

NCERT Class XII — Themes in Indian History

Theme 2

# Kings, Farmers and Towns

Early States and Economies (c. 600 BCE – 600 CE)

## COMPLETE QUESTION BANK

30 MCQs • 20 Fill in the Blanks • 20 One-word / One-sentence Answers

20 Short Answer Questions • 20 FAQs • 20 CBSE Important Questions

Hindi + English | PSC / UPSC / CBSE Ready

**SECTION 1 : Multiple Choice Questions (MCQ)**

Total: 30 Questions | Each carries 1 mark | PSC / UPSC / CBSE Prelims Ready

**Q1. Who deciphered the Brahmi script in 1838?**

- (A) Alexander Cunningham
- (B) James Prinsep
- (C) Colin Mackenzie
- (D) D.C. Sircar

■ **Answer: (B) | James Prinsep was an officer at the Calcutta Mint who deciphered Brahmi and Kharosthi scripts.**

**Q2. The Asokan inscriptions in the northwest were written in which script?**

- (A) Brahmi
- (B) Devanagari
- (C) Kharosthi
- (D) Grantha

■ **Answer: (C) | Kharosthi script was used in the northwest; Brahmi was used elsewhere.**

**Q3. What was the Asiatic Society of Bengal founded in?**

- (A) 1774
- (B) 1784
- (C) 1800
- (D) 1838

■ **Answer: (B) | The Asiatic Society (Bengal) was founded in 1784 — a landmark in Indian epigraphy.**

**Q4. Asoka referred to himself as 'pleasant to behold' — which title is this?**

- (A) Devanampiya
- (B) Chakravarti
- (C) Piyadassi
- (D) Devaputra

■ **Answer: (C) | Piyadassi means 'pleasant to behold'. Devanampiya means 'beloved of gods'.**

**Q5. Epigraphia Indica was first issued in which year?**

- (A) 1877
- (B) 1884
- (C) 1886
- (D) 1888

■ **Answer: (D) | 1888 — First issue of Epigraphia Indica. 1886 was Epigraphia Carnatica.**

**Q6. Which of the following was NOT a factor in Magadha's rise?**

- (A) Fertile agricultural land
- (B) Iron mines in Jharkhand
- (C) Naval dominance over the sea
- (D) Elephant forests

■ **Answer: (C) | Magadha's rise was due to agriculture, iron, elephants and rivers — not naval power.**

**Q7. Chandragupta Maurya founded the Mauryan Empire around:**

- (A) 600 BCE
- (B) 400 BCE
- (C) 321 BCE
- (D) 272 BCE

■ **Answer: (C) | 321 BCE — Chandragupta Maurya's accession marks the founding of the Mauryan Empire.**

**Q8. The Arthashastra is traditionally attributed to:**

- (A) Harishena
- (B) Megasthenes
- (C) Kautilya / Chanakya
- (D) Banabhatta

■ **Answer: (C) | Kautilya (also called Chanakya) was traditionally Chandragupta's minister.**

**Q9. Which provincial centre of the Mauryan Empire was in the south?**

- (A) Taxila
- (B) Ujjayini
- (C) Tosali
- (D) Suvarnagiri

■ **Answer: (D) | Suvarnagiri ('golden mountain') was important for Karnataka's gold mines.**

**Q10. The Mauryan Empire lasted approximately:**

- (A) 50 years
- (B) 100 years
- (C) 150 years
- (D) 300 years

■ **Answer: (C) | About 150 years — not very long in the vast span of subcontinent's history.**

**Q11. Kalinga (conquered by Asoka) corresponds to present-day:**

- (A) Bihar
- (B) Madhya Pradesh
- (C) Coastal Orissa
- (D) Karnataka

■ **Answer: (C) | Kalinga is present-day coastal Orissa. The conquest caused great anguish to Asoka.**

**Q12. The title 'Devaputra' (son of god) was used by which dynasty?**

- (A) Mauryas
- (B) Kushanas
- (C) Guptas
- (D) Satavahanas

■ **Answer: (B) | Kushana rulers adopted 'devaputra' to claim divine status, similar to Chinese 'sons of heaven'.**

**Q13. The Prayaga Prashasti was composed by:**

- (A) Banabhatta
- (B) Kalidasa
- (C) Harishena
- (D) Bharavi

■ **Answer: (C) | Harishena was court poet of Samudragupta; he composed the Prayaga/Allahabad Pillar Inscription.**

**Q14. Prabhavati Gupta was the daughter of:**

- (A) Samudragupta
- (B) Chandragupta I
- (C) Chandragupta II
- (D) Kumaragupta

■ **Answer: (C) | Prabhavati Gupta was daughter of Chandragupta II and wife of Vakataka ruler Rudrasena II.**

**Q15. Agrahara refers to:**

- (A) Military land grant
- (B) Tax-free land grant to Brahmanas
- (C) Grant to Kshatriyas
- (D) Trade-route tax

■ **Answer: (B) | Agrahara: land granted to Brahmanas, exempted from royal revenue, with right to collect dues.**

**Q16. The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea was written by:**

- (A) Megasthenes
- (B) An anonymous Greek sailor
- (C) Harishena
- (D) Strabo

■ **Answer: (B) | Written by an anonymous Greek sailor c. first century CE. 'Erythraean' is the Greek name for Red Sea.**

**Q17. Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW) was associated with:**

- (A) Common peasants
- (B) Buddhist monks only
- (C) Rich urban people
- (D) Pastoral nomads

■ **Answer: (C) | NBPW with glossy finish was found at archaeological sites — used by elites in urban centres.**

**Q18. Punch-marked coins were first minted approximately:**

- (A) 1000 BCE
- (B) 600 BCE
- (C) 300 BCE
- (D) 100 CE

■ **Answer: (B) | Silver and copper punch-marked coins from c. sixth century BCE are among the earliest minted.**

**Q19. Who first issued coins bearing the names and images of rulers?**

- (A) Mauryas
- (B) Satavahanas
- (C) Indo-Greeks
- (D) Kushanas

■ **Answer: (C) | Indo-Greeks were the first to bear names and images of rulers on coins, c. second century BCE.**

**Q20. Kushanas issued the largest hoards of which type of coins?**

- (A) Silver
- (B) Copper
- (C) Bronze
- (D) Gold

■ **Answer: (D) | Kushanas issued the largest hoards of gold coins c. first century CE, matching Roman and Parthian coins in weight.**

**Q21. The Jatakas were written in which language?**

- (A) Sanskrit
- (B) Pali
- (C) Prakrit
- (D) Tamil

■ **Answer: (B) | Jatakas were written in Pali around the middle of the first millennium CE.**

**Q22. Vajji Sangha is an example of which form of government?**

- (A) Theocracy
- (B) Monarchy
- (C) Oligarchy
- (D) Military republic

■ **Answer: (C) | Oligarchy: power exercised by a group of men (rajas) collectively, not a single king.**

