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M.H.I.- 105

History Of Indian Economy-1: From Earliest Times To C.1700

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By: Kshiyama Sagar Meher



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MRP ₹ 300/-

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**Sample Preview
of the
Solved
Sample Question
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Sample
QUESTION PAPER - 1

(Solved)

**HISTORY OF INDIAN ECONOMY-1:
FROM EARLIEST TIMES TO C.1700**

M.H.I.-105

Time: 3 Hours]

[Maximum Marks : 100

Note: Answer any five of the following questions. All questions carry equal marks.

Q. 1. Take a journey to some potters' village or houses. Find out the techniques used by them.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-4, Page No. 20, Q. No. 2.

Q. 2. Analyse the process of penetration of Mughal revenue system in the Deccan.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-21, Page No. 124, Q. No. 1.

Q. 3. Enumerate the taxes other than land tax.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-20, Page No. 118, Q. No. 3.

Q. 4. Account for the recent trends in the economic history writings of ancient India.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-1, Page No. 3, Q. No. 5.

Q. 5. Explain *pariharas*. Analyse the *Pariharas* in the context of the *Brahmadeya* grants.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-13, Page No. 67, Q. No. 2.

Q. 6. Critically examine the changing pattern of the village community of medieval South India.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-18, Page No. 102, Q. No. 5.

Q. 7. In what respect was urbanization linked to trading activities? Discuss the issue in the context of the rise and growth of towns during 300 BCE-600 CE.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-7, Page No. 36, Q. No. 2.

Q. 8. On the basis of the Asokan edicts and the information provided in the Buddhist sources try to map-out the trading activities during the Mauryan period.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-8, Page No. 41, Q. No. 1.

Q. 9. Analyse recent developments in feudalism debate.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-10, Page No. 52, Q. No. 2.

Q. 10. Write short notes on the following:

(a) Environments of History.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-3, Page No. 13, 'Environments of History'.

(b) Roman Coins.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-9, Page No. 46, 'Roman Coins'.

(c) Landownership.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-12, Page No. 62, 'Landownership'.

(d) Navigation.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-24, Page No. 140, 'Navigation'.

■ ■

Sample
QUESTION PAPER - 2

(Solved)

**HISTORY OF INDIAN ECONOMY-1:
FROM EARLIEST TIMES TO C.1700**

M.H.I.-105

Time: 3 Hours]

[Maximum Marks : 100

Note: Answer any five of the following questions. All questions carry equal marks.

Q. 1. Discuss major approaches to study the medieval Indian economy.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-2, Page No. 8, Q. No. 1.

Q. 2. Write a note on the growth of textile industry in South India during 6-9th centuries CE.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-15, Page No. 81, Q. No. 6.

Q. 3. Discuss the characteristic features of neolithic-chalcolithic sites of the northwest and Rajasthan. In what ways they differ from Ash Mound traditions of the southern Deccan Plateau?

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-5, Page No. 27, Q. No. 2.

Q. 4. Examine the agrarian structure of the Sultanate period.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-17, Page No. 91, Q. No. 1.

Q. 5. Discuss the composition of the masses engaged in agricultural production in post-Gupta North India.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-12, Page No. 64, Q. No. 6.

Q. 6. Discuss the growth of crafts and industries during the Satavahana period.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-7, Page No. 37, Q. No. 4.

Q. 7. Critically analyse the interdependence of market and monetary exchange. What role did the state play in controlling the market forces during the medieval period?

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-23, Page No. 136, Q. No. 3.

Q. 8. How far the environment influenced the cropping pattern during the medieval period?

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-16, Page No. 86, Q. No. 3.

Q. 9. Analyse the nature of coastal trade in the 16-17th centuries.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-22, Page No. 131, Q. No. 3.

Q. 10. Write short notes on the following:

(a) Agrarian Economy.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-6, Page No. 30, 'Agrarian Economy'.

(b) Land Rights.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-13, Page No. 70, 'Q. No. 4.

(c) Artillery.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-24, Page No. 141, 'Artillery'.

