

History – When, Where and How

History is a study of the past. This is facilitated by dividing the past into blocks of time. This is called periodisation and helps in the study and analysis of history.

Indian History can be divided into three periods - ancient, medieval and modern. Our focus is on medieval history. Each period is characterised by numerous changes and developments.

The medieval period of Indian history stretches from the 8th to the 18th century CE. This is further divided into early and later medieval periods. The early medieval period is from the 8th to the 13th century CE. This period saw the rise of Rajputs, followed by Muslim invasions into India. The 13th to 18th century CE is considered to be the later medieval period which saw the great Delhi Sultanate and Mughal Empire.

James Mill, a British historian, has divided Indian history into three periods—Hindu Period, Muslim Period and Christian Period. This division has its flaws. This is based on the idea that religion determines history. However, a period of history cannot be characterized by the religion of the rulers. The lives, beliefs and practices of the common People have to be considered when history is recorded. Also, all rulers did not share the same religion.

Many changes took place in these thousand years of the medieval period. The Indian sub-continent reached a high level of prosperity which led to major developments.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

The medieval period was a period of change in every sphere - political, social, cultural, religious and economic.

- Many Rajput kingdoms came up. They were warriors and fought to increase their empires.
- India saw many invasions during this period. Mahmud of Ghazni and Muhammad of Ghor plundered India. This marked the advent of Islam in India.
- The first Muslim empire in India was established by Muhammad of Ghor. Later, the Delhi Sultanate and Mughal Empire were established.
- The invaders brought in new ideas, new religion and new ways of thinking.
- The economy of India flourished under the Mughals and they looked after the welfare of people.
- Many new technologies were introduced like the 'Persian Wheel' in farming and the 'Spinning Wheel' in weaving textiles.
- Many forests were cleared for agriculture.
- The Bhakti and Sufi movements spread in India. They preached love and devotion to God.
- The Europeans came to trade and gradually established a strong foothold in India.

DEVELOPMENTS IN RELIGION

Major developments took place in the field of religion. A new religion, Islam, made an advent in India. The Muslim rulers had different beliefs and rules according to the Islamic laws. They even forced Hindus to convert to Islam. Muslims were further divided into Shia and Sunni Muslims based on their different beliefs.

Hinduism also underwent numerous changes. New deities were worshipped. Also, the Hindu kings considered it their religious duty to construct temples and constructed many temples. The caste system continued.

It was during this period that the Bhakti and Sufi Movements began which stressed on love and devotion to God. They preached universal brotherhood and equality.

HOW GEOGRAPHY AFFECTS HISTORY

The geography has a profound effect on the history. People and their actions cannot be understood without taking into consideration the land where they live. The geographical conditions influence the economic and social development of the people.

The Indian subcontinent has been clearly segregated by the nature. It is a peninsula and is bounded by the ocean on three sides. In the north are the great mountain systems which separate it from rest of the Asia. The high mountain passes allowed the Aryans to enter India and the Arab traders to trade with India since 712 CE. But in 1001 CE, the Arab armies came to invade the Indian Territory through the 'Khyber Pass'. Later, the Huns, Turks and Mughals invaded India. Each invasion brought in foreigners who brought with them their customs and culture and had an impact on the Indian culture. Also, these passes allowed links with China and Tibet, and Buddhism spread to these two countries.

Q. can you name the three water bodies which surround India?

India's two great river systems, the Indus and the Ganges, have also played a role in shaping the history. The Harappan Civilization came up near the river Indus. The navigability of these rivers helped trade and commerce. The Himalayas have helped the northern plains to become more fertile by bringing enough rainfall. The cities came up where there were geographical advantages. The great cities like **Prayag** and **Kanauj** came up in the northern plains. Many wars were fought between kings to acquire the fertile lands near rivers.

Towards the south of the northern plains lie the Vindhya Mountains. These prevented the invaders from getting access to the Deccan plateau which lies towards the south of these mountains.

The Deccan Plateau has non-perennial river systems. Scarcity of water led to the development of irrigation systems. The long coastline led to the rise of numerous ports which facilitated commerce.

