



## Mains Practice Question

**Q.** Ancient History gives us a valuable account of the old Indian society. In this context discuss the sources of ancient Indian History.

12 Sep, 2022 GS Paper 1 History

### Approach

- Start your answer by giving a brief about Ancient Indian History.
- Discuss the sources of Ancient Indian History.
- Conclude suitably.

### Answer

#### Introduction

History is the study of past events. It helps us to understand those processes that enabled the early humans to successfully conquer their environment and develop the present-day civilizations. It is not just a study of battles and kings as is normally understood by some. It is an analysis of society, economy and cultural trends over a long period as reflected in available sources. There are different sources to understand ancient history which provide a vivid account of ancient society.

#### Body

##### Literary Sources

- **Religious Literature:** Most ancient Indian texts contain religious themes and these are known as Vedas. They are assigned to c. 1500–500 B.C. The Vedas are four in number. The Rig Veda mainly consists of prayers. The other three, Sama, Yajur and Atharva-contain prayers, rituals, magic and mythological stories. The Upanishads contain philosophical discussion on atma and pramatma. They are also referred to as Vedanta.
- **Secular Literature:** This category of literature does not have religion as its theme. To this class belongs the Dharmashastras or the law books which prescribe the duties for different social groups. They set out punishments for persons guilty of theft, murder, adultery, etc. The earliest law books is Manu Smriti. It was the first book translated by the British and formed the basis of Hindu code of law. Arthashastra of Kautilya provides rich material for the study of Indian economy and polity of the Mauryan period. Works on grammar are also sometimes useful for historical reconstruction.

##### Non-Literary Sources

- **Inscriptions:** Inscriptions are permanent writings engraved on hard surface such as stone, metal or terracotta. The study of inscriptions is called epigraphy. The earliest inscriptions were written on stone. They usually record the achievements, activities and ideas of those who got them inscribed. So, we get inscriptions which glorify the exploits of kings or mention donations made by men and women for religious purposes.
- **Coins:** The study of coins is known as numismatics. Ancient coins were mostly minted in metals

such as copper, silver, gold and lead. The earliest coins found in India contained certain symbols and were called punch-marked coins. Some of the most spectacular gold coins were issued by the Gupta rulers. Coins provide useful information regarding economic history as they were used as a medium of exchange. Some coins were issued by guilds or associations of the merchants and craftsmen with the permission of the rulers. This shows the influence of craft and commerce. Coins also portray kings and gods, and contain religious symbols, all to which throw light on the art and religion of the time.

- **Archaeology:** The excavated sites belonging to the Harappan period show the layout of the settlements and the form of the houses in which people lived, the type of pottery, tools and implements they used and the kind of cereals they consumed. In south India some people were buried along with their tools, weapons, pottery and other belongings under big and heavy stones. These graves are known as megaliths. By digging them we learn about the life of people who lived in the Deccan and south India before the third century BC.
- **Account of Foreign Travellers:** Indigenous literature can be supplemented by foreign accounts. To India came Greek, Roman and Chinese visitors, either as ambassadors or travellers or to seek religious knowledge from time to time. They have left behind an account of the things they saw.

## Conclusion

Thus, all the above-mentioned sources have helped in constructing the history of the period which has helped us to know the social, political, and economic conditions of that period.

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