

---

## Ancient Indian History sources

**Prof. Vijay Devidas Wakode**

Assistant Professor

Head of History Department

Shri Dnyanesh Mahavidyalaya, Navargaon

Tah. Sindewahi, Dist. Chandrapur

---

Events constitute the material for history. They all happened in the past. The historian cannot have a direct knowledge of past events. He therefore looks for their relics. Relics are traces or features surviving from a past age and serving to remind people of them. The Latin word 'vestigium' means trace left by the sole of the foot. The implication is that there is an intimate relation between a trace and that by which it was left.

The traces may either be left unintentionally by men in the course of their activities or they were intended by them to inform posterity of their deeds. Traces appear in bundle. "A trace is nothing but the still perceptible termination or culmination of a sequence of events or of several sequences of events" The trace is itself an event in the sense that events stand behind traces. By acquainting with a trace one can come nearer to the event. This trace is known as source. The researcher in search of events looks for sources that are still there. All are agreed that historical knowledge come from historical sources.

Sources are the historian's raw materials. The remains which the past leaves behind for the posterity to examine are called sources. The historical sources are the remains of man's unique activities in a society. Sources may be historical or non-historical. Historical sources are those which lead the historian to find out through them sequence of past events that would be of value to the composition of history.

## SOURCES FOR HISTORY OF INDIA

### Sources for Ancient History

Sources for the ancient Indian history are extremely scarce. The historian is confronted with the paucity of sources. The sources are not only scarce but also varied, diverse and scattered. To make matters worse the sources are in many languages and scripts, Indian and foreign. As a result, even the best portrayal of Ancient India on the basis of available sources will be at best fragmentary.

## Archaeological Sources

Archaeology supplies the most direct evidence of the past. For prehistory it is the mainstay. For the historical period it helps the historian in many ways. The archaeological finds unearthed at Mohenjo-daro, Harappa and other places exposed the existence of the Indus-Valley Civilizations of Iran, Mesopotamia and Egypt. The Indus culture is proved to be the starting point of Indian history, thanks to archaeological Sources. The confusion of Kanishkan chronology has been removed by archaeological finds. The respective sects. In short, archaeological sources help to trace the artistic evolution of Indian civilization.

## Epigraphical Sources

A study of epigraphs or inscriptions on stone and copper plates yields invaluable information about the genealogical, geographical, administrative, economic and cultural dimensions of ancient India. The inscriptions of Asoka, “sermons in stone”, Kharavela, Rudradaman I, Samudragupta nad Yasodharma of Malwa are of historical importance, the historical introductions to Chola inscriptions and the epigraphs bearing on Chola administration are exceptional epigraphical sources. The Leyden Grant of Raja Raja I and the Tiruvalangadu epigraphical sources. The Leyden Grant of Raja Raja I and the Tiruvalagadu plates of Rajendra Chola provide copious information about the Cholas and their administration.

## Numismatical Sources

The study of Indian coins and coin images and symbols help to bring back the history of a few ancient Indian dynasties and enrich our knowledge of some others. Numismatic evidence, though subsidiary and corroborative, contains valuable information about the chronological, political, administrative, religious, economic and cultural history of ancient India. The Indo-Greek, Saka, Kushan and Gupta coins and the bilingual coins of the Indo-Greeks, Sakes and Indo-Parthians have “supplied the master-key to the decipherment of Indian

## Numismatical Sources

The study of Indian coins and coin images and symbols help to bring back the history of a few ancient Indian dynasties and enrich our knowledge of some others. Numismatical evidence, though subsidiary and corroborative, contains valuable information about the chronological, political, administrative, religious, economic and cultural history of ancient India. The Indo-Greek, Saka, Kushan and Gupta coins and the bilingual coins of the Indo-Greeks, Sakes and Indo-Parthians have “supplied the master-key to the decipherment of Indian inscriptions”. The Gupta coins are noted for their artistic beauty. The Chalukya and Pallava coins contain emblems and legends. The Roman coins found in Arikamedu are proof for the prosperous Indo-Roman commercial connections in the early centuries of the Christian era.

