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**Sources of Indian History**

Types of sources of Indian history:

- Archeological sources
- Literary sources
- Foreign Accounts

**Archeological Sources:**

- ✓ Inscriptions
- ✓ Coins
- ✓ Seals
- ✓ Potteries
- ✓ Monuments
- ✓ Caves
- ✓ Sculptures

The study of coins is known as numismatics. The study of inscription is known as Epigraphy.

The word archeology is the combination of two word 'Archaios' and 'Logia', where archaios means ancient and logia means knowledge. There are two methods of excavations- Horizontal and Vertical excavations.

**Inscriptions:**

Inscriptions are the most important part of archeological sources. They can be considered as the most authentic and reliable source. These are comparatively less biased. In the series of

inscriptions, the oldest inscriptions belongs to Emperor Ashoka. His maximum number of inscription are in Brahmi script, which exhibit the information about Ashoka's rule, administration and 'Dhamma'. Few inscriptions besides Ashokan inscriptions are Prayag Prashasti of Samudragupta, Hathigumpha inscription of Kharvela, Aihole inscription of Pulakeshin, etc. The entire history of Satvahanas is based on their archeological source. Similarly, the inscription of rulers of 'Pallavas', 'Chalukyas', 'Pandyas', 'Cholas' also proved to be of importance in the formation of their history.

### **Coins:**

Coins are of immense importance in information of ancient Indian history. With the help of coins we not only get to know about the trade and commercial activities of the time but also get to know about the economic and technological development of the time through the shape, material and technology involved in minting these coins. The dates mentioned on the coins help us to know about the chronology of the king. Coins also helps us to interpret about the religious ideologies of the rulers with the help of dates inscribed on them. The first coin of India was known as 'Punchmarked coins'. Since, it was made by the method of punching thus, was known as Punchmarked coins. These coins were possibly introduced by the trading guilds and not by any ruler. The ratio of purity in coins enables us to interpret about the economic condition of the ruler and his time. The example:

The first gold coin was introduced by Indo-Greek the first ruler of Indo-Greek who introduced gold coins.

The purest gold coins were issued by the 'Kushanas' and the maximum number of gold coins but also most impure were issued by the 'Guptas'.

### **Monuments or Memorials:**

Monuments are one of the most important elements of archeological sources. The study of these monuments not only helps us to interpret about the technical skills, living standard, economic condition of the time but also help us to know about the architectural style of the time. Where the magnificent monuments depicts the prosperity of a ruler or the dynasty on the improvement of the empire. There were three styles of architecture in India:

- Nagar style in the North.
- Dravid style in the South.
- And in Deccan i.e, in central part of India, a new style developed which came to be known as Baser style.

There are few temples of Indian deity in South-East Asia and Central Asia for example- Borobudur Temple in Java, Ankorwat Temple in Combodia.

### **Potteries:**

Potteries are one of the important part of archeological sources. These potteries help us to know about the spread of the culture and civilization. These potteries are available right from pre-historic period to historic period. For example- in Rig vedic period BRW, OCP, PGW potteries were used. In later vedic period BW, RW, BRW and PGW potteries were used during the period of Buddhism NBPW culture was formed. Thus, it signifies that potteries play a vital role in reformation of history.

### **Sculpture:**

Sculpture is the important element of Ancient Indian History. The statues made of that time provides us information about the religious conditions of the time. There were three styles of Sculptures:

- Gandhar style.
- Mathura style.
- Amravati style.

### **Paintings:**

This art is also an important elements of history. Ajanta paintings are beautiful example of Ancient Indian History. In these paintings various natural and humanitarian scenes are painted which is extremely unique to witness. Thus, archeological sources, forms a huge part of ancient Indian sources, which can be considered as more authentic more reliable and less biased. But inorder to study ancient Indian history, literary sources are equally important as archeological sources.

### **Literary Sources:**

Literary sources can be broadly divided into:

- Religious sources.
- Non-religious sources.

### **Religious Sources:**

- ✓ Vedic texts(four Vedas)
- ✓ Epics
- ✓ Puranas
- ✓ Smriti texts
- ✓ Buddhist texts
- ✓ Jain texts

### **Non-religious Sources:**

- ✓ **Arthashastra- Kautilya**
- ✓ **Rajtarangini- Kalhana**
- ✓ **Nitisara- Kamandaka**
- ✓ **Mahabshya- Patanjali**
- ✓ **Mudrarakshasa- Vishakhdutta**
- ✓ **Ashtadhyayi- Panini**

### **Religious Texts:**

The base of religious literary sources is formed by Brahmin texts such as Vedic texts, Sutras, Smriti, Puranas and Epics.

