indus and its tributaries.
- Agricultural Settlements emerged in several parts of the subcontinent.
- New mode of disposal of the dead like making Megaliths.
- By C 600 BCE growth of new cities and kingdoms.
- 600 BCE major turning point in early Indian history.
- Growth of 16 Mahajanapadas. Many were ruled by kings.
- Some known as ganas or sanghas were oligarchies
- Between the 600 BCE and 400 BCE Magadha became the most powerful Mahajanapada.
- Emergence of Mauryan Empire Chandragupta Maurya (C 321 BCE) founder of the empire extended control upto Afghanistan and Baluchistan.
- His grandson Ashoka, the most famous ruler conquered Kalinga.
- Variety of sources to reconstruct the history of the Mauryan Empire - archaeological finds especially sculpture, Ashoka's Inscriptions, Literary sources like Indica account.

New Notions of Kingship

- By C 200 BCE emergence of new chiefdoms and kingdoms in several parts of the subcontinent.
 - Cholas, Cheras and Pandyas in Tamilakam, known from Sangam text.
 - Most of these states including Satavahanas and Shakas had control over long distance trade networks.
 - Kushanas (C First century BCE to first century CE) ruled over a vast kingdom extending from central Asia to North West India.
 - Their history has been reconstructed from Inscriptions, Coins and sculptures which convey a sense of the notions of kingship.
 - History of the Guptas (4th century CE) has been reconstructed from literatures, coins and inscriptions including Prashastis.
 - Strategies for increasing agricultural production - use of plough with iron plough share, introduction of transplantation and use of irrigation through wells, tanks, less commonly canals.
 - Land grants to religious institutions or Brahmanas, to extend agriculture to new areas or to win allies by making grants of land.
 - Emergence of urban centres such as Pataliputra, Ujjayani, Puhar, Mathura etc.
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- In the towns different types of people used to live such as washing folk, weavers, scribes, carpenters, potters, religious teachers, merchants, kings.
 - Artisans and traders organized themselves in guild or shrenis.
 - Trade both in the subcontinent and with east and north Africa, West Asia, South East Asia, China.
 - India used to export spices, fine pearls, ivory, silk cloth, medicinal plants.
 - Exchanges were facilitated by the introduction of the coinage. Punch marked coins made of silver and copper were amongst the earliest to be minted and used. The first gold coins were issued (CE) by the Kushanas.
 - James Prinsep an officer in the mint of the East India Company was able to decipher Ashokan Brahmi in 1838.
 - Limitations of Inscriptional evidence- letters are very faintly engraved, damaged or letter missing, not sure about the exact meaning of the words.

Magadha Empire:

- Magadha (in present-day Bihar) became the most powerful mahajanapada.
 - Magadha was a region where agriculture was especially productive.
 - Iron mines were accessible and provided resources for tools and weapons.
 - Elephants, an important component of the army, were found in forests in the region.
 - The Ganga and its tributaries provided a means of cheap and convenient communication.
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