Chapter 6: The Age of Reorganisation

Questions — Questions and Activities

Q1 Why was the post-Maurya era also known as the era of reorganisation?

SOLUTION

After the assassination of the last Maurya emperor (around 185 BCE), the empire broke apart — barely half a century after Ashoka.

Many new kingdoms emerged across the subcontinent. Several of these were earlier tributary kingdoms that had been under Maurya overlordship. They now broke free and competed with each other for territorial control.

The northwest frontier also became vulnerable, inviting invasions from outside the subcontinent (Indo-Greeks, Shakas, Kushanas).

Scholars therefore call this period the 'age of reorganisation' because existing regions were being reorganised into new, competing kingdoms. The political map of India changed significantly, as did people's lives.

Key features that define this reorganisation:
• Fragmentation of Mauryan unity into many smaller kingdoms
• Constant competition and warfare among regional powers
• Foreign invasions from the northwest, bringing new peoples and cultures
• A burst of cultural exchange leading to new styles of art, architecture, and literature
• Flourishing trade networks — both internal and with distant civilisations

Answer: The post-Maurya era is called the 'age of reorganisation' because the Maurya empire fragmented (c. 185 BCE) into many competing kingdoms, the northwest was opened to foreign invasions (Indo-Greeks, Shakas, Kushanas), and the political map was constantly redrawn as regions reorganised into new powers — alongside a burst of cultural exchange, trade, and artistic development.

Q2 Write a note on the Sangam literature in 150 words.

SOLUTION

The Sangam period (roughly 2nd–3rd century BCE to 3rd century CE) saw the rise of three powerful kingdoms in south India — the Cholas, Cheras and Pandyas.

During this era, many poets assembled and created a body of literature collectively known as 'Sangam literature'. The word sangam comes from the Sanskrit sangha, meaning 'association' or 'coming together', referring to an assembly of poets.

Sangam literature is the oldest literary tradition in south India. It consists of several anthologies and collections of poems. The poetry expresses personal emotions — especially love — as well as societal values such as heroism and generosity, with great skill and delicacy.

Historians consult Sangam literature extensively to understand the society and culture of that time. The famous epic Silappadikaram, composed soon after the Sangam collections, reflects the same tradition and centres on themes of justice and a ruler's dharma.

Answer: Sangam literature is the oldest literary tradition of south India, produced during the age of the Cholas, Cheras and Pandyas (c. 2nd century BCE – 3rd century CE). The word 'sangam' means an assembly of poets. It comprises anthologies of poems expressing love, heroism and generosity, and is a key historical source for understanding the society and culture of the period.

Q3 Which rulers mentioned in this chapter included their mother's name in their title, and why did they do so?

SOLUTION

The Satavahana rulers included their mother's name in their own title.

The chapter gives the specific example of Gautamiputra Satakarni, who was named after his mother, Gautami Balashri. The prefix 'Gautami-putra' literally means 'son of Gautami'.

Why this tradition existed:

• It was a Satavahana custom to honour the mother by prefixing her name to the son's name.

• Mothers in the Satavahana royal family held significant power and influence. Gautami Balashri, for instance, was a powerful queen who donated land to Buddhist monks and had an important inscription carved at Nashik, showing her active role in the kingdom.

• Another Satavahana widow queen performed several Vedic rituals, including the ashvamedha yajna — an extraordinary act of authority for a woman of that era.

The tradition thus reflected the high status of royal women and acknowledged their political and social importance in the Satavahana kingdom.

Answer: Satavahana rulers included their mother's name in their title — for example, Gautamiputra Satakarni (son of Gautami). This reflected the high status and political influence of royal mothers in the Satavahana tradition, as seen in the power exercised by queens like Gautami Balashri, who made land donations and had inscriptions carved at Nashik.

Q4 Write a note of 250 words about one kingdom from this chapter that you find interesting. Explain why you chose it.

SOLUTION

Model answer: The Satavahanas

Among all the kingdoms discussed in this chapter, the Satavahanas stand out as one of the most fascinating. Ruling large parts of the Deccan from the 2nd century BCE, their empire covered present-day Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Maharashtra, with famous capitals at Amaravati and Pratishthana (Paithan).

What makes the Satavahanas particularly interesting is the breadth of their achievements:

Trade and maritime strength: Satavahana coins found across India — from Gujarat to Andhra Pradesh — depict seafaring ships with two masts, suggesting advanced shipbuilding and navigation. Their trade networks reached as far as the Roman Empire, exporting spices, textiles, sandalwood, gold-plated pearls and ivory, and importing glass and perfumed ointments.

Agricultural prosperity: The fertile Krishna-Godavari river system provided economic stability. Tolls collected at places like the Naneghat Caves near Pune added to royal revenue.

Cultural and religious inclusivity: Although devout followers of Vasudeva (Krishna), the Satavahanas patronised Vedic scholars, Jaina and Buddhist monks alike. They contributed to the construction of the Karla Caves for Buddhist monks and to remarkable rock-cut architecture at Pitalkhora.

