

UNDERSTANDING OUR PAST

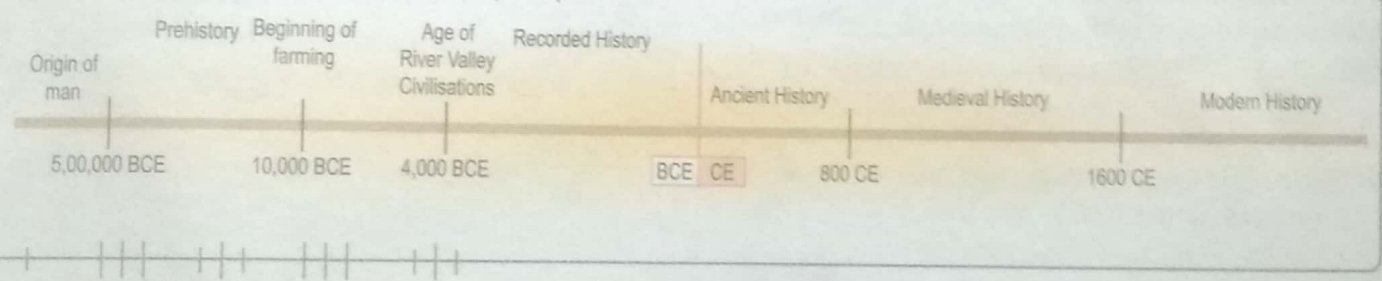
Spotlight

- ◆ Importance of the past in understanding history
- ◆ Dating past events in a chronological order
- ◆ Geographical factors and history
- ◆ Major sources of ancient history

Gear Up

Have you ever seen old coins, maps, objects or old family albums? Do they give us any information? How can we use these objects to know more about our past?

TIMELINE



What Makes the Past Important?

All of us wonder how people lived many years ago. Did they live the way we do? How different were their lives from ours? The branch of study that may have answers to all such queries is called history.

History is a systematic record of past events. To understand the present, we need to study and understand the past. However, it is impossible to get written records of all past events that happened thousands, or maybe, millions of years ago. People probably did not know how to read or write. So, we do not have written records of that period. This period is known as prehistory.

The period for which written records are available is called the historic period. Evolution is the process of change over time, over millions of years.



Fossil of a dragonfly

The Earth has existed for millions of years. By doing research on the layers of old rocks, we can find out about its past. We know that living things have changed over time, because we can see their remains in these rocks. These remains are called fossils.

Ordering of Past Events on a Time Scale

When we know the dates of past events, we get to know the sequence in which they occurred. We can then, get an idea of what happened first, and which event happened after that.

Chronology is the order in which a series of events take place. Historians use chronology as the first step towards understanding historical events. In this way, they can put all past events in a proper order.

GOOD TO KNOW

The Gregorian calendar is the most commonly used calendar all over the world. However, in India, our festivals and holidays are still calculated on the basis of the traditional Hindu calendar.

The birth of Jesus Christ is the reference point from which historians count dates. The dates of years before Christ's birth are counted backwards and are referred to as BC (Before Christ) or BCE (Before Common Era). For instance, any event that happened ten years before the birth of Christ is said to have taken place in 10 BCE. The bigger the number when the date is in BCE, the earlier it happened.

The years after Christ's birth are noted as AD (Anno Domini, which in Latin means 'in the year of the Lord') or CE (Common Era). These years are counted forwards, i.e., 99 CE comes before 100 CE. To arrange historical events in a chronological order, historians refer to a timeline.

