

IMPORTANT QUESTION CLASS – 12 HISTORY CHAPTER- 2 KINGS, FARMERS AND TOWN EARLY STATES AND ECONOMIES

Question 1.

How the Brahmi Script of Ashokan age was deciphered ?

Answer:

Most of the scripts used to write modern Indian languages are defined from Brahmi script. This script was used in most of Ashokan inscriptions. From the late 18th century, European scholars, helped by Indian pandits, worked backwards from contemporary Bengali and Devanagiri.

Scholars who studied early inscriptions thought that these inscriptions were in Sanskrit but the earliest inscriptions were in Prakrit. After decades of great hard work by many epigraphers, James Prinsep deciphered the Ashokan age Brahmi script in 1838.

Question 2.

Describe briefly how the Mauryan Empire was regarded as a major landmark in history.

Answer:

In the nineteenth century, when historians started to reconstruct early Indian history, the emergence of the Mauryan Empire was regarded as a major landmark in history. At that time, India was a part of the British Empire. Nineteenth and early twentieth-century Indian historians found the possibility that there was an empire in early India both challenging and exciting.

Also, few of the archaeological finds associated with the Mauryas, including stone sculpture, were considered to be examples of the spectacular and typical of empires. Many of these historians found the message on Ashokan inscriptions very different from that of most other rulers, suggesting that Ashoka was more powerful and industrious, as also more humble than the later rulers who adopted grandiose titles. So it is not surprising that nationalist leaders in the twentieth century regarded him as an inspiring figure.

Question 3.

Describe briefly any two strategies for increasing agricultural production from sixth century B.C.E. to sixth-century CE.

Answer:

1. Prevalence of Ploughs: One method that helped in increasing the production was the popularity of plough. The use of a plough had started in the 6th century B.C.E. in the valleys

of Ganga and Cauveri. The plough with an iron tip was used in areas which had an ample rainfall. It was used in infertile land. It resulted in increasing the production of paddy. No doubt the farmers had to work a lot to achieve this target.

2. Use of Spade: Though plough helped in increasing the production yet its use was limited to only some areas. In Punjab and Rajasthan, which had less rainfall, the plough was used in the early period of the 20th century. Those farmers who lived in the north-east and mid-mountainous regions used spade for digging the fields which were quite useful in such areas.

Question 4.

“Communication along both land and riverine routes were vital for the existence of the Mauryan empire.” Justify the statement.

Answer:

Communication along both land and riverine routes were vital for the existence of the empire. Journeys from the centre to the provinces could have taken weeks if not months. This meant arranging for provisions as well as protection for those who were on the move.

Megasthenes mentioned a committee with six subcommittees for coordinating military activity.

1. One out of these looked after the navy.
2. The second one managed transport and provisions.
3. The third one was responsible for foot soldiers.
4. The fourth one managed horses, whereas
5. the fifth for chariots and
6. the sixth for elephants.

The activities of the second sub-committee were rather varied: arranging for bullock carts to carry equipment, procuring food for soldiers and fodder for animals, and recruiting servants and artisans to look after the soldiers.

Maintenance of these means was also necessary for the progress of trade.

Question 5.

How did Ashoka propagate Buddhism?

Answer:

Ashoka served a lot for Buddhism. He was deeply hurt by the Kalinga war. His mind became peaceful only because of simple rules of Buddhism. He adopted Buddhism and spent the whole of his life in propagating Buddhism. Some of the works done by him for propagating Buddhism are given below:

1. He himself showed an example to the people by accepting Buddhism and motivated the people. He himself obeyed those rules which he propagated among the masses.

2. After Kalinga War he himself became a Buddhist. He whole-heartedly propagated Buddhism. Common masses were greatly influenced as they saw their king as a monk. As a result, a number of people adopted this religion.
3. Ashoka wanted to propagate Buddhism which is why he engraved inscriptions, pillars and caves which mentioned the rules of Buddhism. People were influenced by those ideas and started to adopt Buddhism.
4. Ashoka built many stupas and Viharas. These Stupas and Viharas, later on, became the centres of Buddhism.
5. Ashoka called Third Conference of Buddhism at Pataliputra in 252 B.C.E. Because of the Conference, the Buddhists were united and this religion became popular.
6. Ashoka tried to convince people through religious acts or plays that living life according to Buddhism leads to the attainment of salvation. People got influenced by these acts and many of them adopted Buddhism.
7. Pilgrimages also proved fruitful in this direction. He himself visited pilgrims related to Buddhism. In his way, he arranged many meetings and propagated rules of Buddhism.
8. Ashoka appointed special officials called Dhamma Mahamatras to propagate Buddhism. They used to move from one place to another to propagate Buddhism. Indirectly it also helped in propagating Buddhism.
9. Ashoka engraved teachings of Buddhism, on inscriptions, rocks, etc., in Pali language. He also translated some of the famous Buddhist epics in Pali language because it was the most commonly spoken language. That is why it became very easy for people to understand the teachings of Buddhism.
10. He not only propagated Buddhism in India but in foreign countries as well. He sent Mahamatras to Gandhar, Sri Lanka, China, Syria, Egypt, etc. His son and daughter went over to Sri Lanka to propagate Buddhism. That is why Buddhism spread to different countries of the world.