Status of women: Royal mothers held real power — Gautami Balashri, mother of Gautamiputra Satakarni, made significant donations and left inscriptions at Nashik. Another Satavahana widow queen performed the ashvamedha yajna, an

extraordinary achievement.

Numerals: Naneghat inscriptions carry early forms of numerals that resemble today's shapes, suggesting that modern numerals originated in India.

The Satavahanas show that a kingdom's greatness lies not just in military might but in trade, culture, inclusivity and the empowerment of women.

Answer: The Satavahanas (2nd century BCE – 3rd century CE) ruled the Deccan with capitals at Amaravati and Pratishthana. They were notable for maritime trade reaching the Roman Empire, religious patronage of multiple faiths, empowered royal women (e.g. Gautami Balashri), early numerals at Naneghat, and contributions to Buddhist rock-cut architecture such as the Karla Caves.

Q5 Imagine you have the chance to create your own kingdom. What royal emblem would you choose, and why? What title would you take as the ruler? Write a note about your kingdom, including its values, rules and regulations, and some unique features.

SOLUTION

Model answer (imagination activity grounded in chapter concepts):

Kingdom: Jnanavayu (Land of Knowledge and Breeze)
Emblem: A lotus with a book open at its centre — the lotus represents purity and growth (as seen in Satavahana and Buddhist art), while the open book stands for learning, echoing the Sangam poets and Patanjali's Yoga Sutras composed in this era.
Title: Lokarakshaka (Protector of the People) — inspired by Kharavela's ideal of being 'an honourer of every sect and repairer of every temple'.

Values:
• Respect for all schools of thought — just as the Kushanas featured Buddha and Shiva on the same coin, no belief is dismissed.
• Trade and openness — like the Satavahanas and Cheras, the kingdom maintains active trade with distant lands, welcoming new ideas.
• Welfare of subjects — following Karikala's example (the Grand Anicut), public works such as irrigation and roads are a royal duty.

Rules and regulations:
• Tax-free land for scholars, monks, and teachers (as the Satavahanas granted).
• Disputes settled by a council of advisors representing different communities.

• No single religion is the state religion.

Unique features:

• Annual poetry gatherings — a sangam — where citizens share poems, stories, and discoveries.

• Coins bear the lotus emblem on one side and a key public work (a dam, a library) on the other.

• History of the kingdom is recorded in inscriptions (like the Hathigumpha) for future generations to read.

Answer: Model answer: The kingdom of Jnanavayu (Land of Knowledge) uses a lotus-and-book emblem (inspired by Buddhist and Satavahana art). Its ruler, the Lokarakshaka (Protector of the People), upholds religious tolerance (as the Kushanas did), trade and openness (like the Cheras), and public welfare (inspired by Karikala's Grand Anicut). Key features include tax-free land for scholars, an annual poetry sangam, and coins that record public works.

Q6 You have read about the architectural developments of the post-Maurya era. Take an outline of the Indian subcontinent and mark the approximate locations of some of the ancient structures mentioned in this chapter.

SOLUTION

Guidance for the map activity:

On an outline map of the Indian subcontinent, mark the following structures discussed in the chapter:

1. Bharhut Stupa — present-day Madhya Pradesh (Shunga period; famous for carved railings depicting the Buddha's life).
2. Naneghat Caves — near Pune, Maharashtra (Satavahana period; used for toll collection; contains early numerals and queen's inscriptions).
3. Karla Caves — near Lonavala, Maharashtra (Satavahana period; rock-cut caves made for Buddhist monks).
4. Pitalkhora Caves — Aurangabad district, Maharashtra (Satavahana period; yaksha sculpture with craftsman's inscription).
5. Udayagiri-Khandagiri Caves — near Bhubaneswar, Odisha (Chedi/Kharavela period; Jain rock-cut caves; Hathigumpha inscription).
6. Kallanai (Grand Anicut) — on the Kaveri river, Tamil Nadu (Chola king Karikala; water diversion system still in use).

7. Heliodorus Pillar — near Vidisha, Madhya Pradesh (Indo-Greek ambassador's pillar praising Vasudeva).

Tip: Use the regions mentioned in the chapter (Deccan, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra) to help you place each structure correctly. Borders of kingdoms were not fixed, so marking approximate locations is acceptable.

Answer: Mark these structures on the outline map: (1) Bharhut Stupa — Madhya Pradesh; (2) Naneghat Caves — near Pune, Maharashtra; (3) Karla Caves — near Lonavala, Maharashtra; (4) Pitalkhora Caves — Aurangabad, Maharashtra; (5) Udayagiri-Khandagiri Caves — near Bhubaneswar, Odisha; (6) Kallanai/Grand Anicut — Kaveri river, Tamil Nadu; (7) Heliodorus Pillar — near Vidisha, Madhya Pradesh.