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About the Tutorial

History is a subject that gives the facts and perspectives of past events. In its given premises, it includes a wide range of topics such as geographical conditions and human settlements; society and cultures; type of governance and administrative systems; trade and economic policy; interstate relationships; wars and battles, etc. in the time frame of Ancient, Medieval, and Modern.

History is one of the essential disciplines of Social Science to know the past and design the future accordingly.

This tutorial is divided into different chapters and provides the historical facts of Ancient India in a given time framework.

Audience

This tutorial is designed exclusively for the students preparing for the different competitive exams including **civil services**, **banking**, **railway**, **eligibility test**, and all other competitive exams of such kind.

Prerequisites

This tutorial is entirely based on **NCERT History Old Edition** (class 8th to 12th); all the important points, concepts, and facts are filtered carefully. Therefore, prior knowledge of basic History or else having experience of reading NCERT History books is essential to understand the topics.

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1. Study of Indian History

Important Features of History

- The important aspects of the study (of History) are:
 - To know - how did agriculture or other means of existence begin.
 - When did our primitives begin the use of metal and how did they develop spinning, weaving, metalworking, etc.
 - How did the political and administrative systems evolve
 - How did the development of literature, urban life, science, and architecture evolve, etc.
- History does not mean only the description of the dates and events related to the kings or dynasties, but rather it also means to study various aspects that shaped the overall personality of the society and the people.
- Therefore, the study of history is the study of the entire human past, which goes back to millions of years.
- Throughout the period (starting from Ancient, Medieval, and Modern), every society has developed over a long period of time; however, they differ in terms of courses they followed and the processes they underwent.
- The primitives experienced stone-age, hunter-gatherers and they all practiced agriculture. Over a period of time, the primitives began to use metal at one time or the other. In spite of so much similar activities, still they differ in their cultural, social, political, and religious identity.
- The study of history helps in understanding the people, societies, and nations and finally, the whole humanity gets a sense of identity and belonging.
- It may be a very superficial view to ask:
 - Why should study history?
 - Does it contribute anything economically to our society?
 - Does it solve the problem of poverty and unemployment?
- Of course, History does not answer these question, but History helps us in knowing the past people, their cultures, their religions, and their social systems, and suggests us how to make future better.
- History, further, makes us learn lessons from the past for the present and future. It reminds us not to repeat the mistakes, which led to various manmade calamities and disasters like wars (in the past).
- History guides us why and how to ignore the bad things that created problems in society and follow the things, which promote harmony, peace, and prosperity.

- Ashoka (the king of ancient Patliputra), in his Rock Edict XII, insisted on the following measures and practices to maintain harmony, peace, and prosperity in the society:
 - Promotion of the common ground or root of all religion.
 - Cultivation of the sense of unity of all religions by the practice of *vachaguti* or restraint of criticism of other religions and sects.
 - The coming together (*samavaya*) of exponents of different religions in religious assemblies
 - Learning the texts of other religions so as to become *bahusruta* or proficient in the scriptures of different religions.

Purpose of Studying History

- The study of past does not mean that one lives in the past, but one learns to live with the past.
- History gives a society or a nation an identity. It is not something that we can disown.
- **Voltaire** (a great intellectual and statesman from France) contended that India is the cradle of worldly civilizations and homeland of religion in its oldest and purest form.



Voltaire

- Voltaire, further, wrote, "*In short I am convinced that everything - astronomy, astrology, metaphysics, etc. comes to us from the bank of Ganges*".
- **Pierre de Sonnerat**, a French naturalist and traveler, believed that all knowledge came from India, which is the cradle of civilizations.
- **Immanuel Kant** (a great philosopher of Germany) recognized the greatness of ancient Indian culture and civilization. He acknowledged that Indian religious thoughts were free of rigidity and intolerance.



Immanuel Kant

- Immanuel Kant wrote (about India), "*Their religion has a great purity ... (and) one can find traces of pure concept of divinity which cannot easily be found elsewhere*".

