

NAKSHALBARI COLLEGE

Department of History

Topic : **The Sources of Ancient
Indian History**

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The Sources of Ancient Indian History

- 1. Literary Sources**
- 2. Archaeological Sources**
- 3. Foreign Accounts**

Literary Sources

- Value of Vedas
- Vedas and the Epics
- The value of the Puranas
- Jatakas, other Buddhist and Jaina Literature
- Biographical writings
- Local Chronicles

Archaeological Sources

- Inscriptions
- Coin
- Monuments and ancient remains of cities

Inscriptions

- Inscriptions are engraved on stone or metals. They can not be easily tampered and their accuracy is unimpeachable. The find spots of the inscriptions give idea about the extent of the empire. The inscriptions are engraved on stone plates, metal plates, pillars, even on terra-cota plates. They were issued in various languages Prakrita, sanskrit, Tamil etc. The Boghaz Koi inscription found in Asia Minor throw much light on the migration of the Aryans. The Tel-el-Amarna and Naksh- i- Rustam inscriptions throw light on India's relations with Ancient Iran.

The Series of Indian inscription open with the Ashokan inscriptions (edicts) engraved on Rocks or pillars. They are written in Brahmi and Kharosthi scripts. The ashokan inscriptions constitute the most important sources of information for the history of the Mouryan Age.

Two types of inscriptions are

1. Public inscription
2. Private inscription

Public inscription

The public inscriptions are two types.

- a. Some are Prasastis or eulogies of rulers e.g. the Allahabad Prasasti of Samudragupta, the Gwalior Prasasti of Bhoja etc. The Hatigumpha inscriptions of Kharvela found at Udaya Giri throws light on the history of Kalinga.
- b. Among the other type of public inscriptions numerous land grants issued by the kings may be mentioned. They throw light on the extent of the kingdoms, the mode of measurements of land and the names of the rulers.

Private inscription

- The private records are by far the largest in number. They are almost 1500 in number. These records throw light on the evolution of art and religious ideas. Most of the pre- Gupta private inscriptions are written in Prakrita language and relate to Buddhist and Jaina religion. The post- Gupta private records are in Sanskrit language and relate to brahmanical religion.

Coin

Coins generally bear the dates, names of kings, royal portraits, images of deities worshipped and miscellaneous information. The Bactrian Greeks have left no records except their names in their coins. It throws much light on the economic condition of that time. The type, shape and artistic design of the coins testify the religious and cultural condition of the time as well as the extent of foreign influence if any on them.

Monuments and ancient remains of cities

The monuments, the remains of ancient cities, works of art and sculpture are of great importance. They help us to trace the evolution of Indian art, the index of culture and the standard of civilization. The excavations of the remains of the pre-historic remains of the Indus Valley civilization has transformed our idea about the origin of the Indian civilization.

Foreign Accounts

- Classical accounts about India
- Chinese accounts about India
- Muslim Historians

Classical accounts about India

Classical or Greek writers have recorded information about India beginning from the Persian invasion in 6th century B.C. Herodotus and Ctesias have narrated the history of the Persian domination over north-western India. Among the classical authorities on India, the most renowned is Megasthenes, the Seleucidian envoy to the court of Chandragupta Maurya. He wrote a remarkable book named 'Indica', which depicts the political social life of the Indians. Classical writers like Arrian, Diodorus, Strabo have recorded fragments of Megasthenes' account in their books. Other classical writers are Plutarch. He wrote a biographical sketch of Alexander. Justin wrote 'Epitome' which throws light on the early life of Chandragupta Maurya. Ptolemy's 'Geography' is a famous work.

Chinese accounts about India

Buddhist pilgrims from China came to India to visit the holy places of Buddhism in India. Chinese historian Ssu-ma-Chien composed an annual about India in the first century B.C. Chinese historian Fan-Ye recorded many information about the Yue-Chi and Kushanas. The Chinese pilgrim Fa-hien visited India in the reign of Chandragupta II. He left a good narrative about India which is regarded as a source of Gupta history. Tibetan historian Lama Tranath's writings named "Dulva and Tangyur" are also valuable sources.

Muslim Historians

- From the 8th century A.D Arabian scholars like Al-beruni visited India. Al-Beruni was a great scholar in Sanskrit. He has left a capital account of India. His work is named 'Tahakak-i-Hind. Other Arab writers like Al-Biladury etc. may also mentioned.

Thank You