

## **Module 2**

**Paper: History of India (From Earliest times upto 8th Century C.E)**

**Topic: Sources for the study of Ancient Indian History: Literary**

**Quadrant: II**

### **Summary**

Literary sources are the information gathered in written forms that explain the essence of ancient culture. Ancient India produced a very rich, vast and varied mass of literature, which, of course is not historical in nature, even then it throws considerable light on social, economic cultural and political condition of India.

Ancient Indian literature may be classified into two broad groups, i.e, Sacred Literature and Secular Literature. The Sacred literature of ancient India comprises

of the Vedas, Brahmanas and Upanishads, Vedangas, Sutras, the two great epics, the Dharmasastras, the Puranas and the Buddhist and Jain texts. Vedas: The four Vedas- Rigveda, Samveda, Yajurveda, and Atharvaveda are known as the earliest of the Brahminical literature. The Rigveda is regarded as the most ancient of all the Vedas, and gives us a glimpse of the political systems of the Aryans.

Brahmanas and Upanishads: Connected with the Veda there is another class of literature known as Brahmanas and Upanishads. The Brahmanas contain prose commentaries on vedic hymns while the Upanishads contain philosophical and ethical discourses which inform us on the cultural and religious thoughts of the Aryans. Vedangas: The Vedangas or Upvedas are treatises on science and art.

These are the means to the understanding of the Vedas. There are six Vedangas. Sutras: The last of the vedic literature are the Sutras. These are texts from different schools which came into being and devoted themselves to the understanding and study of different branches of the Vedas. Epics: The Ramayana and the Mahabharata are two great epics which present a clear picture of the people of those times. These epics throw considerable light on the social, economic, religious beliefs and educational and political institutions of the people in their times.

Puranas: Another important source of information is the Puranas. These are 18 in number. The Puranas are the ancient volumes of the Hindus written in Sanskrit. Buddhist Literature: The Buddhist literature is also very important from the point of view of supplying us historical knowledge of India. This literature has three branches known as Jatakas, Pitakas and Nikaya. Most important work is Milinda Pannha which discusses quite at length number of problems and controversial issues of Buddhism. The Lalitavistara and Vaipulaya Sutras are the most significant Buddhist texts in Sanskrit. Jain

**Literature:**The Jain literature is also a good source of historical literature.It mainly consists of Angas and Upangas.They impart the valuable teachings of Lord Mahavira. **Buddhist Literature:**The Buddhist literature is also very important from the point of view of supplying us historical knowledge of India.This literature has three branches known as Jatakas,Pitakas and Nikaya.Most important work is Milinda Panna which discusses quite at length a number of problems and controversial issues of Buddhism. The Lalitavistara and Vaipulaya Sutras are the most significant Buddhist texts in Sanskrit. **Jain Literature:**The Jain literature is also a good source of historical literature.It mainly consists of Angas and Upangas.They impart the valuable teachings of Lord Mahavira. II)**Secular Literature** For the latter period of the ancient Indian history and culture,beginning with the Guptas,we have to depend on secular literature. i) Banahatta authored "Harshacharita" in about 620 A.D.,which depicts the life of the great emperor Harsha Vardhana.ii) Vakpati and Bilhana both poets composed two epics such as Gaudavaho and Vikramanka-deva charita respectively in which a beautiful descriptionOf the achievements and exploits of Yasovarman and Vikramaditya.iii) Among the chronicles,the Rajatarangini is considered to be the most famous one.It is a history of Kashmir in verse composed by Kalhana in 1149-50 A.D. iv)**Miscellaneous Works:** i) Mudarakshasa of Vishakha Datta narrates the story of Chandragupta Maurya and Chanakya.ii) Kautilya's Arthashastra:The Arthashastra of Kautilya is an important source of historical information.It depicts a clear picture of politicaland administrative system .iv) Patanjali's Mahabhasya:These are works on Sanskrit grammar.IV) **Foreign Accounts** .In addition to Indian literature, we have another useful source of infomation in the writings of foreignners who came to India.Among foreigners,the Greeks,the Persians,the Chinese and the Arabs have left very interesting and valuable accounts of India. Greek writer Herodotus in his work "Histories" has given useful information about India. Ptolemy wrote a geographical account of the India in the second century A.D.Pliny wrote in the first century A.D.,an account of the Indian animals, plants,and minerals. Among the Chinese travellers Hiuen Tsang,Fa-hien and I-tsing covered almost every region of India. Among Arab travellers Al Masudi wrote an account mainly of the kingdom of Kanauj under Mihir Bhoja. Alberuni kept him self engaged in the study of culture and civilization. The sources of ancient Indian history depend on various sources. These sources can be viewed from many perspectives. All historical explanations are ultimately based on pieces of evidence derived from various sources of history.Literary resources are very important because they help us to know the facts about the rulers and the person who ruled that time and the person who has written that is also treated as a historian because he has or she has given a very brief of that time in in his or her book. Literary sources in the form of books , bibliographies , magazines help

**us to reconstruct the past because these work contains the details about the society and the life of the people during that time.**