

Unit-1

Sources

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1.0 Objectives

After the study of this unit, we can understand:

- The nature of literary/written sources;
- The nature of material/archaeological sources
- Foreign accounts and importance of them for the history-writing

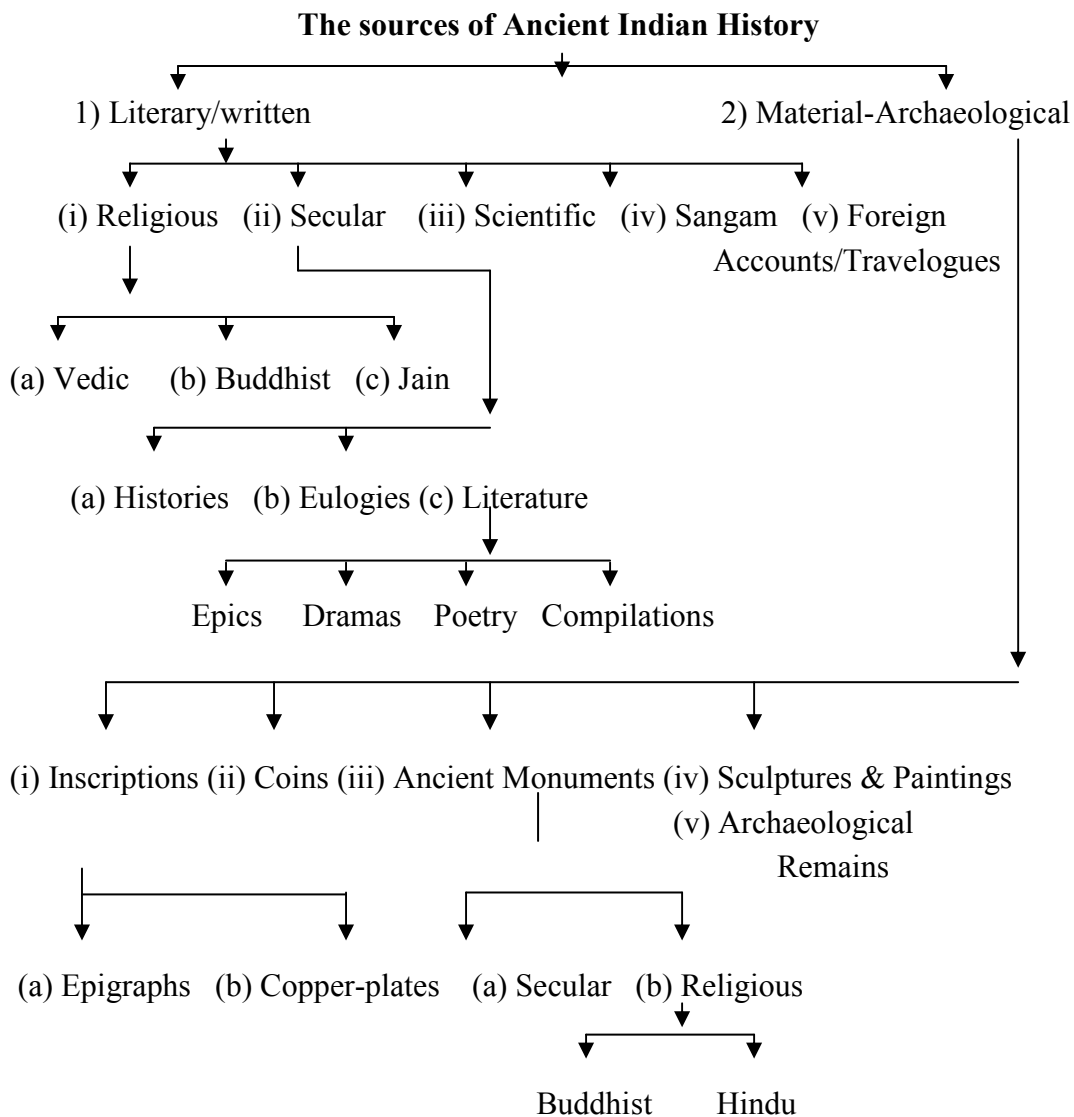
1.1 Introduction

India has a rich cultural heritage. The progress of man in the past is the subject matter of history. In order to understand the present India we have to trace back its roots in Ancient India. However, to reconstruct its history is a difficult task for the historians. Especially difficulty faced in the matter of types and nature of sources

1.2 Subject Matter

Sources of Ancient Indian History: 'Availability and decipherment' are two limitations regarding the sources of Ancient Indian History. Those were the British administrative officers who, for their administrative needs, first paid attention to

Ancient Indian history. Like, Sir William Jones (judge), in 1784, founded 'Asiatic Society of Bengal', for learning, understanding and publishing sources of A.I. History. Then, after the formation of Archaeological Survey of India in 1861, search for archaeological sources get legal-momentum. Then, after the discovery of Indus civilization in 1922, boosted love for ancient Indian history among Indians. Then, up till now, various types of sources are coming forth and their interpretation is becoming more challenging job for the historians of Ancient India.



Section-1 Literary/written sources

The literary/written sources to reconstruct Ancient Indian history can be classified among three major categories, (i) Religious, (ii) Secular and (iii) Scientific. It also comprised of some different kinds of sources like (iv) Sangam literature and (v) travelogues of foreign travelers.

(i) Religious sources

Religion was the backbone of society of Ancient World. India was not an exception. Hence, we find large amount of canonical/religious literature of various religions, prevalent in Ancient India. These throw light on the, along with religious, socio-economic aspects and political thought and ideology of the period under study.

However, such sources should be used with caution. Because, first of all, most of the religious sources are retained through oral traditions and put into writing, hundreds of years after their actual creation. Besides, 'what-we-have-now' are the editions of actual writings. Secondly, religious literatures were mainly written to provide guidance with an idealist approach. Hence, whatever written is there, is 'dos and don'ts' kind of nature and not 'as-actual'. Sometimes, the body of works like Puranas, though written in 4th century AD onwards, written as if they were created 1000 years before and prophesying something about 1000 years after! Hence, with tools like internal and external criticism, a historian can make use of these sources and reconstruct the history of Ancient India.

(a) Vedic/Hindu canonical literature

It comprised of sources like four Vedas, Brahmanas, Aranyakas, Upanishads, Shad-darshanas, Shad-angas, Sutras, Smritis and Puranas.

1. Vedas

The Aryans have created four Vedas; Rig, Yajus, Sam, Atharva. The Vedas (from *Vid*=to know) were basically compilation of prayers of Aryans for the Gods, which were mainly the powers in nature. According to Aryans, the Vedas were heard (and not created by men), hence these were called 'Shrutis' and 'a-paurusheya (not created by any man)'. The Vedas are also called as 'Samhita'.

