

Time Frame and Periodisation

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History by its very character has to have chronological labels i.e. time needs to be divided and each division has to be labeled. For a historian time is not merely a count of hours and days, but it reflects changes in social and economic organization and in the perseverance and transformation of culture, ideas and beliefs. The study of time is made somewhat easier by dividing the past developments into large segments or periods that hold shared and somewhat similar characteristics.

The study of history has long been carried under three different labels or periods *Ancient*, *Medieval* and *Modern* in various parts of the world. However, in Indian history such a division could come up only after independence from British rule. In the middle of the nineteenth century British historians had divided Indian history into three periods- “**Hindu**”, “**Muslim**” and “**British**”. This

division was based on the idea that the religion of rulers determined the history. The British historians, who dominated the historiography during the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, believed that there were no other significant developments taking shape in the economy, society or culture beyond the centre of power. Infact, such a division was deliberate to ignite communal feeling among the Indians and to ignore its great diversity.

New Term

Chronological: Arrangement of events in sequence either from earliest to most recent or in the reverse order.

Historiography: The art of history writing.

Broadly the period from eighth to the eighteenth century of Indian history witnessed considerable change. During these thousand years the societies of the subcontinent were transformed and economies in several regions reached a level of prosperity. The changes were somewhat distinct from the earlier phase termed “Ancient” about which you have studied last year. In popular parlance the period is described as Medieval. Although describing the entire period as one historical unit (Medieval) is not without its problems since certain marked changes were witnessed within the broad category.

The very use of the term “medieval” period leads us to compare it with the “modern” period. For many of us modernity means material progress and intellectual advancement, and therefore, this seems to suggest that the medieval period was lacking in advancement. This is not a reality because medieval period had its own era of development and progress.

In Indian history the term medieval relates to the Sultanate period of north Indian history and the Chola period in south India. For the sake of convenience and better understanding of the changes in society, economy, politics, religion and culture during these centuries, the medieval period is further sub-divided into *Early Medieval Period* and *Late Medieval period*.

The **Early Medieval period** broadly stretches from the eighth to the twelfth century, during which the Palas, the Pratiharas, the Rashtrakutas, the Cholas and the early Rajputs

dominated the political, socio-economic and cultural patterns. The **Late Medieval period** stretches from the thirteenth to the eighteenth century. The Turks (who later established Delhi Sultanate), various regional kingdoms, which emerged on the ruins of Delhi Sultanate, and the Mughals largely dominated the fate of history during this phase.

Changing Names of Regions in India

Find out

List the different name by which you refer to your country/region. Are you aware of any older name for your country/region? Do you think these names would have stood for the same region during all the periods of history?

Today we understand our country as “India”. However, such a modern concept of nation-state was not there in the historical past and people identified themselves from the smaller regions to which they belonged. In the medieval period a “foreigner” or ‘*Pardesi*’ was any stranger who appeared different from the local society or culture. Today a foreigner means a person who resides in another country and is only a temporary visitor to our country. Therefore, historians have to be careful about the terms which have been used in historical literatures because they carried different meaning and concept at different times in history.

The first Article of the Constitution of India states that "India, that is Bharat, shall be a union of states." Thus, **India** and **Bharat** are equally official short names for the Republic of India, while **Hindustan** is considered antiquated and is mostly used in historical contexts (especially British India). Today these three terms are interchangeably used to refer to the political and national entity that is identified as India. But the term *Hindustan* did not carry the same meaning during the medieval period. The rulers in the Sultanate and Mughal periods called their Indian dominion, centred around Delhi as Hindustan. For example, when the term was used in the thirteenth century by *Minhajus Siraj*, a chronicler who wrote in Persian, he meant the areas of Punjab, Haryana and the lands between the Ganga and Yamuna. He used the term in a political sense for lands that were a part of the dominions of the Delhi Sultanate. In the early sixteenth century Babur used Hindustan to describe the geography, the fauna and the culture of the inhabitants of the subcontinent.

Do You Know?

The name **Bharat** is derived from the name of Bharata son of Dushyanta, a legendary ruler mentioned in the *Mahabhārata*. The realm of Bharata is known as *Bharātavara* in the *Mahabhārata* and later texts. The term *varna* means a division of the earth, or a continent.