Geographical Framework

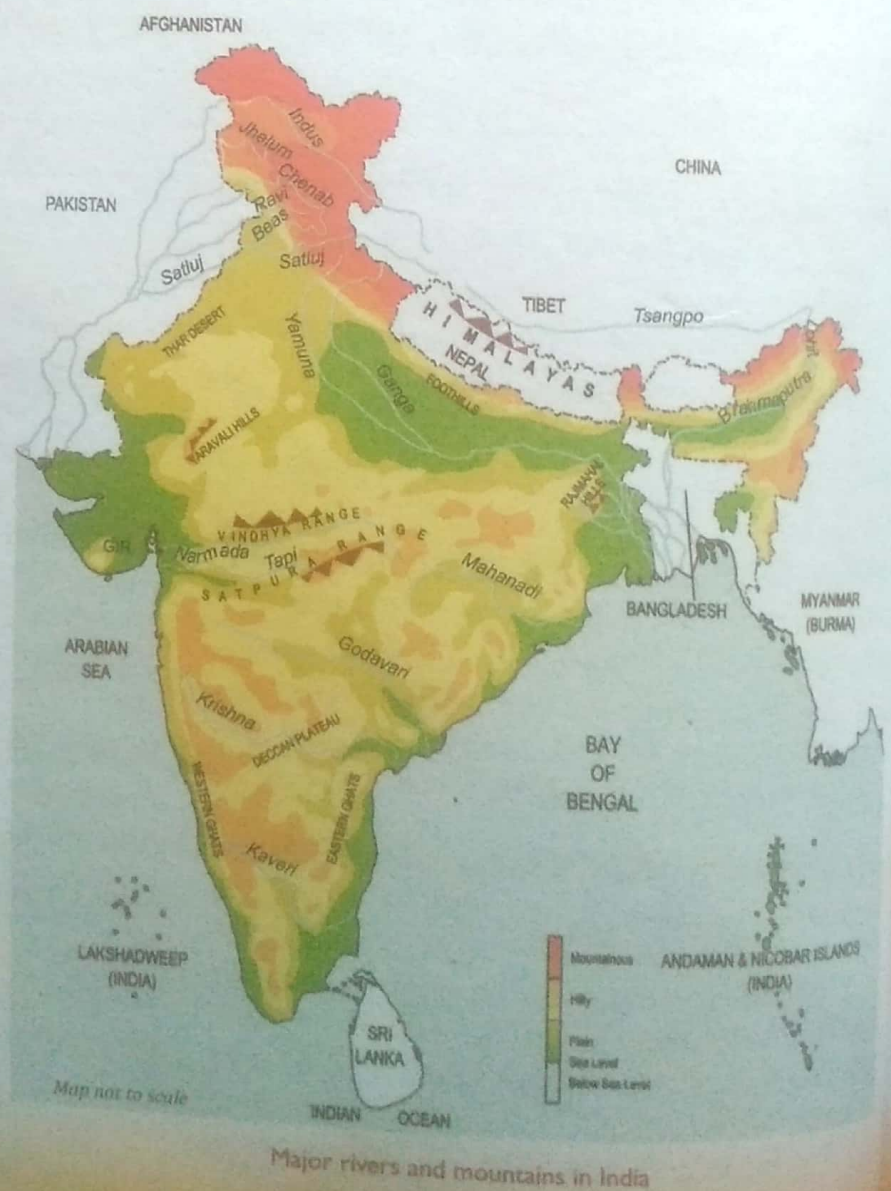
Geographical factors have a great influence on the history of a country. The Indian subcontinent has distinct geographical features.

- ◆ The vast northern Indo-Gangetic plains, around which humans settled first, was very fertile. Thus, many kingdoms emerged in these plains.

- ◆ The southern peninsula was divided into smaller regions by mountains, plateaus and river valleys.
- ◆ The great Himalayas in the North acted as a barrier between India and Central Asia. But people used the passes in the mountains as routes of contact.

These routes of contact were used for different purposes.

- ◆ Traders travelled along these routes to buy and sell goods.
- ◆ People from cold, arid places came here in search of livelihood. Many tribes entered India from the North-western side (present day Pakistan-Afghanistan) through the mountain passes.
- ◆ Religious leaders used these routes to spread their messages.
- ◆ Kings and rulers undertook war campaigns to expand their empires through them.



Some traders returned home, while others settled down to make India their homeland. They exchanged many ideas and traditions.

They taught as well as learnt from the people living here. This exchange of ideas resulted in the development of a unique culture. Many ideas were retained while others underwent change.

GOOD TO KNOW

According to historians, cities began to develop in the Indian subcontinent by 2500 BCE. Around the same time, human settlements came in the Nile Valley.

All early civilisations developed along river valleys. Farming resulted in the production of more food than was required. This allowed people to engage in professions, other than farming.

As traders travelled to different cities to sell their surplus produce, towns and cities developed. Craftsmen began to create better crafts, writing skills developed and the use of the wheel made transportation faster.

