HISTORY

Vital Villages, Thriving Towns

Agricultural Production

Many kingdoms in ancient India flourished due to an increase in the agricultural production. The reasons which led to a substantial increase in the agricultural production are:

- The increasing use of iron helped in the growth of agricultural production. Iron tools such as axes helped in the clearing of forests and iron ploughshares were used for plowing the land.
- The system of transplantation of rice and irrigation works such as wells, canals, tanks etc. also led to an increase in the agricultural production.

The increasing use of iron tools increased the agricultural production

Villages and People

Villages were largely inhabited in the northern and southern part of the Indian subcontinent by mainly three kinds of people:

- In the Tamil region, the big land owners were known as vellalar. Uzhavar were the ordinary ploughmen while landless labourers including slaves were known as kadaisiyar andadimai.
- In the north, the head of the village was known as the grama bhojaka. He was the largest landowner and generally collected taxes for the king. He also employed several slaves and workers to work on his farm.
- The gram bhojaka also acted as a judge or policeman whenever the need arose.
- Independent farmers who owned small lands in the villages were known as grihpatis.
- There were many landless labourers in the villages who worked on the lands of big landowners. They were called dasakarmakaras.
- Many craftsmen such as potters, blacksmiths, weavers, spinners and carpenters also resided in the villages.

Farmers working as labourers in the lands of big land owners came to be known as dasakarmakaras

Cities in the Past

We get information about the various cities of the past from written and archaeological sources.

- The Jatakas were stories which were composed by ordinary people but were written down and preserved by the Buddhist monks.
- These stories throw light on the occupations, social and economic conditions of the people of those times.
- Many images and scenes illustrating the lives of the people living in villages and cities were carved as sculptures. These were an important source of the past.
- Many capital cities were surrounded by large walls and gates. These helped the archaeologists in understanding the geographical and economic condition of the cities of the past.

A punch marked coin

- In several houses of the cities, rows of pots or ceramic rings arranged on top of each other have been found. These are known as ring wells. They were probably used as drains or garbagedumps.
- The accounts left by early sailors and travellers who visited various cities also formed an important source of the past. One unknown Greek sailor has left an account of the port of Bharuch in Gujarat. He observed that in the ports, the ships were steered by skilled fishermen who were employed by the king. He also recorded that commodities such as copper, tin, lead, gold and silver coins were imported, while ivory, plants of the Himalayan region, cotton and silk wereexported.
- Several coins have been found by the archaeologists. The earliest coins which have been found were in use about 500 years ago. These were called punched marked coins as designs were punched onto themetal.
- The Northern Black Polished Ware, a type of pottery, has been excavated from many parts of Northern India. This gives us important information on the economic activities of the people at that time.
- Through various texts and manuscripts, we have come to know that the manufacture of cloth was animportant economic activity. Varanasi in the north and Madurai in the south were important cloth manufacturing centres.

Northern Black Polished Ware was so called as it was generally found in the northern region of the Indian subcontinent and was black in colour with a shinysurface

- Written evidences also tell us that variouscrafts persons and merchants had formed their own associations known as shrenis. These shrenis provided training related to trade practices to the people. They also arranged for raw materials and distributed finished goods to the people. People even deposited their money in these shrenis.

Mathura- A City which Performed Many Functions

Mathura was an important centre as it was located at a strategic position at a cross road leading from the northwest to the east and north to south. The city was fortified and is still known for fine pieces of sculptures.

Mathura became the second capital city of the Kushanas. It was later developed into a religious centre. Mathura had Buddhist monasteries, Jain shrines and many Hindu temples devouted to Lord Krishna.

Many inscriptions have been found on the stone and statues in Mathura. These contain written records of various gifts made by the kings, queens, merchants, officers etc. to the monasteries and shrines.
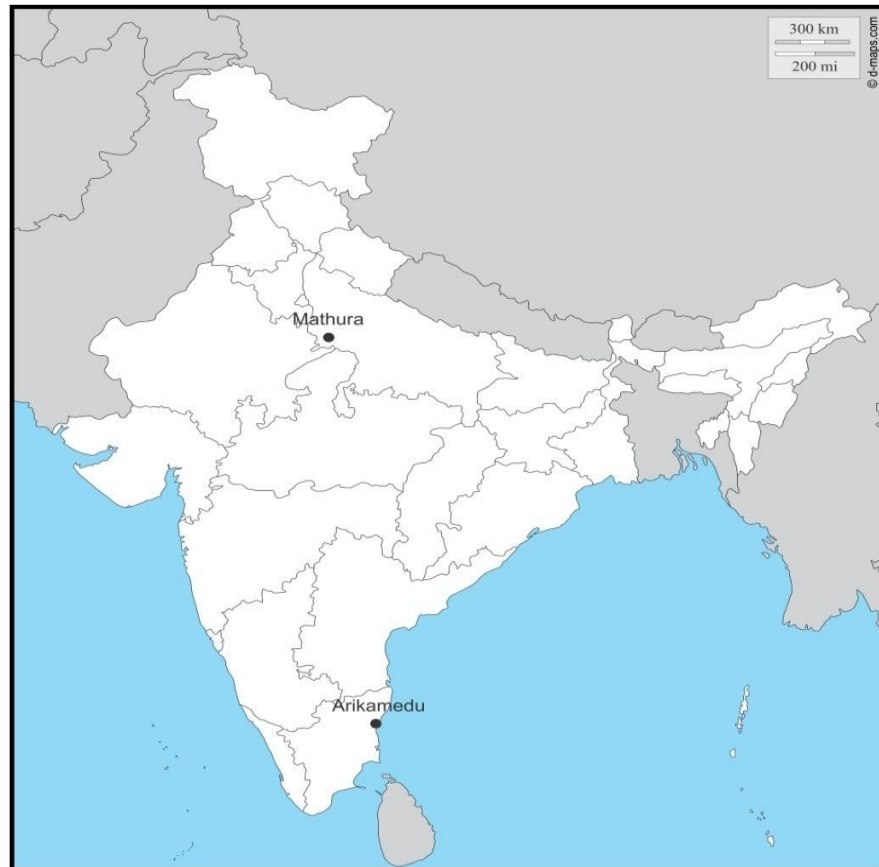
Mathura was a famous religious center in ancient India. It had Buddhist monasteries, Jain shrines and several temples devouted to Lord Krishna.

The Port of Arikamedu

Arikamedu is a port in Pondicherry which had a coastal settlement about 2,000 years ago. Many ships unloaded their goods here. The remains of a great warehouse have been discovered from this site. Many pots from the Mediterranean region such as amphorae, red glazed pottery (also known as Arretine Ware, named after a city in Italy) etc. have been found here. This pottery was made by pressing wet clay into a stamped mould. Many Roman lamps, glassware and gems have also been discovered at this site.

Small tanks have been found in Arikamedu, which were perhaps used to dye the cloth. Many beads were also made out of glass and semi-precious stones.

Map showing the city of Mathura and the port city of Arikamedu.

SangamLiterature

- Sangam literature refers to the earliest literary works in the Tamillanguage.
- These works were composed about 2300 yearsago.
- They are called Sangam as they were composed and compiled in assemblies of poets which were held in the city ofMadurai.
- They also form an important source of information of thisperiod.