



## CHAPTER 2- EARLY STATES AND ECONOMIES

### Keywords

- i) Culminated- point of highest development
- ii) Chiefdoms- head of the community
- iii) Edict- An official order or proclamation issued by a person or authority
- iv) Colossal statue- great, large statue
- v) Homage- special honour
- vi) Inscription- words that are written or cut in something
- vii) Epigraphy- the study of inscriptions
- viii) Land grants- land given as gifts in lieu of military or religious services
- ix) Punch marked coins- pre Christian era coins or pre-common era coins
- x) Anthology- collection of poems or other pieces of writing
- xi) Ganapati- large land holder also the village headman hereditary position

In 1830 James Prinsep, an officer in East Indian company deciphered Brahmi and Kharosthi the two scripts used in the early inscription. He also found some inscription mentioned to the king as Priyadarsika meaning pleasant to behold.

### **The earliest states:**

The 6th century B.C. was a turning point in early Indian history. This era witnessed the rise of early states, cities, the growing use of iron and the development of coinage. Buddhist and Jain literature refers to sixteen states known as Mahajanapadas. Some frequently mentioned Mahajanapadas were Avanti, Vasta, Kosala, Magadha, Kuru, Panchala. Most of the Mahajanapadas were ruled by the kings, some known as Gana or Sanghas were oligarchic in nature.

These sixteen states were engaged in entire struggle. Each Mahajanapadas had a capital city which was often fortified. The states required resources for maintaining the army and bureaucracy. From the sixth century B.C. Brahmana had begun to compose the Dharmashastra. The Dharmashastra advised the ruler to collect taxes and tributes from cultivators, traders and artisans. Raid on neighbouring states were recognised as legitimate means of acquiring wealth. During this time period Brahmins began to impose Sanskrit texts i.e Dharmashastra which laid down rules for various sections of the society.

### **The Kingdom Of Magadha:**

Ancient Magadha Kingdom comprises the district of Patna and Gaya in south Bihar. It became a powerful kingdom between the 4th and 6th century. Magadha had some special advantages over others. It had a sort of natural defence due to hills surrounding its ancient capital Rajagriha which later was transferred to Patliputra. The factors contributed towards its emergence were the productivity of agriculture, iron-mines in its vicinity, availability of elephants which was an



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important component, also the Ganga and its tributaries provided cheap water transport. Some buddhist and Jains writers attributed its power to the policies of individual kings like Bimbisara, Ajatasatru and Mahapadma Nanda.

Maghadha kingdom was conquered and occupied by Chandragupta Maurya by defeating Mahapadma Nanda. He laid the foundation of the Mauryan empire. He extended his control as far as Afghanistan and Baluchistan and his grandson Ashoka conquered kalinga.

### **Sources of Mauryan:**

Buddhist, Jains and puranic literature, historical account left by greek ambassador Meghasthenes, Artharasastra of Kautilya, the inscription of as Ashoka, Mudrarakshasa of Vishakha Dutta are often regarded as most valuable sources.

### **Administration of the Mauryan empire:**

The emperor was the head of the administration. His power was unlimited, a law giver, supreme judge, commander of the army and the chief executive. The king appointed men of high character and wisdom as his ministers. The ministers were of two ranks - the Mantris and the Amatyas. The Mantris were senior ministers and advisers of the king, Amatyas were the executive officers.

For administrative convenience the empire was divided into five provinces- the northern province with its capital at Taxila, western province with its capital at Swarvanagiri. The province with its capital at Tosali and the capital of the kingdom was Patliputra. The province was divided into district allied Janapadas. It had three important officials called pradesika, rajuka and yuktas. The cities were divided into many wards. The city superintendent was assisted by the committee of 30 members. It was divided into five sub committees. The village administration was under Gramani. He was assisted by a council of elders, officially marked by Gopa.

The Mauryan had established vast empires with the help of the army. The Mauryan army consisted of 600,000 infantry, 30,000 horsemen, 3000 chariots and 9000 elephants. Army was under the control of the commander-in-chief. War office was managed by six boards of five members each. They were i) board of infantry ii) board of cavalry iii) board of chariots iv) board of elephant v) board of transport vi) board of navy etc. The espionage system of the Mauryan was elaborated and efficient. The king appointed a large number of spies to keep a watch on government officials. Jugglers, prostitutes, fortune tellers were employed as spies.

### **The importance of empire:**

In the 19thC emergence of the Mauryan empire was a major landmark as India was under colonial rule during that time. The archaeologist found the inscription and sculpture associated with the Mauryan were considered to be examples of a spectacular art type of empire.

### **New nation of kingship:**

The new kingdom emerged in the Deccan and further south including the chiefdoms of the Chola, Cheras and Pandyas in Tamilakam. Satavahana established their rule from 2nd C B.C over the part of western and central India. One means of claiming high status was to identify



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with a variety of deities. This strategy is best exemplified by the Kushans, who ruled over a vast kingdom from central Asia to north west India. By the fourth century there is evidence of large states including the Gupta Empire.

Many of them depend on Samantas men who maintained themselves through local resources. Strong and powerful samanta became the king. Histories of the Gupta ruler have been reconstructed from literature coins and inscriptions. Harisena was the court poet of Samudragupta.

### **Changing countryside:**

Historians have tried to know the subject King relation by examining stories content in anthologies such as the jatakas and Panchatantra. One story known as the Gandatindu Jataka describes the plight of the subject of a wicked king.