(d) Women and Petty Commerce.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-28, Page No. 160, 'Women and Petty Commerce'.



Sample Preview of The Chapter

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HISTORY OF INDIAN ECONOMY-1: FROM EARLIEST TIMES TO C.1700

Economic Historiography of Early India

1

INTRODUCTION

The shift in focus from political or dynastic history towards an understanding of material culture and economic life has caused a wide range of themes such as revenue system and rural settlements to urbanization, trade, etc. to be published on the economic history of early India. In the 1950s and 1960s, D.D. Kosambi and R.S. Sharma began to explain change with reference to environment, technology and economic life. Their writings paved the way for visualizing ancient India in terms of stages in relation to the dominant social and economic patterns prevailing during the various periods. The early historical and the early medieval periods are the two broad phases of early India. While the Age of the Buddha is characterized by peasant production and urbanization, the Mauryan period is found to have been marked by state control of the economy.

Since the second half of the 20th century, the economic history of early India has been explained differently than the previous era. Traditionally, the Mauryan economy was seen in terms of centralized state control over all sectors of the economy. Recent studies, however, by moving away from traditional treatment of the sources and looking at the regional material cultures brought to light by archaeology, has changed our perception. Now, it is recognized that empires by their very nature accommodated varied social formations and differentiated spaces, accounting for the uneven depth of administration across regions. At the same time, the post-Mauryan periods is being understood as networks of trade and money economy and are not being identified only with urban growth.

CHAPTER AT A GLANCE

IDEAS AND ECONOMY

We can find economic ideas inherent in our sources. For example, in the middle of the first millennium B.C., there were numerous crops and cereals like wheat,

rice, barley, mustard, sugarcane, mangoes, lentils, etc. according to Sanskrit and Pali literature. At the same time, paddy transplantation and knowledge of varieties of rice, with *sali* being a generic term, the spread of plough cultivation, etc. is proved. Various terms indicate the growing preoccupation with cultivation. The fields appeared like the robe of a monk which means their uneven, differentiated, patch-work pattern. Similarly, the *Suttanipata*, an early Pali text, describes cattle as *annada* (giver of food), *vannada* (giver of beauty) and *sukhada* (giver of happiness) which shows the significance of cattle. In these references to crops, types of land and agricultural operations, the changed economic condition in the Age of the Buddha is reflected. *Arthashastra* brings out the significance of rural settlements and agriculture as the basis of the revenue of the state. Peasants were allowed tax remissions and state help in the newly settled areas. This helped in bringing virgin land under cultivation and extends the orbit of revenue collection. At the same time, farmers were not allowed to keep their plots unused. Moreover, non-agricultural production, and trade is also mentioned for enhancing revenue.

The post-Mauryan texts like *Milinda-panho* and *Manusmriti* suggest that the field belonged to him who cleared it of the forest cover. Many texts of this period provide information about a large number of occupations and workers. This period was marked by varieties of guilds and long distance inter-regional and maritime trade. Inscriptions at Mathura, Sanchi and such other places mentioning the names and occupations of the donors showing their economic competence and the prosperity of the regions they represent. Post-Mauryan coins bear testimony to the extent and depth of monetization of Indian society.

For the Guptas and later periods, land grant inscriptions are the major source of information for economic history. It is debated that the Gupta and post-Gupta periods witnessed the decline of trade, decay of towns and paucity of metallic money. Land grant inscriptions also provide information on types of settlements and their constituents. Implications for the

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history of agriculture and environment in the references to plants and crops. In the wider context of narrating the story of Harsha, Harshacarita furnish evidence of the agrarian prosperity of Shrikantha in contrast to the forest and forest life in the Vindhya.