2. Writing of Ancient Indian History

- During the 4th century B. C., **Kautilya** in his book '**Arthashastra**' advises the king to dedicate some time for hearing the narrations of history.
- History was conferred holiness equal to pious *Veda*, *Atharvanaveda*, *Brahmanas*, and *Upanishads*. The *Itihas-Purana* is one of the branches of knowledge of history.

Puranas

- There are 18 main *Puranas* and 18 subsidiary *Puranas*.
- The subject matters of history are (As per the *Puranas*),
 - *Sarga* (evolution of the Universe)
 - *Pratisarga* (involution of the Universe)
 - *Manvantantar* (recurring of the Time)
 - *Vamsa* (genealogical list of the kings and sages)
 - *Vamsanucharita* (life stories of some selected characters)
- The reign of **Parikshit** (the grandson of **Arjuna**) was considered as a benchmark for the reference of the royal genealogies given in the *Puranas*.
- In *Puranas*, all the earlier dynasties and kings prior to reign of Parikshit, have been mentioned in past tense. While the latter kings and dynasties have been narrated in a future tense.
- This may be due to the fact that the *Puranas* were completed during the reign of Parikshit. As mentioned in the *Puranas*, the coronation of Parikshit marks the beginning of **Kali** Age.
- In the context of the *Puranas*, it is observed that in ancient India, *Itihas* (History) was looked upon as a means to illuminate the present and future in the light of the past.
- The purpose of history was to understand and inculcate a sense of duty and sacrifice by individuals to their families, by the families to their clans, by the clans to their villages, by the villages to **Janapada** and **Rashtra**, and ultimately to the whole humanity.
- During the ancient time, history was treated as a powerful vehicle of the awakening of cultural and social consciousness. Therefore, the narrations of *Puranas* were a compulsory part of the annual ritual in every village and town (especially) during the rainy season and at the time of festivals. F. E. Pargiter and H. C. Raychaudhury have attempted to write history on the basis of genealogies of various dynasties mentioned in the *Puranas*.
- '**Rajatarangini**' written by **Kalhana** is another work of history, which enjoys the great respect among the historians for its approach and historical content.

Early Foreigners

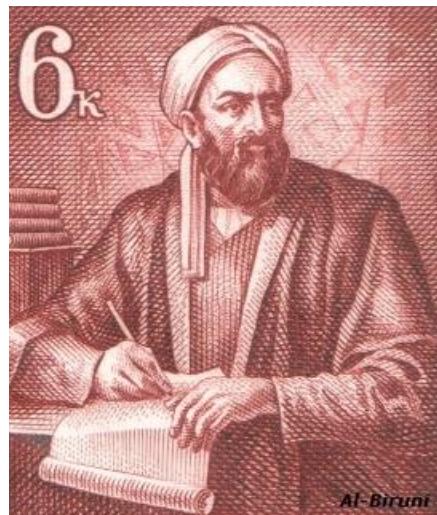
- Important Greek writers were **Herodotus, Nearchus, Megasthenese, Plutarch, Arrian, Strabo, Pliny, Elder, and Ptolemy**.
- The contribution of Greek writers in the history of ancient India was restricted to the northwestern region of India.

Megasthenese

- During 324-300 B.C., Megasthenese (a Greek ambassador) visited in the court of Chandragupta Maurya.
- Megasthenese in his famous book '**Indica**' gave detailed account of society and polity of the contemporary India, but unfortunately, it is no longer available to us.
- Megasthenese affirms about the existence of an array of 153 kings whose reigns had covered the time period of about 6,053 years up till then.
- The writings of Megasthenese, further, had been a source of the information about the ancient India for most of the Greeks writes, including Diodorus, Strabo, and Arrian.

Al-Biruni

- Al-Biruni was born in A.D. 913 in the central part of Asia. He was contemporary of Mahmud of Ghazi and accompanied Mahmud when he conquered part of central Asia; likewise, he came in contact of the Indian culture.



