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HISTORY OF INDIA : FROM THE EARLIEST TIMES UPTO C. 300 C.E.

B.H.I.C.-131

B.A. General - 1st Semester

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Based on

C.B.C.S. (Choice Based Credit System) Syllabus of

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By: Kshyama Sagar Meher



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**Sample Preview
of the
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QUESTION PAPER

June – 2023

(Solved)

HISTORY OF INDIA: FROM THE EARLIEST TIMES UPTO C. 300 C.E.

B.H.I.C.-131

Time: 3 Hours]

[Maximum Marks: 100

Note: Attempt any five questions. All questions carry equal marks.

SECTION-I

Q. 1. Discuss the archaeological sources for the reconstruction of ancient Indian history.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-1, Page No. 4, 'Archaeological Sources'.

Q. 2. What is Neolithic Culture? Discuss with reference to Kashmir valley and south India.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-4, Page No. 36, 'Neolithic Culture of the Kashmir Valley' and Page No. 38, 'Early Farmers of South India' and 'Neolithic Culture of the Kashmir Valley'.

Q. 3. Describe the salient features of later Vedic polity and society.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-9, Page No. 88, 'Policy and Society'.

Q. 4. Answer the following:

(i) Kautilya's Arthashastra

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-1, Page No. 3, 'Kautilya's Arthashastra'

Also Add: *Arthashastra* is the first Indian prescriptive text to define a state and its functions. It is ascribed to Kautilya or Chanakya who is considered as the chief minister of Chandragupta Maurya. There is a debate whether this text on polity describes the functioning of the state of the Mauryan period or an ideal state. The *Arthashastra* refers to a practice of political diplomacy that arose in India, and is epitomized by the written material on position, policy and military strategy written by Kautilya. Kautilya was an academician at Taxila University and later the Prime Minister of the Mauryan Empire. He is referred to as

the *Indian Machiavelli* as

a result of his undisputed and shrewd techniques and policies, which mirror a "realist" approach to politics, diplomacy and warfare. His *Arthashastra* text recommended that no means were on the far side scope of a ruler to expand his territory or obtain power as well-as the unscrupulous ethics of permitting torture, trickery, deceit, and spying as legitimate suggests, to realize territory, wealth and power. *Arthashastra* deals thoroughly with the qualities and disciplines needed for a king to rule his subjects more expeditiously. *Arthashastra* is the first Indian prescriptive text to define a state and its functions. It is ascribed to Kautilya or Chanakya who is considered as the Chief Minister of Chandragupta Maurya. There is a debate whether this text on polity describes the functioning of the state of the Mauryan period or an ideal state.

(ii) Mehrgarh

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-2, Page No. 17, 'Mehrgarh'.

(iii) Mesolithic culture of India

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-4, Page No. 36, 'Mesolithic Age'.

(iv) Great Bath of Mohenjodaro

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-2, Page No. 18, 'Mohenjodaro' and Chapter-5, Page No. 47, 'Decline of Harappan Civilization: Archaeological Evidence'.

SECTION-II

Q. 5. Discuss the emergence of new social groups in the sixth century BCE.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-10, Page No. 107,

Q. No. 3.

Q. 6. Discuss Alexander's invasion of the north-west India.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-12, Page No. 121, Q. No. 1 (Check Your Progress) and Page No. 120, 'The Impact of Alexander's Invasion'.

Q. 7. How would you define an 'Empire'? Discuss with reference to the Mauryas.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-13, Page No. 123, 'Introduction' and Page No. 135, 'Notion of Empire' and Page No. 130, Q. No. 2.

Q. 8. Answer the following:

(i) Arrian's Indike

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-12, Page No. 121, Q. No. 2.

(ii) Ashoka's Dhamma

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-13, Page No. 126, 'Ashoka' and Page No. 127, 'The Kalinga War'.

(iii) Satavahana Administration

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-14, Page No. 138, Q. No. 2.

(iv) Kushanas

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-14, Page No. 135, 'The Kushanas' and Page No. 138, Q. No. 11.



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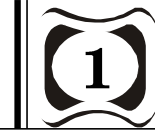


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HISTORY OF INDIA FROM THE EARLIEST TIMES UP TO C. 300 C.E.