## Literary Sources

Literary sources are the historian's mainstay. The indigenous sources - historical, quasi-historical and non-historical-provide valuable historical information. Patanjali's Mahabhashya, Gargi's Samhita, Kalidasa's Paghuvamsa, Dandin's Dasakumaracharita and Rajasekhara's Kavyamimansa provide precious historical and geographical data. The texts of the Brahminists, Buddhists and Jains and the Puranas and Itihikasas and the dramas of Visakhadatta and Kalidasa are the repositories of Indian tradition. Kautilya's Arthasastra and Kalhana's Rajatarangini are quasi historical works. Bana's Vikramankacharita and Bilhana's Harsha-charita, though 'defectively historical', provide glimpses of the glory of the respective sovereigns.

The voluminous Vedic literature, well preserved and contemporary, not only helps to trace the progress of the Aryanisation of India but also to get into grip of the early phases of Indian life and thought. The sangam literature consisting of Thirukurual, the twin epics Silappadikaram and Manimekhalai, the anthologies like Purananuru, the Ahananuru, the Narrinai and Kuruntokai are the veritable historical information about the Sangam polity, society and culture.

The foreign writers, visitors and observers provide valuable testimony to the political and social institutions as well as the life and thought of ancient Indians. The Indica of Megasthenes, though fragmentary and credulous, gives authentic topographical account of the Mauryan metropolis Pataliputra; accurate description of the imperial and municipal administrative system; and a fairly good picture of contemporary social life. The author of the Periplus and distinguished geographers like Strabo, Pliny, Plotemy and Cosmosindicopeustes throw light on the commercial contact between Indian and the Western world. The Chinese pilgrims-Fahien. Hiuen Tsang and It sing-are helpful for knowing the condition of Buddhism in India, administrative history, literary history and Indonesian religious history.

## Sources for Medieval Indian History

The advent of Islam in India, "produced a bumper crop of genuine historical literature". The sources of medieval Indian history are varied and abundant. They are directly relevant to the conditions of the times. The Muslim mosques, forts, palaces, gardens, works of art are of historical interest. The Muslim- Mughal paintings and portraits have "helped in the study of social customs and military techniques that were in vogue". Epigraphically and Numismatic sources supplement the study of the period.

As indicated earlier abundance of literary sources are available for the history of the medieval Muslim and Mughal rule in India. Zia-ud-din Barani and Ibn Batuta are the contemporary authorities for the reign of Muhammed bin Tughlak. Barani's Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi is the history of the Sultans of Delhi from Balban to Firoz Thughlak. Barani besides narrating the deeds of kings also describes the administrative system, legislation, cuvasions

and expeditions. Barani's work is practically a continuation of the *Tabakat-i-Nasiri*, general history of the Muslim world. Ibn Batuta, the African traveler, gives an account of the Sultans of Delhi from Kutb-ud-din Aibak to Muhammad bin Tughlak. He throws light on the Sultanate of Madura. Both Barani and Ibn Batuta have painted faithful pictures of their patron Muhammad bin Tughlak. Amir Khusru's *Tughlak-nama* is useful for the early career of his patron Ghiyas-ud-din Tughlak. The history of Wassaf contains references to India.

A master of Turki prose and a poet, Babar wrote his autobiography giving his impressions about Hindustan. His first impression about the country and the people are not however his best impressions! *Humayun-nama* of Gulbadan Begam, Babar's daughter, written at the suggestion of Akbar, contains the story of the 'transference' of the prince's illness to his father Humayan and the early days of Akbar. Abul Fazl's *Ain-i-Akbari*, or *Institutes of Akbar* is a detailed descriptive record of the Mughal empire in the 16th century. His *Akbar-nama* or *History of Akbar* traces in detail and in full the ancestry of Akbar from Timur and deals in detail with Humayun, and the history of Akbar's reign. Nizam-ud-din Ahmad's *Tabakai-i-Akbari* or *Annals of Akbar* is the history of India down to 1593, which was largely used by Badauni and Ferishta. *Tarikh-i-Badauni* is a general history of the Islamic world including the account of Akbar's reign down to 1595. Badauni's work is a necessary corrective to the over-laudatory composition of Abul Fazl. *Tarikh-i-Ferishta* is important for the Dakhan affairs. The accounts of Fr. Monserrate, Fr. Du Jarric, the French historian and Ralph Fitch throw light on the visits of the Jesuit missions to the court of Akbar, Akbar's religious activities and on the twin cities of Agra and Fatehpur-Sikri.

