

UNIT

2

Ancient Civilisations

Learning Objectives

- To learn about early societies and state formations
- To understand the development of civilisations
- To learn about the ancient Egyptian civilisation
- To study the main features of the Mesopotamian civilisations
- To know the Chinese civilisation
- To gain knowledge about the Indus civilisation



Introduction

Urban societies that adopted complex ways of life were more organised than the early hunter-gatherer and Neolithic farming societies. Urban societies had social stratification and well-planned cities. They practised crafts, engaged in trade and exchange, adopted science and technology and formed political organisation (early form of state). Hence the term 'civilisation' is used to distinguish them from the early forms of societies. However, they should not be considered superior to other forms of societies, since each culture or civilisation had its own unique features.

2.1 Ancient Civilisations

Civilisation is seen as an advanced, organised way of life. It instilled a way of life that could be considered as an adaptation to particular environmental and cultural contexts. When it became necessary for large numbers of people to live in close proximity, they brought in planning, organisation and specialisation. Settlements were planned and laid out, a polity emerged, society became organised and food production and craft production were regulated. As civilisations began to take

shape, huge buildings were built, the art of writing developed and science and technology contributed to the betterment of society.

The Egyptian, the Mesopotamian, the Chinese and the Indus were the important early civilisations. While these civilisations flourished in certain regions, people in other parts of the world lived as hunters-gatherers and pastoralists. The hunters-gatherers and pastoralists maintained their relationships with these civilisations through interactions. Their history is also equally important. During the time of these civilisations, South India witnessed the emergence of Neolithic agro-pastoral communities and Microlithic form of life by hunter-gatherers.

2.2 The Egyptian Civilisation

As one of the oldest civilisations, the Egyptian civilisation is known for its monumental architecture, agriculture, arts, sciences and crafts at a very early age.

Geography

Egypt lies in the north-eastern corner of the African continent. It is bounded by the Red Sea on the east and Mediterranean Sea in the north. Egypt is irrigated by the River Nile,