

## # Types of Sources and Historical Construction

- Material Remains
- Coins
- Inscriptions
- Literary Sources
- Foreign Accounts
- Historical Sense
- Constructing History

### ① Material Remains :-

#### MOUNDS :

- A mound is an elevated portion of land covering remains of old habitations.
- An excavated mound can be used for the understanding of successive layers in material and other aspects of culture.
- Types :
  - (a) Single-culture mounds : represent only one culture throughout. Eg. PGW culture; Satavahana, Kushana, <sup>cultures</sup>.
  - (b) Major-culture mounds : One culture is dominant and the others are not so important.
  - (c) Multi-culture mounds : These represent several important cultures in succession which occasionally overlap with one another.

#### Mound Excavation :

- (i) Vertical excavation - It means lengthwise digging to uncover the period-wise sequence of cultures; it is generally confined to a part of the site. Most sites have been dug vertically and provide a good chronological sequence.

(ii) Horizontal excavation := It means digging the mound as a whole or a major part of it. This method may enable the excavator to obtain a complete idea of the site culture in a particular period.

These are very expensive, very few in number and may not give a full or even adequate picture of material life in many phases of ancient Indian history.

Archaeology : It is the science which enables us to dig the old mounds in a systematic manner, in successive layers, and to form an idea of the material life of the people.

Radiocarbon Dating :  $C^{14}$  ( $t_{1/2} = 5568$  years)

Scientific examinations of material remains :

- (i) Radiocarbon dating is used to fix their dates.
- (ii) The history of climate and vegetation is known through an examination of plant residues, and especially through pollen analysis.  
eg. it is suggested that agriculture was practised in Rajasthan and Kashmir around 7000-6000 BC.
- (iii) The nature and components of metal artifacts are analysed scientifically, and as a result the sources from where metals were obtained are located and the stages in the development of metal technology are identified.
- (iv) Animal bones examination shows whether they were domesticated and what were they used for.

## (2) COINS :

- The study of coins is called numismatics.
- Ancient coins were made of metals - copper, silver, gold or lead.
- Earliest coins contain a few symbols, but the later coins contain ~~the~~ ~~few~~ the names of kings, gods or dates.

### Uses / Importance :

- (i) The areas where the coins are found indicate the region of their circulation. This has enabled us to reconstruct the history of several ruling dynasties, especially of the Indo-Greeks who came to India from north Afghanistan and ruled here in the second and first centuries BC.
- (ii) Since coins were used for various purposes such as donations, mode of payment and medium of exchange, it shows considerable light on economic history.
- (iii) Some coins were issued by the guilds of merchants and goldsmiths with the permission of the rulers, indication that crafts and commerce had become important.
- (iv) Coins helped transactions on a large scale and contributed to trade.

Post-Maurya times : Largest no. of coins.

Guptas : Largest no. of GOLD coins.

- (v) Coins also portrays kings and gods & contain religious symbols and legends - art & culture of the time known

### ③ INSCRIPTIONS :

- More important than coins.
- Study called EPIGRAPHY.
- Study of the old writings used in inscriptions and other old records is called PALAEOGRAPHY.

#### OBJECTS

- Stone
- Seals
- Rocks
- Copper plates (early Christian era centuries)
- Temple walls and bricks or images (eg. South India)

#### LANGUAGES USED :

- (i) The earliest inscriptions were written in the Prakrit language in the third century BC.
- (ii) Sanskrit was adopted in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD and its use became widespread in the fourth and the fifth century AD.
- (iii) Regional languages were used in the ninth and tenth centuries.

→ Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum : It is a series of collections publishing most inscriptions bearing on the history of Maurya, post-Maurya and Gupta times.

#### CHRONOLOGICAL APPEARANCE :

- ① Harappan Inscriptions : The earliest inscriptions are found on the seals of Harappa belonging to about 2500 BC. These inscriptions have not been

deciphered so far and seem to have been written in a pictographic script in which ideas and objects were expressed in the form of pictures.

② Ashokan Inscriptions : These are the oldest 'deciphered inscriptions' and were issued by Ashoka in the 3rd century BC.

- These ~~xxx~~ inscriptions were engraved in the Brahmi script, which was written from left to right.
- Some were also incised in the Kharoshthi script which was written from right to left.
- Greek and Aramaic scripts were employed in the writing of the Ashokan inscriptions in Pakistan and Afghanistan.
- The Ashokan inscriptions writings were first deciphered in 1837 by James Prinsep, a civil servant in the employ of the East India Company in Bengal.

③ Allahabad Inscription of Samudragupta eulogizing the attributes and achievements of the ruler.

④ Votive records of religious followers

⑤ Inscriptions having donative records.

#### TYPES / USES :

- Inscriptions conveying royal orders and decisions regarding social, religious and administrative matters to officials and people in general.  
Eg. Ashokan.
- Inscriptions containing votive records of the followers of Buddhism, Jainism, Vaishnavism, Shaivism, etc., who put up pillars, tablets, temples or images as marks of devotion.

