

# TRACING CHANGES THROUGH A THOUSAND YEARS

## 1 CHAPTER

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### ➤ INTRODUCTION

#### (a) Medieval Period of Indian History

- (i) In this Unit of History, we shall trace the patterns of political developments during the medieval period of Indian History. A vast number of historical records and sources are available for this period. A number of new kingdoms emerged during the period 700 – 1200 A.D. during which diverse styles of architecture flourished.
- (ii) This period of rule by Sultans was followed by the growth of Mughal empire. Significant social changes took place during that era. New towns and urban centers came into existence. A number of religious teachers preached the ideals of humanity and mutual brotherhood. Regional cultures flourished and a number of independent autonomous States were formed during the eighteenth century.
- (iii) This period of Indian history holds out some very important lessons for future generations. Whenever political rivalries overshadow national interests, foreign powers take advantage. This is why Rajput rulers were unable to resist Islamic invaders. The story was repeated later by the European powers gaining control over India after Mughal empire lost its strength. Yet another lesson to be learned from the developments of the Medieval period is that wars are won not just by numbers but also the quality of arms and armaments.
- (iv) There were rulers during the medieval period who were caring and felt concerned for their subjects. The people accepted them. When the rulers wanted to impose their own religious orthodoxy, on the people, the kingdoms lost strength.
- (v) Indian history relating to the medieval period needs to be read and interpreted with these outcomes in mind.

### ➤ CHANGING NAMES OF INDIA

#### (a) Etymology of India

- (i) The etymology or origin of the name 'india' presents a fascinating story. It has been given various names by different people at various times.

- (ii) **Sapt Sindhu** : In the north – west of the sub continent of India, there were seven main tributaries of the river Indus. The local inhabitants called this place 'Sapt sindhu' or the land of seven rivers. The Persian explorers visited the area in ancient times. The 'h' in Persian is cognate (similar nature) with Sanskrit 's'. Thus Sindhu became Hindu.
- (iii) The Greeks dropped the letter 'h' and thus we got Indus.
- (iv) **Aryavarta** : In ancient texts, the word 'Aryavarta' has been frequently used. Aryavarta refers to the Land of the Aryans. Arya in Sanskrit means noble.
- (v) **'Bharat', 'Bharatvarsha' or 'Bharat'** : The name 'Bharat' is derived from either of the two ancient Hindu kings Bharata or Bharat. It is commonly accepted that the name Bharat is derived from the son of king Dushyanta. He is credited with bringing whole of Bharatvarsha under his rule.
- (vi) The name Bharata is derived from the times of the Vedic Civilization after King Bharata. He is said to have conquered all the known world at that time. The land was named after him. His descendants came to be known as 'Bharatas'.

A verse in 'Vishnu Purana' Defines the territory as

The country that lies north of the ocean and south of the Himalayas is called Bharata. There dwell the descendants of Bharata.

- (vii) Translation of a Verse from the 'Mahabharata' reads as :  
"Bharat is the greatest land on earth, it alone is the Land of Action while the rest are Lands of Pleasure.
- (viii) Colonel James Todd in his 'Annals of Rajputana' describes ancient india being under the control of tribes claiming their descent from 'Indu (Moon).
- (ix) **'Hindustan' or 'Hindu'** : In Persian 'Stan' (Sanskrit 'Sthana') means a land. Hence India, the land to the East of Indus, came to be known as Hindustan by the Persians and the Arabs. The term Saptisindu' became 'Hapt Hindu' on account of the use of the word 'h' for 's' as explained earlier. The shortened version of Hindustan was Hind.
- (x) The Arab, the Turk and the Mughal invasions started from the 11<sup>th</sup> century onwards. These rulers called this land as Hindustan.
- (xi) **Extensive use of the name India from the 17 century** : In old and Medieval English, india was exclusively called Indu.
- (xii) From the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards the term india came into extensive use on account of the influence of Latin.
- (xiii) **References of 'Indu' in the Rig Veda** : Some scholars are of the view that the name is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Indu' which occurs several times in the Rig Veda. In due course, the word 'Indu' led to the use of the term Hindu and Hindustan.
- (xiv) The ritual meaning of the word 'Indu' is 'Moon'.
- (xv) **Name as in the Indian Constitution** : Article 1 of the Constitution of India reads "India that is Bharat shall be a Union of States."
- (xvi) **Literal Meaning of Bharat** : 'Bha' in Sanskrit means knowledge or light and 'rat' is a verb for 'doing' Bharat is therefore the one in search of light.