#### ➤ **Vedic Texts:**

The oldest among the Vedas is the Rig veda which give us an idea of Rig vedic which gives us an idea of Rig vedic society, where on other hand Sam veda, Yajur veda and Atharva veda gives us information about the society of later vedic period. Vedas form a history of 900 years(1500B.C-600B.C). These texts helps us to derive out the information about the origin of Aryans, their political structure, their society, economic activities, religious perspectives, cultural achievement and a lot more.

#### ➤ **Sutras :**

After vedic texts, they arrived an era of Sutras, these were called as Sutra because the word or hymns were placed beautifully like pearls in a thread. These Sutras gives us information about the vedic period. Inorder to understand Vedas well, Vedangas were formed then, they were divided in six parts:

- i. Siksha
- ii. Vyakrana
- iii. Chhanda
- iv. Kalpa

- v. Nirukta
- vi. Jyotish

Like Vedangas a section of Upvedas also developed. There are four 'Upvedas' related to different Vedas:

- i. Ayurveda- It is related to medical science and is an upveda of Rig veda.
- ii. Gandharva veda- It is related to music and is an upveda of Sam veda.
- iii. Dhanur veda- It is related to war skills, arms and ammunitions. It is related to Yajur veda.
- iv. Shilpa veda- It is related to art sculpture and architecture. It is an upveda of Atharva veda.

➤ **Smriti Texts:**

After sutras , Smritis texts were formed. Manusmriti is the oldest Smriti text, which was formed between 200B.C- 200A.D (400 Years). Yagyavalkya Smriti was another Smriti text compiled between 100A.D to 300A.D. These two Smriti texts throws light on post Mauryan period.

Narada smriti(300A.D-400A.D) and Parashara Smriti(300A.D-500A.D), throws light on the social and religious conditions of the Guptas. Besides these Brihaspati smiriti(300A.D-500A.D) and Katyayana Smriti(400A.D-600A.D) was also the text of Gupta time.

➤ **Puranas:**

After Smriti texts Purans were compiled, which were mainly 18 in number. Among these Markandey Purana, Vayu Purana, Brahma Purana, Vishnu Purana, Bhagwat Purana and Matasya Purana were possibly ancient Purana and the rest were created later.

Names of 18 available Puranas

- ✓ Agni
- ✓ Brahma
- ✓ Brahmavaivarta
- ✓ Kurma
- ✓ Markandaya
- ✓ Narada
- ✓ Shiva
- ✓ Vamana
- ✓ Bhagvata
- ✓ Brahmanda
- ✓ Garuda
- ✓ Linga
- ✓ Matasya
- ✓ Padma

- ✓ Skanda
- ✓ Varaha
- ✓ Vishnu

There is a great deal of information of ancient Indian dynasties in Matsya, Vayu and Vishnu puranas. Puranas are the only available source of the dynasties which ruled after the battle of Mahabharat. Puranas are also the important element in formation of cultural history of Ancient India. Puranas provides chronology of different dynasties and their hierarchy (from lowest to highest).

➤ **Epics:**

Epics are also a part of Brahmanic text, Mahabharata and Ramayana being most important among them. Ramayana was created by Valmiki in Post-Mauryan period. Though, the historicity of this text is doubtful but it created a picture of ideal Indian society. Mahabharata was the second epic which was compiled by Vedvyas and it was completed in Gupta period. Initially, it was named as Jai Samhita, which later came to be known as Bharata, because it consisted of history of dynasties of India and ultimately came to be known as 'Mahabharata'.

➤ **Buddhist Literatures:**

Pitakas are the oldest Buddhist texts. There are three types of Pitakas- Suttapitaka, Vinaya Pitaka, Abhidhamma Pitaka. It was compiled after Lord Buddha attained Nirvana:

- ✓ Suttapitaka- consists of religious ideology and sayings of Lord Buddha.
- ✓ Vinaya Pitaka- consists of the laws of Buddhist Sangha.
- ✓ Abhidhamma Pitaka- consists of Buddhist philosophies.

Besides Tripitakas, Jataka kathas were created which consisted of anecdote related to previous birth of Lord Buddha. The compilation of Jataka began in first century B.C but the present form of it was compiled in second century A.D.

Milindapanho is another Buddhist text which gives us information about the philosophical dialogue between Greek ruler Minander and Buddhist saint Nagasena. Divyavadana was another Buddhist text completed in 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D which consisted of information about different rulers.

Aryamanjushrimulkalpa is another Buddhist text which consisted of information about different rulers of Gupta empire from the Buddhist perspective. Angutarnikaya was a Buddhist text which gives the names of Sixteen Mahajanapadas.