- (iii) Inscriptions eulogizing the attributes and achievements of kings and conquerors, and never speak of their defeats or weaknesses. Eg. Allahabad inscription of Samudragupta.
- (iv) Inscriptions having donative records which refer specially to gifts of money, cattle, land, etc. mainly for religious purposes, made not only by kings and princes but also by artisans and merchants.

\* - Inscriptions recording land grants, made mainly by chiefs and princes are very important for the study of the land system and administration in ancient India.

- These were mostly engraved on copper plates.
- They record the grants of lands, revenues and villages made to monks, priests, temples, monasteries, vassals and officials.
- They were written in all languages such as Prakrit, Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu.

#### ④ LITERARY SOURCES :=

- Ancient Indians knew writing as early as 2500 BC but our most ancient manuscripts are not older than the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD (found in Central Asia).
- In India, they were written on birch bark and palm leaves, but in Central Asia, where the Prakrit language had spread from India, manuscripts were also written on sheep leather and wooden tablets.
- Sanskrit manuscripts mostly belong to south India, Kashmir and Nepal.

## RIG VEDA (circa 1500 - 1000 B.C.)

- (i) The Rig Veda is the earliest text of the Indo-European languages consisting of a collection of prayers offered to Agni, Indra, Mitra, Varuna and other gods by various families of poets or sages.
- (ii) It consists of 1017 hymns/verses divided into 10 mandalas (or books). Books II to IX belong to the Rig Vedic period forming its earliest portions. Books I and X were compiled during later Vedic age and added to the Rig Veda.
- (iii) The Rig Veda, along with other Vedas, forms part of the Sruti literature.
- (iv) It is the most important Veda as Gayatri Mantra, composed by priest Vishvamitra to widen the Aryan world, is part of it.
- (v) The Rig Veda has many things in common with the 'Avesta', which is the oldest text of the Iranian language. The two texts use the same names for several gods and even for social classes.
- (vi) The priest who recites Rig Veda is called Hotri.

# The collections of the Atharva Veda, Yajur Veda, the Brahmanas, Aranyakas and the Upanishads belong roughly to 1000-500 B.C.

# Rig Veda	- Mainly prayers
Other later Vedic texts	- prayers + rituals + <sup>mythological and</sup> magic stories
Upanishads	- philosophical speculations
Brahmanas	- Conduct of ceremonies
Aranyakas	- Texts related to Forest Life

## \* Religious Literature

Vedas

Epics

Puranas

### II MAHABHARATA

- (i) It is attributed to Vyasa and possibly reflects the state of affairs from the 10<sup>th</sup> century BC to the 4<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.
- (ii) Originally, it consisted of 8800 Verses and was called JAYA or the collection dealing with victory.
- (iii) These were raised to 24000 and came to be known as Bharata because it contains the stories of the descendants of <sup>one of</sup> the earliest Vedic tribes called Bharata.
- (iv) The final compilation brought the verses to 1,00,000 which came to be known as the Mahabharata or the Satasahasri Samhita.
- (v) It contains narrative, descriptive and didactic material. The main narrative which relates to the Kaurava-Pandava conflict may belong to the later Vedic times, the descriptive portion might be used for post-Vedic times, and the didactic portion generally for post-Maurya and Gupta times.

# - THE RAMAYANA of Valmiki originally consisted of 6000 verses which were raised to 12000 verses, and finally to 24,000.

This epic appears to be more unified than the Mahabharata but it also has its didactic portions which were added later.

Its composition started in the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Since then it passed through as many as 5 stages & the 5<sup>th</sup> stage seems to be as late as the 12<sup>th</sup> century A.D. As a whole, it seems to have been composed later than the Mahabharata.



## \* Ritual Literature : Post-Vedic times

- (i) Srautasutras : <sup>They</sup> ~~It~~ provide for several pompous royal coronation ceremonies and sacrifices meant for princes and men of substance belonging to the 3 higher varnas.
- (ii) Grihyasutras : <sup>They</sup> ~~It~~ lay down domestic rituals connected with birth, naming, sacred thread investiture, marriage, funerals etc.
- (iii) Sulvasutras : <sup>They</sup> ~~It~~ prescribe various kinds of measurements for the construction of sacrificial altars. They mark the beginnings of the study of geometry and mathematics.
- (iv) Both the Srautasutras and the Grihyasutras belong to circa 600-300 B.C.
- (v) Grihyasutras, Sulvasutras and Srautasutras are part of KALPASHASTRA. It is derived from one of the 6 Vedangas - Kalpa.

## # BUDDHIST LITERATURE :

- (i) The earliest Buddhist texts were written in Pali, which was spoken in Magadha or south Bihar.
- (ii) They were finally compiled in the second century B.C. in Sri Lanka, but the canonical portions reflect the state of affairs in the age of the Buddha in India.
- (iii) Apart from Buddha, some of his royal contemporaries who ruled over Magadha, north Bihar and eastern UP are also mentioned.
- (iv) The most important and interesting portion of the non-canonical literature is provided by the stories of the previous births of the Buddha, called the Jatakas.