

River Saraswati [UPSC Notes]

The Saraswati River is a mythical river that has an exalted place in Vedic Literature. It is also of interest to researchers and historians today who are trying to ascertain its original path.

In this article, you can read all about the Saraswati River for the [IAS exam](#).

River Saraswati Latest News

The Central Government has constituted an advisory committee to draw up a plan for research on the mythical Saraswati river. The new committee, formed in March 2021, replaces the old one whose term had expired in 2019.

Saraswati River

The Saraswati is a major Rig Vedic river mentioned in the Rig Veda and other Vedic texts. It is part of the **Sapta Sindhu** rivers mentioned in the [Rig Veda](#). The other rivers are Sindhu (Indus), Sutudri (Satluj), Vitasta (Jhelum), Vipasa (Beas), Askini (Chenab) and Parushni (Ravi).

- The texts describe the Saraswati as a mighty and powerful river.
- The Rig Veda says the Saraswati flows between the Satluj in the west and the Yamuna in the east, and as flowing into the *samudra*.
- Later Vedic texts and also the Mahabharata mention that the river dried up in a desert.
- Many modern scholars have identified the Saraswati of Rigvedic times with the Ghaggar-Hakra river system in northwestern India and eastern Pakistan.
- According to experts, the Saraswati originated from the Har-ki-Dun glacier in Garhwal in Uttarakhand.
- It is believed that the river was 1500 km long, 5 m deep and 3 - 15 km wide.
- The Saraswati flowed between 6000 and 4000 BCE after which it dried up due to tectonic shifts of the earth.

Ghaggar-Hakra River System

The Ghaggar-Hakra river system is a seasonal river that flows through northwestern India and Pakistan. It is a rain-fed river and flows only during the monsoon season. But, satellite images from [ISRO](#) and ONGC have confirmed that the major course of a river ran through the present-day Ghaggar River. The Ghaggar river originates from the Siwalik Hills of Himachal Pradesh (about 6300 feet above sea level), and flows through Punjab, Haryana and then into Rajasthan. The river is known as Ghaggar before the Ottu barrage and as the Hakra downstream of the barrage.

Evidence of the Saraswati River

A few researchers have concluded the Ghaggar river is the Saraswati of Rig Vedic times. The evidences presented are:

- Presence of coarse-grained white or grey sand: Researchers have discovered white mica layers 3-10 meters below the surface on both sides of the modern Ghaggar in a stretch of 300 km up to the border

with Pakistan. Such white mica is found in glacier-fed Himalayan rivers like Ganga and Yamuna. Researchers have found by Argon-Argon dating method that the ages of the mica samples in the sand of Ghaggar overlap with those of the rocks of the higher Himalayas.

- According to some researchers, the Ghaggar river had been perennial in two phases - the first phase between 78,000 to 18,000 BCE and the second phase between 7000-2500 BCE. This study, published in Nature magazine, makes a compelling case for the identification of the Ghaggar-Hakra with the Saraswati river. The researchers say that the end of the second perennial phase coincided with the beginning of the decline of the [Harappan civilisation](#).
- Research shows that the Sutlej River was flowing into the Ghaggar River to make it perennial for the Early Harappans.
- Photographs sent by American satellite Landsat showed the presence of underground water in a definitive pattern in the Jaisalmer area. It was then that scientists starting thinking about the possibility of a large palaeo-channel in Rajasthan that could belong to a big river. Remote sensing images of ISRO and the Geological Survey of India (GSI) also found the existence of palaeo-channels of a mighty river in seven to eight places, all lying on the west of the Aravalli ranges. According to many researchers, nearly 2,000 of the 2,600 Harappan sites that have been discovered are situated on the old palaeo-channels of the Saraswati.

Frequently Asked Questions about the River Saraswati

Is Saraswati River still flowing?

The Saraswati is considered to be a mythical river although researchers have identified it with the modern-day Ghaggar-Hakra river system.

What is the old name of Beas river?

The old name of the Beas river is the Vipasa.

Why Saraswati River is underground?

It is believed that tectonic activity could be the reason behind Saraswati's delinking from its source of water, consequently, causing it to dry up and be buried under desertification sands and alluvium.