PRE-1950s HISTORIOGRAPHICAL TRENDS

Up-to-the mid-20th century, ancient Indian economic history was largely dependent on literary texts. For instance, U.N. Ghoshal's *Agrarian System of Northern India* and A.N. Bose's *Social and Rural Economy of Northern India* (c. 600 B.C. to A.D. 200), are mainly based on textual material, though they use inscriptional data also. This kind of thought made it difficult to elaborate on changes in various periods. However, there is a sea change in the perspectives on early India from the middle of the 1950s. Thus, the economic history, with bearings on society and polity, has occupied centre stage. Early India is now being seen in terms of socio-economic stages.

Now, the questions are: whether the Harappans had a plough or not or the Vedic people had access to iron or not or why it was that the rise of Magadha, emergence of urban centres and 'heterodox' sects happened to coincide in the middle of the first millennium B.C. The wide ranging economic activities in the post-Maurya centuries and the comparative decline or stagnation in the Gupta period were discovered. Now, the dynastic history has shifted to economic history and made common people visible.

THE NEW HISTORIOGRAPHY

The dominant historiography during the 1960s and 1970s stressed technological and economic changes and their importance and characterized the early historical and early medieval periods in opposition to each other. The scholars started looking at the early historical period as wideranging exchange networks, monetization of the economy, horizontal spread of urban centres, and comparatively less unequal distribution of land. The society was stratified but it was more open and less exploitative than the later periods. The early medieval period is seen in terms of fragmentation of authority (related to the phenomenon of land grants), loss of mobility of artisans, traders and peasants and the emergence of closed, self-sufficient economic units, the decline of long distance and maritime trade, urban decay, localization of crafts etc.

It is observed that the rise of a dominant class of rent collecting landlords and a suffering peasantry turned itself into violent agrarian conflicts and rural revolts. Some historians characterize the 11th-12th centuries as a categorically distinct phase compared to the 7th-10th centuries, which were marked by

economic decline, others locate growth in the rural economy within the early feudal context, with long-term consequences for trade, towns, markets, merchants, etc.

The dominant historiography for early medieval India used to see this period as a stage of general decline, notwithstanding the acknowledgement of agrarian expansion in certain regions during the same period. However, the alternative historiography shows regional variations and changes over time. For instance, many types of rural settlements are shown: village (*grama*), hamlet (*palli*), herders' settlement (*ghosha*), etc. Moreover, rural settlements changed with time. Similarly, there were typological distinctions between trade centres and traders; and yet these hierarchies did not hinder interactions.

RECENT RESEARCHES

New perspectives and new sets of questions of recent researches on the economic history of ancient India have contributed substantially to our better understanding of the past. There have been some efforts towards the use of statistical methods in analyzing sources for discerning patterns in economic and administrative histories. However, the evaluation by the economic historian of agrarian expansion, production, prices, etc. about early India is still tentative. Generally, there is a tendency to compare a political formation such as the Mauryan state or Satavahana Deccan with a social formation or to compare a region such as Gangetic northern India for the whole country. However, in such examples the unevenness in levels of material cultures across regions, and even sub-regions is ignored.

These differences when recognized help us to understand the phased manner of economic growth. For example, even in Mauryan times, much of the progress was largely confined to Gangetic northern India and adjoining regions. Similarly, parts of Peninsular India experienced comparable growth during and after the Mauryas. The numerous archaeological cultures (Black-and-Red Ware, Painted Grey Ware, etc.) dated between the later half of the second millennium B.C. and the middle of the first millennium B.C. in indicating mutual contacts and adaptations have helped us in moving away from invasion and colonization as explanatory categories for change during these periods.

Now, researches on early medieval India are becoming more and more inscription based and region centred. Besides looking for the numerical richness of the epigraphical material, there is an attempt to move away from only theoretical and prescriptive positions on state, society and economy. Yet, there is no uniformity in the volume and quality of regional research.

EXERCISES

Q. 1. Discuss the contemporary ideas on ancient Indian economic history.

ECONOMIC HISTORIOGRAPHY OF EARLY INDIA / 3

Ans. At present, economic history is viewed as a part of the wider history and it is not treated in isolation. The interdisciplinary approach is being adopted and new dimensions of early Indian history have been initiated which have led to enhanced interest in issues such as social mobility, social differentiation, stratification, state formation, etc. Research in these fields clearly shows that economy is not the only agency of social change.