- Al-Biruni learned the Sanskrit language to gain a precise knowledge of Indian society. He made multidimensional observations ranging from philosophy, religion, culture, and society to science, literature, art, and medicine.
- The work of Al-Biruni is free from all religious or racial biases.
- Al-Biruni died in Ghazni (Afghanistan) in A.D. 1048.

Christian Missionaries and Enlightenment

- The contribution of Christian Missionaries during the 17th and 18th centuries was mainly affected by the religious and political movements in Europe.
- A large number of works were produced on India by the Christian Missionaries, but their writings can hardly be said to be fair. In fact, their interest in learning and writing about India was to show faults in Indian society and culture driven by zealous activities.
- A large number of works were produced by the Christian Missionaries on India, but none of them stands near to the works of Al-Biruni.
- Some other group of European Scholars, including John Holwell, Nanthaliel Halhed, and Alexander Dow had written about Indian history and culture proving the pre-eminence of the Indian civilization in the ancient world.
- Holwell had written that Hindu texts contained a **higher revelation** than the Christian one.
- Halhed had discussed the vast periods of time of human history assigned to four Yugas and concluded that human reason can no more reconcile to itself the idea of Patriarchal longevity of a few thousand years for the entire span of human race.

3. Imperialist Historiography

- The Asiatic Society of Bengal established in 1784 that contributed towards the writing of the Indian History.
- Imperialist Writings were mostly reflecting the contemporary debate on religious faith and nationality and also their interests in enlarging the European colonies for economic exploitation.

Imperialist Intellectuals

- Leading imperialist intellectuals of the 19th century were:
 - Max Muller,
 - J.S. Mill,
 - William Jones,
 - Karl-Marx, and
 - F. W. Hegel.

The works of a few intellectuals have been described below:

Max Muller

- Friedrich Max Muller is considered as one of the most respected Indologists of the nineteenth century. He was a German, but lived in England. On the financial support of the British East India Company, he undertook massive jobs of translation and interpretation of the Indian religious texts in English.



- He attained the best achievement of getting translated a huge mass of Sanskrit texts into English, but his approach and intention were never free from the prejudice.

- Muller was inspired by his religious belief and political requirements that affected his entire approach of unbiased writing and interpretation of Indian history.
- The guiding principle under which William Jones, Max Muller, and Vincent Smith wrote Indian history, was to settle all history within the period up to 4,000 B.C.
- In 1868, Max Muller wrote to the Duke of Argyll "*The ancient religion of India is doomed, and if Christianity does not step in, whose fault will it be?*"
- The majority of works done on Indian history during the 18th and 19th centuries were guided by the preconditions imposed by the belief in the Genesis and to reject all the writing that were projecting India's past in terms of great civilization and Indian philosophy and thoughts indicating great antiquity for the origins of universe and human beings.
- The major factor that is responsible for the distortion of the ancient Indian history was the British imperial interests in India. They were worried about the fact that popularity of the Indian text among British civilians might develop an inferiority complex in them.

James Mill

- Between 1806 and 1818, James Mill wrote six volumes on the history of India without ever visiting India or knowing any Indian language. He divided Indian history into three periods i.e.
 - Hindu Period,
 - Muslim Period, and
 - British Period – (all he did without any logic and justification).



James Mill

- Mill presented an extremely demeaning picture of Hindu periods. He condemned every institution, idea, and action of the Hindu period and held Hindus responsible for all the ills of the country.
- Mill's book was introduced as a text book in the Harleybury school in England, which was established to educate the young Englishmen coming to India as administrators and civil servants.