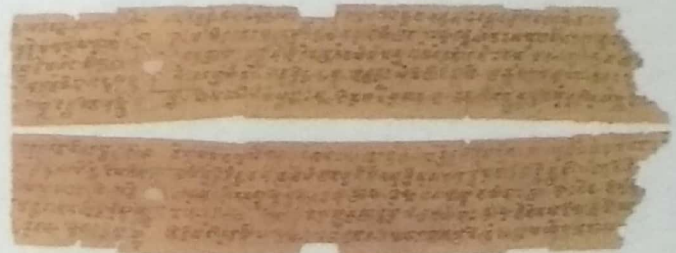
TIME TO THINK

Which is the first archaeological inscription of India?

The two main types of source material are literary and archaeological.

Literary sources

Literary sources refer to any written account. Long ago, before paper was used, books were written on palm leaves or on the bark of the birch tree. Literary works include religious books, accounts of foreign travellers, and writings on cave walls or stone tablets. Each of these tell us about the social, political, economic and cultural conditions during the time in which they were written. Most ancient books found in North India were written in Sanskrit, Pali or Prakrit. Tamil was mainly used in South India.



An ancient palm leaf manuscript

Several literary sources from the ancient period were written in scripts that are no longer used and are therefore, unknown to us. For example, the Harappans used a **pictographic** script which historians have not yet been able to decipher.

Literary sources

Indigenous works of Indian writers	These include <i>Harshacharita</i> and other works written by Indian writers
Foreign works written by travellers who visited India during different periods	These include works such as the <i>Indica</i> by the Greek author Megasthenes, the writings of Fa-Hsien and other travellers
Secular or non-religious texts	The <i>Arthashastra</i> by Kautilya and <i>Meghadoota</i> by Kalidasa are examples of secular literature
Sacred or religious texts	The Vedas and <i>Purans</i> are considered sacred texts

Various Sources of History

Historians have to use evidence or clues to write history and give us a complete picture of the past. Have you ever wondered where do they get these clues and evidence from? There are several sources from which we may get information about the past.

Archaeological sources

Archaeological sources are objects from the past. These could be ruins of buildings, pieces of pottery, tools, coins or jewellery. These objects reveal the level of development of a society, and the expertise of craftsmen of that time.

- ◆ **Coins:** They give us information about the economy of kingdoms, and the reigning kings. The study of coins is called numismatics.



Archaeological remains

- ◆ **Monuments:** Much of our information about art and architectural style are drawn from the study of monuments.
- ◆ **Inscriptions:** These are records engraved on pillars, stone walls and clay tablets. Scribes carved their writings onto stone surface using chisels and hammers. They usually give details of battles won or instructions from the ruler to the common people. Study of inscriptions is called epigraphy.
- ◆ **Artefacts:** These include pottery, seals, ornaments, tools, weapons, etc. Seals and pottery provide information about trade links between two places. Through tools, weapons and ornaments, we learn about the lifestyle of people who lived during that time.

Archaeological objects are usually found during excavations at historical sites. Experts known as **archaeologists** study such objects. They give us a lot of information, such as the time period they belong to and how people lived at that time.

They even study grains, plant remains and the bones of animals found at excavated sites. These can

provide further details about food, livelihood and religious beliefs of the people in those times.



Ashoka's Brahmi script

Use of Historical Sources for Writing History

Literary and archaeological sources both provide information required to write history. Historians study both literary and archaeological sources together to reconstruct events of the past, using clues provided by the various sources. History is thus, a systematic study of past events by historians.



Egyptian hieroglyphic script

To accurately interpret history, historians must consider all sources available and must not impose their own thoughts or ideas on the information they provide. They should use both types of sources to confirm their interpretation.

They should not be biased in their approach and try to narrate the past as it once was.

GOOD TO KNOW

In 1822, the French scholar Jean-Francois Champollion deciphered the Egyptian hieroglyphic script, by successfully reading the inscription of the Rosetta Stone. It was a piece of rock that had been inscribed with tiny writings. When scholars examined it, they found that it contained the same passage in three ancient scripts: Egyptian hieroglyphics, a simple Egyptian script and Greek. Since scholars could read the Greek and Egyptian writings, they were finally able to decode the hieroglyphics.

PICSTOP



1. What kind of source is shown here?
2. What information can you derive from it?

SUM IT UP

- ◆ History is a systematic study of past events. To understand the present, we need to study and understand the past.
- ◆ Evolution is the process of change over time, over thousands and millions of years.
- ◆ To arrange historical events in a chronological order, historians refer to a timeline.
- ◆ Historians have to use evidence or clues to write history and give us a complete picture of the past. Two main types of source material are literary and archaeological.
- ◆ Literary sources refer to any written account, Archaeological sources are objects from the past like pots, coins, seals, etc., which are found during excavations.
- ◆ To accurately interpret history, historians must consider all sources available and must not impose their own thoughts or ideas on the information they provide.

