

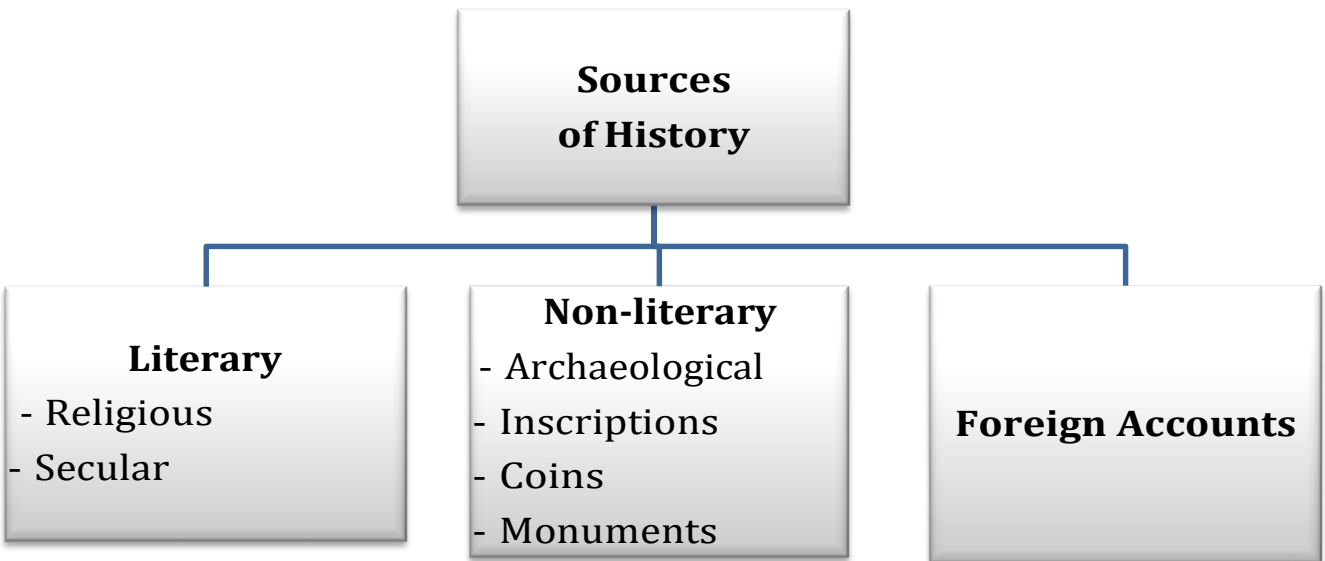
Lesson 1

Understanding Indian History

Summary

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 civilization. It is an analysis of society, economy and cultural trends over a long period as reflected in available sources. In this lesson you will learn how India's ancient past was constructed with the help of historical evidence and their interpretation.

SOURCES FOR RECONSTRUCTING ANCIENT INDIAN HISTORY



Religious Literature

Most Ancient Indian texts contain religious themes, known as Vedas.

Rig Veda- The Rig Veda mainly consists of prayers

Sama Veda- The Sama veda is a collection of verses mostly taken from the Rigveda, arranged in a poetic form to facilitate singing

Yajur Veda- The Yajurveda is found in two recessions, Black and White, and is full of rituals to be performed publicly or individually

Atharva Veda- The Atharvavedais a collection of magic spells and charms to ward off the evil spirits and diseases

Sutras (Literature on moral values)- Shrautasutra and Grihyasutras

Buddhist Literature-The earliest Buddhist texts were written in Pali. They are called *Tripitakas*(three baskets) viz. *Suttapittaka*, *Vinayapitaka* and *Abhidhammapitaka*

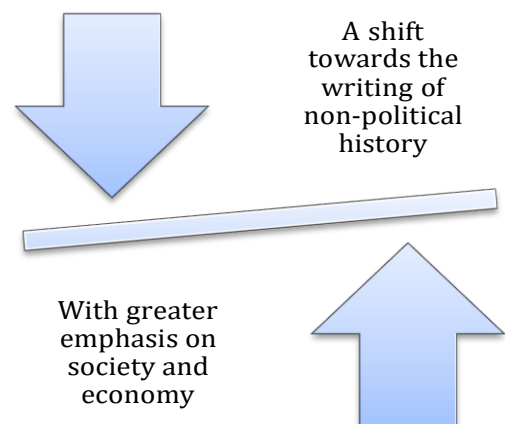
The Jaina - Texts were written in Prakrit. Angas contain the philosophical concepts of the Jainas

Changing Notion of History -

Indian's sense of writing history was different from that of the Westerners.

- The people from the West recorded events in chronological order while the ancient Indians wrote in a different manner.
- Modern research in ancient India history began in 1765 when East India Company took control of Bengal and Bihar.

After independence, a new trend in history writing took over:



Themes in History -

- For an overall knowledge of the past, students are to be made aware of various aspects of society, called THEMES.
- These themes enable us to learn about developments in different spheres – social, economic, religious, political and cultural.

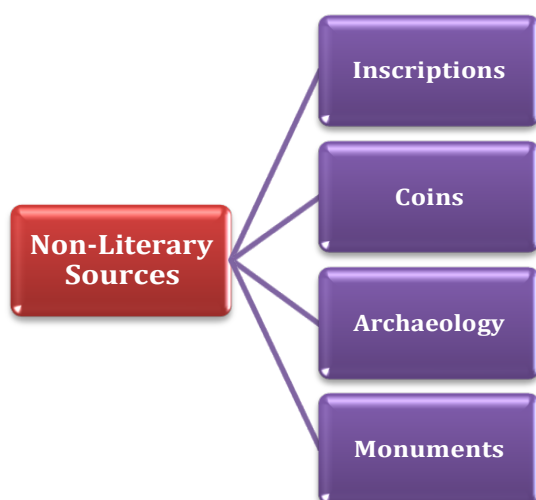
Secular Literature-

This category of literature does not have religion as its theme.

- Dharmashastras
- Manu Smriti
- Arthasastra of Kautilya
- Ashtadhyayi by Panini
- Abhijanashakuntalam, Ritusamhara and Meghadutam by Kalidas
- Rajataranagini by Kalhana
- Harshacharita by Banabhatta
- Sangam literature

Account of Foreign Travelers-

- Indigenous literature can be supplemented by foreign accounts.
- Greek, Roman & Chinese visited India either as ambassadors or to seek religious knowledge or as travelers.
- They have left behind an account of the things they saw.
- A Greek Ambassador called Megasthenes came to the court of Chandragupta Maurya and he wrote *Indica*.
- The Periplus of the *Erythrean Sea* & Ptolemy's *Geography*, both written in Greek, provide valuable data in this regard
- Fa-Hien who came to India in the fifth century AD describes the conditions in India in the age of Guptas.
- Hsuan Tsang presents a similar account of India in the seventh century during the time of king Harshavardhan.



Evaluate yourself -

1. Describe about the various sources of history in your words
2. Write down the difference between the religious and secular literature.
3. Explain the importance of the account of the foreign travelers to glorify the history of Indian culture.