Today, differentiation is being seen as emanating from multiple sources. For example, upward social mobility depended upon acquiring economic or political power or both, which in turn were prerequisites for the observance and emulation of upper caste norms and rituals.

The topic of state formation is a good example of how one dimension of society cannot be studied to the exclusion of other dimensions. For instance, for the emergence of states an agrarian base, settlements and social differentiation of some degree are generally essential although once states emerged they could, and in fact did, influence changes in each of the aforementioned areas. Such examples show the continuous interplay of numerous forces in the making of history.

Q. 2. Did the prevailing ideas on economic history of ancient India suggest pattern of growth or stagnation?

Ans. The prevailing ideas on economic history of ancient India suggested a pattern of general decline during the early medieval India, notwithstanding the acknowledgement of agrarian expansion in certain regions during the same period. The historical complexity and variety across regions are subsumed under generalizations and do not receive their due. There are stereotypes associated with 'the village community' (as closed, self-sufficient and homogeneous entities) and the decline of trade and urban centres in early medieval India. Now these ideas have been questioned and instead of general decline the historical transformation of regions outside Gangetic northern India and the changes coming from within local societies, leading to the making of agrarian regions are being considered.

Q. 3. Analyse the new emerging trends in historiography during the early 1960s.

Ans. The new emerging trends in historiography during the early 1960s emphasized technological and economic changes and their significance. It saw the early historical and early medieval periods in opposition to each other. The early historical period is seen as marked by wideranging exchange networks, horizontal spread of urban centres, monetization of the economy and comparatively less unequal distribution of land, if not produce. It has been observed that although society was stratified, it was more open and less exploitative than the later times.

The 'feudal' early medieval period is perceived in terms of the fragmentation of authority (related to the phenomenon of land grants), decline of long distance and maritime trade, dearth of metallic money, urban decay. However, the views on these changes have not remained static over the years nor do all the exponents of the 'Indian feudalism' school hold similar views. Now, the views on the transition to the early medieval phase have shifted from the decline of long-distance and maritime trade to decline of towns and even a social crisis. Scholars differ in their treatment of the post-Gupta centuries. For example, some are of the view that the 11th-12th centuries were a categorically distinct stage in comparison to the 17th-10th centuries. The later ones are considered to be marked by economic decline. Some historians locate growth in the rural economy within the early feudal context.

Q. 4. In what ways the post-1950s economic historical writings represent a departure from early 20th century historical writings?

Ans. The post-1950s economic historical writings represent a departure from early 20th century historical writings because of the issues focused by it and its treatment as well as research tools used by it for its analysis. For instance, ancient Indian economic history in the pre-1950s was largely dependent on incidental references in literary texts. This type of analysis made it difficult to work out processes of change with regard to any institution. Moreover, the analysis and explanation of economic life and institutions within incorporative concepts were unknown. Today's perspectives on early India show that society and polity have a centre stage. Now, economic history has occupied an important position. Since 1950s, instead of being seen as a period dominated by numerous dynasties and their wars early India came to be understood in terms of socio-economic stages. Explanations of change, centering on political authority made way for another kind of analysis.

The type of new questions that began to be asked and addressed were whether the Harappans had a plough or not or the Vedic people had access to iron or not or why it was that the rise of Magadha, emergence of urban centres and 'heterodox' sects happened to coincide in the middle of the first millennium B.C. Thus, there was a significant change in perspective. In the light of the wide ranging economic activities in the post-Maurya centuries and a relative decline or stagnation in the Gupta period the Guptas lost some of their lustre. Now, instead of dynastic history it was economic history and the common people became visible with it.

Q. 5. Account for the recent trends in the economic history writings of ancient India.

Ans. (i) The study of early Indian economic history goes back to the middle of the 19th century. Christian

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lanen's monumental history of India down to the fall of Vijayanagara emphasized political history. The economic sections occupied a subsidiary place. Another colonial writer Richard Fick primarily dealt with social or caste relationships prevalent in north-eastern India. But many historians of the 19th and the 20th centuries wrote under the auspices of the imperial government and had pre-conceived ideas about the India's past.