#### (b) **Sub-continent of India**

- (i) **Meaning of sub – continent** : A sub-continent is a large part of a continent. It is a large land mass such as India – a part of the Asian continent but is considered geographically and politically as an independent entity. It is split from the rest of the continent by a mountain range or some geological factor. The region is known as sub-continent because its geography, geology and culture are different from the rest of the continent.
- (ii) In the present context, the terms sub-continent commonly refers to the Indian Sub – continent.

- (iii) Until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Indian sub-continent along with south-eastern Asia was collectively known as the East Indies. This term formerly used by European colonists and traders is no longer in use.
  - (iv) Indian sub-continent is a peninsular region south of the Himalayas and east of the Hindukush and Baluchistan ranges. It extends southward into the Indian Ocean between the Arabian sea to the south-west and the Bay of Bengal to the east.
  - (v) Indian sub – continent includes India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Maldieves and Sri Lanka. It may be recalled that till 15<sup>th</sup> August 1947, Pakistan and Bangladesh (it was a part of Pakistan, known as East Pakistan) were an integral part of Indian sub – continent. Bangladesh became an independent country in 1971.
- (c) New and old Terminologies**
- (i) Historical records exist in a variety of languages which have changed considerably over the years. Medieval Persian, for example, is different from modern Persian. The difference is not just with regard to grammar and vocabulary; the meanings of words also change over time.
  - (ii) Take the term "Hindustan", for example. Today we understand it as "India", the modern nation state. When the term was used in the thirteenth century by Minhaj I Siraj, a chronicler who wrote in Persian, he meant the areas of Punjab, Haryana and the lands between the Ganga and Yamuna.
  - (iii) He used the term in a political sense for lands that were a part of the dominions of the Delhi Sultan.
  - (vi) The areas included in this term shifted with the extent of the Sultanate but the term never included south India. By contrast, in the early sixteenth Babur used Hindustan to describe the geography, the fauna and the culture of the inhabitants of the subcontinent.
  - (v) While the idea of a geographical and cultural entity like "India" did exist, the term "Hindustan" did not carry the political and national meanings which we associate with it today.

## ➤ **MEDIEVAL INDIAN HISTORY**

### **(a) Indian History**

The History of India is generally divided into three periods.

- (i) Period one – Ancient or Early Period (Period upto 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D.).
- (ii) Period two – Medieval or Middle period (Period between 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D. and 18<sup>th</sup> century A.D.), and
- (iii) Period three - Modern Period (Period between 19<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries A.D.).

### **(b) Meaning & Scope of Medieval Period**

- (i) The word medieval means 'the middle age'. In history it refers to the period that lies between the ancient and the modern periods.
- (ii) The medieval period has further been divided into two parts – the early period from the 8<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> century A.D. and the later from the 13<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century A.D. The later medieval period covers the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire in the North, it also includes the Bahamani and the Vijaynagar kingdoms in the south. The rise and fall of the Marathas and the Sikhs are also included in the later medieval period.
- (iii) Medieval period is regarded to have come to close by the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century when the Mughal empire was broken up. European powers had started setting their foot on Indian soil. A fresh wave of economic and social changes started sweeping the country. By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the country had ushered into the modern period History.

### **(c) Sources of Medieval History of Indian**

1. **Variety of Sources** : Compared to the sources of ancient History of India, a large number of sources relatively more reliable, are available for the medieval History of India. These provide a deep insight and knowledge about the conditions and life of those times. Sources of History greatly help us in reconstructing

historical events relating to that particular era important sources of History for the medieval period are as follows.