Sources of Ancient Indian History



INTRODUCTION

Sources for reconstructing the history of ancient India can be classified into two categories: (i) Literary (ii) Archaeological. Literary sources include the: Vedic, Buddhist and Jain literature, the Epics, Puranas, Sangam literature, ancient biographies, poetry and drama. Archaeological sources include epigraphic, numismatic and architectural/archaeological remains that are recovered as the result of archaeological explorations and excavations. The sources can also be divided into primary and secondary. Primary sources are all archaeological artifacts recovered from the earth or written documents in the form of temple records; *talapatra* (palm-leaf manuscripts); inscriptions on palm leaves, pillars, rocks copper plates, pot sherds. These are used by the historians to write articles, books or any form of written history which are used by the subsequent researchers and are called the secondary sources. The written primary sources: (i) Manuscript sources/Inscriptions (ii) Published material.

CHAPTER AT A GLANCE

LITERARY SOURCES

Most of the early Indian literature has much that deals with religion, theology, cosmology, cosmogony, magic, rituals, prayers and mythology. Thus, there are problems associated with dating these texts. Their period of composition and compilation differ by a wide margin. The *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, *Brahmanas*, *Shastra* literature, *Sutras* and *Puranas* deal broadly with non-secular themes.

Vedic Literature

The Vedic literature is the earliest known literature from the Indian subcontinent. The word *veda* has been derived from the Sanskrit root 'vid' which means 'to

know'. *Veda* means knowledge. They are traditionally regarded as *Shruti* i.e. 'heard' or revealed texts. The words said to have been uttered by the God *Brahma* in the ears of the First Man. Vedas were handed down from one generation to the next with emphasis on accurate memorization. The Vedic literature has three classes of literary works:

(a) **The Samhitas or Collections:** There are collections of hymns, prayers, incantations, benedictions, sacrificial formulas and *litanies*.

Four Vedic *Samhitas* are:

(i) *Rigveda Samhita* (ii) *Atharvaveda Samhita* (iii) *Samveda Samhita*, and (iv) *Yajurveda Samhita*

(i) **Rigveda Samhita:** It has 1028 hymns (*suktas*) in 10 books (*mandalas*). They deal with a variety of issues on the customs, social norms and formations.

(ii) **Atharvaveda Samhita:** It has 20 books. The first seven books deal with incantations, poems, spells and *charms* for healings various illnesses, ailments and injuries. Books 13-18 throw light on the rites of passage like those for initiation into learning (*upanayana*), marriage and funerals. It has royal rituals and the duties of the court-priests. It also mentions herbs and nature-derived potions as medicine.

(iii) **Samveda Samhita:** *Samveda* is the root of the Indian classical music. It is referred to as the musical version of the *Rigveda*. The rules and suggestions for playing various instruments are encoded in a separate compilation called the *Gandharva-Veda*, a supplement to the *Samaveda*.

(iv) **Yajurveda Samhita:** *Yajurveda* has the knowledge of the sacrificial formulas (*yajus*) for worship-rituals like: *Agnihotra*, *Vajapeya* and *Rajasuya*, *Agnichayana*. It also provides crucial information on agriculture, economic and social life.

For a proper understanding of the *Vedas*, Six *vedangas* (limbs of the *Vedas*) were evolved: These

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are: (i) Shiksha (phonetics), (ii) Kalpa (rituals), (iii) Vyakarana (grammar), (iv) Nirukta (etymology), (v) Chhanda (metrics) and (vi) Jyotish (astronomy).

(b) **Brahmanas:** These are voluminous prose texts on theological matter, particularly observations on sacrifice and the significance of sacrificial rites and ceremonies.

(c) **Aranyakas and Upanishads:** The *Aranyakas* have the etymologies, identifications, discussions, descriptions and interpretations related to the ritual-sacrifices of the Vedas.

The term *Upanishad* means “to sit down” as *upa* means by and *nishad* meaning “to sit down”. It implies a pupil sitting near the preceptor, receiving the pearls of spiritual wisdom. Other connotations are “Esoteric Doctrine”, “Secret Doctrine”, “Mystic Meaning” and “Hidden Connections”. Monier Williams defines it as “Setting to rest ignorance by revealing the knowledge of the supreme spirit”. The *Upanishads* has some of the key philosophical aphorisms of Hinduism such as the *Brahman* (highest entity or ultimate reality) and the *Atman* (soul or self).