Rig-Veda: Rig-Veda is the earliest among four Vedas. It is comprised of 10 mandalas and 1028 suktas. These were prayers to the gods like Indra, Varuna, Agni, Parjanya, Vayu, Marut etc. It gives us information regarding socio-economic,

religious, political condition of Early Aryans, located in the area of Sapta-Sindhus. For example, the 'Purushsukta' of Its 10th mandala depicts the origin of Varna-system in India.

Yajur-Veda: It comprised the prayers to be recited while performing sacrifices or yadnya. Actually, the major parts of the prayers are borrowed from the Rig-Veda, itself. It has two parts, Shukla and Krishna and six other samhitas. The Vajasaneyi Samhita of Yajurveda throws ample lights on various Vedic sacrifices.

Sam-Veda: It comprised the prayers to teach how to recite the prayers while performing sacrifices. Again it comprised the prayers from Rig-Veda, and provided methods to recite them. Hence, it is considered as the origin of Indian classical music.

Atharva-Veda: It comprised assorted subjects like magic, black-magic, superstitions etc. We find origins of medicines, botany, and surgery in this Veda.

The four Vedas throw light on life-ways of Vedic Aryans. We come to know that, when the Aryans, initially were settled in Saptasindhu region, their life-style was different. The second to ninth mandala of Rig-Veda tells us about this. But when they migrated to more eastern part of their actual location, and came into contact with other communities, we find drastic changes in their life-ways. The first and 10th mandala of Rig-Veda and other three Vedas inform such change. Hence, to understand Vedic Aryans, we have to think in two parts: Early Vedic and Later Vedic.

After Vedas, some other important works were compiled by Vedic Aryans. These were basically created to explain the thoughts and laws in the Vedas: to make them more understandable. Hence, these work as appendices of Vedas and were mostly in prose. These were comprised of, Brahmanas, Aranyakas, Upanishads, Vedangas, Shad-darshanas.

2. Brahmanas:

The Brahmanas were created to teach the procedure of sacrifices that were compiled in the Vedas. Hence, each Veda has its own Brhamana, e.g. of Rigveda-Aitareya Brhamana, of Samveda- Jaiminiya Brahmana, Yajurveda-Shatapath and of Atharvaveda-Gopath. From these Brahmanas, we get information of Vedic Aryans' various institutions, like, four Varnas, four Ashramas, philosophy etc.

3. Aranyakas:

The Aranyakas were created to teach the learning of Vedic religion, especially sacrifices & mystic philosophy into seclusion. Aitareya Aranyaka is meant for Rig-Veda whereas Taittiriya Aranyaka is for Yajur-Veda.

4. Upanishads:

The word Upanishad means 'to learn, by sitting close to one's teacher'. These were created to teach the learning of Vedic spiritualism, comprising the subject of, like, knowledge of one's self, knowledge of God, relations between self and God, creation of Universe, our place in such a vast Universe, etc. Traditionally there are 108 Upanishads, however, some of the important are, Ken, Kath, Prashna, Aiterya, Chandogya etc. As these come, chronologically, at the end of Vedas, hence, the Upanishads are also known as 'Vedanta'. The basic backbone of Indian religions were based, mostly, on Upanishads, hence, with the help of later, we can understand Indian religions more holistically.

5. Vedanga:

These were created to make Vedas more understandable, as follows:

- Shiksha: How to pronounce the Vedic prayers in proper manner
- Kalpa: Rules to perform sacrifice in a proper manner
- Vyakaran: To know the proper grammar of Sanskrit language
- Nirukta: Etymology of words, mentioned in the Vedas.
- Chanda: Various meters in which Vedic shlokas are structured to recite. It comprised of Gayatri meter (chanda), Anushtubha meter (chanda) etc.
- Jyotish : It deals with proper time (Shakun) on which sacrifices should be performed. It also discusses the subjects of astronomy like Sun, Moon, and constellations and, on cycles of seasons etc.

6. Shad-darshanas:

These works deal with philosophical teaching or aspects in the Vedas. These are six, like, Vaisheshik (Kanad), Nyaya (Kanad), Sankhya (Kapil), Yog (Patanjali), Mimamsa (Jaimini), Uttar-mimamsa (Badrayan). These cover topics like the theory, logic, unity of soul with God, atoms, Vedic rituals, structure of universe etc.

7. Sutras

The 6th century BC was the milestone in the history of India. The period witnessed emergence of early states and growth in economy and coinage. In this period, India went through its second urbanization. This was the period where heterodox religions like Buddhism, Jainism, Ajivakas were grew and developed. They challenged Vedic religion and its shortcomings and provided a strong alternative. Besides, during that period, India was came into closer contacts with foreigners.

Such was the period of constant churning and speedy processes. In response to such changes, the custodians of Vedic religion resorted to reconstruct and regulate their religion. Hence, Sutras were created to provide norms, rules and regulation to consolidated Vedic religion.

Sutras were compiled around 6th c. BC. These were comprised of three sutras, viz. Dharmasutras, Shrautasutras and Grihyasutras; together they are called as Kalpasutras. They throw ample light on such processes, going through during 6th c. BC.

8. The Smritis

During the last centuries of BC and first centuries of AD, India again witnessed the period of speedy changes. The economy was flourished, India had great relations with Roman world, Buddhism was at its peak, local dynasties were forming empires: thus no area, be it society or culture, was untouched by such changes. Such was the dynamic and vibrant scenario. Vedic religion, again, felt to reconstruct their religion and thus created the Smritis.

The Smritis, like Sutra, are the books of norms, codes, rules, regulations to consolidate and reconstruct Vedic religion. These were written by various scholars, like, Manu, Narad, Parashar, Yadnyavalka etc. Hence, we find many smritis on their name, e.g. Manu-smriti, Narad-smriti etc.

9. Puranas

Up to 3-4th century AD, Buddhism was its peak. Under Mahayana, the idol of Buddha was started worshipping; and thus, it gained popularity. On the other side, Vedic religion was felt alienated and needed popularity among the masses. It was introspecting and experimenting in its thoughts. As a result, Vedic religion, for

common mass, created a certain kind of literature and, through it, opened the doors of religion to common mass. The genre of literature is called as 'Puranas'.

The Puranas are mainly comprised of 18 Puranas and these were classified according to the devotional cults, prevailed in 3rd-4th c. India. For example, the Puranas of Shaiva consisted of Shaiv Puranas, Vayu Puranas, Skanda Puranas; whereas the Vaishnavas venerated Vishnu Purana, Garud Purana, Matsya Purana, Varaha Purana. The Shakti cult (devoted to mother goddesses) and Ganapatya cult also created their own Puranas.