Question 6.

Analyse the character of 'Ashoka the Great'.

Answer:

Ashoka was a great king of the world. None of the kings of the world could reach the status of Ashoka. Other kings of the world knew only how to expand their empire, to run their rule and wanted to rule over the people. But Ashoka wanted to rule over the hearts of the people and that also with love, peace and tolerance. Following things made Ashoka – the Great:

1. Service of Humanity: After the Kalinga war, he left the policy of wars and took an aim of service of humanity. He left the life of leisure and hunting and started to preach the people by moving from one place to another. He himself left eating flesh. This was the greatest ideal and we cannot find such an example in world history.
2. Safety of Animals: Ashoka was the first king who not only opened hospitals for humans but for animals as well. Hunting of animals was strictly prohibited in his state. In 243 B.C.E. he made a declaration that no one could kill animals during 56 days in a year fixed by the state. That is why he was known as Ashoka the Great.
3. Public Welfare Works: Ashoka always considered his subjects as his children. He built a number of roads for public welfare. He planted trees on both sides of roads, built rest houses, opened hospitals. Patients were given free medicines in these hospitals.
4. Ideal Administration: Administration of Ashoka was of top quality. He appointed Mahamatras who used to convey the grievances of masses to the king. No discrimination took place while giving justice.
5. Propaganda of Buddhism: Ashoka himself adopted Buddhism after the Kalinga war. He sent Dhamma Mahamatras to other countries to propagate Buddhism. He changed a small religion into a world religion.
6. Lover of Peace: Ashoka started to hate wars after the Kalinga war. He left the policy of war and became a lover of peace.
7. Art: Arts also made great progress during his tenure. He built many Stupas and Viharas and founded two new cities of Srinagar and Devapattan.
8. Ashoka's Dhamma: Ashoka propagated Dhamma for the moral upliftment of his subjects. According to this, one should live a simple and pure life and respect his parents and teacher.
9. Religious Tolerance: He equally respected all the religions. That is why he helped other religions as well as Buddhism. It tells us about his greatness.
10. Large Empire: Ashoka had a large empire which stretched from the Himalayas to Karnataka, from the Bay of Bengal to Hindukush and to Arabian Sea in the west.

After looking at the given description we can say that Ashoka was actually one of the greatest kings of the world. That is why Dr R.K. Mukherji wrote that "In the annals of kingship there is scarcely any record comparable to Ashoka".

Question 7.

Write a note on the main sources of Mauryan history.

Answer:

Maurya dynasty is the first dynasty of India about which we have correct and enough historical information. It tied whole of India with a thread of unity. This dynasty was founded by Chandragupta Maurya. We get this information from various sources which are given below:

1. Description of Megasthenes: Megasthenes was a Greek resident. He remained as an ambassador of Seleucus in the court of Chandragupta Maurya from 302 B.C.E. to 298 B.C.E. He wrote a book called 'Indica' in which he wrote about the Mauryan ruler, his administration and social condition of that age. Although this book is not available, still some of the descriptions of his book are available in a few Greek and other books. We can clearly get information about Mauryan empire by collecting all these descriptions.

2. Arthashastra of Kautilya: Kautilya (Chanakya) was the teacher and prime minister of Chandragupta Maurya. Kautilya wrote an epic called 'Arthashastra'. He wrote about various political theories in his book. Kautilya wrote that "King should run the administration with the help of his ministers even if he is an autocratic ruler". Actually, Chandragupta used his political concepts and became a successful king. Proper analysis of Kautilya's Arthashastra gives us enough information about administration and society under Mauryan rule.

3. Mudrarakshasa: It is a historical play written in the fifth century. It was written by the famous writer of Gupta age, Vishakhadutta. This play tells us how Nanda dynasty was destroyed by Chandragupta Maurya and how he founded the Mauryan empire.

