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Q. Role of coins in constructing the history of ancient India can not be undermined. Analyse. (150 words)

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Approach

- Briefly talk about the origin of coins in India
- Discuss how coins hold clues to several important historical processes
- Conclude suitably

Answer

The word coin is derived from the Latin word 'Cuneus'. They were first used in China and Greece around 700B.C. and in India around the 6th century B.C. The study of coins is called Numismatics. Coins are as important as the inscription in history. They confirm the information derived from literature. They are of various metals: gold, silver, copper, or alloy and contain legends or simple marks. Those with dates are probably very valuable for the framework of Indian Chronology.

The Bilingual coins had served as Rosetta Stones in deciphering the Ancient Indian writings.

- Coins are linked to monetary history which includes an analysis of the production and circulation of coinage, frequency and volume of issues. For eg. The wide distribution of Kushana coins indicates the flourishing trade of the period.
- Ships on certain Satavahana coins reflect the importance of maritime trade in the Deccan during this period. Roman coins found in various parts of India indicate the presence of Indo-Roman trade.
- Although dates appear rarely on early Indian coins, exceptions being Western Kshatrapa Coins of the Shaka era and some Gupta era silver coins, they play a vital role in dating a period through archaeological excavation.

- Coins have also been used as important royal message-bearing media, thus acting as an important source of political history of India between 200 BCE and 300 CE. Most of the Indo-Greek kings are known almost entirely from their coins.
- The term 'Gana' on coins of tribal republics of Yaudheyas and Malvas points to their non-monarchical polity. City coins are suggestive of the importance and possible autonomy of certain city administrations.
- Coins have also been informative about personal aspects of rulers such as coins commemorating marriages, performance of Ashvamedha sacrifice by Samudragupta, and Kumaragupta I have also been recorded by coins.
- The depiction of deities on coins provides information about the personal religious preference of kings, royal religious policy, and history of religious cult. For instance, representations of Balrama and Krishna appear on 2nd century BCE coins of the Indo-Greek king Agathocles at Ai-Khanoum (Afghanistan) indicating the popularity of these Gods in the regions.

A meticulous and skilful analysis of the sources is the foundation of history. The various literary and archaeological sources for ancient and early medieval India have given a window to understand the period in detail. The correlation of evidence from texts and archaeology is important for a more comprehensive and inclusive history of ancient and medieval India. Coins thus have a crucial role in establishing these links.