“*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*” (meaning “The world is one family”) which is inscribed on the entrance-hall of the Parliament of India has been taken from the *Upanishad*. Gandhi’s vision of holistic development, respect for all forms of life and the conflict resolution strategy based on non-violence was believed to have been derived from this ancient scripture.

Atithi Devo Bhava (meaning “The Guest is God”), a central idea showcasing Indian hospitality, is taken from the *Taittiriya Upanishad*. *Panchopchara Puja* or the five formalities deemed to be observed while receiving guests: providing pleasant fragrance (*Dhoop*), lighting a lamp (*Dipa*), offering edibles (*Naivedya*), smearing *Tilak* (religious mark on the forehead) and flower (*Pushp*) offering has been taken from this scripture.

Satyamev Jayate (“Truth Alone Triumphs” or “The Truth Prevails”) has been borrowed from the *Mundaka Upanishad*. It was popularized by Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya, the president of the Indian National Congress in 1918. It was declared as the national motto of India on the occasion of Independence. It is inscribed on the base of our national emblem: the Lion Capital of Ashoka. It is also there on the Indian currency.

The *Rigveda* is the oldest document of India. Books II-VII of the *Rigveda* are the earliest and called the Family Books because each is ascribed by tradition to a particular family of sages.

Books II-VII of the *Rigveda* were believed to have been composed between c. 1500-1000 BCE. The later Vedic literature includes Books I, VIII, IX and X of the *Rigveda*; *Sama Veda*; *Yajur Veda*; *Atharva Veda*; *Brahmanas*; *Aranyakas* and *Upanishads*. These were composed between c. 1000-500 BCE. These books have been used by historians to get political, religious and social data of historical value. These texts have information about processes like the transition from a pastoral, pre-class/caste society in the *Rigveda* to agrarian, class, caste society and formations of political territories in the later Vedic period.

The *Sutras*—which form part of the post-Vedic literature—have been classified as *smriti*: memorized rather than heard (*shruti*) texts. These are manuals on ritualism (c. 600-300 BCE). These include:

(a) The *Shrautasutra*: It has rules for the performance of great sacrifices.

(b) The *Grihyasutra*: It has directions for simple ceremonies and sacrificial acts of daily life.

(c) The *Dharmasutra*: These books have instructions on spiritual and secular law. The *Dharmasutras* are rules and regulations for general public and the rulers. They are the law-books for the ancient Indian polity and society. They were compiled between c. 600 BCE-200 CE.

Post-*sutra* texts are the *Smriti* texts. They are: (i) *The Manu Smriti*, (ii) *The Narada Smriti*, and (iii) *The Yajnavalkya Smriti*. These texts were composed between c. 200 BCE and 900 CE. They mention duties for the different *varnas* as well as for the kings and their officials. They have rules for marriage and property. They also prescribe punishments for persons guilty of theft, assault, murder, adultery, etc.

Kautilya’s Arthashastra

Kautilya’s *Arthashastra*, divided into 15 books, deals with different polity, economy and society. Books II and III are believed to have been written in an earlier time by different hands. It shows that even before the *Arthashastra* was written, there was a tradition of writing and teaching of statecraft because Kautilya acknowledges his debt to his predecessors in the field.

Epics

The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* (c. 500 BCE-500 CE) are used as a historical source. Vyasa’s *Mahabharata* shows the state of affairs from c. 10th-4th century BCE. The *Kaurava-Pandava* conflict relates to the later Vedic period, the descriptive portion to post-Vedic and the dialectic portions to the post-Mauryan and Gupta periods. Valmiki’s *Ramayana* appears to be more unified than the *Mahabharata*.

Puranas

The *Puranas* attributed to *Vyasa* are dated to the Gupta and post-Gupta period. There are 18 *Mahapuranas* and numerous *Upapuranas*. These were heterogeneous, encyclopedic works of various hands encompassing multifarious topics. For example, *Agni Purana* (c. 8th-11th centuries CE) has ritual worship, cosmology and astrology, mythology, genealogy, law, politics, and many other aspects of human life.

The subject-matter of the *Puranas* can be divided into five branches: (i) *sarga* (creation of the world/evolution of universe), (ii) *pratisarga* (involution of universe/re-creation), (iii) *manvantara* (recurring of time/periods of the various *Manus*), (iv) *vamsha* (genealogical lists of gods, kings and sages), and (v) *vamshanucharita* (account of royal dynasties/life stories of selected characters).

