



Sri Aurobindo National History Essay Competition 2025-26



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GRADE 8
FIRST PRIZE

A Greek Traveller in Mauryan India

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A FOREIGN TRAVELLER COMING TO ANCIENT INDIA

As the sun rose over the vast plains of India, I awoke in Taxila, a land ruled by the powerful Mauryan Dynasty. I am Xavier, a Greek traveler. I had travelled from the western lands and through lengthy trade routes to reach this empire ruled by Ashoka, one of the greatest emperors I have ever heard of. I heard a lot about this country. As I slowly awoke, I sensed soft ringing of the bells, the chants of monks and the distant movement of guards. These all reminded me that I was in one of the strongest empires of our world.

I began my day near the banks of the river Indus, where people assembled for their morning routines. Some bathed quietly, while others offered prayers to the all-mighty. I also noticed Buddhist monks walking calmly, carrying bowls for alms. They taught the lessons of Dhamma, a philosophy embraced by Ashoka to the common people. They taught kindness, non violence and respect towards your fellow countrymen. Stone pillars stood nearby, carved with inscriptions of vernacular language called Prakrit so that common people could understand his laws. I was surprised to see an emperor like Ashoka who ruled not only by power but also by values.

After sunrise, I was invited into the rest house by the locals for travelers like me. I learnt that such rest houses were built by Ashoka himself. I was served a simple meal of rice, lentils, fruits and some water. My hosts believed that caring for guests was part of proper and dignified living. "Athiti Devo Bhava", they said. "It means that guests are gods. Serving guests is a great offering to god." Even as a foreigner, I felt safe and respected under the rule of the Mauryans. This wasn't that common in other kingdoms.

As my day in India continued., I traveled towards a nearby city named Pushkalavati connected by wide and well maintained roads. Trees surrounded the path, providing shade, and there were milestones which marked distances - These were clear signs of advanced administration. As I entered the grand city, I saw officials recording goods and collecting taxes in a very orderly manner. The Mauryan administration was strict but effective. Soldiers were patrolling the streets, ensuring peace, while spies, whom I had heard a lot about, quietly observed and noted the activities of the people. The securities were strategically planned such that it could be much easier to capture miscreants.

I then went to the marketplace, which was full of life and color. Traders sold spices, cotton textiles, ivory, metal tools such as spears, and valuable stones such as Diamonds. I bought pearls. Exchange was done by copper coins called mashakas. I met merchants from Persia and the Mediterranean world. Some were also from my homeland, proving again that the Mauryan Empire was deeply connected internationally. Standardized weights and measures such as angulas and Prastha were used for measurements, running trade and commerce smoothly . This level of organization was unlike anything I had seen in other kingdoms.

By noon, the sun burned intensely, and I couldn't bear the heat for any longer. I decided to find shelter in a Buddhist Vihara, where monks lived and studied. Inside, students learned not only religious teachings but also medicine, logic, and philosophy and many other lessons. Among other monks, I heard people talking about ahimsa (non-violence) and control over emotions like anger. The focus on learning and moral values reflected the values promoted during Ashoka's reign.

In the afternoon, I visited the royal palace from a distance. Though peasants and ordinary people could not enter that freely, the grandness of Mauryan architecture was visible to me from afar. Massive wooden structures, fortified walls and watchtowers showed the strength of the empire. It reminded me again that the Mauryan empire was one of the biggest and most developed empire of our time . Yet, unlike other empires obsessed with war, the land under Ashoka focused on welfare and architecture such as building stupas and viharas.

As evening approached, people came together in public spaces. Some people listened to monks preaching Dhamma, while others discussed trade, farming, and governance and politics. I noticed harmony among people of different faiths - Buddhists, Hindus and Jains - living together peacefully. This tolerance was another result of Ashoka's hard work and policies. I was quite shocked. I did not find such unity in any other powerful empire.

At night, oil lamps illuminated the city. Families sat together, elders told stories of Chandragupta Maurya's rise, Bindusara's rule. Under the starlit sky, I thought about my journey. The Mauryan Empire was not just powerful in land and wealth, but rich in ideas, organization, and most importantly humanity. I had not seen this much morals in any kingdom. As a foreign traveler, I felt like I had witnessed a golden age of administration- one where strength was balanced with kindness, and empire was guided by righteousness. I hope I would visit India again and witness it's culture and its people once more.



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GRADE 8
SECOND PRIZE

A Journey into the Indus Valley Civilization

Sam Porter and his Indus valley civilization adventure

In a prestigious university in America a renowned scientist named Sam Porter invented a time machine. He wanted to test it out and the machine took him to the Indus valley civilization of India. Soon he realized that he was in the 3300 BCE to 1300 BCE. He was thrilled to explore this era and was excited to see what lies ahead.

The first thing that caught Sam's attention was the remarkable planning of the cities of the cities. The streets were laid out in straight lines, intersecting at right angles. Most of the houses were built using bricks and were of uniform size, this was new for him because nothing like this existed in modern times. The cities were extremely clean and orderly; this reflected a very strong sense of organization. All the homes had access to wells and very well-planned drainage systems, which carried waste away through covered channels beneath the streets. Sam was truly impressed by this advanced understanding of sanitization and urban planning.

As Sam continued walking through the city, he observed people were very engaged in their daily work. Farmers brought grains from the surrounding fields, artisans were working carefully with metals and beads, and the traders were measuring with stone weights. He noticed that agriculture was the backbone of the Indus valley civilization. Fields of wheat and barley stretched beyond the city walls, nourished by water from Indus River. Sam noticed how closely people lived in harmony with nature, depending on the river for water, trade, and fertile soil, this really touched his heart as he had never seen people coexisting with nature this closely in the modern era.