4. Epics of Jainism and Buddhism: Jain and Buddhist literature also give us enough information about Mauryan age. We can take Mahavams, Dipavams and Mahabodhivams for this purpose. Kalpasutra of Jainism can also be used in this regard. Jain literature tells us that Chandragupta Maurya became a follower of Jainism in the last days of his rule. Buddhist literature informs us that Ashoka was very cruel at an early age but became very kind when he adopted Buddhism.

5. Puranas: Puranas also give us enough information about the Mauryan age. They inform us that Nanda rulers were Shudras. Chanakya destroyed them and made Chandragupta as the new king. But modern scholars are of the view that many things written in Puranas could have been imaginary.

6. Other Sources:

(a) Ashoka engraved descriptions on caves, inscriptions and rocks in his empire. These descriptions give us enough information about his administration, religious policy, Mauryan age and the character of Ashoka.

(b) Coins issued by Mauryan rulers also proved to be a vital source of Mauryan history.

Question 8.

What is the importance of the emergence of Gupta age in Indian history?

Answer:

Gupta age occupies an important place in ancient Indian history. All the rebellious elements remained no more with the advent of this age and political unity came into the scenario. Peace and security were established in the country and all the internal conflicts came to an end. The country made huge progress in the fields of art and literature. The whole atmosphere was filled with peace and prosperity. In short, the following are the important aspects of this age :

1. **End of Darkness:** After the Mauryan empire, peace was established in-country during Kushanas. But it lasted only for a short span of time. After Kushanas, again, internal conflicts and wars started. We do not have enough information about the kings who ruled during this age of chaos but this darkness came to an end with the advent of the Gupta age. We have enough sources to know about the history of Gupta kings and life during the Gupta age. In short, we can say that the dark age of our history remained no more with the advent of Gupta age.
2. **Political Unity:** Country was divided into smaller states before the Gupta age. Nag and Vakatah were important dynasties. Except these, Yoddeya, Licchhavi, Malwa, etc., dynasties were also present. Kings of these dynasties were often engaged in wars with each other. There was no powerful king in the country who could establish political unity in the country. Kanishka was an able and powerful ruler but his tenure was very small. Gupta kings established political unity in the country.
3. **Peace and Prosperity:** Gupta kings provided top quality administration and established peace in the country. Trade was encouraged and the country became prosperous.
4. **Re-emergence of Hinduism:** Hinduism re-emerged during the Gupta age. Buddhism made huge progress during the reign of Ashoka and Kanishka. But Gupta kings were the followers of Hinduism which spread to a great deal during their reign.
5. **Progress in Fine Arts:** Fine arts also made huge progress during the Gupta age. Beautiful sculptures and paintings of Hindu gods and goddesses were made. Ajanta Caves were built during this age. The art of metal sculptures also developed in this age.
6. **Progress in Literature:** Gupta age was very important from the literary point of view. Sanskrit language and Sanskrit literature made huge progress in the country. Kalidasa was born in this age and so was Vishakhadatta. Harissa and Amarsena held an important place in Sanskrit literature. Except these, books were written on astrology, mathematics, geography, chemistry, etc. Aryabhata, Varhamihira and Brahma Gupta were the great scientists of this age.

7. Foreign Relation: Actually Gupta age holds an important place in Indian history. The first time, Indians went over to foreign countries to spread their culture. Centres of Indian culture were made in Java, Sumatra, Bali, Burma and other countries. Even Indians made colonies in various other countries.

8. Foreign powers in the country came to an end during this age. Samudragupta defeated foreign kings and made India free from the rule of foreign kings.

Question 9.

Mention any two ways in which the inscriptions of land grants help us to understand the rural society in ancient times.

Answer:

1. The land grants give us a glimpse of the relationship between the state and the farmers.
2. There were some people who were not under the control of officials or feudal lords. They included those who reared animals, hunters, fishers, sculptors and nomadic farmers.

Question 10.

Briefly describe the new trends that emerged from 6th century B.C.E. and their sources.

Answer:

There is evidence of new trends that emerged from 6th century B.C.E. which were as follows:

1. Probably the most visible was the emergence of early states, empires and kingdoms. Some other changes were responsible for these political processes. These are evident in the ways in which agricultural production was organised.
2. Simultaneously, new towns emerged throughout the sub-continent. Historians try to understand these developments with the help of certain sources like inscriptions, texts, coins and visual material.