Such Puranas have common sections, like, origin of universe, stories regarding respective God and its Family, importance of pilgrim centres and pilgrimages, political dynasties and myths of lineages (vansha and vanshanucharit) etc. Subsequently, other related subjects were also touched in the Puranas, like, iconography, architecture (Vishnudharmottar Purana), medicines, geography, political history etc.

In short, to understand India of 3rd to 6th century AD, the Puranas help historians in a large manner.

(b) Buddhist Canonical Literature

Buddhism was the religion of masses; hence, their literature and the language of them were maintained as of the followers. Hence, these are in various languages, like, Prakrit (Pali), Tibetan, Chinese, Sinhali etc. To challenge Vedic religion, these were also written in Sanskrit language.

The vast body of Buddhist literature comprised of, mainly, the Pitakas, the Jatakas, etc.

1) Pitakas:

The Pitakas comprised of three compilations, viz. Vinaya, Sutta, Abhidhamma and together they are known as 'Tri-Pitakas'.

The Vinay- Pitaka was compiled by Upali and comprised of five books. These were basically created to provide codes of conducts for Monasteries, Bhikus, Bhikkunis, their daily routine, ethics etc. It has parts like Sutta-vibhanga (origin of codes regarding Bhikkus), Khandaka (rules regarding entry into monastery and admissions etc) and Parivar.

The Sutta-pitaka compiled by Ananda. These were created to teach Buddha's teaching with examples, parables and lectures. This body of literature is oriented towards common people. The Sutta-Pitaka comprised of five books (nikayas), like Digha-nikay, Mazzim-nikaya, Sanyukta-nikaya, Anguttar-nikaya, Khuddak-nikaya. The Khuddak-nikaya was an important volume consisting of works like, Dhammapada, Suttanipata, Thergatha and Therigatha. Jatakas were also become part of Khuddak-nikaya.

The same, i.e. Buddha's teaching is the main theme of Abhidhamma-Pitaka, however, it has a philosophical & scientific form. Obviously, these were meant for Buddhist scholars. It comprised of 'Kathavastu' an important Buddhist book.

In, short, these books throw ample light on thoughts and codes-of-conducts of Buddhism.

2) The Jatakas

The Jatakas are the compilation of the stories regarding previous births of Buddha. To solve the problems of his followers, Buddha devised a beautiful method to tell the stories from his own-experiences that of his previous births, and, the skeptic or problem follower drew answers from these stories. These were the Jatakaas who throw light on India during 6th c. BC.

3) Dipvamsha and Mahavamsha

These Buddhist works are of Shri Lankan origin. They inform us about Ashoka-the Mauryan Emperor and various Buddhist scholars.

4) Divyavadan

This Buddhist work is of Napali origin. It tells Buddhist stories and throws light on northern dynasties, from Mauryan kings to Shunga period.

The Buddhist literature also comprised of other important works, like, Milind-Panha (discussion between Bhikku Nagsen with Milind (Menander) Buddhist turned Greek king; Ashvaghosha's Buddha-Charit (biography of Buddha); Mahavastu, Lalitvistar, Manjushri Mulkalpa etc.

(c) Jain Canonical Literature

Ancient Jain literature is in various languages, like, Prakrit (Ardhamagadhi, Shaurseni), Tamil, Sanskrit etc. The literature can mainly be classified into two parts,

Anga (14) and Agamas (purva). Besides, Chedasutras (6) and Mulsutras (4) are also important parts of it.

1) Anga and Agam

These works throw light on the teaching of Mahavir. The Acharang Sutra reflects on codes-of-conducts of Jain monks'; whereas, Bhagavati Sutra throws light on Mahavir's biography and his exploits.

2) Philosophical

These comprised of Samaysar, Pravachansar etc. These were mainly created by Acharya Kundakunda, reflected upon Jain spiritualism.

3) Puranas

The Jain Puranas were based on the framework of Vedic epics and Puranas; however, with the main content of Jain philosophy. These comprised of Harivamsha purana, Maha-purnana, Padmacharit etc.

4) Biographies

These were comprised of Bhadrabahu-Charita, Jasahar-chariu, Naykumar-chariu etc. The Bhadrabhau -charita throws light on the events related to Mauryan Emperor Chandragupta and his teacher, Bhadrabhau-Jain Acharya.

The Jain literature also comprised of Kathakosh of Harisen, Parishishta-parva of Hemchandra Suri, Dhananjay-mala (thesaurus), Alankar-chintamani (on literature), Mahavir-ganit-sarsamgraha (mathematics), Niti-vakya-mrita of Somdeva (Political Science) etc.

(ii) Secular Literary Sources

India was not totally engulfed itself in religions, as half-learned people may think. It also created a large hoard of secular literature throughout thousand years of its history. A mere cursory glance through it may testify this.

(a) Histories

India was not unaware of history-writing. We would understand some regional histories in following lines.

Rajtarangini:

This is perceived as the first-book of history of India, as per modern lines of historiography. It is the history of Kashmir, written by Kalhan (born in 1100 AD in Kashmir). He completed this book within two years, during the reign of King Jaysimha of Kashmir. It is in Sankrit, comprising eight Khandas (chapters/volumes) and 7826 sholkas (verses). It gives history of Kashmir from the period of Mahabharata-war up to 12th century AD; however, only from 9th century, a precise history can be seen. Kalhan was an unbiased historian who, for writing history, utilized large body and variety of sources. He undertook field-work and traveled through out Kashmir. During his travel, he, not only collected sources but also interviewed local people and collected oral traditions. Thus based on literary sources and oral tradition and through extensive field-work, he wrote 'Rajatrangani'. His work shows his love of Kashmir and respect of his patron king. However, as a historian, he also criticizes the negative-points of his king. The work shows his beautiful narrative-descriptive style, dramatic dialogues, sprinkled with good-advises here and there.

Rajatrangini shows importance of sources and variety of them for writing of history. It also stresses the impartiality and unbiased nature of historian. According to Kalhana, "...Such person (historian) should be praised whose writing abstained itself from any kind of anger-hatred and remained impartial while describing historical events..". Such was the urge of Kalhana and work like Rajtarangini. Hence, it is called as first book of History in India.

Apart from Rajtarngini, the 'Rasmala' and 'Kirtikaumudi' (written by Someshvar) inform us about the history of Gujarat during the Chalukya (of Lata) period.

(b) Eulogies

The Eulogies are those works which are created to praise the patron king (and his deeds) by a charan/bhat/poet in the court. Such work, though one-sided, informs us about king, his dynasty and family, his deeds & policies etc.

1) *Vikramank-deva-charit:*

This eulogy is written by Bilhan who praises the king Vikramaditya (of Chalukya dynasty) and his various deeds.

2) *Gaudavaho:*

Vakpati wrote this eulogy in praise of Yashovarman's (of Malwa) victory over Bengal (Gaud region).

3) *Harsha-charit:*

This eulogy was written by Banbhatta in praise of Harshavardhana.