The markets there were lively yet disciplined. Goods such as cotton cloth, pottery, ornaments, and seals were neatly arranged. Sam found the seals particularly fascinating. They were made of stone engraved with animals and symbols; they were used for trade and identification. Though Sam could not understand the script carved on them, he sensed that it represented and brought a sense of great sophisticated system of communication. One of the most striking structures Sam saw was a large public bathing area, which was known as the Great Bath in the modern era. It was built with great care, lined with bricks and sealed to prevent leakage. This structure suggested that cleanliness and ritual purity held great importance in the lives of the people there. Nearby, large granaries stood as evidence of efficient food storage and planning, ensuring the communities survival during difficult times.

Sam also observed the peaceful nature of the civilization. There were no grand palaces or massive temples, and weapons were rarely seen. Sam noticed how even without these huge temples and massive palaces the people all lived in harmony, smiling and happy. This showed that the society valued equality and cooperation rather than power and warfare. Men and women appeared to be well-dressed and dignified, wearing ornaments made of gold, shell, and precious stones. Cotton clothing was common, showing the early use of textile production. Trade played a significant role in the Indus valley civilization. Sam learned through observations that goods were exchanged with distant regions, including Mesopotamia. Boats traveled along the river, carrying spices, metals, and crafted items. This wide network of trade connected the Indus people to the outside world and brought prosperity to their cities.

Religion in the Indus valley seemed closely linked to nature and daily life. Sam noticed figurines of a mother goddess, sacred animals, and symbols connected to fertility and strength. Worship appeared simple, and in personal ways rather than grand or imposing. This showed that the Indus valley civilization reflected a spiritual life rooted with respect and balance.

Education during the Indus valley civilization was mostly practical and skill based, and it was closely connected to daily life and the occupations. Sam noticed that children learned through observation and training rather than the formal schools present in the modern era. The knowledge of pottery, agriculture, and metalwork was passed down from elders the elders to the younger generations. The overall education taught during the civilization were skills necessary for an organized, efficient, and prosperous society. Sam had grown to admire the strength of the Indus Valley civilization. Though its people did not display wealth through order or control, but through cleanliness, and skilled craftsmanship. Their achievements spoke through their cities and their way of life.

Sam eventually teleported back to the present time. He knew, though centuries would pass and its cities would fade but its legacy and history would continue to inspire the generations yet to come and that the lasting impression of the Indus valley civilization would always continue living in his heart.



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Shreshtha H

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GRADE 8

SPECIAL MENTION FOR OUTSTANDING RESEARCH

*A Foreign Traveller in the Harappan Port
City of Lothal*

A Day in the Life of a Foreign Traveler Coming to Ancient India

Lothal, as I have discovered, is a magnificent, self-sufficient, extremely disciplined, and an independent place, which works smoothly and is more advanced than any other city I have ever visited. I chose to visit Lothal, because I heard of its rich cultural significance and beauty, and I hope to see a place completely different from where I am, that is South Africa. I am glad that it was totally worth it.

I entered India through the Arabian sea, and Lothal via the Bhogava river. I also witnessed the impressive sight of small and big boats moving in the pure, blue water and learned that the ships were anchored by the captain of the ship in a dockyard, made with fine burnt brick, and is in the east of the town, away from the main channel of the river.

The one thing that really struck me was the hydraulic system built there. I saw a large basin connected to a course of the Sabarmati River. When huge ships come in the dock, the people could close the wooden or brick gate that will increase the water level, allowing the ship to enter the dock, regardless the water level present.

I have seen the workers and the inhabitants playing a game with a board and terracotta figures and some dice. When I asked them what it was, they told me, the local people called it 'Chaturanga,' and I was told that it means "four divisions." There was no prize for the game, but you get respect and recognition instead. The sight made me wonder, how they could be so co-operative, and happily coexist than any other place I have ever visited.

The wonderful, uniform organization of the city make it clear that the Harappans were extremely disciplined people. Commerce and administration duties were done by the people according to the rules laid down in front of them, unquestioningly. I deeply appreciate the self-leadership they have for their city. The house owners, possess a collection chamber for the deposition of solid waste to avoid clogging of the drainage pipes. The waste in the drains, utility holes, were collected in cesspools, and thrown in the river, which gets washed away with the tide, maintaining the cleanliness of the city effortlessly.

As I delved deeper into their trades, I found various seals depicting animals and a writing, of Harappan script, which I could not understand. It was particularly used in trade, identification, and administration. I even saw some seals that were a 'Persian Gulf' type. Which, when I asked where they got it from, was told that they had gotten it from trade with Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Persia. I came to know from the local workers and inhabitants that their exports were, beads, ivory, shell ornaments, wood and cotton, and the imports were copper, lapis lazuli, and other semi-precious stones.

Their lands were very fertile, in which rice, wheat, barley, ragi, jowar and other lentils were grown. Among them, the staples was rice, along with it, ragi and jowar were also popular. They also ate meat along with their daily diet. The people of Lothal clothe in cotton wear. Some men wear turbans, and women wear knee-length skirts. Men here, wear bead necklaces and bangles, while women wear bangles, earrings, rings, anklets, belts made of strings of beads, and fancy hair styles.

Finally, it was time for me to go back to my homeland after a wonderful experience in Lothal. There were people standing respectfully during my departure. When I was about to leave, a child ran up to me and gave me a beautiful doll made of terracotta. It was a figurine of a horse, and with wonderfully carved details. I thanked the child whole-heartedly for the precious gift. The child smiled at me and ran away to its parents. I do not have any words to describe the immense pleasure I felt on receiving the gift and the experience I had, visiting this place. Lothal is a very advanced city and is highly respectful towards its visitors and guests, is all that I can find words about.