Similarly, the name **India** has been in use since the seventeenth century. It is an English term derived from Greek (via Latin) word *Ivδία* which stood for region beyond the river Indus according to Heroostus (5th Century B.C). The name is ultimately derived from *Sindhu* which is the Sanskrit name of the river.

Excerpts from *Baburnama*

“ Hindustan is ...a wonderful country. Compared with our countries, it is different world. Its mountains, rivers, jungles and deserts, its towns, its cultivated lands, its animals and plants, its people and their tongues, its rains and its winds, are all different...Once the water of Sind is crossed, everything is in the Hindustan way- land, water, tree, rock, people and horde, opinion and custom.”

What does the term Sind denote here?

Which are the things that Babur notices as being different from the region that he comes from?

Hindustan was in use synonymously with *India* during the British Raj. In the 19th century, the term as used in English referred to the northern region of India between the Indus and Brahmaputra and between the Himalayas and the Vindhya in particular, hence the term Hindustani for the Hindi-Urdu language.

Thus, while the idea of a geographical and cultural entity like “India” did exist during medieval period, the term Hindustan did not carry the political and national meanings which we perceive today.

Map of India (Medieval) to be placed here

Sources

Historians depend on a variety of sources to learn about the past. However, it is pertinent to know that while most of the sources of information remain the same as in earlier period (about which you have learnt last year) i.e. inscriptions, buildings, coins, religious and non religious literature etc., yet there is a marked difference between the period under scanner and the earlier one as the number of historical evidences increase considerably. The medieval period also witnessed the first good examples of history writing which give us a better insight into the period.

Literary Sources

One of the distinct features of the sources of medieval period is that the number and variety of literary or textual records increased noticeably during this period. One of the possible reasons was that during this period paper gradually became cheaper and more widely accessible. Literates and chroniclers used it to write chronicles of rulers, petitions, judicial records, accounts and taxes. The teachings of saints and traders’ transactions were also recorded on these papers. Since the paper used to be very costly therefore, manuscripts were collected only by

wealthy people, rulers, monasteries and temples and stored in **archives**. These manuscripts and documents provide a lot of detailed information to historians. However, historians have to be very careful while using these old manuscripts. Since there was no

Archive is a place where old manuscripts and documents are stored. For example, National Archives of India, New Delhi maintains many old documents. Similarly, Rajasthan State Archives, Bikaner has huge storage of Rajasthani manuscripts and official documents of the rulers of Rajasthan.

printing press in those days so scribes copied manuscripts by hand. As scribes copied manuscripts, they might have also introduced small changes unknowingly. And there is a possibility that these small changes went on increasing generation after generation to

such an extent that the manuscripts of the same text became substantially different from one another.

Activity

Write a small story in your own handwriting. Ask each student of your class to make a copy of the story in their own handwriting. Now get all the copies together and compare them with the original story. Do you notice any difference, however small, in the copied stories? What do you think would be the effect of these changes if copy after copy was made over a period of time?

IMPORTANT FOREIGN TRAVELLERS/ENVOYS

Al-Masudi (957 A.D.): An Arab traveler, he has given an extensive account of India.

Al-beruni (1024-1030 A.D.): His real name was Abu Rehan Mahmud and he came to India along with Mahmud of Ghazni during one of his Indian raids. He traveled all over India and wrote a book *Tahqiq-i-Hind*. The book dealt with the social, religious and political conditions in India.

Ibn Batuta (1333-1347 A.D.): A Moorish traveler, he visited India during the reign of Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq. His book *Rehla* (the Travelogue) throws a lot of light on the reign of *Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq* and the geographical, economic and social conditions in India.

Nicolo Conti (1420-1421 A.D.): A Venetian traveler, he gives a comprehensive account of the kingdom of Vijayanagar.

Abdur Razzaq (1443-1444 A.D.): He was a Persian traveler who came to India and stayed at the court of the Zamorin at Calicut. He has given a vivid account of the Vijayanagar empire, especially of the city. He describes the wealth and luxurious life of the king and the nobles.

Domingos Paes (1520-1522 A.D.); He was a Portuguese traveler who visited the court of Krishnadeva Raya of the Vijayanagar empire.