Besides, some other notable eulogies comprised of Kumarpala-charit (by Hemchandra), Hammir-mad-mardan (by Jaychand Suri) etc.

(c) Literature

The literature comprised of dramas, poetry, epics etc. These are secular kind of literature hence we find factual information regarding society and economy, sometimes polity of specific period. However, these should be used with caution as their purpose was not-to-write-history but to entertain readers.

1) Epics

Epics comprised of Mahabharata (by Vyasa) and Ramayana (by Valmiki). We get information from these epics of vast areas of interests, like, the movement of Aryans throughout Indian subcontinent, their relations with local or native communities and tribes, their political thoughts, institutions, society, social customs and traditions, forest tribes, economy etc. It also deals with long-term processes like Aryanization of India, inception of Urbanization, conflicts between two modes of economies (Pastoralism and agriculture) etc. In short, to understand India during 8th to 6th century BC, these epics proved to be important source.

2) Dramas

The 'Sariputta-prakaran' was considered as the first drama, written by Ashvaghosha. Then, one scholar-Bharat wrote his famous 'Natysashtra' on dramatics. Some of the important drams are as follows:

Mudra-rakshas:

This is a drama, written by one Vishakhadatta. The drama deals with one incident concerned with Chanakya (the prime minister of Chandragupta Maurya) and Rakshasa (Amatya of Dhanananda). The play gives information on Chankyas politics, espionage and the foundation of Mauryan Empire.

His drama 'Devi-chandraguptam' deals with the life of Chandragupta II of Gupta dynasty.

Mrichcha-katika:

This drama revolves around the love between one poor Charudatta and beautiful Ganika (prostitute) Vasantasena. It is written by Raja Shudrak which sheds light on economical affluence of ancient India, the prostitutes and respect to them in society, the social structure etc. It also gives passing reference on people's revolt against unjust king.

Malvika-agnimitra:

This play was written by Kalidasa, great poet and dramatist during Gupta period. The subject of the drama is the love between one Malvika and Agnimitra, brave king of Shunga dynasty.

Kalidasa also wrote beautiful dramas like Vikramorvasiya, Shakuntal etc.

Nanganada, Ratnavali, Priyadarshika:

These plays were written by king Harshavardhana. These reflect upon socio-economic condition and religious outlook during his reign.

Other dramas of importance comprised of Uttar-rama-charit and Malati-madhav of Bhavbhuti, Svapna-vasavdatta of Bhasa, etc.

3) Poetry

After early centuries of Christian era, and especially during Gupta times, India witnessed growth of classical literature.

The 'Raghu-vamsha', 'Kumar-sambhav', 'Riti-samhar' and 'Meghaduta' were the classic creation of Kalidasa. The last two are world-famous and the description of nature and cycles of seasons, written therein reflects, not only the classicality India received at that time, but, the contemporary ecology of that time.

Other works of poetry consisted of Dashakumara-charit (Dandi), Kiratarjuniya (Bharavi), Ravan-vadha (Bhatti), Vasavadatta (Subandhu) etc.

4) Compilations

Some compilations are of worth mentioning regarding secular sources;

Gatha-saptashati

'Hal' the Satavahana king was himself a great man of literature. He collected folk tales/songs and compiled into 'Gatha-saptashati, a compilation of 700 short-poems. It has a great literary merit. As a source, it is an impartial source which gives information of common folks during early historic Godavari-valley. It touches, mainly the human relations, various relationships and complexities, the cropping patterns, social structures etc.

Then, some other compilations include Brihat-katha (of Gunadhya), Brihat-katha-manjari (of Kshemendra), Panchatantra (of Vishnusharma). These are basically universal stories, told to inculcate ethics and moral values in the hearts and minds of peoples and children, by using imaginary dialogues between trees and animals.

(iii) Scientific Treaties

Ancient India was not unaware of scientific attitude. Hence, considerable amount of scientific work were created during that period. The treaties mainly comprised of works on Political sciences and Grammar, however, after early centuries, many scientific works were started showing up on subjects like medical science, agro-irrigation science, mathematics, astrology-astronomy, art-architecture, iconography etc. Especially, Gupta period witnessed the emergence of various sciences.

1) Arthashastra:

This main subject matter of this book is 'Political Science', written by Chanakya/Kautilya, the prime minister in Chandragupta Maurya's court. He defines Arthashastra as 'the science to teach how to be benefitted by the power and how to preserve it'. In short, it informs us about methods to acquire power and various types of administrative systems/policies to sustain it. This book is a firsthand document which informs us about the polity and administrative system of Mauryan Empire. As it is an administrative document and especially 'written-for-the-king, it is in court-language, i.e. Sanskrit.

To write this book, Chanakya took review of, pervious researches of 18 scholars on the subjects. The Arthashastra comprised of 15 parts (pradhikaranas), 150 chapters (adhyayas), 180 headings (up-vibhagas) and 6000 verses (Shlokas).

The Parts are as follows:

1. Vinaya-dhikar (appointments of ministers)
2. Adhyaksha-prachar (responsibilities of administrator: forts, taxes, weights-measure, espionage etc.)
3. Dharmasthiya (Laws regarding marriages)
4. Kantik-shodhan (punishments)
5. Yogvritta (duties of servants)
6. Mandal-yoni (External Policies: who are friends and who are enemies)
7. Shada-guna (External Affairs)
8. Vyasana-dhikaraka (how to search for the origin/cause of problems)
9. Abhiyasytkarma (Preparation before war)
10. Sangramic (war-strategies)
11. Sangha-vritta (how to divide and rule)
12. A-baliyas (how to defend weak state from more powerful enemy)
13. Durga-labhopay (how to capture forts)
14. Aushad-nishadak (various methods to defeat the enemy)
15. Tantra-yukti (the meaning of Arthashastra, i.e. political science)

In short Arthashastra have touched upon various matters of state-concerns, like, the integral parts of state system (theory of Saptanga), relations among various states, duties of officers and servants, administrative divisions of Empire, taxation system, laws, foreign affairs etc. Other subjects are also dealt with, like, social conditions in various regions, medicinal plants, mines and the art of mining, cropping pattern, irrigation systems etc.

Other political treaties comprised of Niti-sar (by Kamandak), Niti-vakya-mrit (by Somadevsuri).

2) *Ashtadhyayi* and *Mahabhashya*:

Ashtadhyayi deals with Grammar, written by Panini. It throws light on social-churning of 6th century BC, i.e. the period of second urbanization in India. Similar

work is *Mahabhashya*, written by Patanjali, informs us about social condition during Early Historic period.

3) *Charak-samhita and Sushrut-samhita*:

These works inform us about medical sciences during Ancient India and considered as the basis of Ayurveda-branch of medicines.