**Q23. The term 'Gahapati' in Pali texts refers to:**

- (A) A military commander
- (B) A religious priest
- (C) Owner/head of household and wealthy landholder
- (D) A forest dweller

■ **Answer: (C) | Gahapati: owner/master of household with control over land, animals, workers, slaves.**

**Q24. Iron-tipped ploughshares were most productive in which region?**

- (A) Semi-arid Punjab
- (B) Deccan plateau
- (C) Hilly northeast
- (D) Fertile alluvial valleys of Ganga and Kaveri

■ **Answer: (D) | Iron ploughshares dramatically increased paddy production in alluvial river valleys.**

**Q25. The Manusmriti was compiled approximately between:**

- (A) 600-400 BCE
- (B) Second century BCE - second century CE
- (C) 400-600 CE
- (D) 100-300 CE

■ **Answer: (B) | Manusmriti is one of the best-known legal texts, compiled c. second century BCE - second century CE.**

**Q26. Which Gupta ruler's achievements are described in the Prayaga Prashasti?**

- (A) Chandragupta I
- (B) Chandragupta II
- (C) Samudragupta
- (D) Skandagupta

■ **Answer: (C) | Samudragupta — Harishena describes him as without an antagonist on earth.**

**Q27. D.C. Sircar published 'Indian Epigraphy and Indian Epigraphical Glossary' in:**

- (A) 1938
- (B) 1950
- (C) 1960
- (D) 1965-66

■ **Answer: (D) | 1965-66 — D.C. Sircar's publication is a landmark twentieth-century contribution to epigraphy.**

**Q28. In early Buddhist texts, which of these is mentioned as a mahajanapada?**

- (A) Kanchi
- (B) Varanasi only
- (C) Vajji
- (D) Dwarka

■ **Answer: (C) | Vajji is one of the frequently mentioned mahajanapadas in early Buddhist and Jaina texts.**

**Q29. What does the term 'Janapada' literally mean?**

- (A) Capital city
- (B) Land where a jana (people/tribe) plants its feet
- (C) River valley
- (D) Fortified settlement

■ **Answer: (B) | Janapada: jana = people/tribe + pada = foot — land settled by a people. Used in Prakrit and Sanskrit.**

**Q30. Rajagaha (Rajgir) was the capital of which ancient state?**

- (A) Kosala
- (B) Vajji
- (C) Magadha
- (D) Avanti

■ **Answer: (C) | Rajagaha means 'house of the king' in Prakrit. It was Magadha's capital before Pataliputra.**

**SECTION 2 : Fill in the Blanks**

Total: 20 Questions | Write the correct word/phrase in the blank

Q1. The script used in most Asokan inscriptions was \_\_\_\_\_.

■ Answer: Brahmi

Q2. James Prinsep deciphered Asokan Brahmi in the year \_\_\_\_\_.

■ Answer: 1838

Q3. Asoka called himself '\_\_\_\_\_', meaning 'beloved of gods'.

■ Answer: Devanampiya / Devanampiya Piyadassi

Q4. The Mauryan Empire was founded by \_\_\_\_\_ around 321 BCE.

■ Answer: Chandragupta Maurya

Q5. The \_\_\_\_\_ was a Greek ambassador at the court of Chandragupta Maurya.

■ Answer: Megasthenes

Q6. Kalinga (present-day coastal Orissa) was conquered by king \_\_\_\_\_.

■ Answer: Asoka

Q7. The title '\_\_\_\_\_' meaning 'son of god' was adopted by Kushana rulers.

■ Answer: Devaputra

Q8. The Prayaga Prashasti was composed by the court poet \_\_\_\_\_ in praise of Samudragupta.

■ Answer: Harishena

Q9. A tax-free land grant to a Brahmana was called \_\_\_\_\_.

■ Answer: Agrahara

Q10. \_\_\_\_\_ were organisations of craft producers and merchants in early Indian cities.

■ Answer: Guilds / Shrenis

Q11. The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea was written by an anonymous \_\_\_\_\_ sailor.

■ Answer: Greek

Q12. \_\_\_\_\_ were the first rulers to issue coins bearing the names and images of rulers.

■ Answer: Indo-Greeks

Q13. The Jatakas were written in \_\_\_\_\_ language.

■ Answer: Pali

Q14. The study of inscriptions is known as \_\_\_\_\_.

■ Answer: Epigraphy

Q15. Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW) with a glossy finish was used by \_\_\_\_\_ people.

■ Answer: Rich / Urban elites

Q16. \_\_\_\_\_ is the study of coins including visual elements and metallurgical analysis.

■ Answer: Numismatics

Q17. The initial capital of Magadha was \_\_\_\_\_, later shifted to Pataliputra.

■ Answer: Rajagaha / Rajgir

Q18. Land grants were usually recorded on \_\_\_\_\_ plates.

■ **Answer: Copper**

Q19. Prabhavati Gupta was the daughter of Chandragupta II and issued a land grant in the village of \_\_\_\_\_.

■ **Answer: Danguna**

Q20. The early state Vajji was an example of \_\_\_\_\_, where power was exercised by a group of men.

■ **Answer: Oligarchy**



**SECTION 3 : One Word / One Sentence Answer Type**

Total: 20 Questions | Answer in one word or one sentence

Q1. What does the term 'epigraphy' mean?

■ **Answer: The study of inscriptions.**

Q2. In which year was the Asiatic Society of Bengal founded?

■ **Answer: 1784.**

Q3. What does 'Piyadassi' mean?

■ **Answer: Pleasant to behold (title used by Asoka).**

Q4. Name the Greek ambassador at Chandragupta Maurya's court.

■ **Answer: Megasthenes.**

Q5. What is an Agrahara?

■ **Answer: A tax-free land grant given to a Brahmana, who also received the right to collect dues from local people.**

Q6. What script was used in northwest India for Asokan inscriptions?

■ **Answer: Kharosthi.**

Q7. Who compiled the Arthashastra?

■ **Answer: Kautilya / Chanakya (traditionally).**

Q8. Name the five major political centres of the Mauryan Empire.

■ **Answer: Pataliputra, Taxila, Ujjayini, Tosali, Suvarnagiri.**

Q9. What is Numismatics?

■ **Answer: The study of coins, including visual elements, scripts, images, metallurgical analysis, and contexts.**

Q10. What does 'Janapada' literally mean?

■ **Answer: Land where a jana (people/tribe) plants its foot.**

Q11. Which dynasty issued the largest hoards of gold coins in ancient India?

■ **Answer: Kushanas (c. first century CE).**

Q12. What were the Jatakas and in which language were they written?

■ **Answer: Jatakas were Buddhist texts containing popular stories/tales, written in Pali.**

Q13. What term was used for a powerful head of a household who controlled land, workers, and animals?

■ **Answer: Gahapati.**

Q14. Name the court poet who composed the Prayaga Prashasti.

