



Ravindra's IAS

HISTORY

(for prelims)



UPSC & STATE PSC'S

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Ancient History

Sources of History

- The purpose of history is to throw light on the past. This is done through discovery and study of historical sources.
- It is rather easy to find sources for writing the history of the recent past, because there is plenty of hand written and printed material on and about modern State and Society. There is also enough material in respect of medieval times.
- But the real difficulty arises for writing ancient history. It is mentioned in the great Indian epic Mahabharata that ***"History is that ancient description which contains instructions of virtue, wealth, desire and salvation"***. In other words, India's ancient seers laid greater emphasis on those events which carried higher ideals rather than actual happenings.
- In ancient Greece and Rome, there were historians to write the accounts of their times. But ancient Indians who wrote on many subjects, rarely wrote history. Most of ancient material has also been lost. It is thus a challenging task to rediscover India's ancient past. Yet there are sources from which history is written.
- These sources are divided into two main groups. They are Archaeological and Literary. The Archaeological Source can again be divided into three groups, namely, Archaeological Remains and Monuments, Inscriptions and Coins. The Literary Source can also be divided into three groups, namely, Religious Literature, Secular Literature and Accounts of Foreigners. A brief account of these sources is given below.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOURCES:

Archaeological remains and Monuments:

- Ancient ruins, remains and monuments recovered as a result of excavation and exploration are archaeological sources of history. The archaeological remains are subjected to scientific examination of radio-carbon method for its dates. Archaeological sources give us some knowledge of the life of the ancient people. India is rich with ancient ruins, remains, and monuments.
- Many historical places are lying buried under the earth. But excavations are being carried out to bring some such places to light. The material remains discovered from excavations and ruins speak a good deal of the past. For example, the excavations at Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa brought to the knowledge of the world the existence of the Indus Valley Civilization.
- Excavations have been conducted at Taxila, Pataliputra, Rajgir, Nalanda, Sanchi, Barhut, Sarnath and Mathura. They are being done at many other places too. By digging the old sites and mounds, and discovering the material remains, historians try to understand the past. Archaeology is the science and method to explore and understand the ancient ruins and remains.
- All over India there are countless historical monuments like, Temples, Stupas, Monasteries, Forts, Palaces, and the like, which speak of their time. Similarly, tools,