4) *Brihat-samhita*:

It is written by Varhamihir and of an encyclopedic nature. It touches various subjects like, crops, cropping pattern, agriculture technology, how to foresee earthquakes, astronomy, astrology etc. It testifies the scientific progress in India during Gupta period.

He also has written 'Pancha-siddhantika', concerns with eclipses, path of planets and pace of constellation etc.

Other works on astronomy and astrology comprised of Aryabhatiya (by Aryabhatta), Brhama-sphuta-siddhant (by Brahmagupta) etc.

(iv) Sangam Literature

The Sangam literature gives us information regarding early historic and historic Southern India. The Sangam means an assembly. The body of Sangam literature comprised of the poems, presented in three assemblies, by Tamil poets. These poems were actually collected by the poets, from various eco-regions in southern India. Thus, these are basically folk-lore, compiled by urban poets. The important works are Shilappadikaram, Manimekhalai, Pattupattu etc.

There are five eco-regions in Tamil-land, called as 'Tinaï' and these are five, hence, 'Ain-tinaï'. Each 'tinaï' has a specific kind of ecology and, naturally, specific kind of response (or mode of subsistence) to their surrounding ecology. Thus, the poems in hilly regions display different subject-matter or surroundings than those were of coastal region. However, these folk-songs were created on two basic theme-lines, i.e. Love (ekam) and War (puram). Thus, 'waiting on the coast for her lover who was not written from fishing' is a matter of tension in coastal region and 'fear of attacks of wild animals on her lover' is a concern of hilly regions.

Such type of literature is mostly a secular one and reflects true nature of common men-women and their life-style. If we look deeply into that, vast hoard of

information could come forward of utmost importance, like, ancient ecology, modes of subsistence and methods/techniques to acquire food, forest/sea/plain-products, cropping patterns and their cycle, methods of irrigation, social condition and tensions in social groups, independence of eco-regions and interdependence upon each other whereas on other sides, Tamil polity, kingship and duties of kinds, towns and town-administration, laws, judiciary, city-layouts, internal and external trade etc.

(v) Foreign Accounts

After the invasion of Persians and Greeks, India was re-exposed to ancient world. The wars were some incidents; however the process of mobility of people between two counties became a sustainable phenomenon of Ancient India. Such travelers were foreigners hence they had no obligation to any king of the region. Hence, their accounts are impartial and; being 'eye-witness' gives us first hand information on the subjects they touched upon. However, it should be kept in mind that, as they were foreigners and not-rooted in India, it is not possible to expect from them a perfect knowledge of the socio-economic and political thoughts and institutions in India.

(a) The Greeks and Romans

1) *Herodotus:*

He is considered as first historian of the world. He, while describing the war between Persian and Greece, mention Indian soldiers, fighting along the side of Persians.

2) *Megasthenes:*

He was the ambassador of Seleucus Nicator, posted in the court of Chandrgupt Maurya. In his work, 'Indica', he gives description of the layout of Pataliputra, like, a big city, with an extent of 14 km x 2 km, fortified with 570 bastions and 67 gateways with one huge royal palace etc. He also touches upon social structure, caste-system, caste-relations etc. It should be noted that the original Indica is lost; hence, we can't use any information, actually written in there. However, the travelers, who came into India after Megasthenes, have referred Indica and quoted it. Thus, through them i.e. indirectly, we can use 'Indica' as a source.

3) *Peryplus of the Erythraean Sea:*

This travelogue is an anonymous work, presumed to be written by one fisherman on Egypt coast. The work gives us impartial and objective information on the Indo-Roman trade during Early Historic period. It informs us about the ports on India's coast-line, trade-centres in India, the trade-routes-connecting trade centres and ports, distance between centres, the list of items-of-trade, the annual volume of trade, the rates, types of ships etc.

(b) Chinese

1) *Fa-Hien (Fa Xian) (337-422 AD):*

This Chinese traveler visited India during Gupta period. He was a Buddhist monk, visited India to seek knowledge from Dev-bhumi (i.e. India) and visit Buddhist pilgrimage centres. On the basis of his three years of travel, he has written, in his chronicle 'Records of Buddhistic Kingdoms', on society and culture of North India, besides, various factors in Gupta administration.

2) *Hiuen-Tsiang (Xuan Zang) (602-664 AD)*

This Chinese Buddhist monk, against all odds, visited India during Harshavardhana's reign. He started his journey in 629 AD, from Gansu, and then through, Gobi Desert-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan-Samarkand-Balkh came to India in 630 AD. He visited Buddhist pilgrimage centres, stayed at Nalanda University and studied Buddhism, gone through original Buddhist works, collected original manuscripts and mementos, made copies, attended Harsha's assembly and after 15 years of travel throughout India, returned to China in 645 AD. In China he wrote his account as 'Si-Yu-Ki' (Great Tang Records on the Western Regions). This chronicle give vivid description of what he had witnessed in India. He gives information of kings especially Harsha and his generosity, people and customs of various regions in India, life-ways etc. He has written of habits and nature of Maharashtrian people.

Other chronicles consists of Taranath's (Tibetan Buddhist monk) *Kangyur and Tangyur*, reflect upon early Medieval India.

Check your progress-1

a. Answer in one sentence.

1. Which was the earliest of the Vedas?

2. How many mandalas are there in Rig-Veda?
3. What is the subject-matter of Vinaya Pitaka?
4. Which work was credited to Megasthenes?
5. What is name of chronicle written by Hiuen-Tsiang?

b. Choose correct alternative.

1.is related to medical science.
a) Aryabhatiya b) Kamsutra c) Sushrutsamhita d) Ratnavali
2.are the compilation of stories of previous births of Buddha.
a) Pitakas b) Jatakas c) Vedas d) Arthashastra
3. Dipavamsa and Mahavamsa were written in.....language.
a) Sanskrit b) Prakrit c) Persian d) Sinhali
4.give earliest information on Aryans.
a) The Puranas b) The Smritis c) The Sutras d) The Vedas
5. is the famous work of grammarian Panini.
a) Mahavastu b) Bhagavatisutra c) Ashtadhyayi d) Anguttarnikaya

Section-II Material/Archaeological sources

The Material/Archaeological sources comprised of (i) Inscriptions, (ii) Coins, (iii) Ancient Monuments, (iv) Sculptures & Paintings and (v) Archaeological Remains

(i) Inscriptions

After contact between Persian and India, India came to know the importance of 'art-in-stone'. Being a stable material, stones were being used for engraving king's orders, policies, outlooks to public them and kept them for time immemorial. These were also used for issuing land-grants to the grantee. With same notion, court-poets also engraved eulogies by using such material to make it immortal. These are generally called inscriptions and written, either on rock or pillar. These are called Epigraphs or edicts.