(ii) The best known exponent of the imperialist view of Indian history was Vincent A. Smith. He devoted himself to the study of the general history of ancient India. He made a significant observation that in the ancient times land was own by the King. British writers after Smith gave special attention to Indian connection with Europe and Greek rule in India. In numismatic the study of Indo-Greek coins received their chief attention. In 1916, H.G. Rawlinson wrote his 'Intercourse between India and the Western world, which covered India's commercial contact with the Greece-Roman world from the earliest times to the fall of Rome. Indo-Roman trade continued to attract the attention of British scholars till the 50s. From 1951 onward, there was a new trend in the economic history writing and contemporary British scholars directly or indirectly provide some justification for the commercial enterprise of the European nations in India in modern times and support the British exploitation of the Indian resources. The main challenge to the historical models of writing put forward by British historians came from Indian scholars who, under the influence of growing nationalist movement, wrote in conscious opposition to the imperialist, view of Indian history.

(iii) The development of nationalism and political consciousness at the term of the century made the Indian scholars keenly aware of the economic exploitation of India by the British, which formed the theme of writings of Dadabhai Naroji and R.C.Dutt. The strong nationalist movement that followed the partition of Bengal in 1905 gave a great impetus to the study of the economic condition of ancient India. A more forceful attack on the imperialist writer came from K.P. Jaswal who was considered a potential contributor of the 'seminaries' of sedition. At the time of nationalist movement several monographic studies were published, through several scientific themes of early economic history attracted the attention of Indian scholars in the 20s. Writer like N. C. Bandopadhyaya, S. K. Das M. A. Buch seeks to make a systematic study of economic development in ancient India, with special references to the land system, agriculture industry and trade. One of the earliest writings on the economic content of the arthashastra's was by H.C. Ray. He deected in Kautilya's social and economic policies and the element of modern state

socialism developed in Germany by the social legislation of Bismark of the Indian scholars of the twenties U.N.Ghoshal handled his sources most critically. His contributions to the study of the taxation system of India from the Vedic age to c. A.D.1200 but it gave a detailed information, detailed studies of early South Indian economic history was undertaken by K.M.Gupta (The Land System in South India between A.D. 800 and A.D.1200, Lahore,1933) and A. Appadorai (Economic Conditions in Southern India, A.D.1000-1500, 2 vols, Madras,1986).

(iv) In recent year detailed economic studies of the different regions of peninsular India have undertaken. K.Sundaram in his studies in Economic and social conditions of Medieval Andhra A.D.1000-1600 (Machilipatanam and Madras, 1968) gives an account of metal work, jewellery, carpentry, architecture, spinning and weaving, salt manufacture etc., but analysis is absent in most of the economic writings like D.R. Das's economic History of the Deccan During the First Six Centuries of the Christian era.

MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

Q. 1. What crops and cereals are mentioned in Sanskrit and Pali literature from the first millennium BCE?

- (a) Corn and potatoes
- (b) Barley, wheat, rice, sesamum, mustard, lentils, sugarcane, banana, and mangoes
- (c) Rye and oats
- (d) Quinoa and amaranth

Ans. (b) Barley, wheat, rice, sesamum, mustard, lentils, sugarcane, banana, and mangoes.

Q. 2. What does the description of cattle in the Suttanipata, an early Pali text, highlight?

- (a) Their speed in racing
- (b) Their use in warfare
- (c) Their role as givers of food, beauty, and happiness
- (d) Their wild and untamed nature

Ans. (c) Their role as givers of food, beauty, and happiness.

Q. 3. According to the Arthashastra, why were shudras preferred in newly founded agrarian settlements?

- (a) Because they were skilled in trade
- (b) Because they were capable of hard work and amenable to exploitation
- (c) Because they were good administrators
- (d) Because they were known for their intellectual prowess