William Hawkins (1608-1611 A.D.): He was an English ambassador of the British King James to the court of Jahangir (1609).

Sir Thomas Roe (1615-1619 A.D.): He was an ambassador of James I, king of England, at the court of Jahangir, the Mughal emperor.

Peter Mundy (1630-34 A.D.): He was an Italian traveller to Mughal empire in the reign of Shah Jahan. He gives valuable information about the living standard of the common people in the Mughal empire.

Jean Baptiste Tavernier (1640-1665 A.D.): He was a French traveller who visited India four times. His account covers the reign of Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb.

Francois Bernier (1656-1717 A.D.): He was a French Physician and philosopher. Danishmand Khan, a noble of Aurangzeb, was his patron.

The medieval chronicles which were written by contemporary authors were either court historians or free-lancers. Some of them came as travellers and wrote about India. Such writings have their own advantages and disadvantages. They had their own prejudice and bias on the one hand and had the benefit of giving an eyewitness account or accounts ascertained through reliable participants.

However, it is not easy to find out the truth in these accounts although their veracity has often been taken as authenticated. The availability of ready-made histories has its own pitfalls. Such histories with their aura of being 'authentic' and 'contemporary' often dull our critical senses. The advantage of having written accounts can become a disadvantage

if the nature of these works is not understood. An individual writing a few centuries ago was reacting in his own personal way to events and situations. He was making his own decisions about what was important and what was not, and what facts would he include in his history. Thus, for us it is also important to know why he was writing and for whom before we put his work to any use to understand history.

Medieval Literatures

Kalhana	Rajatarangini
Al-beruni	Tarikh-ul Hind
Firdausi	Shahnama
Amir Khusrau (court poet of Al-ud-din Khalji)	Tarikh-i-Alai
Ibn Batuta (court poet of Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq)	Tughlaqnama, Safarnama
Ziauddin Barani	Tarikh-i-Firuzshahi, Fatwa-i-Jahandari
Minhaj-us-Siraj	Tabaqat-i-Firuzshahi, Tabaqat-i-Nasiri
Khwaja Abd Malik Isami	Futuh-us-Salatin
Babur	Tuzuk-i-Baburi (Babarnama)
Gulbadan Begum	Humayunnama
Jayasi	Padmavat
Abul Fazl (court poet of Akbar)	Akbar-nama, Ain-i-Akbari
Surdas	Sur Sagar
Tulsidas	Ramacharitmanas
Abdul Hamir Lahori	Padshahnama
Inayat Khan	Shah Jahan-nama
Dara Shikoh	Mahasamudra Sagam
Siraj Afif	Tariq-i-Firuzshahi
Ali Ahmad	Chachnama
Jahangir and Mautmida Khan	Tujuk-i-Jahangiri
Abdul Qadir Badayuni	Muntakhab-ul-Tawarikh

Archaeological Sources

Apart from the literary sources, the archaeological sources that include inscriptions, coins, monuments, paintings, weapons and other antiquities are of immense value in the reconstruction of the socio-cultural and political history of medieval India. The inscriptions have been mostly published in the *Epigraphia Indo-Moslemica*, *Epigraphia Indica* and other antiquarian journals. Edward Thomas was the first among the modern historiographers of medieval India to make extensive use of numismatics (coins). Coins are not only valuable source for reconstructing dates of historical events, but they also give us idea of the economic conditions of those period.

Shared Characteristics of Medieval Period

Emergence of new social and political groups

The period between 700 and 1750 saw the movement of a number of people. The immense wealth and prosperity of the subcontinent attracted not only the traders but also people who wanted to plunder its wealth or carve out a kingdom for themselves. Among such political groups were the early Muslim invaders like Mahmud of Ghazni and Ghori. They were followed by other Turks who founded the Delhi Sultanate. Five different dynasties about whom you shall read in the Chapter 3 ruled under Delhi Sultanate beginning with the Slave or Ilbari dynasty. Delhi Sultanate was uprooted by a new group

of people from Central Asia known as *Mughals* who established the Mughal empire. While these people from beyond the frontiers of India made her their home, there were several groups of new rulers who emerged within the borders of India. Such groups included the *Rajputs*, a name derived from “Rajputra” (the son of a king), who were known for their courage and valour. The term Rajput was loosely applied to all the warrior classes who claimed the status of Kshatriya, be it the rulers or the soldiers. Other groups of people like Sikhs, Marathas, Ahoms, Jats and Kayasthas also seized the opportunities of the age to become politically important