- Historical Accounts by Scholars
- Historical Accounts by Foreign Travellers
- Literary Accounts
- Monuments
- Coins
- Inscriptions
- Art, Architecture and Music

**2. Historical Accounts by scholars and Documents relating to that period :**

- (i) Tahrique -i- Hind (11<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) by Al – Beruni
- (ii) Tarikh – i – Subuktikin (10<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) by Baihaki
- (iii) Tarikh - i – Firoze Shahi (13<sup>th</sup> century AD.) By Ziaud - Barni
- (iv) Tuzuk-i-Babri (Memoirs of Babar) by Babar
- (v) Humayun Nama (16<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) by Begum Gul Badan
- (vi) Ain-i-Akbari (16<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) by Abul Fazal
- (vii) Akbar Nama (16<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) by Abul Fazal
- (viii) Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri (17<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) by Jahangir
- (ix) Fatuhali-i-Aurangzed (17<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) by Muhammad Masum

**3. Historical Accounts and Documents by Foreign Travellers :**

- (i) Tuhfat – un – Nuzzar fi Gharibi – il-Amsar by Ibn-e-Batuta
- (ii) Accounts of Marco Polo (13<sup>th</sup> century A.D.)
- (iii) Accounts of Nicolo Conti (16<sup>th</sup> century A.D.)
- (iv) Tarikh-i-firishta (16<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) by Firishta  
(translated by J. Briggs, titled Rise of the Mohammedan Power in India).

**4. Literary Accounts**

- (i) Shahnama (10<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) by Firdausi
- (ii) Rajtaragini (11<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) by Kalha
- (iii) Prithvi Raj Raso (12<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.) By Chandbardai
- (iv) Padmavat (14<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) by Malik Mohammad Jayasi

**5. Monuments :**

**Medieval Temples :** (i) Khajuraho (ii) Sun Temple, Konark (iii) Dilwara Temple, Mt. Abu (iv) Golden Temple, Amritsar (v) Meenakshi Temple, Madurai.

**Medieval Mosques :** (i) Jama Masjid (ii) Moti Masjid (iii) Fatehpur Sikri Dargah

**Medieval Forts :** (i) Agra Fort (ii) Chittor Fort (iii) Gwalior Fort (iv) Red Fort

**Medieval Palaces :** (i) Jaipur Palace (ii) Jaisalmer Palaces (iii) Jodhpur Palace.

**Medieval Pillars :** (i) Qutab Minar (ii) Char Minar

➤ **Medieval Tombs :** (i) Taj Mahal (ii) Humayun tomb

➤ **Ruins of Medieval Buildings :** (i) Hastinapur (ii) Firozabad (iii) Tughlaqabad.

➤ **Coins of emperors :** Almost all emperors issued their coins, especially the Chola Rulers.

➤ **Inscription on plates of stones.**

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➤ Paintings from Akbar Nama.

6. **Prominent Historians :** In 11<sup>th</sup> century, Alberuni, an Iranian scholar who accompanied Mahmud Gazni during his invasions of India gave an account of the Indian society in his Tahrique + Hind, Chand Bardai in his epic narrated the exploits of Prithvi Raj Chauhan. Kalhan in that century wrote the history of Kashmir.

In the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Hasan Nizami, a migrant from Gazni, gave information about Qutub – Ud – din Aibak. Marco Polo provided an account of South India.

In 14<sup>th</sup> century, Ibn-e-Batuta, a Moorish traveller wrote about Muhammad Tuglaq, Khwaja abu Malik and Zia-ud-Barni covered the history from Balban to Firoz Tughlaq.

In the 15<sup>th</sup> century Abdul Razzaq described about the times of Vijaynagar Kings.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century Babar's Babar Nama, and Abul Fazal's Ain-i-Akbari and Akbar Nama provided detailed information about these two emperors.

7. **Discussion on Historical Sources :**

Historiography of medieval India i.e. the writing of history falls into three phases.

**Medieval Chroniclers :** These comprised court historians and the rulers themselves. Since by and large, history was written by courtiers or rulers, it is very difficult to determine the extent of objectivity of the records. History was written in Persian and Turkish language.

**Colonial Chroniclers :** British historical writing on the period was intimately linked with the expansion of their rule in India. The perspective of historians did not encompass developments in the economic and social fields.

**Modern Chroniclers :** In the 20<sup>th</sup> century historians broadened the scope of history to encompass administrative developments, economic policies and religious and social movements.

8. **While interpreting historical sources, the following points need to be kept in mind :**

- (i) Absolute historical truth is hardly possible.
- (ii) Every kind of prejudice – caste, faith, personal, political, racial, regional, religious, etc. of the historiographer exercises some influence in recording of events and facts.
- (iii) Different sources have to be used while arriving at some definite conclusions.