The *Tuzik-i-Jahangir* or *Memories of Jahangir* gives information on the personal lives of Jahangir and his nobles and is full of political and administrative details. Mutamad Khan's *Ikbalknama-i-Jahangiri* deals with the Timurids up to the accession of Shah Jahan, Kazwiri's *Padshah-nama* and Abdul Hamid Lohari's *Padshah-nama* are the principal sources for the first two decades of Shah Jahan's reign. Wasis' *Padshah-nama* covers the third decade of the emperor's reign. Sadik's *Shah Jahan-nama* and Kambu's *Amal-i-Salih* are accounts of the whole reign of Shah Jahan. Kazim's *Alamgir-nama* covers the first decade of Aurangzib's reign. Mustaid Khan's *Maxsir-i-Alamgiri* is the history of the Mughal Emperors from Babar to 1733, the year in which the work was completed. An ardent admirer of Aurangzib he was not in agreement with his anti-Hindu policy. Bhimsen's *Nusaha-i-Dirkasha* contains information about social and economic life of the Dakhan. Ishwarda's *Fatuh-i-Alamgiri* narrates the happenings in Rajputana and Malwa during 1657-1698. Shah Nawaz Khan's *Maasir-ul-umara* is a biographical dictionary very raw materials of history. Local histories like the *Basantin-i-Salatin* or the history of Bijapur throw light on the Mughal relations with the Dakhan Sultanates.

European travelers like Captain Hawkins, Sir Thomas Roe, Terry, Polsaert, Tavernier, Bernier, Manucci, Dr. Frier, and Dr. Careri have left valuable accounts of the Mughal court and Emperor Jahangir's daily life; political intrigues; the customs and manners of the people; economic condition of the Mughal empire, politics and administration; the

oppressive provincial administration; description of Golkonda; the great war of succession, description of Delhi, Agra and other cities and the resources and the administration of the Mughal empire; the Mughal institutions; the greatness of Sivaji; and the demoralized state of the army respectively.

### **Sources for Modern History of India**

The Sources are strong and systematic for the modern Indian history. From the very beginning, the Portuguese, the Dutch, the French, the Danes and the English recorded their official transactions in India on state papers. Their well preserved records are very valuable to know about their relations in India. The archives' at Lisbon, Goa, Pondicherry and Madras were literally storehouses of precious historical information.

The indigenous sources are available in many places and in different languages. Poona was a great centre of Sanskrit learning during the rule of the Peshwas. The Peshwas, particularly Balaji Rao, gave much attention to public records and to manuscript collection of valuable books. The bakhars are historical accounts in prose. For example Sabhasad Bakhar deals with the life of Sivaji. Anandaranga Pillai's voluminous Diary in Tamil covering the period, 1736 to 1760 is "a very valuable source of history for that period, particularly for the Governorship of Dupleix". Abu Dubois' Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies is self-explanatory. Dr. Francis Buchanan, under instruction from Governor General Richard Wellesley, studied the animals and birds of India. Systematic study of India's past was promoted by the enthusiastic efforts of history conscious persons like Warren Hastings, Sir William Jones, James Prinsep. Max Muller, Wilson, Cunningham, Marshall and others Lord Curzon's interest in the preservation of ancient monuments made archaeological research possible. Many other European scholars 'led the way in modern Indian historiography'. Besides historical works of contemporary value, journals, periodicals and dailies serve as sources of historical information. All these sources must, however, be critically evaluated before they are used for historical writing.