Q. why did cities come up in the Northern Plains?

NEW AND OLD TERMINOLOGIES

In ancient times, India was known as **Aryavarta** or 'the land of the Aryans'. In Buddhist texts, it is called **Jambudvipa** meaning 'the island of rose apple tree'. Later, it was called **Bharatvarsha** after the king Bharat, a powerful king who ruled during the period.

History Reveals

The name Bharat for India is derived from king Bharat ^ the son of Shakuntala, wife of king Dushyanta. It was first time in the history that whole India was united under one king, so India was named\ Bharat.

India was also referred to as Hindustan. This is a Persian word meaning 'land of the Hindus'. River Indus was called Sindhu and the Persians pronounced it as Hindu. During the times of Persian invasion/ the region came to be known as Hindustan and the inhabitants as Hindus. However, the term Hindustan was first used by Minhaj-i-Siraj, a Persian writer. According to him, Hindustan included northern India only.

Today, the term is applied to India as a whole and sometimes to refer to the Hindi speaking part of the country.

The Greeks referred to India as Inde, derived from the word Indus. The British called it India.

Q. Who used the term 'Hindustan' for the first

SOURCES OF THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD

There are two kinds of sources which give information to reconstruct the past. These are - archaeological and literary sources.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOURCES

These include ancient buildings, coins, paintings, inscriptions, sculptures and any other artefacts.

Monuments

Many monuments were built during this period. These tell us about the architectural skills of that time. The material used gives an idea about the craftsmanship and mining. Numerous temples and mosques exhibit the skills and religious beliefs of the people.

Q. can you name some famous monuments built during this period?

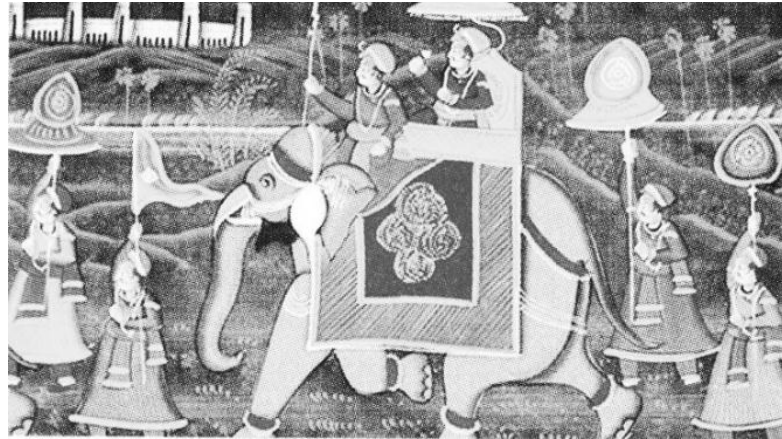
Paintings

Most medieval kings were patrons of art. Many styles of painting flourished. Many paintings depict the rulers themselves and the court life of the time. These paintings are like the binoculars through which we can see the medieval period. For example, the **Tanjore paintings** of the south depict Lord Krishna and Lord Shiva.



A Tanjore gold painting depicting Lord Shiva's family

The Mughal rulers patronized paintings. The art developed as well as prospered under the rule of Mughal Emperors. The painting style that developed was a combination of Indian, Persian and Islamic styles.



A Mughal Painting

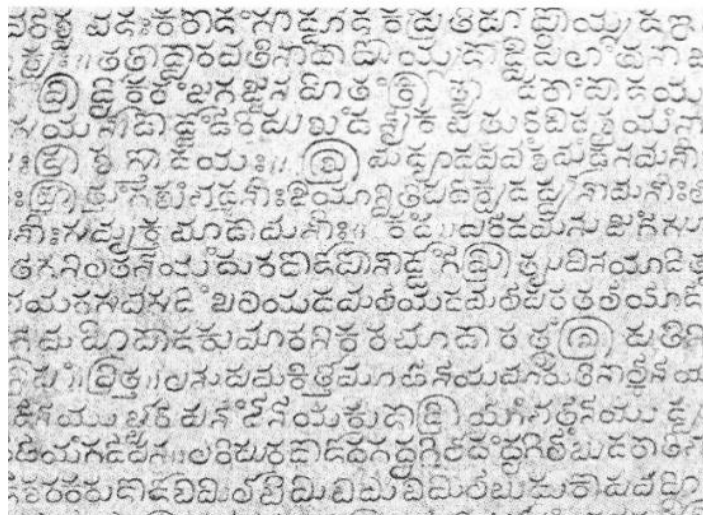
Sculptures

The medieval period of India witnessed a wide variety of sculptures. Stone and metal both were used. The indigenous style was deeply impacted by foreign style. The Cholas were great patrons of sculpture and during their reign, many temples were built with intricate sculpture. Many exquisite statues were also crafted during their reign. These shed light on the life of the people, their religious beliefs and customs.