The king frequently tries to fill their coffers by demanding high tax and peasants particularly found such demands oppressive.

### **Strategies for increasing production:**

one strategy for increasing production was the shift to plough agriculture, which spread in fertile Alluvial Valley such as those of the Ganga and the Kaveri. Production of paddy was dramatically increased by the introduction of transplantation. Agriculture was practised on hill regions in the north eastern and central part of the continent.

Another strategy adopted to increase agricultural production was the use of irrigation through Wells and tanks.

### **Difference in rural society:**

The benefit of increased production leads to a growing differentiation among people engaged in agriculture. The stories within the Buddhist tradition refer to landless agricultural Labourers, small farmers and land holders. Ganapati was used in Pali to describe small farmers and large landholders. Tamil literature mentions large landowners or velars as ploughmen and slaves as animals. With the rising difference among the people engaged in agriculture, questions of control over land become very crucial.

### **Land grants and new Royal elites:**

from the early century of the common era grand of lands where made, many of which were recorded in inscriptions. According to Sanskrit legal text, women were not supposed to have independent access to resources such as land. The inscriptions indicate that prabhavati Gupta had access to property and it seems rules were not implemented uniformly. There were regional variations in the size of land donated ranging from small to vast stretches of uncultivated land. Land grants were a strategy to extend agriculture in a new area. Land grants were an indicator of weakening political power as King were losing control over their Samantha as they tried to win allies by making land grants. Land grants provide some insight into the relationship between cultivators and the state.



### **Towns and trade:**

All major towns were located along routes of communication. Some such as Patliputra were on riverine route, others such as Ujjain were along the land routes and yet others such as Puhar were near the coast from where sea route began. Many cities like Mathura were bustling centres of commercial cultural and political activities. A wide range of artefacts have been recovered from them. This includes fine pottery, bowls and dishes with a glossy finish known as northern black ware probably used by rich people and ornaments tools weapons figurines made of white range of materials like gold silver copper bronze Ivory glass shelves and terracotta. By 2nd century BC we find short votive inscriptions in the number of cities. They mention guilds organisations or crafts producers and merchants. These guilds probably produced raw materials regulated production and marketed the finished product. From the 6th century BC land and river Criss-cross the subcontinent and extended in various directions. Rulers attempted to control this route possibly by offering protection for caravans. Those who transverse this route included travellers who probably travel on foot and merchants who travel with Caravan of Bullock carts and pack animals. Spices, especially pepper were in high demand. Textile and medicinal plants were all transported across the Arabian Sea to the Mediterranean.

Exchange was facilitated by the introduction of coinage punch mark coins made of silver and copper were among the earliest to be minted and used. The first coin to bear the names and image of rulers were issued by the Indo Greeks who established control over North Western parts of subcontinent in the 2nd century BC. The first gold coins were issued in the first century by the Kushanas. Hoards of Roman coins have been found from archaeological sites in South India. Coins were also issued by tribals such as that of Yaudheyas of Punjab and Haryana. Some of the most spectacular gold coins were issued by Gupta rulers; these coins facilitated a long distance transaction from which Kings also benefited.

### **How are inscriptions deciphered:**

Deciphering Brahmi- most scripts used to write modern Indian languages are derived from Brahmi script used in the Ashokan inscriptions. It was only after painstaking investigation by several epigraphers that James Prinsep was able to decipher Ashoka Brahmi in 1838.

### **How Kharosthi was read:**

The Kharosthi script was used in inscriptions in the Northwest. The coins of Indo Greek kings who ruled over the areas contain the name of Kings written in Greek and Kharosthi script.

### **Historical evidence from inscriptions:**

Ashokan inscriptions describe the title Devanamapriya and Priyadarshi. The name of Ashoka was not mentioned in inscriptions instead the king is referred to as Devanamapriya (beloved of gods) and Priyadarshi (pleasant to behold). By examining the contents style language and palaeography of this inscription epigraphy has come to the conclusion that they were issued by the same ruler.

### **Limitations of institutional evidence:**



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Letters are very faintly engraved and reconstructions are uncertain. Inscriptions may be damaged or letters missing. It is not always easy to be sure about the exact meaning of the words used in inscriptions. Routine agricultural practice and the joy and sorrow of daily existence are not mentioned in the inscriptions.

**Some extra points added-**

-This chapter traces the development in the Indian sub-continent society, economy, polity, agriculture etc. The time period from 600 BC to 680 BC was a period for important civilizational developments like elaborate writing systems, rise of Empire and city states use of iron for agriculture wholesale forest cleaning and warfare. This age is also the rise of famous religions like Buddhism and Jainism. Hindu religion was codified by the writing of Shastra and Sutras.

-Indian subcontinent witnessed many developments after the end of Harappan civilization. Notably among them are-

- i) composition of Rigveda
- ii) emergence of Agricultural settlement all over the centuries
- iii) constitution of megalith that is stone structure over the dead bodies
- iv) 600 BCE onwards mark the emergence of states Kingdoms and cities
- v) the earlier years impetus towards the study of Indian in the ancient past was provided by James Prinsep by his development of Brahmi and kharosthi script.

-From the 1st century A.D onwards many kings started to give 'land grants' mainly to Brahmins. This land grants were mostly recorded in the form of inscriptions on copper plates. Most of these inscriptions were in Sanskrit, though some were in regional languages too.

-By the 6th C. BC. Indian agriculture had seen higher productivity due to 'transplantation' of paddy and introduction of iron. Though the technologies brought prosperity but it also led to growing differentiation.