



History and prehistory: History is divided into two periods: Prehistory and History. Prehistory is the study of events that happened before humans learned to write. History, on the other hand is a written account of events of the past.

What can we know about the past? There are several things we can find out what people ate, the kinds of clothes they wore, the houses in which they lived etc. We can also find out about the games children played, the stories they heard, the plays they saw, the songs they sang. We need to know our past to be able to understand our present. A study of past gives us a sense of identity. It teaches us who we are and who our ancestors were. History educates us. We can learn from our mistakes made by the people in the past.

Where did people live? People have lived along the banks of Narmada River for several hundred thousand years. Some of the earliest people who lived here were skilled gatherers, that is, people who gathered their food. They knew about the vast wealth of plants in the surrounding forests, and collected roots, fruits and other forest produce for their food. They also hunted animals.

1. The river Indus and its tributaries: Tributaries are smaller rivers that flow into a larger river. About 4700 years ago, some of the earliest cities flourished on the banks of these rivers. Later, about 2500 years ago, cities developed on the banks of the Ganga and its tributaries, and along the sea coasts.

2. The Ganga and its tributary called the Son: In ancient times the area along these rivers to the south of the Ganga was known as Magadha. Its rulers were very powerful, and set up a large kingdom. Kingdoms were set up in other parts of the country as well.

3. The Himalayas and Deccan Plateau: Throughout, people travelled from one part of the subcontinent to another. The hills and high mountains including the Himalayas, deserts, rivers and seas made journeys dangerous at times, but never impossible. So, men and women moved in search of livelihood, as also to escape from natural disasters like floods or droughts. The Deccan Plateau is separated from Northern India by the Satpura and Vindhyan Mountain Ranges.

Why do people travel nowadays? Hills, mountains and seas form the natural frontiers of the subcontinent. While it was difficult to cross these frontiers, those who wanted could and did scale the mountains and cross the seas. People from across the frontiers also came into the subcontinent and settled here. These movements of people enriched our cultural traditions. People have shared new ways of carving stone, composing music, and even cooking food over several hundreds of years. Also, nowadays people travel in search of good jobs, good education, to visit tourist places for business etc.

Names of the land: Two of the words we often use for our country are India and Bharat. The word India comes from the Indus, called Sindhu in Sanskrit. Bharata is used for a group of people who lived in the North – West and are mentioned in the Rigveda. The Greeks and Iranians called India as “Hindos”.

Sources for the Study of History: There are several ways of finding out about the past.

1. Manuscripts: are important sources of information for history. These were written long ago. These are called manuscripts because they were written by hand (this comes from the latin word ‘manu’, meaning hand). These were usually written on palm leaf, or on the specially prepared bark of a tree known as the birch, which grows in the Himalayas. Over the years, many manuscripts were eaten away by insects, some were destroyed, but many have survived, often preserved in temples and monasteries. These books dealt with all kinds of subjects: religious beliefs and practice, the lives of kings, medicines and science. In India, manuscripts were written in Sanskrit, Prakrit or Pali, Tamil was one of the languages used in South India. **Religious literatures** like Vedas, the Ramayana, and the Tripitakas provide a wealth of knowledge about India’s ancient past. **Secular literatures** refer to writings on



subjects other than religion, like politics, grammar, medicine and law. Biographies like Harshacharita by Banabhatta written in the 18th Century, gives us social, economic and political conditions. The Arthashastra by Kautilya written in 4th century is a manual on government, economic and military strategy. **Travellers accounts** left by travelers are important source of information for historians. Megasthenes, a Greek ambassador to the court of the Mauryan king Chandragupta, wrote a detailed description of Mauryan rule in his book “Indika”.

2. Archaeology: it is the study of the remains of human life in the past. They were many other things that were made and used in the past. Those who study these objects are called archaeologists. They study the remains of buildings made of stone and brick, paintings and Sculpture. They also explore and excavate (dig under the surface of the earth) to find tools, weapons, pots, pans, ornaments and coins. Archaeologists also look for bones of animals, birds and fish to find out what people ate in the past. Plant remains survive far more rarely if seeds of grain or pieces of wood have been burnt; they survive in a charred form.

3. Inscriptions: These are writings on relatively hard surfaces such as stone or metal. Sometimes, kings got their orders inscribed so that people could see, read and obey them. There are other kinds of inscriptions as well, where men and women (including kings and queens) recorded what they did. For example, kings often kept records of victories in battle. The process of reading and understanding the script used in inscriptions is known as **decipherment** and the study of inscriptions is known as **epigraphy**. One good example of decipherment is of the Rosetta stone found in Egypt which was used to decipher ancient Egyptians using Greek Language. Cartouche was a little frame in the Egyptian inscription in which names of kings and queens were enclosed.

4. Coins and seals: Coins were issued by the ruler of a country to enable people to buy goods and services. Often, the name of the king and the year in which the coin was issued were engraved on the coin. Some coins also had battle scenes, faces of kings and queens, or scenes from the life of the ruler engraved on them. The study of coins is known as **numismatics**. Seals, like those found at Indus valley civilization sites, often show animals and figures of gods. They contain inscriptions from which archaeologists can get information.

One past or many: The word ‘pasts’ is used in plural to draw attention to the fact that the past was different for different groups of people. For example, the lives of herders of farmers were different from those of kings and queens, the lives of merchants were different from those of crafts persons, and so on. Also, as is true even today, people followed different practices and customs in different parts of country.

What do dates mean? Years are counted from the date generally assigned to the birth of Jesus Christ, the founder of Christianity. So, 2000 means 2000 years after the birth of Christ. All dates before the birth of Christ are counted backwards and usually have the letters BC (Before Christ) added on. The period after that is known as AD (Anno Domini) meaning ‘in the year of the lord’ (i.e. Christ).so 2012 can also be written as AD 2012. Sometimes CE is used instead of AD and BCE instead of BC. The letters CE stand for “Common Era” and BCE for “Before Common Era”. We use these terms because the Christian Era is now used in most countries of the world. In India we began using this form of dating from about two hundred years ago. A decade is a period of 10 years, while a century is a span of 100 years and a millennium refers to a period of 1000 years. Sometimes, the letters BP meaning ‘Before Present’ are used. **Naming centuries:** When we say an event occurred in the 12th century CE, we are naming the century. This name is different from the actual date on which the event occurred. For example, the years from 1100 CE to 1199 CE fall in the 12th century. We say India became independent in the 20th century, though the year was 1947. You live in the 21st century, though the year may be 2010 or 2007.