Inscriptions

Epigraphy is the study of inscriptions. These are a very reliable source. These are engraved on stone tablets, metal plates, pillars etc. Some inscriptions give detailed accounts about the political and religious activities of that time.

Others are official, commemorative or historical. Many inscriptions have been found which tell us about the reign of the Cholas. The Uttaramerur inscription is an example.



Inscriptions found at the sravanbelagola temple

Coins

Coins give useful information about a kingdom. The material used tells us about the economic condition of the kingdom and information of dates during which the particular kings ruled. We also get information about rulers and their relations with other empires.

LITERARY SOURCES

There is no dearth of literary sources as paper was first used in India during this period. Slowly the use of paper increased and it became easily available and was widely used by scribes and chroniclers who wrote by hand since printing had not been invented. These were called **manuscripts** and give us detailed information of the medieval period.

These manuscripts were kept in **temples, monasteries** or with **rulers**. They formed the archives. These manuscripts provide detailed information but they are not without limitations. Manuscripts were copied by hand and due to copying errors, the latest version was sometimes quite different from the original.

Literary sources can be classified into **indigenous and foreign**.

Indigenous Literature

Kings, court poets and scholars wrote extensively and their work throws light on the administration, economy and society of the time.

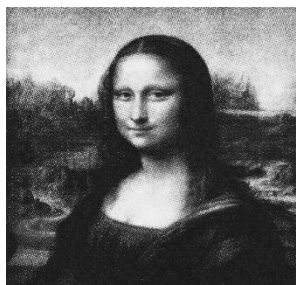
- Kalhana wrote the 'Rajatarangini' which is a history of Kashmir.
- Babur wrote the 'Baburnama' or 'Tuzuk-i-Baburi' which is a priceless record of his reign.
- Gulbadan Begum wrote the 'Humayunnama'.
- Abul Fazal's 'Akbarnama' and 'Ain-i-Akbari' deal with Akbar's reign.
- Amir Khusrau's 'Tughluqnama' gives a detailed account of the Tughluq dynasty.
- Abdul Hamid Lahori wrote 'Padshahnama' which sheds light on the reign of Shah Jahan.

Foreign Literature

Foreign travellers have left interesting accounts of the medieval India.

- **Alberuni** wrote 'Ta'rikh al-hind' which is a mirror of the 11th century. It gives information on religious, scientific and literary traditions of India.
- **Marco Polo**, a Venetian traveller visited south India and his book tells us about the customs, lifestyle and economy of the region. Marco Polo has been called the 'Prince of Medieval travellers'.
- **Ibn Batuta**, a Moroccan traveller has compiled his travel memoirs called 'Rehla'. It throws light on the social, geographical and economic conditions of the Sultanate.
- **Sir Thomas Roe and William Hawkins** visited Jahangir's court. Thomas Roe's 'A Voyage to the East' is a very useful source of information. Our knowledge of India's glorious past has been enhanced by these sources which have brought to light the culture that flourished in India.

Around the world



Mona Lisa by Leonardo da Vinci is a masterpiece of Renaissance and world art

Renaissance was a cultural movement that started in Italy in the 14th century. It slowly spread to the whole Europe. Renaissance means 'rebirth' or 'revival'. The influence of Renaissance was felt in literature, philosophy, art, music, politics, science, and other aspects of intellectual inquiry. During this time, many

great changes took place. One of the greatest changes was the revival of classical learning. There were numerous artistic developments. World
Mona Lisa by Leonardo da Vinci famous polymaths such as Leonardo da Vinci and Michaelangelo is a masterpiece of Renaissance made great contributions.