(d) **Historians and their use of these sources :**

- (i) Historians use different types of sources to learn about the past depending upon the period of their study and the nature of their investigation.
- (ii) There is some continuity in the sources used by historians for the study of this period. They still rely on coins, inscriptions, architecture and textual records for information but there is also considerable discontinuity.
- (iii) The number and variety of textual records increased dramatically during this period. They slowly displaced other types of available information. Through this period paper gradually became cheaper and more widely available.
- (iv) People used it to write holy texts, chronicles of rulers, letters and teachings of saints, petitions and judicial records, and for registers of accounts and taxes.
- (v) Manuscripts were collected by wealthy people, rulers, monasteries and temples. They were placed in libraries and archives.
- (vi) These manuscripts and documents provide a lot of detailed information to historians but they are also difficult to use.

- (viii) As scribes copied manuscripts, they also introduced small changes – a word here, a sentence there. These small difference grew over centuries of copying until manuscripts of the same text became substantially different from one another.
- (ix) This is a serious problem because we rarely find the original manuscript of the author today. We are totally dependent upon the copies made by alter scribes.
- (x) On occasions authors revised their chronicler at different times. The fourteenth – century chronicler Ziyauddin Barani wrote his chronicle first in 1356 and another version two years later.

## ➤ MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS AND HISTORICAL TRENDS IN THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD

### (a) New Social and Political Groups

- (i) The study of the thousand years between 700 and 1750 is a huge challenge to historians largely because of the scale and variety of developments that occurred over the period.
- (ii) At different moments in this period new technologies made their appearance – like the Persian wheel in irrigation, the spinning wheel in weaving and firearms in combat.
- (iii) New foods and beverages arrived in the subcontinent – potatoes, corn, chillies, tea and coffee. All these innovations, new technologies and crops – came along with people, who brought other ideas with the as well.
- (iv) As a result, this was a period of economic, political social and cultural changes.
- (v) This was also a period of great mobility Groups of people traveled long distances in search of opportunity . The subcontinent held immense wealth and the possibilities for people to carve a fortune.
- (vi) One group of people who became important in this period were the Rajputs, a name derived from "Rajaputra, the son of a ruler. Between the eighth and fourteenth the term was applied more generally to a group of warriors who claimed Kashatriya caste status.
- (vii) The term included not just rulers and chieftains but also soldiers and commanders who served in the armies of different monarchs all over the subcontinent. A chivalry code of conduct – extreme velour and a great sense of loyalty – were the qualities attributed to Rajputs by their poets and bards.
- (viii) Other groups of people such as the Marathas, Sikhs, Jats, Ahoms and Kayasthas (a caste of scribes and secretaries) also used the opportunities of the age to become politically important.
- (ix) Throughout this period there was a gradual clearing of forests and the extension of agriculture, a change faster and more complete in some areas than in others. Changes in their habitat forced many forest – dwellers to migrate.
- (x) Others started tilling the land and became peasants.. These new peasant groups gradually began 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. As a result significant economic and social differences emerged amongst peasants.
- (xi) Some possessed more productive land, others also kept cattle, and some combined artisanal work with agricultural activity during the lean season.
- (xii) As society became more differentiated, people were grouped into Jatis or sub- castes and ranked on the basis of their backgrounds and their occupations. Ranks were not fixed permanently, and varied according to the power, influence and resources controlled by members of the jati. The status of the same jati could vary from area to area.
- (xiii) Jatis framed their own rules and regulations to manage the conduct of their members. These regulations were enforced by an assembly of elders, described in some area as the jati panchayat. But

jatis were also required to follow the rules of their villages. Several villages were governed by a chieftain. Together they were only one small unit of a state.

