

Reclaiming the History of Punjab: Literary and Archaeological sources

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Abstract

The ancient past is immensely magnificent, abundant, and diverse. But the reconstruction of its continuous history presents many difficulties. This is true not only of the people of the Punjab alone but of all other ancient people. We have to depend to a great extent only on dynastic list of Kings, Traditions and mythology. Appropriate historical writings are few. i.e. accounts of public did exist in the country at one time, later perished as a result of an unfavorable climate, insects, pests and innumerable political upheavals, Nevertheless, the great efforts of the archaeologists and scholars, both Indian and European have succeeded in bringing much to light. Literary sources and Archaeological sources are the two categories into which historical sources can be divided. Once more, literary works can be divided into three groups: traveller's accounts from overseas, secular information available, and works of religion. The religious literature consists of biographical literature, chronicles, dramas and folk literature. The accounts of foreign travelers consists of the Greek, the Chinese, the Tibetan and Muslim travelers, Inscriptions, Coins, monuments, sculpture, paintings and excavations come under the category of Archaeological sources.

Keywords: Archaeological, Secular, Vedas, Upanishads & Inscriptions.

INTRODUCTION

Ultimately, all historical interpretations are predicated on knowledge obtained from historical sources, which are erroneously separated between two groups: literary sources and archaeological sources. From the perspective of a historian, all texts—long or short, written or oral—are considered literary sources, while all physical, material remains are considered archaeological materials. Literary materials are crucial because they provide us with information on the rulers and the author, who is also regarded, considered an expert on history as the author provides a very brief account of that period in his or her work knowing what a nation's historical materials is crucial for a thorough understanding of its history. For history students, sources are crucial. Regarding the historical sources of Punjab, we have many obstacles to overcome. Through these, mythology and historical truths have also been combined. As a result, finding an accurate historical sequence can be extremely challenging. Muslims who were also passionate adherents of their religion misinterpreted the historical facts in their writing.

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LITERARY SOURCES

1. Religious Literature

i. *The Vedic Literature:* The major portion of the Vedic literature, the earliest available literature in the world, came into being in the land of the Punjab. This literature rose and developed in the course of a long period, generally between 1200 B.C. and 300 B.C. and was handed down from generation to generation in oral tradition. The following categories apply to the Vedic literature:

a. *Vedas*: The Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda, and Atharvaveda are the four Vedas. The Rigveda consists of 10 chapters and 1028 Suktas. King Sudas makes reference to the conflict between the two monarchs. (Day) Later, the Yajurveda, Samaveda, and Atharvaveda were created. The Yajurveda outlines the process for offering sacrifices. The Rigveda is merged into the Samaveda's remaining hymns, leaving 75 songs that are entirely original. The hymns are chanted during the sacrifice ceremony. Medical knowledge is covered in the Atharvaveda, which was written by Sage Atharva. (S. (-8.-1.-X. Nigel) [8]

The Vedas gives us a glimpse of the prehistoric era even if its primary purpose seems religious. Documents reveal a great deal of details on the Punjab-based Aryans' spiritual and social lives. Through the Vedas, we also know who the original residents of India were and how they spread into different parts of India, and how they fought the original tribes in the Punjab. The Rigveda is regarded as the most ancient sacred book in the human canon. It provides important details concerning the political establishment of the Punjab through the Vedic era. It also mentions the rivers and geographical conditions of the Punjab. (Singhal and Gupta) [12]

b. *The Brahmanas and the Aranyakas*: These books contain the commentaries from the Vedas to the priests in society and hermits in the forests. The important Brahmanas works are Aitareya and Kandsitki of the Rigveda, the Shatapatha of the Yajurveda the Panchavimsha and Jaiminiya of the Samaveda and the Gopatha of the Atharvaveda. The Aitareya and part of the Shatapatha were composed in the Kuru-Panchala country. While the Panchavimsha was written mostly on the Sarasvati-Drishadvati Doab. The Aranyakas books meant to be studied in the forest deals with the mysticism and symbolism. (S. (-8.-1.-X. Nigel) [8]

c. *The Upnishads*: 'Up' signifies close, while 'nishad' denotes sitting. The students learned about the soul, God, the creation of the universe, and soul transmigration while sitting at the feet of gurus. They are storehouse of Indian philosophy. The main Upnishads are: Ish, Kain, Katho, Prashan, Mandukya, Mundak, Aitriya and Taitriya. (Krishnananda) [1,7]. The Sutras. The Sutras are divided into three parts namely Kalpa Sutra, the GrihSukra and Dharam Sutra.

d. *The Vedangas*: They are six namely Shiksha, Kalpa, Vyakarn, Nirukta, Chhand and Jyotish.

e. *The Smritis*: Manu, Vishnu, Yagyavalkya, Narad, Brihaspati, and Prashar wrote the Smritis. (Darvill) [2]

f. *The Epics*: The Ramayana and the Mahabharata are two epics. Maharishi Valmiki wrote the Ramayana, while Sage Ved Vyasa wrote the Mahabharata. The two epics throw the light about the extend of Aryans in India.

