TOPIC

SOURCES AND TOOLS OF HISTORICAL RECONSTRUCTION:
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, monuments and other architectural remains. The archaeological explorations and excavations have opened the great landscapes of new information.

INDIAN LITERARY SOURCES:
WE CAN DIVIDE THE INDIAN LITERARY SOURCES INTO THE FOLLOWING CATEGORY:

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Sources

Indigenous sources          Foreign

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  Religious                  Secular

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  Brahamanical   Buddhist   Jain

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  Chronicles   Biographical Grammar and Politics Dramas and poetry Scientific works
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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: 1. Siksha (Phonetics)

2. Kalpa (Rituals)

3. Vyakarna (Grammar)

4. Nirukta (Etymology)

5. Chhanda (Metrics) and


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 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.

Mudrarakshasha 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: 1. Kumarapalcharita of Jayasimha,

2. Kumarapalcharita or Dvayashraya Mahakavya of Hemachandra,
3. Hammirakavya of Nayachandra

4. Navasahasankacharita of Padmagnu
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5. Bhojaprabandha of Billal

6. Priihvirajcharit 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.

**BUDDHIST AND JAIN LITERATURES:**

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.

**BUDDHIST LITERATURE:**

Early Buddhist literature is generally divided into canonical and non-canonical texts. Canonical texts are the books which lay down the basic tenets and principles of a religion or sect. The various Buddhist school classify their canonical literature in different ways, some into 9 or 12 Angas others into 3 pitakas.

There are Pali, Chinese, and Tibetan versions of the Tipitaka. The Tipitaka consists of three books-

1. Sutta,
2. Vinaya,
3. Abhidhamma

The Sutta pitaka contains the Buddha’s discourses on various doctrinal issues in dialogue form.
The vinay pitaka has rules for monks and nuns of the Sangha.

The Abhidhamma Pitaka is a later work, and contains a thorough study and systemization of the teaching of the Suttapitaka through lists, summaries, and question and answer.

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.

Non-canonical Buddhist literature in Pali includes the Milindapanha which consists of a dialogue on various philosophical issues between King Milinda and the monk Nagasena.

**JAIN LITERATURE:**

The historic information mentioned in Jaina literature also help us in reconstructing the history of different regions of India.

The sacred books of Jains are collectively known as the Siddhanta or Agama. The language of the earliest texts is an eastern dialect of Prakrit known as Ardha-Magadhi. The Jains monastic order came to be divided into the Shvetambara and Digambara schools, perhaps in about the 3rd century CE. The Shvetambara canon includes the 12 Anga, 12 Upanagas, 10 Painnnas, 6 Cheda Sutta, 4 Mulla sutta and number of individual texts such as the Nandi Sutta and Anugodhra.

**SANGAM LITERATURE**

The earliest literature of South India is represented by a group of texts in old Tamil, often collectively referred to as Sangam literature. A tradition recorded in post 7th century texts speaks of three sangams or literary gatherings in ancient times. The first is supposed to have been held in Madurai for 4,440 years, the second at Kapatapuram for 3,700 years and third in Madurai for 1,850 years.

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.