Sangam Literature

Sangam literature (c. 400 BCE-200 CE) has the earliest Tamil texts. It has short and long poems written over a period of three to four centuries, patronized by chiefs and kings. There were three Sangams (literary gatherings): the first and the last at Madurai and the second at Kapatapuram.

Some scholars use the term “The early classical Tamil literature” for Sangam literature. The poems, about 30,000 lines, are about love and war. Modelled on ancient bardic songs, they were transmitted orally for long before they were compiled. The poets included teachers, goldsmiths, merchants, carpenters, blacksmiths, soldiers, ministers and kings.

Biographies, Poetry and Drama

Historians have used numerous dramas and poetry to cull information. Ashvagoshya's *Buddhacharita*, *Sariputraprakarna* and *Saundarananda* and Bhasa's *Pancharatra*, *Dutavakya*, *Balacharita* and *Svapna Vasavadatta* are the most well-known. Kalidasa (c. 4th-5th centuries CE) wrote dramas like: *Abhijnana-Shakuntalam*, *Malavikagnimitram*, *Vikramorvashiyam* and poetic works such as: *Raghuvamsham*, *Kumarasambhavam* and *Meghadutam*. They provide information on the social and cultural life of the Guptas. Vishakhadatta's *Mudrarakshasa* (c. 7th-8th centuries CE) gives a glimpse of the then society and culture. Shudrak has written plays based on historical events. *Panchatantra* (c. 5th-6th centuries CE) and *Kathasaritasagara* (Ocean of Streams of Stories) are the collections of popular folk tales. Banabhatta's *Harshacharita* (c. 7th century CE) is about Harshavar-

ghan of the *Pushyabhuti* dynasty. Bilhana's *Vikramankadevacharita* (c. 12th century) is about the later Chalukyan king Vikramaditya VI and describes his victories. Vakpati wrote *Gaudavaho* based on the exploits of Yashovarman of Kannauj. Some other prominent biographical works based on the lives of different kings are: (i) *Kumarapalacharita* of Jayasimha, (ii) *Kumarapalacharita* or *Dvyasryakavya* of Hemachandra, (iii) *Hammirakavya* of Nayachandra, (iv) *Navasahasankacharita* of Padmagupta, (v) *Bhojaprabanda* of Ballal, and (vi) *Prithvirajacharita* of Chanda Bardai. The *Rajatarangini* by Kalhana is the best illustration of history-writing appreciated by modern historians.

Buddhist and Jain Literature

The Buddhist and Jain literature were written in the Pali and Prakrit languages respectively.

Prakrit was a form of Sanskrit. Pali is a form of Prakrit which was in vogue in Magadha. Ashokan edicts are also in Pali. Pali texts *Tripitakas* (“Three Baskets”) narrate the state of affairs in India at the time of the Buddha and the 16 *Mahajanapadas*. They have three books: (i) *The Sutta Pitaka*, (ii) *The Vinaya Pitaka*, and (iii) *The Abhidhamma Pitaka*. *The Sutta Pitaka* has the discourses of Buddha on various doctrinal issues in stories, poems and dialogue form. Written in 386 BCE, the *Vinaya* is about 227 rules and regulations for the monks and nuns of the sangha. It has information about Buddha, events and the story of Buddhism down to the 1st schism. The *Abhidhamma Pitaka* (higher *Dhamma*) has the Buddhist philosophy. The *Sutta Pitaka* has five *Nikayas* of which the *Khuddaka Nikaya* is a collection of discourses. *Theragatha*, *Therigatha* and *Jatakas* which are also used as important sources for historians. The *Jatakas* has more than 550 stories about the former births of the Buddha. *Theragatha* (“Verses of the Elder Monks”) and *Therigatha* (“Verses of the Elder Nuns”) are collections of poems, narrated by the early members of the Buddhist *Sangha*. *Therigatha* is the first surviving poetry in India supposed to have been composed by women. Thus, it is important for gender studies.