■ **Answer: Harishena.**

Q15. In which script were Asokan inscriptions in the northwest written?

■ **Answer: Kharosthi.**

Q16. What was the original capital of Magadha before Pataliputra?

■ **Answer: Rajagaha (present-day Rajgir, Bihar).**

Q17. Who were Dhamma Mahamattas?

■ **Answer: Special officers appointed by Asoka to spread the message of dhamma.**

Q18. What does 'Devaputra' mean?

■ **Answer: Son of god — title adopted by Kushana rulers.**

Q19. Name one important limitation of inscriptional evidence.

■ **Answer: Inscriptions focus on grand events, not daily life; routine agricultural practices and personal experiences are not recorded.**

Q20. What is the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea?

■ **Answer: A text by an anonymous Greek sailor (c. first century CE) describing trade on the Malabar coast and beyond.**

**SECTION 4 : Short Answer Type Questions (3-5 marks)**

Total: 20 Questions | Answer in 80-150 words | CBSE / Board Exam Standard

**Q1. Why is James Prinsep's contribution significant for Indian history?**

Ans: James Prinsep, an officer at the Calcutta Mint, deciphered both Brahmi and Kharosthi scripts in 1838. This was momentous because it opened up Asokan inscriptions to study — revealing for the first time the existence of a king named 'Piyadassi' (later identified as Asoka). It enabled historians to reconstruct early Indian political history and understand the Mauryan Empire. Without his work, thousands of inscriptions would have remained unreadable.

**Q2. What were the factors responsible for Magadha becoming the most powerful Mahajanapada?**

Ans: Several geographical and political factors contributed: (1) Fertile agricultural land in Bihar enabled productive crops. (2) Iron mines in Jharkhand provided resources for tools and weapons. (3) Elephant forests gave a critical military advantage. (4) The Ganga and its tributaries offered cheap transport and communication. (5) Ambitious and strategic kings — Bimbisara, Ajatasattu, Mahapadma Nanda — consolidated power through policy. Early Buddhist and Jaina writers emphasised royal policy; modern historians add geographical-economic factors.

**Q3. What were the limitations of inscriptional evidence as a historical source?**

Ans: Inscriptional evidence has several limitations: (1) Technical: letters may be faintly engraved, inscriptions damaged, letters missing, reconstructions uncertain. (2) Linguistic: exact meaning of words unclear; scholars constantly debate alternative readings. (3) Content bias: inscriptions project the perspective of those who commissioned them — kings and elites. Routine life (agriculture, joys, sorrows) is not recorded. (4) Scope: thousands discovered but not all deciphered; many more must have existed but perished — available evidence is only a fraction. (5) Context: epigraphy alone cannot provide full economic or social history.

**Q4. Explain the significance of the Mauryan provincial centres. Why was administrative control uneven?**

Ans: The Mauryan Empire had five major political centres: capital Pataliputra and provincial centres Taxila (NW), Ujjayini (W), Tosali (E/Orissa), and Suvarnagiri (S, for Karnataka's gold mines). These were carefully chosen on important long-distance trade routes. However, control was uneven because the empire's regions were too diverse — from hilly Afghanistan to coastal Orissa. Administrative control was strongest near the capital and provincial centres. Historians increasingly accept that the empire lacked a truly uniform system; the empire was bound together by dhamma, military strength, and trade networks rather than uniform bureaucracy.

**Q5. How did kings in the post-Mauryan period claim high status? Give examples.**

Ans: Post-Mauryan kings used several strategies: (1) Divine identification — Kushana rulers adopted 'Devaputra' (son of god); colossal statues installed at shrines in Mathura (near Mathura) with divine imagery. Coins showed king on obverse, deity on reverse. (2) Prashastis — eulogistic poetry praising kings; Prayaga Prashasti praised Samudragupta as 'without an antagonist on earth'. (3) Association with Brahmanical traditions — Gupta rulers performed yajnas, patronised Sanskrit literature. (4) Land grants — inscriptions legitimised authority over new territories. These strategies helped establish legitimacy, especially for dynasties of obscure or foreign origin.

**Q6. What was the significance of land grants in early Indian history? Why do historians debate their purpose?**

Ans: Land grants (especially copper plate grants) increased significantly from the early centuries CE. They were given to religious institutions or Brahmanas (agrahara grants) — tax-free land with rights to collect local dues. Significance: (1) Evidence of agrarian expansion into new areas. (2) Created new rural elites who wielded power locally. (3) Prabhavati Gupta's grant shows women queens could also make grants — exceptional given Sanskrit legal texts' restrictions on women. Historians debate purpose: (a) Strategy to extend agriculture — kings encouraging development. (b) Sign of weakening royal power — kings losing control over samantas, compensating with land grants to buy loyalty. Both interpretations have merit.

**Q7. Describe the role of trade and traders in early India with reference to the Periplus.**

Ans: From the sixth century BCE, trade routes crisscrossed the subcontinent — overland to Central Asia, maritime through the Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal. Traders included peddlers on foot, merchants with bullock carts, and seafarers. Successful merchants were designated minsattuvan (Tamil) or setthi and satthavaha (Prakrit). The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea (anonymous Greek sailor, c. first century CE) describes Malabar coast trade: foreign traders sent large ships for pepper, malabathrum, cinnamon, ivory, silk, diamonds, and other goods. Roman coins found in south India confirm extensive cross-cultural trade networks. Kings controlled routes and collected taxes.

**Q8. What was the role of coinage in the economic development of early India?**

Ans: Coinage facilitated exchanges across the subcontinent. Punch-marked coins (silver and copper, c. sixth century BCE) were among the earliest. Numismatists studied these to reconstruct commercial networks. Indo-Greeks first put rulers' names and images on coins (c. second century BCE), establishing a tradition. Kushanas issued the largest hoards of gold coins matching Roman and Parthian coins in weight — indicating extensive long-distance trade. Gupta gold coins were remarkable for purity. Tribal republics like Yaudheyas also issued copper coins. From sixth century CE, gold coin finds taper — possibly indicating trade shifts or economic changes.

**Q9. Explain the features of a 'chief' as different from a 'king' in early Indian context.**

Ans: A chief was a powerful man who may or may not be hereditary. Functions included performing special rituals, leadership in warfare, and arbitrating disputes. Unlike kings, chiefs received gifts from subordinates (not taxes) and distributed these among supporters. There were no regular armies or bureaucracies in chiefdoms. Power depended on personal prestige and kin networks. Kings, by contrast, collected regular taxes, maintained standing armies and bureaucracies, and claimed more formalised sovereignty. When chiefdoms acquired power, they often adopted royal titles and claimed divine status — as the Satavahanas and Shakas did.