### **Sources for South Indian History**

The History of South India is an integral part of the history of India. The Deccan is one of the oldest inhabited regions of the world. Its prehistoric archaeology and contacts with neighbouring lands constitute an important chapter in the history of world's civilizations. Lot of source material is available for the ancient history of South India. Inscriptions are the most copious and authentic source of South Indian history. The earliest are in the Brahmi script and they were found in Siddapura, Jatinga-Ramesvara and Brahmagiri in Mysore State; Maski in Raichur district; and Yerragudi and Rajula-Mandagiri in Kurnool District. These inscriptions reveal the extent of the Mauryan empire in the south. The short inscriptions found in natural caves in the Tamil districts, and the early inscriptions of the Satavahana dynasty show the extent of the Jain and Buddhist ascetic orders.

Archaeological remains of the places of Kolhapur; Paithan, Kondapur in Bidar; Chandravali and Brahmagiri in Mysore; the temples forts and places in Tamil Nadu and Andhra State; the excavations at Adichanallur; and monuments discovered at Amaravathi; Nagarjunakonda and Pondicherry speak volumes about the South Indian commercial contact with the Roman Empire, the existence of the settlements of the microlithic age, and the monumental achievements of South Indian Kings.

Next to epigraphical and archaeological sources come the numismatic evidences. Ancient coins are rare and contain no dates and less legends. The rectangular silver coins with punch marks were found in South India and they belong to the centuries before Christ. Copper punch marked coins were also known. Later, the principal coinage of the South was struck in gold, not silver. The gold coins of the Rajendra I, and Rajadhiraja I Chola and of Rajaraja I, E.Chalukya, discovered at Dowlesvaram, are of considerable historical value. Chola coins with a design of a tiger seated under a canopy in the centre of the field, the Pandya coins with fish on one side and Chera coins with the bow at the bottom indicate conquests. The pagodas of Vijaynagar kings are well known. The coinage of the Sultanate of Madurai and the Bahmini Sultans followed the contemporary Delhi models.

Both indigenous and foreign literary evidence is an important source of knowledge. The later vedic literature and the epics contain clear hints of the progressive penetration of Aryan influences in the southern lands. The earliest extant stratum of the Sangam Tamil literature exhibits the results of Aryanisation of South Indian. Legends bearing on this blend of cultures are preserved in the southern literatures.

Tamil prabandha class of literature such as the Kalambakam, ula, parani and kovai narrate much history. The verses of the Kovai mention the names of several battles fought by the Pandya kings on the line of Kadungon. Pallava Nandivarmam III is the hero of Nandikalambakam, which is 'much more trust worthy and of real value on the history of the time'. Kalingattupparani of Jayangondar treats the invasion of Kalinga by the Chola forces in the reign of Kulottunga. I. Ottakuttan's triple ulas deal with these successive sovereigns - Vikrama Chola, Kulottunga II and Rajaraja II. In Kannada, the Pampa-charata and Ranna's Gadayudda shed much light on contemporary Rashtrakuta and Chalukya history. Bilhana's Vikramanka deva - Charitta has limited historical value. Kalainanas provide literary evidence for the history of Vijayanagar.

The Persian historical works composed under the patronage of Muslim monarchs in the Deccan are genuine historical writing. Isami's Futuhsalatin is the only surviving contemporary source on the history of the Bahmani kingdom. Late compositions like Burham-i-maasir of Ali bin Aziz-ullah Taba Tabai of Persia is a history of the Nizam Shahis. Shirazi's Tazkirat-ul-muluk is a contemporary account of some aspects of Bijapur history.

Foreign sources of South India are many and varied. The first direct notice of South India occurs in Megasthenes. He gives an attractively odd account of the Pandyan Kingdom

ruled over by Pandaia, a daughter of Herakles. Strabo records the increase in the knowledge of India among the Romans of his time. Pliny the Elder, the anonymous author of the Periplus of the Erythraean sea, and Ptolemy represent the further stages in that increasing acquaintance of the Romans with South India.