The *Therigatha* strongly supports the view that women are equal to men in terms of spiritual attainment. The non-canonical Buddhist literature includes *Milindapanha* (“Questions of Milinda”) dated around 1st century BCE-1st century CE. It has a dialogue between the Indo-Greek king Menander and a Buddhist monk *Nagasena*. The Sinhalese chronicles *Mahava-*

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msha (“Great History”) and *Dipavamsha* (“History of the Island”) tells about Buddhism. The Jain literature includes *Ardhamagadhi* which has the history of different regions of ancient India. The literature of the *Digambaras* is in Jain Shauraseni while the *Shvetambara* literature is in two dialects of *Ardhamagadhi*. Mahavira’s teachings to his disciples were 1st compiled in 14 *Purvas*. In 4th century BCE, Sthulabhadra convened a great council at Pataliputra and reconstructed the Jain canon in 12 *Angas*. Later in 5th century CE at a council at Valabhi the existing texts were formalized and presented in a written form. The scriptures accepted by the *Shvetambaras* are: (i) 12 *Angas*, (ii) 12 *Upangas*, (iii) 10 *Prakirnas*, (iv) 6 *Chedasutras*, (v) 2 *Sutras*, and (vi) 4 *Mulasutras*.

They have code of conduct, various legends, Jain doctrines and metaphysics. The *Digambaras* do not accept the scriptures accepted by the *Shvetambaras*. They use the scriptures written by the great *Acharyas* but based on the original teachings of *Mahavira* for their religious practices.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOURCES

Archaeology is the study of material culture to know the past. Closely related to history, archaeological studies include: sculptures, pottery remains, bone fragments, house remains, temple remnants and floral remains such as charred grains, coins, seals and inscriptions.

Archaeological sources in reconstructing India’s past have been used in the past two centuries. Until the 1920s, the Indian civilization was considered to have started from c. 6th century BCE. After the excavations at Mohenjodaro and Harappa, the starting of the Indian civilization has gone back to about 5000 BCE.

The pre-historic artifacts show human activities started in India as early as two million years ago. Archaeological evidence shows that India was populated sparsely and thickly right from the Stone Age periods. Archaeological methods such as excavation and exploration are used to collect data on trade, state, economy, societal aspects, religion and mundane aspects like how people lived, ate and clothed themselves. Excavations have provided evidence of Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic, Chalcolithic, Iron age, Megalithic and many other cultures. We know about the origin, spread, settlement patterns, town planning, trade, polity, economy, agriculture, hunting, technology, beads, seals, fire altars and religion.

Archaeological Source: Various archaeological finds such as excavated remains, standing monuments, sculptural reliefs and inscribed records have been used for reconstructing Indian history. Sites are identified through ground reconnaissance and aerial surveying. Experts involved in the study of archaeological artefacts include palaeontologists, palynologists, geo-archaeologists, archaeo-zoologists and ethno-archaeologists.

Excavation: Excavations are of two types: (i) Vertical, and (ii) Horizontal. Vertical excavations reveal stratification and are cut into deep deposits. Horizontal excavations reveal the spatial relationships between artefacts and features of a particular layer. Excavators combine both the strategies. Archaeologists make a systematic study of the artefacts to arrive at conclusions regarding past life-ways and events.

Today, archaeologists use various dating methods and assign age to a particular artefact. Radiocarbon dating is the most popular. Other absolute dating techniques include Thermoluminescence dating and Dendrochronology.

Historians have also used other branches like epigraphy and numismatics. We know about the Indo-Greek, Shaka-Pahlava and Kushan kings from numismatic sources. Epigraphs reveal Ashoka’s views on dhamma and the conquests of Samudragupta.

Coins

Coins have been found in excavations. The study of coins is called Numismatics. Coins are considered as the 2nd most important source for reconstructing the history of India; the first being inscriptions. Coins are very valuable because their chronology and cultural context are precise. They also bear the stamps of the issuing authorities. The Second Urbanization (c. 6th century BCE) in the early Indian history is the first instance for which historians have found both the literary and archaeological evidence of coinage.

Coin made of burnt clay, dating to the Kushan period (first three centuries of the Common era), have been found in hundreds. The post-Mauryan coins were made of lead, potin, copper, bronze, silver and gold. Most of the coins belonging to the major dynasties have been catalogued and published. The earliest coins in the Indian subcontinent are the Punch-Marked coins. These are mostly of silver and sometimes of copper. Some gold Punch-Marked coins have been found but their authenticity is doubtful.