The period saw great social and economic changes. Extension of agriculture was marked by the gradual clearing of forests which in turn led to the migration of forest dwellers to other areas. More and more people started tilling the soil. These new peasant groups gradually came to be influenced by regional markets, chieftains, priests, monasteries and temples. They became part of large complex societies, and were required to pay taxes and offer goods and services to local lords. Some peasants were rich while others were poor, some others combined artisanal work along with agricultural activity. The result was a socially and economically differentiated society. In such a society, Caste or *Jati* and sub-castes came to play an important role and determined the ranking of a person in the society.

Developments in technology

The new people who came to India also brought with them new ideas which resulted in better technology. In irrigation Persian wheel came to be used. Spinning wheel made weaving clothes easier. In combat fire arms came to be used. For writing paper was introduced. New foods and beverages arrived in the subcontinent including potatoes, corn, chillies, tea and coffee.

Region to Empire and again to Region

The early medieval period saw the emergence of many small kingdoms which were frequently in conflict with one another. Among these recurrent conflicts for increasing the area of influence one of the most popularly referred to conflicts is the tripartite struggle among the Palas, the Pratiharas and the Rashtrakutas. In south India this period saw the emergence of the powerful Chola kings, who subjugated large areas of the peninsula and devised their own system of rule agricultural practices. They were powerful not only politically but financially as well. One of the major sources of their richness were the merchants who traded with the countries of South-East Asia and China. It was largely because of the huge resources at the disposal of the Chola rulers that many beautiful temples were built during the early medieval period.

In north India and the Deccan, large states like those of the Delhi Sultans and the Mughals were created which encompassed many regions. However, not all these empires were equally stable or successful and under different rulers the dimension and control of the empire varied. Under powerful rulers like Alauddin Khalji and Akbar the central control remained dynamic not only in the core regions i.e. surrounding Delhi, but also to the peripheral regions and remote areas. And therefore, whenever there were long and continuous periods of weakening central control, the regions started emerging with their own area of rule. It happened with the decline of the Delhi Sultanate from the mid

fourteenth century, and again when the Mughal Empire declined in the eighteenth century, it led to the re-emergence of regional states.

The processes of centralization and regionalisation were not mutually exclusive and both influenced one another. On the one hand, the empire had to take into account the regional elites to govern huge and characteristically divergent territory, on the other hand, long years of imperial rule had influenced the character of the regions. Many of the regions were left with the legacies of the big and small states that ruled over them. This is visible in the manifestation of many distinct and shared traditions in governance, economy, revenue generation machinery and structure, architecture, painting and language. The regions imbibed many of the features of the long existing Mughal empire.

Religious Traditions

Religion played a predominant role in the medieval Indian society because people's belief in god or supernatural was deeply personal. However, the period witnessed major developments in religious traditions and important changes took place in Hinduism. By the twelfth century Islam had also made its proper entry into the society with establishment of Turkish rule. Apart from Islam another tradition which came along from West Asian culture was the Sufi tradition. Thus, the early medieval period saw a proliferation of religious traditions in India and it was bound to have a profound impact on Indian society.

One of the major repercussions was the propagation of the worship of new deities, the construction of huge and magnificent temples by the kings and the growing importance of Brahmanas (the priests) because of their knowledge of Sanskrit texts. Their dominant position was consolidated by the support of their patrons as rulers who were searching for legitimacy. Probably as a challenge to this Brahmana-King (Rajput) grouping, a major development took place and that was the emergence of the idea of bhakti. It meant a devoted, personal deity that devotees could reach without the aid of priests and without performing elaborate rituals. This was also the period when new religion called Islam appeared in India. Merchants and migrants first brought the teachings of the holy Quran to India in the seventh century and later with the rule of the Delhi Sultans Islam became popular in India. The greatest change in the religious tradition during the period was the emergence and popularity of Bhakti and Sufi saints, who took up the cause of socio-religious reforms and preached the gospel of equality of all mankind and universal brotherhood in local dialects and regional languages which could be easily understood by the common people.