The celebrated Chinese traveler Yuan Chwang spent many months in the states of Deccan and South India and has made interesting observations on the religious and social conditions of his day. There are records in the Chinese annals of embassies exchanged between China and Pallava court of Kanchi in the 8th century and the Chola court in the 11th. Wang Ta-yuan, a Chinese merchant, visited many countries and wrote the Tao-i-chi-lio or Description of the Barbarians of the Isles, giving glimpses of ports and noteworthy localities in South India. Fei Hsin's Hsing-cha-sheng-lan or Description of the Star Raft and Mahuan's Ying-yai-sheng-lan or Description of the Among the Arab travelers and geographers Ibn Khurdadbeh, Abu Zaid Hassan, Ibn al-Fakih, Al-Idrisi, Ibn Said and Ibn Batuta are important. The most important coasts of the ocean are valuable for their notices of Ceylon, Cochin and Calicut.

Among Arab writers is Ibn Batuta. He gives an accurate account of his travels and experiences in South India. His work contains much authentic information on the state of politics, religion and society of the time.

Of the many European travelers Marco Polo, the 'prince of medieval travelers' passed through some parts of South India on his way to Persia and has left an astonishing amount of information about his short sojourn. He tells many things about the manners, beliefs and practices of the people of South India. John of Monte Corvino, the Franciscan friar; Friar Odoric of Pordenone; and Friar Jordanus who visited South India soon after Marco Polo represent the other side of the culture contacts between the West and East.

Nicolo Conti who visited Vijayanagar in 1420 gives a good description of the Vijayanagar court and its festivals, its currency and other matters. Abdur Razza, the Persian ambassador, visited Vijayanagar and the record of his mission is 'the testimony of a trained official on the state of administration and society at the time'. Athanasius Nikitin, the Russian trader, spent some years in the Deccan and had described the court, the army, and the condition of the people under Bahmani rule. Ludovico di Varthema of Bologna, an Italian soldier knighted by the Portuguese has left a vivid account of Goa and Calicut and other ports of the west coast. His description of the city and empire of Vijayanagar is valuable. The Portuguese Duarte Barbosa, who mastered the Malayalam language wider ground. Other Portuguese writers like Domingos Paes, Fernao Nuniz Caesar Frederick, Ralph Fitch, Nicolas Piementa and Pietro della valle have left a good crop of foreign evidence on South India.

The Sources for the modern history of South India include ecclesiastical correspondence, diaries, government records, reports and journals. The Jesuit records, though essentially religious in nature, yield information about political and social issues. The Diary

of Ananda Ranga Pillai in dozen volumes is indispensable for the study of Anglo-French relations in South India. The extensive government records are available in English, French, Portuguese, Danish and Dutch languages. Mir Ismail Khan Abjadi's Anwar-nama and Burhan Ibn Hasan's Tuzak-Walajai describe the history of Wallajah rulers of the Carnatic.

The accounts and observations of the European writers are copious and more useful for the study of Modern South Indian History. Robert Orme's History of Indostan describes the early history of the English East India Company in South India. Marx Wilks' History of Mysore traces the historical developments in Modern South India with reference to Mysore. James Welsh's Military Reminiscences is a detailed account of the British military operations against the rebels of Tamil Nadu and Travancore. Buchanan's A Journey explains the geographical features and social conditions in Madras, Mysore, Canara and Malabar in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Dubois, the French missionary wrote about the Hindu manners, customs and ceremonies. Fullarton's Report, Lushington's Diary, and Munro's Report deal in detail the historical and administrative matters of South India.

## References

1. Prof. R.S. Sharma - Ancient India (NCERT)
2. A.L. Basham - The Wonder That was India
3. D.N. Jha - Ancient India - An Introductory Outline
4. Romila Thapar - History of India, Vol. I
5. R.S. Sharma - Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India
6. Satish Chandra - Medieval India (NCERT)
7. Satish Chandra - Medieval India (Macmillan)
8. S.A.A. Rizvi. - The Wonder That was India (Vol.2)
9. Irfan Habib - The Agrarian System of Mughal India 1556-1707
10. J.F. Richards - The Mughal Empire
11. Bipan Chandra - Modern India (NCERT)
12. Sumit Sarkar - Modern India (Macmillan)
13. Suhash Chakravarty - Anatomy of the Raj (PPH)
14. Bipan Chandra - India's Struggle For Independence
15. Suhash Chakravarty - The Raj Syndrome (Penguins)