**Q10. How do Jataka stories help us understand the relationship between kings and ordinary people?**

Ans: Jatakas are Buddhist texts compiled in Pali (c. middle of first millennium CE), originally from popular oral traditions. The Gandatindu Jataka describes the plight of a wicked king's subjects — elderly women and men, cultivators, herders, village boys, even animals — all cursed the king when he went in disguise. They complained of robbers at night and tax collectors during the day, and many fled to the forest. This reveals that: (1) Kings were perceived as oppressive by rural populations. (2) High taxes were a major grievance. (3) The relationship between kings and rural people was often tense. (4) Forest represented an escape from state control. This source gives us rare insight into popular perceptions — unlike official inscriptions.

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*Continuing Short Answer Questions...*

**Q11. What does the Sudarshana Lake inscription tell us about the Mauryan and later administrations?**

Ans: The Sudarshana Lake (Gujarat) inscription is a rock inscription (c. second century CE) in Sanskrit, composed to record achievements of the Shaka ruler Rudradaman. It mentions the lake with embankments and water channels was built during the Mauryas by a local governor. A terrible storm broke the embankments. Rudradaman claimed to have repaired the lake using his own resources without imposing any tax. A fifth-century inscription records how a Gupta dynasty ruler repaired it again. This inscription is significant as: (1) It documents continuity of administrative concern for irrigation across dynasties. (2) Rulers used such inscriptions to project benevolence and capacity. (3) It shows royal investment in infrastructure as a tool of legitimacy.

**Q12. Explain the social hierarchy in early Indian villages as revealed by textual sources.**

Ans: Textual sources reveal significant differentiation: (1) Large landholders (gahapatis) exercised control over women, children, slaves and workers — owned land, animals, other resources. (2) Village headmen (often hereditary) were powerful, exercising control over other cultivators. (3) Small peasants and landless labourers at lower levels. (4) Buddhist texts use 'gahapati' for second and third categories. (5) Sangam literature mentions: landowners/vellalar, ploughmen/uzhavar, slaves/adimai. (6) Pastoralists, fisherfolk, hunter-gatherers, shifting cultivators existed beyond state reach — rarely kept detailed records. Land grants created new hierarchies as Brahmana grantees received rights over local communities.

## ■ SECTION 5 : Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Total: 20 FAQs | Deep conceptual answers | Hindi-English mixed discussion

### FAQ 1: What is epigraphy and why is it important for reconstructing Indian history?

Ans: Epigraphy is the study of inscriptions — writings engraved on hard surfaces like stone, metal or pottery. It is crucial for Indian history because: written manuscripts decay, but stone inscriptions survive for millennia. They provide direct evidence of rulers' policies (Asoka's dhamma), administrative systems, trade donations, land grants, and religious practices. Early inscriptions in Prakrit (not Sanskrit) reveal the language of ordinary communication. Without epigraphy, we would know very little about the Mauryan Empire or Asoka's actual policies. However, epigraphic evidence has its limits — it doesn't capture daily life, agriculture, or the experiences of common people.

### FAQ 2: Why did Asoka use the titles 'Devanampiya' and 'Piyadassi' instead of his personal name?

Ans: This was a common royal tradition — rulers used formal titles rather than personal names in official inscriptions to project a universal royal identity. 'Devanampiya' (beloved of gods) asserted divine favour, while 'Piyadassi' (pleasant to behold) projected a benevolent image. Asoka's name appears in some later inscriptions connecting him to these titles, allowing epigraphists to identify him. The use of titles also meant inscriptions could represent an ideal of kingship beyond any individual ruler.

### FAQ 3: How did the Mauryan Empire maintain control over such a vast territory?

Ans: The Mauryas used multiple mechanisms: (1) Provincial system — five major centres (Pataliputra, Taxila, Ujjayini, Tosali, Suvarnagiri) on key trade routes. (2) Officials — Megasthenes describes committees managing river superintendence, land measurement, transport, soldiers, provisions. (3) Dhamma — Asoka propagated moral principles through inscriptions; Dhamma Mahamattas were special officers to spread dhamma. (4) Trade routes — controlling long-distance routes meant economic power and communication. However, control was not uniform across such a diverse empire, and by the second century BCE new kingdoms had emerged in many regions.

### FAQ 4: What was the significance of the Kushana Empire in Indian history?

Ans: The Kushanas (c. first century BCE - first century CE) ruled a vast kingdom from Central Asia to northwest India. Their significance: (1) They were the first to systematically put rulers' images on coins and identify with deities — 'devaputra' title. (2) They facilitated Silk Road trade connecting China, India, Central Asia and Rome — gold coins identical in weight to Roman and Parthian coins. (3) Patronage of Buddhism — Kanishka is associated with a Buddhist council. (4) Cultural synthesis — Greek, Iranian and Indian elements combined. (5) Their history is largely reconstructed from inscriptions, coins and sculpture — showing the importance of material evidence.

### FAQ 5: Why do historians debate the purpose of land grants in early India?

Ans: Historians debate because the same evidence (land grant inscriptions) supports two contrasting interpretations. First view: land grants were a strategy to extend agriculture to new areas — kings encouraging Brahmanas and others to develop uncultivated land, thus expanding the agrarian economy and the tax base. Second view: land grants indicate weakening royal power — kings losing control over samantas (local lords), trying to win allies by granting land. Evidence for both: some grants are in settled areas (suggesting reward/allegiance), others in forest/new areas (suggesting agricultural expansion). Most historians now accept both processes may have operated simultaneously in different regions and periods.

**FAQ 6: How did early Indian cities function economically and socially?**

Ans: Urban centres from the sixth century BCE served multiple functions: (1) Political — many were mahajanapada capitals, centres of administration and royal power. (2) Commercial — located on riverine or land routes, facilitating trade. Short votive inscriptions name donors by occupation: weavers, washers, scribes, carpenters, potters, goldsmiths, blacksmiths, merchants, kings. (3) Craft production — guilds (shrenis) procured raw materials, regulated production, marketed products; they also sometimes functioned as banking institutions. (4) Religious — donations to shrines and monasteries recorded. Northern Black Polished Ware found at urban sites indicates a wealthy consuming class. Mathura was especially important as a commercial, cultural and political centre.

**FAQ 7: What role did iron technology play in early Indian economic history?**

Ans: Iron technology had a transformative impact: (1) Iron-tipped ploughshares allowed cultivation of hard alluvial soils in the Ganga and Kaveri valleys (from c. sixth century BCE), dramatically increasing paddy production through transplantation. (2) Iron tools and weapons gave Magadha military and economic advantages. (3) However, adoption was uneven — semi-arid Punjab and Rajasthan didn't adopt iron ploughshare cultivation until the 20th century; hilly tracts continued hoe agriculture. (4) Iron-tipped ploughshares led to growing differentiation — large landholders and gahapatis benefited more than small peasants. The benefits of new technology were socially unequal.

