

History-When, Where and How

Exercises

Long answer questions:

1. Discuss how India's geography has had an important role in shaping its history.
2. How have coins and inscriptions contributed to our knowledge of history?

Solutions

Long-answer questions:

1. Geography has a profound effect on the history of India. It is a peninsula and is bounded by the ocean on three sides. In the north are the great mountain systems which separate it from the rest of Asia. The high mountain passes allowed the Aryans to enter India and the Arab traders to visit India since 712 CE. But in 1001 CE, the Arab armies came to invade the Indian Territory through the Khyber Pass. Later, the Huns, Turks and Mughals invaded India. Each invasion brought in foreigners who brought with them their customs and culture and had an impact on the Indian culture. Also, these passes allowed links with China and Tibet, and Buddhism spread to these two countries, India's two great river systems, the Indus and the Ganges, have also played a role in shaping the history. The Harappan Civilization came up near the river Indus. The navigability of these rivers helped trade and commerce. The Himalayas have helped the northern plains to become more fertile by bringing enough rainfall. Cities came up where there were geographical advantages. Great cities like Prayag and Kanauj came up in the northern plains. Many wars were fought between kings to acquire the fertile lands near rivers. Towards the south of the northern plains lie the Vindhya Mountains. These prevented the invaders from getting access to the Deccan plateau which lies towards the south of these mountains.

The Deccan Plateau has non-perennial river systems. Scarcity of water led to the development of irrigation systems. The long coastline led to the rise of numerous ports which facilitated commerce.
2. Inscriptions are a very reliable source. Some inscriptions give detailed accounts about the political and religious activities of that time. Others are official, commemorative or historical. Many inscriptions have been found which tell us about the reign of the Cholas. The Uttaramerur inscription is an example.

Coins give useful information about a kingdom. The material used tells us about the economic condition of the kingdom and information of dates during which the particular kings ruled. We also get information about rulers and their relations with other empires. There is no dearth of literary sources as paper was first used in India during this period. Slowly the use of paper increased and it became easily available and was widely used by scribes and chroniclers who wrote by hand since printing had not been invented. These were called manuscripts and give us detailed information of the medieval period. These manuscripts were kept in temples, monasteries or with rulers. They formed the archives. These manuscripts provide detailed information but they are not without limitations also. Manuscripts were copied by hand and due to copying errors, the latest version was sometimes quite different from the original.