(a) Epigraphs

The earliest epigraphs in India are those of Ashoka, the Mauryan Empire. He, to propagate his dhamma and policies, issued 14 edicts. These were inscribed on rocks, e.g. Junagadh (Gujarat). Besides, he put up pillars in public places or places where people can gather easily; and, inscribed them. To help people to read these commands, he, categorically, inscribed them into the language and script of common people, i.e. Brahmi (script) and Parkrit (language). The edicts in North-western India had Kharoshtri script, known to local people of that area. These Ashokan epigraphs (rock-edicts and pillar-edicts) inform us, near about biography of Ashoka, like, his early days, his gruesome war with Kalinga and his remorse, his conversion to Buddhism, his dhamma, his compassionate attitude towards other religion and the same expectations from his subjects, his methods of propagation, stress on morality-ethics-civic sense and universal values etc.

Other inscriptions of importance comprised of

- Naganika's inscription at Nangeghat which gives information of various sacrifices, performed by Satavahana King Satakarni I and his deeds
- Gautami Balashri's and Yadnya Satkarani's inscription at Nasik caves which give information on the adventures of Gautamiputra Satkarni, the great Satavahana king.
- Kharvela's inscription at Hathigumpā tells his deeds.
- Harisena's inscription (eulogy) on the pillar of Allahabad (called as 'Prayag-prashasti'), informing us about adventures and campaigns of Samudragupta, great Gupta emperor.
- Ravikirti's eulogy at Aihole informs us about adventures of Pulkeshi II, the Chalukya king of Badami.

So far the epigraphs for 'land-grants' are concerned; we find lots of information in there. Like, the king or issuing authority, his lineages, mythical origins of his dynasty, his kingdom and its extent, then; the origin/gotra of grantee; then; purpose of grant, the extents and limits of granted land, list of rights and privileges to the grantee, punishments to the trespassers or violators of the grant etc.

Such epigraphs, along with the king's biographical sketch, as immovable, also inform us about the extent of the kingdom of the issuer.

(b) Copper-plates

Generally for 'land-grants' the copper-plates were engraved and issued to the grantee. These are basically three plates of copper, tied with each other through copper knot. The upper and last portions are left un-engraved as these can be blurred with ravages of time. Such copper-plate reveals the same information that is in the land-grants, engraved as epigraphs.

Such copper-plates give information on socio-economic condition of that period. For example the 'Sauhagaura-copper plate' informs us about severed draught and the measures undertaken by authorities to tackle the problem of food-shortage.

(ii) Coins

Since 6th century BC we receive information regarding coins in India. Basically the earliest were crude and of punch-marked silver coins;

Punch-Marked Coins

then, after the stability of foreigners in India like Greek, Kushanas, Parthian, round, cast-coins with bust of kings-Deities, their titles etc. With their influence, Indian dynasties also came up with developed coins. However, those were the Guptas who came up with fully developed coins.

We find such ancient coins, generally by accidents; or through gifts. Such coins help us to reconstruct our Ancient History through many ways, like,

- Coins inform us about such dynasties and kings which missed place in literary sources.
- The metal used in them informs us about ancient metallurgy.
- The proportion of pure metal in the coins of 'claimed metal' informs us about economical condition of issuing dynasty. For example, the gold-coins of Kushanas and Guptas are true to their 'claim' and show higher proportion of gold in them; whereas, the proportion is minimal or more-or-less absent in later Gupta rulers. This shows the growth of Indian economy since Kushanas to Gupta period and dwindling during later Gupta period.

- Coins inform us the economic relationship among people. For example, the discovery of northern punch-marked-coins in Deccan indicated relationships between north and south India. The same is true when we find Roman coins in Deccan during Satavahana period and Satavahana coins in Mediterranean world.
- Religious symbols or figures of deities on coins inform us about religious outlook of issuing dynasties. For example, Krishna and Balarama in the coins of Agathocles' indicated compassionate attitude of that Greek king.

The symbols related to Vishnu on Gupta coins like Garuda-dhvaja indicates their belief on Vaishnavism. The titles also tell us about their religious attitude, e.g. titles of Guptas like Param-vaishnava, param-bhagavat indicate their inclination towards Vaishnavism.

Samudragupta with Garud-dhvaja

- Coins also reflect king's personality, his interests etc. For example, the lion-slayer image of Chandragupta II indicates his braveness; the harp-in-hand image of Samudragupta indicates his love for art.
- Some coins also have years, engraved on them. It helps to date the issuers.
- The coins also help for relative dating. For example, in archaeological excavations, if we find coins in one specific stratum then that stratum is relatively dated to the period of that coin.

(iii) Ancient Architecture/Monuments

Earlier, during Stone Age, people took shelters in caves. However, the invention of agriculture compelled them to reside on plains. Thus, the houses get started from Neolithic period. Initially, those were made from perishable materials like wood and grass, hence, except post-holes, we find nothing of that. The scenario changed when burnt-bricks were started utilizing for constructing houses or public architecture or so-called Ancient Monuments. This can be witnessed from Chalcolithic period. Since then, India witnessed developments and variations in material, as well as, types of construction, public/civic and individual. These, broadly, can be classified into Secular and Religious architecture. So, let us, at first, look at the secular architecture in Ancient India.

(a) Secular Architecture/monuments

So far the public and secular architecture is concerned; first instances were brought from western and north-western India that is of Harappan civilization of Chalcolithic period. During Harappan civilization, India went through its first urbanization. Hence, public/civic architecture of utmost importance was dotted these cities. These comprised of, long-wide roads, huge bathing places, tanks, religious places, granaries/warehouses, thrashing floors, dock-yards, man-made ports, sanitary arrangements like bathrooms and gutters, stadium, pavilion, palaces, fortification, bastion etc. The site of Inamgaon, during Chalcolithic period, also came up with a large bund and canal.

Then, in Maurayan and post-Mauryan period, we find, large fortification (Pataliputra), palaces (Pataliputra), stadiums (Nagarjunkonda), flight of steps to the rivers (Nagarjunkonda) etc.

The remains of houses also give information on the standard-of-life and living-condition of that period. It also throws light on civic sense, personal hygiene of concerned people.

Such sources give us information on socio-economic condition, the role of polity, defensive strategies, water-management, civic sense, life-style of the people of concern period.

(b) Religious Monuments

The religious monuments started showing up from Mauryan period. It started with the caves of Ajivakas (at Barabar and Nagarjuni hills: Bihar), then, we find large number of Buddhist monuments in India. Then, since Gupta period, we find the beginning, growth and classicality in Hindu monuments in India.

Buddhist Stupas, Chaityas, Viharas

Since Early Historic period, India was dotted with Buddhist Stupas, Chaityas and Viharas. At the outset, the construction began in Northern India; then through Gujarat, percolated to Maharashtra; and through Orissa, came to Andhra Pradesh.