The two Epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata, provide us much information regarding religious, social and political conditions of the Later Vedic Punjab. From the point of view of political condition of the Punjab of the Epic Age, the Mahabharata is indeed important. It gives us much information regarding the new tribes which emerged in the Punjab during the later Vedic Age. (Krishnananda) [1]

h. *The Puranas*: There are eighteen Puranas. Nevertheless the Bhavishya, Vayu, Matsya, Vishnu, Brahmana, and the others Purana are significant from a point of view of history. Each Purana is divided into five sections. (S. (. Nigel) [9] The last division Vanshanuchrit of each Purana depicts the history of Royal dynasties which is important. The Puranas are full of mythology but still their depiction of dynasties like Suryavanshi, Chandravanshi, Purus of Hastinapur, Ikshvakus of Koshalas, Mauryas of Magadha and the Kushana is very important. (Fagan) [5]

ii. *The Buddhist and Jain Literature*: The most significant Buddhist texts composed in Pali are the Tri-pitakas. Pitak means basket, so Tri-pitakas means three baskets of Buddhist acquaintance. The

Pitakas are Vinay Pitak, SutaPitak and AbhidhamPitak. Dipvansha and Mahavansha, the Buddhist scriptures, were printed in Ceylone in Pali language. Lalit Vistar is a biographical sketch of Lord Buddha. H. C. Raychaudhuri (1972). [6] Divydaan and Manju Sri Mulkalpa we composed in Sanskrit. Malindapanha was written in Pali by BhikshuNagasena. (Williams, Tribe and Wynne) [14]

The significant Jain scriptures are: 12 Angas, 12 up-Angas, 10 Prakaran, 6 Chhed Sutra, Nandisutra, Anis Yoga Sutra and Mula Sutra etc. The Jain work 'ParishishatParva' written by Hem Chandra is most important of all. The life of Chandra Gupta Maurya is clarified by "BhadraBahuCharit." The religious literature is full of myth and spiritualism which cannot be claimed as historical information. Still, every work of literature, regardless of its genre, reflects the time at which it was written. We can draw the picture of society from the literature. The religious literature of Ancient Punjab tells us about pre-historical period, different tribes, political developments and geographical changes. We come to know about Vedic Age and Later Vedic Age and the history of this region before the coming of Alexander. (David) [3]

iii. *Secular Literature:* We have secular literature in shape Grammar, History, Politics, Biographies of kings, imaginative and gossip literature. Panini's 'Ashtadhyayi' contains references to certain kings and republican states. Patanjali in 'Mahabhashya' gives a useful account of the invasions on Punjab by the Greeks. Arthashastra was written by Kautilya famous as Chanakya, the prime minister of Chandra Gupta Maurya. The work is compared with Machiaveli's 'The Prince'. The Arthashastra gives a detailed account of Mauryan period specially the rise of Chandra Gupta Maurya. Kautilya was a teacher in Taxila University in Punjab who was guru to Chandra Gupta Maurya. He assisted Chander Gupta Maurya to consolidate his power in Punjab and then to occupy Magadha. Another important name in secular literature is that of Bharata, the author of Natya-Shastra. It is further believed that Pingala, the author of the Chhand-Sutra, was a resident of the Punjab. (Tahir) [13]

The North-Western part of the Punjab became a centre of fruitful literary activities in the time of Kanishka, the great Kushan king who had his capital at Purushapura, modern Peshawar. Three famous Buddhist scholars Vasumitra, Ashavghosh and Nagarjuna lived in his court. Ashavghosh is the famous author of Buddhacharitra and Saundarananda while Nagarjuna wrote Mula-madhyamakarikā and Suhrilekha. Another scholar of Kanishka period was Charaka who wrote Charaka-Samhita which is the oldest available work on Ayurveda. (Prasad) [10]

Writing in Sanskrit flourished in all of its different forms during the period of the Gupta dynasty. Kalidas, the Indian Shakespeare, wrote Malvika Agni-Mitram, Vikramo-Urvashi, Abhijyana Shakuntlam, Raghuvamsha, Meghdoot and Ritu-Samhar. Shudraka wrote Mrichhkatika and Vishakhadatta wrote Mudrarakshasa and Devichandra Guptam. Subandhu wrote Vasavadatta and Vishnu Sharma Panchatantra. The court poet of Harsha, Banabhatta wrote Harsha-Charita and Kadambri. Harsha wrote three plays, the Ratnavali, Priyadarshika and Nagananda. (S. (.8.-1.-X. Nigel) [8]