- James Mill, his son John Stuart Mill, and his disciple Thomas Macauley played a very important role in shaping the imperialist policy in India and the future of Indian education in the core of which was the distorted history of ancient India.
- V.A. Smith, an officer serving the British Government in India, prepared the text book called '*Early History of India in 1904*.' He emphasized the role of foreigners in ancient India. Alexander's invasion accounted for almost one-third of his book.
- Smith's racial superiority is clear with his sentence i.e. "*The triumphant progress of Alexander from the Himalayas to the sea demonstrated the inherent weakness of the greatest Asiatic armies when confronted with European skill and discipline*".
- Smith had given the impression that Alexander had conquered the whole of India from the Himalayas to seas while the fact is that, he only touched the northwestern borders of India.
- Smith had presented India as a land of dictatorship, which did not experience political unity until the establishment of the British rule.
- The whole approach of Imperial historians was to give such interpretations of Indian history to denigrate Indian character and achievements, and justify the colonial rule.
- Vincent Arthur Smith (1843-1920) prepared the first systematic history of ancient India that published in 1904.
- On the basis of the Bible story of Creation Bishop Usher had calculated that the whole universe was created at 9.00 a.m. on 23rd October 4004 B.C. and the Great Flood took place in 2,349 B.C.
- In the light of Indian concept, the age of the Earth is several hundred million years that the *Bible* stories of creation appears to be wrong and threatened the very foundation of the faith.
- With the object to promote the Sanskrit learning among the English, Boden Professorships of Sanskrit at Oxford University was endowed by Colonel Boden. This was precisely for enabling his countrymen to proceed in the conversion of the natives of India to the Christian religion.
- Prizes were offered to the literary works for refutation of the Hindu religious systems and undermining Indian tradition.

4. Historiography: Nationalist Approach

- In the late 19th century, there were some of the eminent Indian scholars who studied and researched Indian History with Indian point of view.

Nationalist Intellectuals

- Some of the nationalist scholars who understood and interpreted Indian History with Indian perspective are like:
 - Rajendra Lal Mitra,
 - R.G. Bhandarkar,
 - R. C. Majumdar,
 - V. K. Rajwade etc.
- Bhandarkar and Rajwade worked on the history of Maharashtra region and reconstructed the social, political, and economic history of the area.
- D. R. Bhandarkar, H. C. Raychaudhary, R. C. Majumdar, P. V. Kane, A. S. Altekar, K. P. Jayaswal, K. A. Nilakant Sastri, T. V. Mahalingam, H. C. Ray, and R. K. Mookerji were some other Indian historians who attempted to describe Indian History (according to Indian point of view).
- D. R. Bhandarkar (1875-1950), in his books, on Ashoka and on Ancient Indian Polity helped in clearing many myths created by the imperialist historians.
- K. P. Jayaswal (1881- 1937), in his book, Hindu Polity published in 1924, effectively knocked down the myth that Indians had no political ideas and institutions.
- Jayaswal revealed (on the basis of his study of literary and epigraphical sources) that India was not a despotic country as propagated by the imperialist historians, but rather India had the tradition of republics right from Rig Vedic times.
- K. P. Jayaswal's book Hindu Polity is considered as one of the most important books ever written on ancient Indian history.
- H. C. Raychaudhury (1892-1957) reconstructed the history of ancient India from the time of Mahabharata War to the time of Gupta Empire and practically cleared the clouds created by V. A. Smith. The title of his book is '*Political History of Ancient India*'.
- R. C. Majumdar wrote a number of books covering the time period from ancient India to the freedom struggle.
- Majumdar is considered as a leader among Indian historians. The most outstanding achievement under his editorship is the publication of '*History and Culture of the Indian People in eleven volumes.*'
- K. A. Nilakant Sastri (1892-1975) in his books '*A History of Ancient India*' and '*A History of South India*' contributed immensely towards the understanding of South Indian history.