The Stupas were created on the physical remains or used-equipments of Buddha or noteworthy Buddhist monks. These stupas were surrounded by beautifully decorative Gate-ways (torana), e.g. stupas at Sanchi, Barhut (Madhya Pradesh); Amaravati (Andhra Pradesh); Pauni, Kolhapur (Maharashtra); Sannati (Karnataka).

The Chaityas are Buddhist chapels/temples; where Buddha was worshipped in the symbolic form of Stupa at the end of Chaityas. Except one at Bairat, the Chaityas were created in the caves; e.g. Chaityas at Bhaje (the earliest of them), Bedasa, Karle.

The Viharas are the residential place of Buddhist monks, where a large space is surrounded by rooms along all its three sides. Similar to Chaityas, these were also hewn in rock, e.g. Viharas at Kanheri, Nasik, Junnar etc. After some centuries and under the influence of Mahayana cult, the stupa in Chaitya replaced by idol of Buddha and Chaityas were combined with Viharas. This development can be witnessed in Ajanta.

These Buddhist shrines give lot of information regarding various areas; like, the development of religious thought and ideology, its spread in various regions, influence from other religions, its influence on other cults, the monastery (Sangha), relations between monastery and traders, stylistic evolution and growth of art etc. Besides, the decorative motives on the gateways give us idea of public/individual architecture, flora-fauna, artistic styles of concerned period etc.

Hindu Temples

Since Gupta period we witness beginning of separate temple architecture. Initially, drawing influence from Buddhist cave art, these were started in caves. However, to congregate large masses, these descended on plains.

The first experiment in separate-temple architecture can be seen in modest temple No. 7, at Sanchi. It only comprises two parts, garbhagriha (sanctum) and mukhamandapa (frontal space). Then, through Tigava, Nachana and Devgad (all in Madhya Pradesh), a complete temple with 'garbhagriha-enclosed path of pradakshina-mukhamandapa at three sides and pier' emerged; and that is with beautiful sculptures. The treatment to the Shikhara was to maintain it high, hence, it got narrower to the top. Hence, when a viewer looks at the temple his gaze goes straight, from base to top. Such style is called as 'Nagara style'.

However, in Deccan and South India, the progress was different. At the outset, Chalukyas experimented in Temple architecture, from rock-cut temples (Badami) to separate temples (Pattadakal and Aihole). Near about same time, Pallavas, created temples in rock-cut fashion (the 'Ratha Temples at Mahabalipuram). Then, Cholas came up with huge temples. Drawing from these experiments, the Rashtrakutas

undertook an experiment of beautiful temple; however, in rock-cut fashion. That is Kailasa temple of Ellora. These temples in Deccan and South India generally use stone-slabs; placing upon each other for the Shikharas. Hence, the Shikhara looks steps-like, presenting squat impression. Such, architectural style is known as 'Dravida style'.

After such experimentation, large temples, beautified with sculptures started dotting whole of India. After 6th-7th century AD, growth of regionalism paved way of emergence of regional styles in temple architecture. Thus, within short period of time, India became abode of temples with beautiful sculptures on their walls and complex plan plus designs.

Such Ancient monuments are the mute but objective source of Ancient Indian history. They help us to understand the growth of religion as well as ideology of religions. It also informs us about the exchange and influence of ideas among various belief systems. It also give us idea of changes, growth of artistic styles and influences they draw on them. It also tells us the nature of patronage and the role of temples in political economy of the concerned period.

(iv) Sculptures & Paintings

Sculptures:

Since Harappan period we find evidences of sculptures in India. These were made of various materials, like, stone, steatite, clay, terracotta, lime, bronze, ivory, wood etc. Some of them got place in shrine and became idol or icon. Some of them were made to beautify the walls of temples. Some of them were individual sculpture, made for various purposes, like as toys and for entertainments.

The bronze statues of dancer (Harappan civilization) and toys (Diamabad) during Chalcolithic period show artistic merit, as well as expertise in metallurgy of India. Various other statues of the same periods indicate place of entertainment, hair-styles, ornaments and costume of Harappans. Same is true with terracotta toys, belonged to Shunga period.

The Mauryan sculptures, like, the Yakshi of Didarganj indicate the contemporary affluence and aesthetic sense of people. The sculptural-reliefs on the gateways of stupas (Sanchi, Barhut), not only display growth of Buddhist ideology, but also of various other things like flora, fauna, civic architecture etc.

The statue of Kanishka indicates the foreign origin of the king and costume of foreign style, like, high shoes, overcoats etc.

Bronze statue of Poseidon and relieves on plates/mirror-handles (Kolhapur) indicate trade relationship between Kolhapur and Rome during Satavahana period. The same is true by finding of ivory figure of Laxmi of Ter in the site of Pompeii (in Rome).

Gupta sculptures indicate high artistic merit India achieved during that period. At this time, the science of sculptures had attained perfection and classicality. Hence, after Gupta period, the sculptures were made on the same models, that were determined during Gupta period.

Whereas, the development of icon/idols (individual sculptures for worship) regarding their poses and weapons they carry, indicate, development of religious ideology and influence they draw from various sources. These also indicate synchronization of various cults. A separate branch as 'Iconography' studies such developments.

Paintings:

Earliest instances of paintings can be found in the rock-shelters of Bhimbetaka (Madhya Pradesh). These were drawn by Mesolithic cave-dwellers by using colours and tools from his surrounding nature. Through these rock-paintings we can understand the life-style of Mesolithic people; like, his way of living, methods of hunting, the flora and fauna in his surrounding etc.

Then, we find beautiful paintings, especially from Ajanta and then at Bagh. The world-famous paintings of Ajanta give us information about religious ideology, the spiritual serenity, the ornaments, the costumes, the foreign visitors etc. And of course, through these paintings, we can understand the artistic merit and great esthetic sense of concerned period.

Whereas, the paintings of Chola king on the walls of temples at Tamil Nadu, display the concept of 'divine kingship' of Chola polity.

(v) Archaeological Remains

People settles-people live-create institutions and physical structure and in some unfavorable condition leave the place. The place gets abandoned with material remains that people have left behind-unintentionally. Then, by the environmental

agents like wind, soil, rain, a heap of soil gets accumulated on that place. Then, again the next group of people settles over there. Then, the same cycle continues. Thus, after sequence of repeated settlements and abandoning, a heap of soil forms over that place. Such heaps are called as 'archaeological mounds', hiding in its belly the history of mankind. Then some certain kind of historians, called as archeologists unearthed these mounds, called as an excavation. Through excavation, archaeologists exposed the hidden history of that specific settlement. The archaeological material they unearthed can be used as sources for the reconstruction of history of that particular settlement.

The material helps us to reconstruct history of: those common people who were disregarded by the written source; those periods before the discovery of writing; to supplement the history, reconstructed by written sources.