iv. *Writings of Foreigners:* To some degree, writings by foreigners are solely Indian sources. Greek, Persian, and Roman accounts to arrive, as well as those of Greek and Iranian travelers, have left an impression on the Punjab and in the northwest India. While some of them were written following in-person examination in India, others were based on hearsay. Such records were mainly destroyed. Only a small percentage of these records—trash—as well as excerpts cited by later authors are accessible. But they are quite helpful since they support all the proof provided by Indian sources. Before Alexander's invasion of India, three early Greek authors—Herodotus, Skylax, and Ctesias—wrote about the country. Through the Persians, Herodotus and Ctesias learned approximately India. North-western India was the 20th satrap of King Darius's realm, according to Herodotus. He mentions that the soldiers inhabiting Gandhara used reed bows and short spears, while those of the lower Indus valley wore cotton clothing and confronted with

glucose bows and arrows with iron tips. Skylax chronicles his journeys through the Persian Gulf to the valley of the Indus in his writings. Xenophon, probably lived from 444 to 357 B.C., writes in his work *Cyropaedia* that Cyrus the Great, or Cyrus the Great, (559–530 B.C.) launched a message through a wealthy Indian ruler, most likely Pukhast, the king of Gandhara, to request a loan. After these early Greek historians, Alexander's Indian expedition was complemented by historians from that country including Aristobulus, Nearchos, Ptolemy, Onesicritus, and Ctesias. The historical record of Alexander's wars had been compressed into writing by these academics. Without these writers, we would not be aware of his conquest of India. Strabo, Diodorus, Arrian, Pliny, Ptolemy, Curtius, and other later Greek and Roman authors shed important insight on Alexander's conquest of the Punjab. Their accounts are harsher while remaining logical. A Greco-Roman official named Arrian describes India in great detail in the second century A.D. Alexander's invasion of the Punjab is also described by him. He makes note about several tribal kings who ruled the Punjab at the period. Quintus Curtius reported Alexander's incursions into the Punjab and presented an overview of the population of the area beyond the Beas. Nearchus defines the area spanning the Persian Gulf to the Indus. The book *KurushKabir*, written in Persian by Hasan Hidayati, describes the 5th-century B.C. Achaemenian conquest of Gandhar. The geographer Pliny described the economic condition of India throughout his time in his book *Natural History*. After surrendering to Chandra Gupta Maurya, Alexander's successor in India, Seleucus, ordered Megasthenes as his envoy to the court of Chandra Gupta Maurya. Megasthenes depicted Chandra Gupta Maurya's era in her work *Indica*, which details its involvement in politics, social, economic, and cultural life. (Shaw and Jameson) [11]

- v. Chinese travellers. Fa-hien, Hsien-Tsang were the prominent Buddhist scholars who visited India during ancient times. Fa-hien visited India during Chandra Gupta II's period and depicted in his writing about the social, economic, religious and political condition of that period. The second Chinese traveler to visit India was Hsien-Tsang, who authored a book on his experiences while there while King Harsha was in power. Si-yu-ki. The third Buddhist traveler to visit India was I-tsing. In the seventh century, he travelled to India. A.D. (Shaw and Jameson) [11]
- vi. *Tibetan Travellers*: Taranath Lama was a famous Tibetan traveller. His work, 'History of Buddhism' gives us useful information about Buddhism. His works *Tangyur* and *Kangyur* are important from historical point of view. Accounts of early Muslim Writers. The most significant work by an early Muslim author relevant to the history of the ancient Punjab is *Tahqiq-i-Hind* Enquiry into India by Alberuni. Mahmud's companion Alberuni studied Indian literature in-depth during his stay with him in India, and his writing has been hailed as "a marvel of well-digested erudition." He paints a true representation of Indian life and civilization about the year 1000 A.D. Sulaiman Sudasani was a different author from Arabia who arrived in India a long time prior. Although his brief description of the North-West India is useful to historians, it does not merit much attention. Punjab not all of it factual. The *Kautilya Arthashastra* is valuable. The works of secular literature produced in the period of Alexander to draw the history of Alexander's invasion on Punjab and occupation of Punjab by Chandra Gupta Maurya. The literature written during Kanishka's period helps us to draw the history of that period. Kalidasa's works throw light on the society of that period. Depictions of Vishakhadatta and Banabhatta are important historically. Every work provides a wealth of information on people's modern political, social, cultural, and economic lives. (Shaw and Jameson) [11]

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOURCES

Archaeological sources help us to construct the history of ancient Punjab. The archaeological sources are more trustworthy and help us in testifying and authenticating the sources gathered from other sources. The archaeological sources are mentioned below:

Inscriptions

Inscriptions are the most fundamental and reliable source for historical research. "The inscriptions, being actual records of a reliable character, have helped us most," claims R.C. Majumdar. They gave us the names of the kings and queen, Occasionally, together with their dates and other necessary

particulars; they have recorded many chief events of history." Conquests of the kings, events of their kingdoms etc. are other useful bits of information which are based on the aesthetic elements. They also assist us in verifying the information observed in books. They are etched on terracotta seals, copper, and bronze plates, iron pillars, underground spaces, and rocks. They have come from all parts of this country and from the countries in the North-West of India. The texts discovered at Bogaz-koi (in Asia Minor) most likely allude to the Aryan migrations before to their arrival in India, which inadvertently aids in our effort to piece together the Vedic period's history. Strong allusions to political exchanges between the ancient Punjab and Iran can be found in inscriptions found at Persepolis and Nakshi-i-Rustam (in Iran). According to the Persepolis Inscription, the Indus Valley was subjugated to Persia's monarch Darius sometime about 518 and 515 B.C. We may learn about the tribes residing in the areas between Jehlum and Chenab during Alexander's conquest by reading the Shorkot Inscription. Samudra Gupta's fourth-century A.D. Allahabad Stone Inscription describes his conquests of India and his alliances with the republican tribes that inhabited Punjab. Chandra Gupta II's deeds are presumably described in the Mehrauli Pillar Inscription. It implies that he crossed the seven Indus system outlets after subduing the Vahalikas and annexing their lands to his western provinces. The Huna Chiefs Toramana and Mihirakula's inscriptions, which were found in Khewra in Punjab's Salt Range, provide information about their authority in the Region. The size of Ashoka's empire is revealed by some of his inscriptions. (Tahir)

Coins

Another important source for piecing together the prehistoric Punjab's past is its coins. They generally contain short folklore about the kings and their dynasties. Their spatial distribution patterns reveal the region of their transmission. So far as the early Punjab history is concerned, the coins have been our most important source of knowledge about the Indo-Greek, Indo-Parthian and Indo-Bactrian dynasties who ruled over parts of the Punjab and the North-West Frontier in the period from the second century B.C. onwards. The fact that for several centuries, the Greeks ruled over the North-West Frontier and the Punjab is established through their coins. The Huna king Mihirakula's various coins were discovered at Chiniot (West Punjab, Pakistan). They suggest that the Punjab was a part of the monarch's realm. (S. (-8.-1.-X. Nigel)[8]

Monuments

Prehistoric structures such as temples, palaces, pillars, stupas, and chaityas provide us with an enormous amount of information pertaining to the religious beliefs of the people, their apparel, customs, and formats of worship. They also aid in underlining the significant moments in history. There are several monuments available in the region of ancient Punjab in the shape of temples and Buddhist stupas which help us to construct the history of this area. (Tahir)

Sculpture And Painting

Several figurines of terracotta and bronze have been found during the excavations from the places in Punjab connected with Harappan culture. Gandhara School of Arts which flourished in this region provides us many Sculptures and paintings to know about the people's beliefs, tastes and practices.

Quarry

The archaeological study carried out by the experts in the Punjab and other parts of India has given valuable data for the renovation of the history of the Punjab. Past data that was previously unknown to our world has been provided by the excavations at Taxila, Mohenjodaro, and Harappa with great reliability. Several cultures from the ruins of the Indus Valley have been found in other places, including KotlaNihang Khan (that is, within Ropar), UchaPindSanghol in Fatehgarh Sahib District, Banwali in Hissar district, and Sukengdor on the east coast of Baluchistan. They comprise the ruins of large buildings and dwelling houses, weapons of war, household implements, different types of pottery and most important of all, seals and other objects and engravings and the pictographic alphabet. These excavations have pushed back the history of the Punjab by more than three thousand

years. The disclosures of the Indus Valley Civilization have proved the existence of civilization in the Punjab prior to that of the Aryans. The excavations by Sir John Marshall at Taxila have resulted in unearthing valuable specimens of the Gandhara School of Art. (S. (-8.-1.-X. Nigel) [8]

CONCLUSION

The brief review of the sources of the ancient history of the Punjab shows that there is sufficient material on which the history of this period can be reconstructed. One significant challenge, though, is that there isn't a single homogenous era. There are thirty different eras used in the Indian chronicles without reference to any proper era. Secondly, the scholars have not been able to know the starting date of a preponderance of events. No specific date can be assigned to some of the most important events in the history of the Punjab, for instance, the coming of the Aryans, the composition of the Vedas and the war of Mahabharata. Still a workable chronological order, at least from the 6th century B.C. onwards has been made available by the efforts of abundant foreign and Indian scholars. Thus, we can summaries, though we have unsatisfactory historical material, as the ancient Punjabis lacked historical sense and history was so curiously mixed with philosophy, myth and religion that it was difficult to find out the truth from the untrue. Nevertheless, using the literary as well as architectural evidence that is currently available, historical scholars had been able to construct an ancient Punjabi history.

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