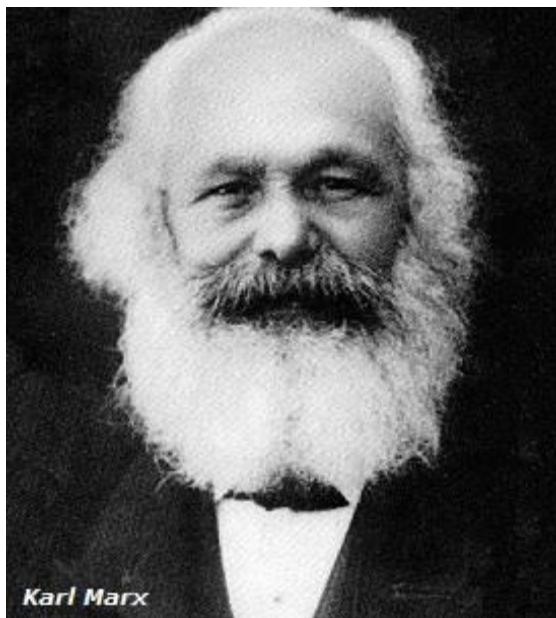
- R. K. Mookerji (1886-1964) in his books including Hindu Civilization, Chandragupta Maurya, Ashoka, and Fundamental Unity of India, expressed the cultural, economic, and political history of India in simple terms and made it accessible even to a lay reader.
- P. V. Kane's (a great Sanskritist, 1880-1972) work i.e. the '*History of Dharmashastra*' in five volumes is considered as an encyclopedia of social, religious, and political laws and customs.

5. Marxist School of History

- The Marxist school of historiography was significant in the second half of the 20th century. They believe in universal laws and stages of history.

Stages of History

- The Marxist, further, believe that all the societies pass through at least five stages of history. These stages were defined by Karl Marx and F. Engels as:
 - Primitive Communism
 - Slavery
 - Feudalism
 - Capitalism
 - Communism
- The stages of history proposed by Marx and Engels were based on their understanding of European history. They clearly acknowledged their intellectual debt to F. W. Hegel and Lewis Henry Morgan.



Karl Marx

- **G. W. F. Hegel** (1770-1831) was a great western philosopher. He made no attempt to learn Sanskrit or any other Indian language. His writings on Indian history and philosophy were based mainly on the writings of William Jones, James Mill, and other British writers whose approach to ancient Indian history has already been discussed above; so, the results were really disastrous.
- Hegel reluctantly accepted that India had a philosophical system and its history had great antiquity and he explicitly considered Indian system to be inferior to that of the Greeks and the Romans.

- Marx knowledge about India was not really free from racial considerations. He took his lead from Hegel.
- Marx was a great supporter of British rule in India and dismissed India as a backward and uncivilized nation with no history.
- The Hegelian and Marxian approach to Indian history by and large remained dormant for a long time. It was largely non-existent during the British rule in India.
- The Marxist school of historiography became one of the most influential and dominant schools after the independence of India.
- Marx held that all that is good in Indian civilization is the contribution of conquerors". Therefore, according to this school, the **Kushana** period is the golden period of Indian history and not the **Satavahanas** or **Guptas**.
- According to Marxist School of History, the period from the Gupta's to the conquest of Muslims in the 12th century A.D. has been termed as the "Period of Feudalism" i.e. "Dark Age" during which everything degenerated.
- D. D. Kosambi was the first among the pioneers of the Marxist school of thought.
- D. R. Chanana, R. S. Sharma, Romila Thapar, Irfan Habib, Bipan Chandra, and Satish Chandra are some of the leading Marxist historians of India.
- In the Marxist scheme of history, the Soviet Union was the ideal state and Marxism is an ideal philosophy and polity.

6. Sources of Ancient Indian History

- Literary and Archaeological records are the two main categories that give evidences of Ancient Indian History.
- The literary source includes literature of Vedic, Sanskrit, Pali, Prakrit, and other literature along with other foreign accounts.
- The archaeological source includes epigraphic, numismatic, and other architectural remains.
- The archaeological explorations and excavations have opened the great landscapes of new information.