Following is a brief list of archaeological material that can be used as source:

Pottery

During Protohistory up to Early Medieval period, the base equipment of the common people was the pottery. The Pottery or 'ceramic assemblage' comprised of various items, like, bowls, plates, pots, etc. It should be noted the pottery gets differentiated according to respective culture that created them. The difference lies in shapes, fabrics, surface-treatment (fabric, colour, designs, painting), pottery-making-technique etc. Thus, specific pottery-type is assigned to particular culture/period. With such logic, archaeologist can date the site relatively on the basis of these differences. Hence, pottery is considered as alphabet of that site.

Beads

Since time-immemorial the bead-industry is one of the world-famous industries of India. These were made of various materials, like, stone, semi-precious stones (like Agate, Chalcedony, Crystal, Turquoise, Lapis-lazuli), glass, metals like gold, copper; terra cotta, ivory, shell etc. Besides, those were of different shapes like round, square, cylindrical, barrel-shaped etc. The technology was so higher that we have achieved the technique of making beads, inlaying other metal into them. These can be used as source to know the technological development & esthetic sense of specific period.

Faunal Remains/Bones

Excavations reveal large amount of bones or faunal remains. These shed light on the surrounding historical ecology or ecosystem of that particular site. Besides, we can also understand the dietary habits of concerned people.

Floral Remains

The floral remains are also give us information on the surrounding historical ecology and dietary habits of concerned people.

Foundations of architecture

During horizontal excavations, we come across foundation of architecture of related period. The architecture comprised of civic architecture like huts, houses, palaces, stadiums, assembly-halls, bath-rooms, ware-houses, activity areas like kitchen-bedrooms-hall-verandah-thrashing floors; roads, system of sanitation, water-source, etc. On these bases and the layout of sites we can know the standard-of-living of the people, besides, the spatial distribution in the area indicates the social division of particular period, if any. The structures like bunds/docks throw light on the economy and technological development, attained by these people. Whereas; defensive architectures, like fortification, bastion, moats indicate the affluence of that particular site and quantum of threat to that site.

Domestic Material

The excavations reveal a hoard of domestic items, like, kitchen equipment (pots, hearth, spatula, querns etc.), ornaments, items of entertainment like toys; etc. These were made of various materials, like, stone, clays, terra-cotta, metal, shell, ivory etc.

Occupational Material

The occupation material comprised of agricultural equipments (hoe, plough, fishing-equipments (hook, net), trade-equipments (weights & measures, seals and sealing, coins). These were also made of various material, like, stone, clay, terracotta, metal etc.

The Charcoal

Excavation unearths burnt-organic material of any kind. These are called as 'Charcoal'. Such charcoal, in specific amount and through laboratory tastes, could be used for dating the period, called as 'Carbon-14'.

Thus, we can see that archaeological materials are the major source for the reconstruction of history of common people.

Check your progress-2

a. Answer in one sentence

1. Which were the earliest coins of India?
2. Where are the famous Ratha Temples of Pallavas located?
3. Which evidence denote to the contacts between Ter and Pompeii?
4. What do you mean by Chaitya and Vihara?
5. Which archaeological material is known as 'alphabet of site'?

b. Choose the correct alternative

1. Ashoka's 14 edicts were inscribed at
a. Junagadh b. Pataliputra c. Pratisthan d. Sarnath
2.inscribed the famous inscription at Hathigumpha.
a. Chandragupta I b. Ashoka c. Kharvela d. Satakarani
3. The symbol of.....on coins of Gupta indicates their inclination towards Vaishnavism.
a. Trishula b. Veena c. Snake d. Garuddhvaja
4. A large fortification of Mauryan period was found at.....
a. Junagadh b. Pataliputra c. Taxila d. Nevasa
5. The earliest example of separate-temple architecture was found at.....
a. Sanchi b. Nagari c. Bairat d. Bhaje

1.3 Summary

India has a rich cultural heritage and Ancient India is a glorious epoch in Indian history. However, as we go back in time, we suffered great lack of written sources to reconstruct its history. Thus, very few written sources are there at our disposal. They were mostly of religious nature and, should be used with caution, either for they were written by a small group of people or, for, they were basically the guidelines for the

society-and don't depict actual facts. However, we also find written sources of great literary merit, like, epics, anthology, dramas, etc. There were also treatises on science like politics, astrology, astronomy, medicines, irrigations, architecture etc. The architectural and evidences of art also help us to understand Ancient India. Another group of source is archaeological sources. For understanding India before the beginning of literacy and to understand life-ways of common man, and to date scientifically, such archaeological remains help us a lot.

1.4 Terms to Remember

- **Sapta-Sindhu** The North-western region of India. Seven rivers traverse this area, like, Indus, Ravi, Zelum, Chinab, Biyas, Sarasvati and Sutlej. hence, called as 'Sapta-Sindhu' region.

- **Kalp-Sutra:** Rules and regulations for Vedic people, created around 6th c. BC to consolidated Vedic Religion in the context of social-churning during the period. It comprised of Shraut-sutra, Dharma-sutra and Griha-sutra.

Shraut-Sutra: Rules for performance of sacrifices.

Dharma-Sutra: Rules for customs, social duties

Griha-Sutra: Rules for domestic responsibilities

- **Ajivakas:** A heterodox cult and ascetic movement (6th-5th centuries BC), considered to be founded by Makkhaliputra Goshal. He was contemporary to Buddha and Mahavir. To challenge the claim of Vedic Religion of 'Freedom of soul by adhering one's duties'; Ajivakas claim that no human action can free our soul, instead the freedom depended upon destiny.

- **Horizontal Excavation:** For the reconstruction of history, it is an archaeological method to dig the site/mound-completely and expose the structures lied underneath. In 'vertical method' a single dig was taken, either from top to bottom or in one line of the mound.

- **Spatial Distribution:** Position of space between two structures. It indicates social and economical differentiation in the society.

1.5 Answers to check your progress

Check your progress-1

- a. 1. Rigveda; 2. 10; 3. Codes of conduct for Buddhist monks;
4. Indica; 5. Si-Yu-Ki
- b. 1. Sushrutsamhita; 2. Jatakas; 3. Sinhali; 4. The Vedas;
5. Ashtadhyayi

Check your progress-2

- a. 1. Punch-marked coins;
2. Mahabalipuram;
3. Ivory statue of Laxmi;
4. Chaitya is a the Buddhist temple and Viharas are the residential place of Buddhist monks;
5. Pottery
- b. 1. Junagadh; 2. Kharvela; 3. Garuddhvaja; 4. Pataliputra; 5. Sanchi

1.6 Exercise

a. Short Notes

1. The Tripitakas
2. The Vedas
3. Foreign Accounts

b. Broad Questions

1. Give information on the written sources for history-writing of Ancient India
2. Give information on the archaeological sources for history-writing of Ancient India

1.7 Reference for further study

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