➤ **Sinhalese Texts:**

The Sinhalese texts consisted of Deepvamsha and Mahavamsha which grows like on ancient Indian history. Deepvamsha was created in 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D and Mahavamsha was created in 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Thus, these Buddhist texts provides us the information about the social and cultural life of that time and also gives us the knowledge of cultural relation of India and foreign counties.

➤ **Jain Texts:**

The Agama texts are the main Jain texts. The Acharangasutra, a part of the Agamas which were compiled were based on the teachings of Mahavira, talks about the conduct of Jain saints. Vyakhyaprajapati commonly known as Bhagvati sutra, throws light on the life of Mahavira. Nayadhammakaha is the compilation of teaching of Lord Mahavira. There are many other Agama texts. They are total 12 in number. The Bhagvatisutra consist of the information about the 16 Mahajanapadas. The 'Bhadrabahucharita' which throws light on the life of Jain Acharya Bhadrabahu and Chandragupta Maurya. The most important Jain text is Parishistaparvana written by Hemchandra in 12<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

**Non-Religious Texts:**

The religious texts mainly give us information about the religious ideology and philosophy. Thus, it gives us a very little information about political activity, whereas, non-religious texts throws light on almost all the aspects of the society. Few non-religious texts are:

**Ashatadhayayi-** It was written by Panini and is the oldest grammer/literature of India. It gives us information about the political, social and religious condition of Pre-Mauryan period.

**Mudrarakshasa-** of Vishkhadutta gives us information about the Mauryan period. Arthashastra was written by Kautilya also identified as Vishnugupta and Chanakya. It was divided into 15 parts. It gives us information about Indian political system. It also throws light on the condition of Mauryan age Mahabhashya of Patanjali and Malvikagnimitram by Kalidasa gives us information about 'Shunga Dynasty'. Kamasutra of Vatsyana gives information of sexual life, social life, physical relations, family life, etc . this explains that these sources in scientific ways that it was created to give sex education to the youth of that period. 'Mricchhakatikam' by Shudraka and 'Dashkumaracharita' by Dandin also provides us information of the social life of that period.

**Foreign Accounts:**

Foreign Accounts are a part of literary sources which consist of writing of Greek, Roman, Chinese and Arab travelers. In contradiction to Indian historians, foreign travelers too interest in Non-religious incidence. Thus, their work throws light on political and social conditions.

### **Greek or Roman Writers:**

Herodotus and Thucydides are the oldest Greek and Roman writers. Possibly, these two writers attained information about Iran. Despite of the Greek writers the writing of those travelers who came along with Alexander, Nearchus, Onesicritus are considered to be more authentic. The another important account is 'Indica', which is unfortunately unavailable in the present time other Greek and Roman writers created their works based on Indica. These Foreign writers wrote on the condition and aspects which was ignored by the Indian writers. Thus, their writings proved to be of immense importance in the construction of Ancient Indian History.

Periplus of the Erythrean sea is another Greek work written by an unknown writer provides us the information about the Indian ports and the names of commodities imported and exported from India. Ptolemy wrote about the geographical description of India, in 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. 'Pleny the elder' Roman historian who wrote 'Naturalis Historia' in 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D proves to be of great importance as it provides plenty of information about animals, crops and minerals in India.

### **Chinese Travellers:**

It is important to mention about all those Chinese travellers who travelled to India and wrote about the conditions that they witnessed. The Chinese writers consist the name of Fa-Hien, Huen Tsang and It-tsing. Fa-Hien visited India in the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D and stayed here for fourteen years. He wrote basically about Buddhism and less about the political condition of that time. Huen-Tsang visited India during the time of Harsha and stayed here for sixteen years. He wrote about the religious condition as well as the political condition of that time. He also wrote about the cultural society and education of that time. It-tsing visited India by the end of seventeenth century A.D. He stayed for long time in Vikramshila and Nalanda Universities. Thus, described about the educational institutions of India. Besides these he also described about the food habit and costumes of India.

### **Arab Travellers:**



The Arab travelers began to write about India in 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Sulaiman-al-tajir visited India in the middle of 9<sup>th</sup> century A.D and wrote about the Palas, Pratiharas and Gurjars. Al-Masudi stayed in India for two years(941-943A.D) and wrote about the rulers Rashtakuta dynasty. Abu-rehan-alberuni was the most famous writer among the other Arab writers in his Kitab-ul-hind. He gave detailed information about mathematics, geography, philosophy and other religious practices, culture and traditions and social conditions which is worth appreciation.