Indian Literary Sources

- The ancient Indian literature is mostly religious in nature.
- The *Puranic* and Epic literature are considered as history by Indians, but it contains no definite dates for events and kingdoms.
- The effort of history writing was shown by a large number of inscriptions, coins, and local chronicles. The principles of history are preserved in the *Puranas* and Epics.
- The *Puranas* and epics narrate the genealogies of kings and their achievements. But they are not arranged in a chronological order.
- The Vedic literature contains mainly the four Vedas i.e. **Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda, and Atharvanaveda**.
- The Vedic literature is in a different language called as the Vedic language. Its vocabulary contains a wide range of meaning and is different in grammatical usages. It has a definite **mode of pronunciation** in which **emphasis** changes the meaning entirely.
- The Vedas give reliable information about the culture and civilization of the Vedic period, but do not reveal the political history.
- Six *Vedangas* are the important limbs of Vedas. They were evolved for the proper understanding of the Vedas. The *Vedangas* are:
 - *Siksha* (Phonetics)
 - *Kalpa* (Rituals)
 - *Vyakarna* (Grammar)
 - *Nirukta* (Etymology)
 - *Chhanda* (Metrics) and
 - *Jyotisha* (Astronomy).
- *Vedanga* has been written in the precepts (*sutra*) form. This is a very precise and exact form of expression in prose, which was developed by the scholars of ancient India.

- **Ashtadhyayi** (eight chapters), written by **Panini**, is a book on grammar that gives excellent information on the art of writing in *sutra* (precepts).
- The later Vedic literature includes the *Brahmanas*, the *Aranyakas*, and the *Upanishads*.
- *Brahmanas* gives a description of Vedic rituals.
- *Aranyakas* and *Upanishads* give speeches on different spiritual and philosophical problems.
- *Puranas*, which are 18 in numbers give mainly historical accounts.
- **The Ramayana** and **the Mahabharata** are epics of great historical importance.
- The Jain and the Buddhist literature had been written in *Prakrit* and *Pali* languages.
- Early Jain literature is mostly written in *Prakrit* language.
- Prakrit language was a form of Sanskrit language.
- Pali language was a form of Prakrit language which was used in Magadha.
- Most of the early Buddhist literature is written in Pali language.
- Pali language reached to Sri Lanka through some of the Buddhist monks where it is a living language.
- Ashokan edicts had been written in *Pali* language.
- Mahavira and Buddha are considered as the historical personalities (equivalent to the God). They have created Jain and Buddhist religious ideology respectively.

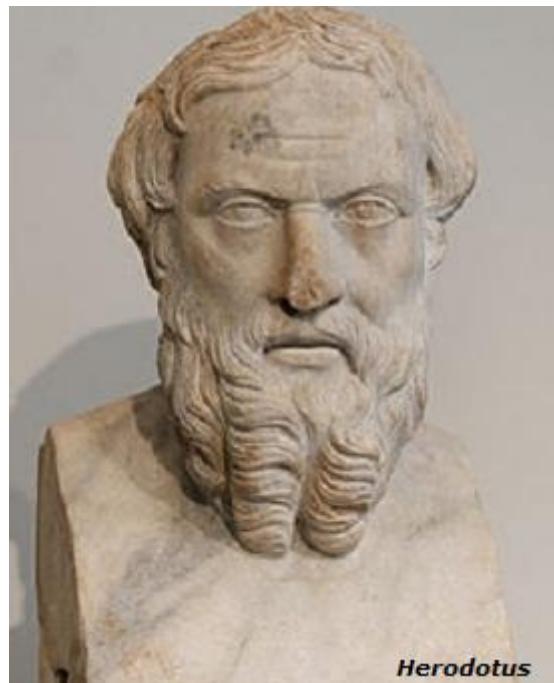
Ancient Books

- The Buddhist books are called as **Jataka** stories. They have been given some historical importance because they are related with the previous births of the Buddha. There are more than 550 such stories.
- The historic information mentioned in *Jaina* literature also help us in reconstructing the history of different regions of India.
- The *Dharmasutras* and the *Smritis* were the rules and regulations for the general public and the rulers. It can be equated with the constitution and the law books of the modern concept of polity and society. For example, **Manusmriti**.
- *Dharmashastras* were compiled between 600 and 200 B.C.
- *Arthashastra* is a book on statecraft written by Kautilya during the Maurya period. The book is divided into 15 parts dealing with different subject matters related to polity, economy, and society.
- The final version of *Arthashastra* was written in the 4th century B.C.
- Kautilya acknowledges his debt to his predecessors in his book, which shows that there was a tradition of writing on and teaching of statecrafts.
- *Mudrarakshsha* is a play written by **Visakha datta**. It describes the society and culture of that period.