**FAQ 8: How do historians use coins as historical evidence?**

Ans: Numismatics (study of coins) provides multiple types of evidence: (1) Political — coins bearing rulers' names and images help identify dynasties and dates. (2) Economic — the spread of coin finds indicates commercial networks; quality of gold in Gupta coins indicates prosperity; tapering of gold coins from sixth century CE may indicate economic shifts. (3) Cultural — images on coins reveal divine associations (Kushana coins: king on obverse, deity on reverse), artistic styles, and cultural connections. (4) Chronology — coins help date archaeological layers. (5) Trade connections — coins found far from their origin (Roman coins in south India) indicate long-distance trade.

**FAQ 9: What can we learn from Prabhavati Gupta's inscription about women and land grants?**

Ans: Prabhavati Gupta's Danguna village inscription (copper plate) is remarkable for several reasons: (1) She was a queen — daughter of Chandragupta II and wife of Vakataka ruler Rudrasena II. (2) She commanded the householders and peasants of the village, which was unusual for a woman. (3) Sanskrit legal texts did not normally allow women independent access to resources like land. Her situation was exceptional because of her royal status. (4) The inscription indicates that the provisions of legal texts were not uniformly implemented. (5) It shows that women of royal families could exercise power and make grants, challenging assumptions about women's legal status in early India.

**FAQ 10: Why did early Indian kings claim divine status and what were the methods used?**

Ans: Claiming divine status served several political purposes: (1) Legitimacy — especially important for rulers of foreign or unclear origin (Kushanas from Central Asia, Shakas from Central Asia). (2) Superiority over rivals — divine descent made a ruler's authority unquestionable. (3) Social integration — identification with popular deities brought religious constituencies on board. Methods included: installing colossal statues with divine imagery in shrines; adopting titles like 'Devaputra' or 'Maharajadhiraja'; having court poets compose prashastis associating rulers with gods (Samudragupta as Purusha, Kubera, Varuna, Indra, Yama); performing brahmanical yajnas; patronising religious institutions.

**FAQ 11: What do the Jatakas and Panchatantra tell us about popular perceptions of kings?**

Ans: The Jatakas (Pali, c. first millennium CE) and Panchatantra contain stories that probably originated as popular oral tales, giving rare insight into how ordinary people viewed rulers. The Gandatindu Jataka shows subjects cursing a wicked king, fleeing to the forest to escape tax collectors and robbers — revealing: (1) Kings were often perceived as oppressive. (2) High taxes were the primary grievance of the rural poor. (3) Forest offered refuge from state control. (4) The relationship between kings and subjects, especially rural population, could be very tense. These texts contrast with official inscriptions which always present kings positively — together they give a more balanced picture of early Indian society.

**FAQ 12: How did the decline of the Mauryan Empire lead to new political formations?**

Ans: After the Mauryan collapse (c. 185 BCE), the subcontinent saw fragmentation and new formations: (1) In the northwest, Indo-Greek kingdoms controlled regions that had been Mauryan — their bilingual coins (Greek and Kharosthi) helped decipher the northwest script. (2) Satavahanas emerged in the Deccan and central India, ruling c. second century BCE to second century CE, bridging north-south connections. (3) Shakas (Central Asian origin) established kingdoms in northwestern India. (4) In the south, Cholas, Cheras and Pandyas of Tamilakam proved stable and prosperous. (5) These new kingdoms adapted Mauryan administrative ideas but developed different notions of kingship — more divine, more decentralised, more dependent on land grants and samantas.



## ■ SECTION 6 : CBSE Important Questions (Board Exam Pattern)

Total: 20 Questions | Source-based, Short Essay & Long Essay | Based on CBSE Pattern

**CBSE Q1. 'Epigraphists have translated the term pattivedaka as reporter.' In what ways would the functions of the pattivedaka have been different from those we generally associate with reporters today? (CBSE-style Source Based)**

Model Answer: The pattivedaka was an official (mentioned in Asokan inscriptions, Source 10) who was required to report to the king about the affairs of people at all times — while the king was eating, in the inner apartment, in the bedroom, in the cow-pen, being carried (in palanquin), or in the garden. This was a government official reporting to the king. Modern reporters are journalists who report to the public, maintaining independence and freedom of press. Key differences: (1) The pattivedaka served the king exclusively; modern reporters serve public interest. (2) Pattivedakas had no concept of press freedom. (3) Access was unlimited to the king but not to the public. (4) Modern reporters investigate independently; pattivedakas were appointed officers. The term 'reporter' is thus only partially appropriate.

**CBSE Q2. Discuss the evidence of craft production in Early Historic cities. In what ways is this different from the evidence from Harappan cities? (100-150 words)**

Model Answer: Early Historic cities show craft production through: (1) Archaeological finds — fine pottery (Northern Black Polished Ware), ornaments, figurines, tools, weapons in gold, silver, copper, bronze, ivory, glass, shell and terracotta. (2) Short votive inscriptions naming craftspersons by occupation — weavers, carpenters, potters, goldsmiths, blacksmiths. (3) Guild (shreni) systems that procured raw materials, regulated production, and marketed products. Difference from Harappan cities: Harappan craft evidence is purely archaeological — standardised weights, specialised craft areas, but no textual records identifying specific craftspeople or their organisations. Early Historic evidence combines archaeological and epigraphic sources, allowing us to identify social categories and economic organisations. Harappan script remains undeciphered, so we lack the direct naming of crafts and craftspeople that Early Historic inscriptions provide.

**CBSE Q3. Describe the salient features of Mahajanapadas. (100-150 words)**

Model Answer: Key features of Mahajanapadas: (1) Emerged c. sixth century BCE across the subcontinent — 16 major ones mentioned in early Buddhist and Jaina texts. (2) Frequently mentioned: Vajji, Magadha, Koshala, Kuru, Panchala, Gandhara, Avanti. (3) Two forms of government: oligarchies (power shared by a group of rajas, e.g., Vajji) and monarchies. (4) Had fortified capital cities — providing security and serving as centres of administration and trade. (5) Maintained regular armies and bureaucracies. (6) Collected taxes from cultivators, traders and artisans. (7) Resources also came from pastoralists, forest peoples, and raids on neighbouring states. (8) Brahmanical texts (Dharmasutras) advised rulers on ideal governance. (9) Magadha became most powerful by the fourth century BCE.

**CBSE Q4. How do historians reconstruct the lives of ordinary people in early India? (100-150 words)**

Model Answer: Historians use multiple strategies: (1) Jataka stories (Pali, c. first millennium CE) — originally popular oral tales — describe the lives of cultivators, herders, village boys, artisans and women. (2) Votive inscriptions in cities mention donors by occupation — washers, weavers, carpenters, merchants. (3) Land grant inscriptions describe rural categories: large landholders, small peasants, pastoralists. (4) Sangam literature in Tamil describes social categories: landlords (vellalar), ploughmen (uzhavar), slaves (adimai). (5) Buddhist texts use terms like 'gahapati' for wealthy householders and landless labourers. (6) Archaeological evidence — simple pottery, tools, domestic objects — supplement textual sources. The challenge is that inscriptions were commissioned by elites; ordinary people rarely left records of their own experiences.