CORNER

CREATIVE

1. **Map Work:** Mark on the outline map of India, any four geographical features that have influenced Indian history.
2. **Project:** Close your eyes and go back to the ancient Egyptian time. Pretend that there is no form of writing. How will you send a message to someone staying far away? Make a chart using pictures of familiar objects corresponding to the sound and write a secret message for your friend. Let them decipher or decode the message.
3. **Visit:** Go to a monument in your city and collect information about it. See what information about the past can you get from that monument.
4. **Find Out:** Find out about the importance of cave paintings as sources of prehistory.

GLOSSARY

pictographic

a form of writing which uses representational, pictorial drawings

archaeologist

a scientist who studies human history by digging up human remains and artefacts

interpret

to explain the meaning of something

EXERCISES

A. Answer the questions given by choosing the most appropriate alternative from those given below.

1. People who study excavated objects are known as
a. cartographers b. historians c. archaeologists d. none of these
2. The French scholar Jean-Francois Champollion deciphered the hieroglyphic script in
a. 1822 b. 1844 c. 1833 d. 1855
3. Most ancient books in the South were written in
a. Prakrit b. Tamil c. Pali d. Hindi
4. The term used for the order in which a series of events happened is
a. history b. chronology c. fossil d. archaeology

B. Match the following:

- | | |
|----------------|------------------------|
| 1. archaeology | a. pictographic script |
| 2. Meghadoota | b. Megasthenes |
| 3. Indica | c. digging |
| 4. Sumerians | d. Kalidasa |

C. Fill in the blanks.

1. Before paper, books were written on leaves.
2. In 2500 BCE, cities in were already flourishing.
3. Literary sources refer to accounts.
4. To arrange historical events, historians refer to
5. The period for which we do not have written records is known as

D. Classify the type of historical sources.

1. Writing on stone surfaces = (archaeological/literary)
2. Books written by hand = (archaeological/literary)
3. Ruins of buildings = (archaeological/literary)
4. Vedas = (archaeological/literary)
5. Writings of Fa-Hsien = (archaeological/literary)
6. Portrait of a king on a coin = (archaeological/literary)

E. Answer the questions in about 50-70 words.

1. Give two reasons why the Indo-Gangetic plains witnessed the rise of big cities.
2. Explain the various types of literary sources with examples.
3. What do you mean by chronology? How is the birth of Christ used as a reference point in history?
4. Why is it important to date events in history?
5. Mention any two archaeological sources of ancient Indian history.

F. Answer the questions in about 80–100 words.

1. What are sources of history? Explain its two types with examples.
2. What is the significance of the geographical boundaries and features in shaping the history of our country?
3. What are secular literary sources? Explain with examples.

G. Think and answer.

1. What gives a more accurate account of the past—literary sources or archaeological sources?
2. Why are pottery and tools the most common archaeological objects found in an ancient site?

PROJECT WORK

Being an archaeologist

Imagine you are an archaeologist working on an archaeological site. How will you use the following equipments?



a. Camera



b. Magnifying glass



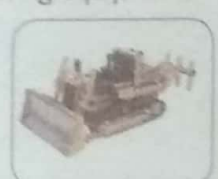
c. Trowel



d. Shovel



e. Measuring tape



f. Bulldozer

LIFE SKILL (COPING WITH EMOTION)

Make your own album consisting of pictures (from the day you were born till present). Include pictures of important milestones in your life like birthdays, report cards and school events you participated in. Show this album to your family and relive your beautiful memories. Whenever you feel sad or upset about something, look at this album and think of all the good things in your life.

SURF AND LEARN

Use these links to learn more about the topics:

<http://etc.ancient.eu/2015/11/18/sources-of-history/>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archaeology>

<http://www.historydiscussion.net/articles/sources-of-ancient-indian-history-archaeological-and-literary-sources/2336>

SELF-ASSESSMENT RUBRIC

1. I have learnt about the meaning and purpose of history.
2. I have learnt about chronology and how to arrange events in a timeline.
3. I have learnt about archaeological and literary sources.

YES

NO

PARTIALLY