- *Malavikagnimitram* written by **Kalidasa** gives information of the reign of Pusyamitra Sunga dynasty.
- **Bhasa** and **Sudraka** are other poets who have written plays based on historical events.
- *Harshacharita*, written by **Banabhatta**, throws light on many historical facts about which we could not have known otherwise.
- **Vakpati** wrote *Gaudavaho*, based on the exploits of Yasovarman of Kanauj.
- *Vikramankadevacharita*, written by **Bilhana**, describes the victories of the later Chalukya king Vikramaditya.
- Some of the prominent biographical works, which are based on the lives of the kings are:
 - *Kumarapalacharita* of Jayasimha,
 - *Kumarapalacharita* or *Dvayashraya Mahakavya* of Hemachandra,
 - *Hammirakavya* of Nayachandra
 - *Navasahasankacharita* of Padmagupta
 - *Bhojaprabandha* of Billal
 - *Priihvirajacharit* of Chandbardai
- *Rajatarangini*, written by **Kalhana**, is the best form of history writing valued by modern historians. His critical method of historical research and impartial treatment of the historical facts have earned him a great respect among the modern historians.
- The **Sangam** literature is in the form of short and long poems consisting 30,000 lines of poetry, which arranged in two main groups i.e. *Patinenkilkanakku* and the *Pattupattu*. It describes many kings and dynasties of South India.
- The *Sangam* was the poetic compilation by a group of poets of different times mainly supported by chiefs and kings.
- The *Sangam* literature was composed by a large number of poets in praise of their kings. Some kings and events mentioned are also supported by the inscriptions.
- The *Sangam* literature generally describes events up to the 4th century A.D.

Foreign Accounts

- **Herodotus** was dependent upon the Persian sources for his information about India.
- Herodotus in his book Histories (written in many volumes) describes about the Indo-Persian relations.
- A detailed account of the invasion of India by Alexander was written by **Arrian**.
- The Greek kings send their ambassadors to *Pataliputra*. Megasthenes, Deimachus, and Dionysius were some of them.



Herodotus

- **Megasthenes** came in the court of Chandragupta Maurya. He had written about the Indian society and culture in his book called as '**Indica**'. Though the original work has been lost, but it had been frequently quoted in the works of later writers.
- A book '*Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*' written by an anonymous Greek author who settled in Egypt on the basis of his personal voyage of Indian coast in about A. D. 80 gives valuable information about the Indian coasts.
- In the second century A. D., **Ptolemy** had written a geographical treatise on India.
- The Greek writing about India, however, is based on secondary sources. They were ignorant of the language and the customs of the country and hence their information is full of errors and contradictions.
- Many Chinese travelers visited India as Buddhist pilgrims from time to time; three important pilgrims were:
 - Fa-Hien (Faxian) - visited India in 5th century A.D.
 - Hiuen-Tsang (Xuanzang) - visited India in 7th century and
 - I-Tsing (Yijing) – visited India in 7th century.
- Hiuen-Tsang had given valuable account about Harshavardhana and some other contemporary kings of Northern India.
- Fa-Hien and Hiuen-Tsang traveled many parts of the country and they have given an exaggerated account of Buddhism during the period of their visit.
- Hiuen-Tsang mentioned Harsha as a follower of Buddhism while in his epigraphic records, Harsha mentions himself as a devotee of Siva. Such contradictions may be considered due to the fact of multi-religious nature of Indian rulers, which might confuse a foreigner.
- Al-Biruni gave important information about India. He was Arab scholar and contemporary of Mahmud of Ghazni.

- Al-Biruni studied Sanskrit and acquired knowledge of Indian society and culture through literature. Therefore, his observations are based on his knowledge about Indian society and culture, but he did not give any political information of his times.

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