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**CBSE Q5. List some of the problems faced by epigraphists. (100-150 words)**

Model Answer: Epigraphists face several problems: (1) Technical: inscriptions may be damaged, letters faintly engraved, parts missing — making reconstructions uncertain. (2) Linguistic: exact meaning of words is not always clear; some words may be specific to a particular place or time; alternative readings are constantly debated. (3) Scope: although several thousand inscriptions have been discovered, not all have been deciphered, published and translated. Many more must have existed but have not survived. What is available is probably only a fraction of what was inscribed. (4) Content bias: inscriptions project the perspective of those who commissioned them — usually kings and elites. Routine daily life, agriculture, and common people's experiences are absent. (5) Decipherment challenges: scripts like Harappan script remain undeciphered entirely.

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**CBSE Q6. Discuss the main features of Mauryan administration. What do you see as evident in the Asokan inscriptions you have studied? (500 words essay type — key points)**

Model Answer: Introduction: The Mauryan Empire (c. 321-185 BCE) is one of the best-documented early states due to Asoka's inscriptions, Megasthenes' account, and the Arthashastra. Main Features: (1) Centralised capital at Pataliputra with five provincial centres (Taxila, Ujjayini, Tosali, Suvarnagiri) on key trade routes. (2) Bureaucratic administration: Megasthenes describes committees — managing rivers, measuring land, inspecting sluices, supervising trades, collecting taxes, overseeing occupational groups. (3) Communication: land and river routes vital; journeys from centre to provinces could take weeks. (4) Military: large army — Greek accounts mention 600,000 foot-soldiers, 30,000 cavalry, 9,000 elephants (possibly exaggerated). Arthashastra describes six subcommittees for chariots, elephants, cavalry, foot-soldiers, provisions, and transport. (5) Dhamma policy: Asoka propagated dhamma — respect for elders, generosity to Brahmanas, kindness to slaves, respect for all religions. Dhamma Mahamattas were special officers. Evidence from Asokan Inscriptions: Asoka's inscriptions reveal: his concern for subjects' welfare in this world and the next; the system of pattedakas (reporters) keeping him informed at all times; his grief at the Kalinga war and subsequent adoption of dhamma over military conquest; administrative reach from Afghanistan to coastal Orissa. Limitations: Historians note the empire was not uniformly administered — too geographically diverse. Control was strongest near provincial centres. By second century BCE, new kingdoms had emerged, showing the empire's limits.

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**CBSE Q7. 'This is a statement made by one of the best-known epigraphists of the twentieth century, D.C. Sircar: There is no aspect of life, culture and activities of the Indians that is not reflected in inscriptions.' Do you agree? Discuss. (500 words — key points)**

Model Answer: Sircar's statement is an overstatement, though inscriptions are extremely valuable. What inscriptions DO capture: (1) Political history — royal genealogies, conquests, administrative systems. (2) Religious life — donations to Buddhist, Jaina and Hindu institutions; construction of shrines. (3) Economic activities — land grants, trade guild donations, merchant donations, taxation systems. (4) Social categories — occupational groups mentioned in votive inscriptions; Brahmanical social hierarchy in legal grants. (5) Cultural achievements — prashastis reveal literary traditions, Sanskrit poetry, royal patronage. What inscriptions do NOT adequately capture: (1) Daily life of ordinary people — agriculture, family life, personal experiences. (2) Women's perspectives — most inscriptions are male-authored or male-focused. (3) Non-elite communities — pastoralists, forest peoples, shifting cultivators, fisherfolk. (4) Economic fluctuations — routine market activities, prices, wages not recorded. (5) Dissent and resistance — people's opposition to rulers not in official inscriptions. Conclusion: Epigraphic evidence must be supplemented with coins, sculpture, literary texts (Jatakas, Sangam literature), and archaeological evidence for a complete picture. Sircar's enthusiasm reflects his field's importance but overstates inscriptions' comprehensiveness.

**CBSE Q8. Compare and contrast the list of things given to the Pandyan chief (Source 3) with those produced in the village of Danguna (Source 8). Do you notice any similarities or differences? (CBSE Source-based)**

Model Answer: Source 3 (Pandyan chief Senguttuvan's forest visit from Silappadikaram): Gifts brought — ivory, fragrant wood, fans, honey, sandalwood, red ochre, cardamom, pepper, coconuts, mangoes, medicinal plants, fruits, onions, sugarcane, flowers, arecanut, bananas, baby tigers, lions, elephants, monkeys, peacocks, musk cat, wild cocks, speaking parrots — forest and exotic animal products. Source 8 (Danguna village grant by Prabhavati Gupta): Village produces — grain, hay, wood, charcoal for soldiers and policemen; animals (hides and skins); royal officials' provisioning; salt, fermented liquors. Similarities: Both include agricultural/forest products; both show obligations to authorities. Differences: Pandyan chief receives luxury forest products (animals, spices, exotic goods) as gifts — showing tribute relationship. Danguna village provides subsistence and military supply items — showing revenue/administrative relationship. The Pandyan context reflects chiefdom economy; Danguna reflects an agrarian state economy with formal obligations.

**CBSE Q9. Discuss the notions of kingship that developed in the post-Mauryan period. (500 words — key points)**

Model Answer: After the Mauryan collapse (c. 185 BCE), new kingdoms developed more elaborate and diverse notions of kingship: (1) Divine Kingship: Kushanas adopted 'Devaputra' (son of god), installed colossal statues in shrines with divine imagery; coins showed king on obverse, deity on reverse. This divine association was crucial for legitimacy, especially for rulers of foreign (Central Asian) origin. (2) Prashasti tradition: court poets composed elaborate eulogies — Harishena's Prayaga Prashasti for Samudragupta described him as incomprehensible, possessor of compassion, giver of thousands of cows, equal to Kubera, Varuna, Indra and Yama. These were poetic, not factual, assertions of divine/heroic status. (3) Brahmanical legitimacy: performing yajnas, patronising Sanskrit learning, issuing land grants to Brahmanas — integrating kings into the varna system as ideal Kshatriyas. (4) Samantas: powerful subordinates who provided military support and homage; weak kings could see samantas become independent. By the fourth century CE, larger Gupta Empire shows kings dependent on networks of samantas and land grants. (5) Regional kingdoms (Cholas, Cheras, Pandyas): Tamil Sangam literature describes gift-giving relationships — chiefs received elaborate gifts (Source 3) and distributed them. This reflects a different model — chief as redistributor. In contrast to Mauryan relatively uniform kingship, post-Mauryan period shows greater regional diversity in how rulers legitimised authority.