**(b) Region and Empire**

- (i) Large states like those of the cholas, Tughluqs or Mughals encompassed many regions.
- (ii) A Sanskrit prashasti for an example of a prashasti praising the Delhi Sultan Ghiyasuddin Balban (1266 – 1287) explained that he was the ruler of a vast empire that stretched from Bengal (Gauda) in the east to Ghazni (Gajjana) in Afghanistan in the west and included all south India (Dravida).
- (iii) People of different regions – Gauda, Andhra, Kerala, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Gujarat apparently fled before his armies. Historians regard these as exaggerated claims of conquests. At the same time, they try to understand why rulers kept claiming to have control over different parts of the subcontinent.
- (iv) By 700 many regions already possessed distinct geographical dimensions and their own language and cultural characteristics.
- (v) There was considerable conflict between these states. Occasionally dynasties like the Cholas, Khaljis, Tughluqs and Mughals were able to build an empire that was panregional – spanning diverse regions. Not all these empires were equally stable or successful. When the Mughal Empire declined in the eighteenth century, it led to the re-emergence of regional states.
- (vi) But years of imperial pan – regional rule had altered the character of the regions.
- (vii) Across most of the subcontinent the regions were left with the legacies of the big and small states that had ruled over them.
- (viii) This was apparent in the emergence of many distinct and shared traditions. In the realms of governance, the management of the economy elite cultures, and language.
- (ix) Through the thousand years between 700 and 1750 the character of the different regions did not grow in isolation.
- (x) These regions felt the impact of larger pan regional forces of integration without ever quite losing their distinctiveness.

**(c) Old and New Regions**

- (i) The thousand years of history witnessed major developments in religious traditions. People's belief in the divine was sometimes deeply personal, but more usually it was collective.
- (ii) Collective belief in a supernatural agency – religion was often closely connected with the social and economic organization of local communities. As the social worlds of these groups altered so too did their beliefs.
- (iii) It was during this period that important changes occurred in what we call Hinduism today. These included the worship of new deities, the construction of temples by royalty and the growing importance of Brahmanas, the priests, as dominant groups in society.

- (iv) Their knowledge of Sanskrit texts earned the Brahmanas a lot of respect in society. Their dominant position was consolidated by the support of their patrons – new rulers searching for prestige.
- (v) One of the major developments of this period was the emergence of the idea of bhakti – of a loving, personal deity that devotees could reach without the aid of priests or elaborate rituals.
- (vi) This was also the period when new religions appeared in the subcontinent. Merchants and migrants first brought the teachings of the holy Quran to India in the seventh century.
- (vii) Muslims regard the Quran as their holy book and accept the sovereignty of the one God, Allah, whose love, mercy and beauty embraces all those who believe in Him, without regard to social background.
- (viii) Many rulers were patrons of Islam and the Ulama learned theologians and jurists. And like Hinduism, Islam was interpreted in a variety of ways by its followers.
- (ix) There were the Shia Muslims who believed that the Prophet Muhammad's son – in - law, Ali was the legitimate leader of the Muslim community and the Sunni Muslims who accepted the authority of the early feeders (Khalifas) of the community and the succeeding Khalifes.
- (x) There were other important differences between the various schools of law (Hanafi and Shaji mainly in India), and in theology and mystic traditions.

**(d) Thinking about time and Historical Periods**

- (i) Historians do not see time just as a passing of hours, days or years – as a clock or a calendar. Time also reflects changes in social economic organization, in the persistence and transformation of ideas and beliefs.
- (ii) The study of time is made somewhat easier by dividing the past into large segments periods that possess shared characteristics.
- (iii) In the middle of the nineteenth century British historians divided the history of India into three periods "Hindu", "Muslim" and "British".
- (iv) This division was based on the idea that the religion of rulers was the only important historical change and that there were no other significant developments – in the economy, society or culture.
- (v) Such a division also ignored the rich diversity of the subcontinent.
- (vi) Few historians follow this periodisation today. Most look to economic and social factors to characterize the major elements of different moments of the past.
- (vii) The medieval history is more about the spread of peasant societies, the rise of regional and imperial state formations – sometimes at the cost of pastoral and forest people. – the development of Hinduism and Islam as major religions and the arrival of European trading companies.
- (viii) These thousand years of Indian history witnessed considerable change. After all, the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries were quite different from the eighth or the eleventh. Therefore describing the entire period as one historical unit is not without its problems.
- (ix) Moreover, the "medieval" period is often contrasted with the "modern" period. "Modernity" carries with it a sense of material progress and intellectual advancement. This seems to suggest that the medieval period was lacking in any change whatsoever. But of course we know this was not the case.



- (x) During these thousand years societies of the subcontinent were transformed often and economics in several regions reached a level of prosperity that attracted the interest of European trading companies.

## ➤ MAP OF INDIA

- (a) Provinces of the Delhi Sultanate during Muhammad Tughluq's region