**CBSE Q10. To what extent were agricultural practices transformed in the period under consideration (600 BCE - 600 CE)? (500 words — key points)**

Model Answer: Agricultural transformation was significant but uneven across the period: Technological Changes: (1) Iron-tipped ploughshare spread from c. sixth century BCE — enabled cultivation of hard alluvial soils in Ganga and Kaveri valleys. Dramatically increased paddy production through transplantation (seeds broadcast first, saplings transplanted to waterlogged fields — higher survival and yield). (2) However, adoption was limited — semi-arid Punjab and Rajasthan did not adopt iron ploughshare until 20th century; hilly tracts preferred hoe agriculture. Irrigation expansion: Communities and powerful individuals — including kings — organised construction of wells, tanks and canals. The Sudarshana Lake (Gujarat) is a famous example of state-sponsored irrigation — initially built during Mauryas, repaired by Shaka ruler Rudradaman and later by a Gupta ruler. Social Impact: Agricultural surplus led to growing differentiation — Buddhist texts mention landless labourers, small peasants, and large landholders (gahapatis). Land grants from early CE created new rural elites — Brahmana grantees received tax rights over local cultivators. Village headmen (often hereditary) became powerful intermediaries. State Demand: Growing tax demands drove production increases. Jataka stories reveal peasants' grievances about tax collectors. Pastoralists, hunter-gatherers, shifting cultivators and fisherfolk existed beyond the agrarian state's direct control — but were gradually brought within its orbit. Conclusion: Agricultural transformation was real but regionally varied, socially unequal, and driven by both technological innovation and state demand. It shaped the social hierarchies and political structures of early India.

**CBSE Q11. What was the significance of the discovery of Brahmi and Kharosthi scripts for Indian historiography? (3 marks)**

Model Answer: The decipherment of Brahmi (James Prinsep, 1838) and Kharosthi was transformative: (1) It opened thousands of Asokan inscriptions — previously unreadable — to historical analysis. (2) It revealed the existence of Asoka, who became central to understanding the Mauryan Empire. (3) It showed early Indian languages were Prakrit (not Sanskrit), changing understanding of ancient Indian society. (4) It enabled historians to reconstruct the political geography of the Mauryan Empire from rock edicts and pillar inscriptions. (5) It demonstrated that historical evidence could be extracted from material sources, not just literary texts — establishing archaeology as a discipline in India.

**CBSE Q12. Explain the term 'Dharmashastra' and its importance as a historical source. (3 marks)**

Model Answer: Dharmashastras (Sanskrit texts, composed by Brahmanas from c. sixth century BCE) laid down norms for rulers and for other social categories (ideally Kshatriyas as rulers). They advised rulers to collect taxes and tribute from cultivators, traders and artisans, and to procure resources from pastoralists and forest peoples. The Manusmriti is the best-known such text (compiled c. second century BCE - second century CE). Historical importance: (1) They reflect ideal Brahmanical society, not necessarily reality. (2) They reveal contested questions about land, boundaries, and social hierarchy. (3) The Manusmriti's advice on boundary markers (stones, bones, ash, potherds, etc.) reveals concern over land disputes. (4) They show Brahmanical attempts to integrate diverse social groups into a hierarchical order. Historians use them cautiously as prescriptive (what should be), not descriptive (what was).

**CBSE Q13. Describe the role of the Ganga and its tributaries in the rise of the Magadhan Empire. (3 marks)**

Model Answer: The Ganga and its tributaries played a crucial role: (1) Communication and transport: rivers provided the cheapest means of moving goods, armies and officials. The Ganga connected Pataliputra to the Bay of Bengal and beyond. (2) Economic fertility: the Ganga plains had among the most productive agricultural land in the subcontinent — supporting large populations and tax bases. (3) Strategic advantage: control of river routes meant control of long-distance trade and military movement. (4) Access to resources: tributaries like the Son and the Gandak connected Magadha to iron ore regions (Jharkhand) and elephant forests. (5) Pataliputra's location at the confluence of the Ganga, Son and Gandak rivers made it an almost impregnable capital and a natural trading hub.

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**CBSE Q14. 'The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea gives us valuable information about trade in early India.' Explain. (3 marks)**

Model Answer: The Periplus, written by an anonymous Greek sailor (c. first century CE), is a navigational manual describing trade along the Red Sea and Indian Ocean coasts. Its value for early Indian history: (1) It describes the Malabar coast (present-day Kerala) as a major entrepot where traders from abroad sent large ships for pepper, malabathrum, ivory, silk, pearls, diamonds, and other goods. (2) It lists both imports and exports — showing India's integration into a vast Eurasian trade network. (3) It names specific ports (like Barygaza/Bharuch in Gujarat). (4) Archaeological corroboration: Roman coins and amphorae found at south Indian sites confirm the trade described. (5) It shows the importance of maritime trade routes alongside land routes, and reveals how Indian merchants and seafarers were key participants in Indian Ocean trade networks.

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**CBSE Q15. How did the Gupta period mark both a continuation and change from earlier periods in terms of kingship and economy? (500 words — key points)**

Model Answer: Continuity with earlier periods: (1) Land grants continued — copper plate inscriptions from Gupta period show extensive agrahara and other grants to Brahmanas and religious institutions. (2) Long-distance trade continued — gold coins of high purity indicate continued prosperity and trade connections. (3) Brahmanical legitimacy continued — Gupta kings performed yajnas and patronised Sanskrit learning. (4) Provincial administration continued — though less centralised than Mauryas. Changes under the Guptas: (1) Prashasti tradition developed further — Harishena's Prayaga Prashasti is the most elaborate example, associating Samudragupta with multiple deities. (2) Sanskrit replaced Prakrit as the primary language of inscriptions — showing a cultural shift toward Brahmanical cultural dominance. (3) More elaborate court culture — Kalidasa, Aryabhata, other scholars flourished under Gupta patronage. (4) From c. sixth century CE, gold coin finds taper — possibly indicating economic disruption, perhaps from Western Roman Empire's decline affecting trade, or new economic patterns. (5) Growing importance of samantas (local lords) — Gupta kings increasingly dependent on these allies, prefiguring the later feudal system. Chandragupta II's daughter Prabhavati Gupta's Vakataka connection shows matrimonial alliances as a tool of expansion. Economic Assessment: Gupta period probably represented a high point of early Indian prosperity — archaeological sites yield elaborate objects, Sanskrit literature flourishes, and gold coins are found across a wide area. The subsequent tapering of gold coins and decline of urban centres in some areas may reflect genuine economic change rather than mere political fragmentation.

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**CBSE Q16. Examine the role of guilds (shrenis) in the economic life of early Indian cities. (3 marks)**

Model Answer: Guilds (shrenis in Sanskrit, various terms in Prakrit and Tamil) were organisations of craft producers and merchants in early Indian cities. Their functions: (1) Economic organisation: they procured raw materials collectively, regulated production to maintain quality, and marketed the finished product — functioning like modern trade associations. (2) Financial role: guilds sometimes functioned as banking institutions, accepting deposits and issuing credit. (3) Social role: votive inscriptions show guilds making donations to religious institutions — washers' guilds, weavers' guilds, merchants' guilds all recorded. (4) Quality control: regulating standards prevented competition from driving down quality. (5) Political role: powerful guilds sometimes mediated between the state and craftspeople. Their presence in inscriptions (e.g., Mathura, Sanchi, Amaravati) across different regions shows they were a subcontinent-wide phenomenon. They declined in significance after c. seventh century CE, possibly as trade networks changed.

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**CBSE Q17. 'Source-based learning is central to the study of CBSE Class XII History.' Using Sources 1, 10 and 11 from this chapter, explain how historians use primary sources critically. (Analytical Question)**

Model Answer: Source 1 (Megasthenes — king's officials) shows a Greek outsider's perspective on Mauryan administration. It describes committees managing rivers, land, transport and trades. Value: contemporary eyewitness; Limitation: foreigner's perspective, possible misunderstanding, Megasthenes may have exaggerated or misinterpreted. Source 10 (Orders of the king — Asoka) shows Asoka commanding pattivedakas to report at all times. Value: primary royal document; Limitation: projects king's ideal of governance, not necessarily reality; we can't verify if orders were followed. Source 11 (Anguish of the king — Asoka's Kalinga inscription) describes Asoka's remorse after Kalinga. Value: rare royal expression of regret; Limitation: historians debate whether this reflects genuine change or is political messaging; the inscription was not found in Kalinga itself (absent from the conquered region) — raising questions about intended audience. Critical approach: Historians cross-reference these three sources to triangulate: if Megasthenes describes efficient administration and Asoka claims welfare concern, but neither mentions resistance or failure, the gap suggests sources are systematically incomplete. Epigraphic evidence alone is thus insufficient — it must be combined with archaeological and literary sources.

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**CBSE Q18. What were the contributions of Alexander Cunningham to Indian archaeology and epigraphy? (3 marks)**

Model Answer: Alexander Cunningham (1814-1893) was a British Army officer and archaeologist who made foundational contributions: (1) Archaeological Survey: He founded the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) in 1861 and served as its first Director-General — institutionalising systematic archaeological investigation. (2) Asokan Inscriptions: In 1877 he published a comprehensive set of Asokan inscriptions, building on Prinsep's decipherment. (3) Site identification: Cunningham identified many key ancient sites mentioned in Chinese pilgrim accounts — including sites associated with the Buddha's life. (4) Coins: His numismatic studies helped date many dynasties. (5) Documentation: He travelled extensively across the subcontinent, recording inscriptions, coins, and monuments that might otherwise have been lost. Limitation: His approach was strongly influenced by Buddhist texts and colonial assumptions — sometimes leading him to overlook or misidentify sites. Later scholars have revised some of his identifications.

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**CBSE Q19. How do modern historians' approaches to early Indian history differ from those of nineteenth-century historians? (3 marks)**

Model Answer: Nineteenth-century historians (when Indian history was being 'reconstructed' under colonial rule): (1) Focused primarily on political history — kings, dynasties, conquests. (2) Regarded the Mauryan Empire as a major landmark, seeing it through the lens of British imperial parallels. (3) Were primarily interested in Sanskrit texts and Brahmanical traditions. (4) Treated inscriptions and texts largely as factual records. Modern historians: (1) Focus on social and economic history — trade networks, agricultural change, marginalised communities. (2) Question the reliability of sources — interrogate whose perspective they represent. (3) Use a wider range of sources — coins, archaeology, non-Sanskrit texts, oral traditions. (4) Are interested in women's history, history of lower castes, environmental history. (5) Recognise that epigraphic and literary sources are biased toward elites. (6) Engage with global comparative frameworks — situating Indian developments in Eurasian context. The shift from mid-twentieth century onwards has been toward histories of economic change, social differentiation, and marginalised groups.

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**CBSE Q20. Discuss any one example of how archaeological evidence and textual evidence complement each other in this chapter. (3 marks)**

Model Answer: Best example: Punch-marked coins and literary references to trade. Archaeological evidence: Thousands of punch-marked coins (silver and copper) have been found at archaeological sites across the subcontinent — dated c. sixth century BCE onwards. Their distribution patterns (studied by numismatists) show commercial networks radiating from urban centres. Textual evidence: Early Buddhist texts like the Jatakas mention setthi (wealthy merchants), trade routes, and commercial transactions. The Arthashastra discusses taxation of trade and regulation of markets. The Periplus describes international maritime trade. How they complement: Archaeological coin finds confirm the existence of the trade networks described in texts. Texts explain what the coins were used for and by whom. Coin hoard locations suggest where commercial centres were — confirmed by archaeological excavations at urban sites. Neither source alone is sufficient — coins don't tell us about social relationships in trade; texts don't always match archaeological distributions. Together they provide a richer picture of early Indian economic history.

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## ■ Quick Revision: Important Dates & Facts

| Date / Period      | Event                                                 |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| c. 600 BCE         | Rise of Mahajanapadas; iron tools; punch-marked coins |
| c. 500-400 BCE     | Rulers of Magadha consolidate power                   |
| c. 327-325 BCE     | Invasion of Alexander of Macedon                      |
| c. 321 BCE         | Accession of Chandragupta Maurya                      |
| c. 272/268-231 BCE | Reign of Asoka                                        |
| c. 185 BCE         | End of the Mauryan Empire                             |
| c. 78 CE (?)       | Accession of Kanishka (Kushana)                       |
| c. 320 CE          | Beginning of Gupta rule                               |
| c. 335-375 CE      | Samudragupta                                          |
| c. 375-415 CE      | Chandragupta II; Vakatakas in Deccan                  |
| 1784               | Founding of the Asiatic Society (Bengal)              |
| 1838               | James Prinsep deciphers Brahmi script                 |
| 1965-66            | D.C. Sircar publishes Indian Epigraphy                |

## ■ Key Terms at a Glance

| Term           | Meaning                                                                 |
|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Epigraphy      | Study of inscriptions                                                   |
| Mahajanapada   | Large territorial state (c. 600 BCE); 16 major ones                     |
| Oligarchy      | Government by a group of men (e.g., Vajji Sangha)                       |
| Agrahara       | Tax-free land grant to Brahmanas with right to collect local dues       |
| Gahapati       | Head of household; wealthy landholder / merchant (Pali term)            |
| Dhamma         | Asoka's moral code — respect, generosity, kindness, religious tolerance |
| Devaputra      | Son of god — Kushana royal title                                        |
| Prashasti      | Eulogistic court poetry praising kings                                  |
| Numismatics    | Study of coins — scripts, images, metallurgy, context                   |
| Samantas       | Local lords providing military support to kings                         |
| Shreni / Guild | Organisation of craftspeople / merchants in early cities                |
| Gahapati       | Head of household; owner of land, animals, workers                      |