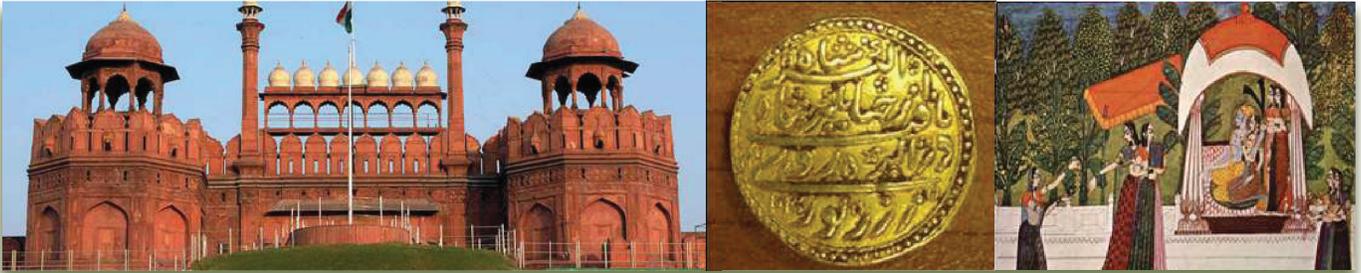


# Tracing Changes in The Medieval Period



The Medieval Period stretches from the eighth to the eighteenth century. The word 'medieval' comes from a Latin word meaning 'middle.' In history, we generally refer to it as the period between the ancient and the modern periods.

During this period India witnessed many economic, political, religious and cultural changes in society. This period also saw progress in art and architecture.

The Medieval Period can be divided into two periods: The Early Medieval Period and the Late Medieval Period. The Early Medieval Period stretched from the eighth to the thirteenth century. It includes the rule of Palas, Pratiharas, Rashtrakutas, Cholas and the Rajputs. The Late Medieval Period stretched from the thirteenth to the eighteenth century. It includes the rule of the Turks, Afghans and the Mughals.

In the middle of the 19th century, British historians divided the history of India into three periods – 'Hindu', 'Muslim' and 'British'. This division was based on the idea that the religion of

rulers was the only important historical factor, ignoring other significant developments in society, economy and culture. This division was erroneous.

## OLD AND NEW TERMINOLOGIES

India was known in the past as Bharatvarsha – the land of the Bharatas. The Muslims during the Medieval Period called the subcontinent Hindustan. They referred to the people as Hindus. "Hindu" here literally meant 'a native of Hindustan'. It had no religious connotation as we understand it today. In the early sixteenth century, Babur used the term 'Hindustan' to describe the flora, fauna and culture of the inhabitants living in the subcontinent.

The name 'India' was first used by the



Persian Wheel



Spinning Wheel

Persians for the region watered by the river Indus. The Greeks who referred to river Sindhu as 'Indos' subsequently borrowed the term from the Persians.

## SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CHANGES

The period CE 700 to 1750 witnessed large-scale developments. New technologies made their appearance like the Persian wheel in irrigation, spinning wheel in weaving and firearms in combat. New foods and beverages such as potatoes, corn, chillies, tea and coffee arrived in the subcontinent.

### Chronology

Medieval Period – CE 700 – CE 1750

- Early Medieval Period (8th – 13th century)
- Late Medieval Period (13th – 18th century)

This was a period of great mobility. People travelled long distances in search of opportunities.

Throughout this period, forests were being gradually cleared for extension of agriculture. Many forest dwellers were forced to migrate. Others tilled the land and became peasants. These peasants were influenced by chieftains, priests, temples and monasteries. They were required to pay taxes and offer goods and services to local lords. This resulted in social differences among peasants. As society became differentiated, people were divided into *jatis* or subcastes. They were ranked on the basis of their backgrounds and their occupations. Ranks were not fixed permanently but varied on the basis of power, influence and resources controlled by members of the *jati*. The status of the same *Jati* could vary from area to area. *Jatis* framed their own rules and regulations. These rules were enforced by the *Jati* panchayat.

## MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

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 8th and 14th Centuries, the term was applied generally to a group of warriors who claimed Kshatriya caste status. The term included not

just rulers and chieftains but also soldiers and commanders who served in the armies of various kings. Extreme valour and a great sense of loyalty were the attributes of the Rajputs. Other groups such as Marathas, Sikhs, Jats, Ahoms and Kayasthas (a caste of scribes and secretaries) also became politically significant.

The period after the death of Harshavardhana came to be known as the Rajput period.

During this period there were several powerful ruling dynasties such as the Pratiharas, Chauhans, Chandelas, Paramaras, Solankis, Tomaras and Guhilas. The Tomaras built the city of Delhi. The Pratiharas ruled over Rajasthan and parts of central India. The Solankis ruled in the region of Kathiawar. The Chandelas ruled around Bundelkhand and the Chauhans ruled over central Rajasthan.

These Rajput clans were constantly at war with one another. This enabled the Turks to embark on their campaigns against the Rajputs. The defeat of Prithviraj Chauhan, a Rajput king, at the hands of Muhammad Ghori in the second battle of Tarain (1192 CE) brought India under the rule of the Slave dynasty. After the fall of the Slave dynasty, the Khaljis, Tughlaqs, Sayyids and Lodis came to power. The last Lodi ruler, Ibrahim Lodi, was killed by Babur in the First Battle of Panipat (1526).

Delhi now had a new ruler. It was Babur who laid the foundation of the Mughal empire in India. Babur's son, Humayun, was defeated by Sher Shah, an Afghan chief, but later on he regained his empire. But it was his grandson, Akbar, who consolidated and extended the Mughal empire over practically the whole of the north India and parts of the south.

Jahangir who succeeded Akbar was a man of refined taste and an able ruler. He was followed by Shah Jahan who was a patron of art and architecture. His successor, Aurangzeb, was an able administrator. But his virtues were overshadowed by his rigid and strict doctrines. The Mughal empire declined slowly after his death. The successors of Aurangzeb were weak, inefficient and corrupt. Due to the weaknesses of the empire, Nadir Shah and

Ahmed Shah Abdali plundered Delhi and left it in ruins. As a result, a number of provinces broke away from the empire.

### Languages

Even in this period different languages were spoken in various regions of our country: *Sindhi, Lahori, Kashmiri, Dvarsamudri* (in south Karnataka), *Telangani* (Andhra), *Gujari* (Gujarat), *Ma'bari* (in Tamil Nadu), *Gauri* (in Bengal), *Avadhi* (eastern Uttar Pradesh) and *Hindawi* (area around Delhi). The above information was given by the famous poet Amir Khusrau in 1318. Sanskrit did not belong to any region and only the Brahmins spoke it.

## OLD AND NEW RELIGIONS

The Medieval Period witnessed many religious developments. These included the worship of new deities, construction of temples and the growing importance of Brahmins as dominant groups in society. The Brahmins were well versed in Sanskrit texts which earned them a lot of respect in society.

One of the major developments of this period was the Bhakti movement. This was a form of prayer in which the devotees could worship God without the help of priests and elaborate rituals. Also, a new religion called Islam appeared in the subcontinent. It accepted the sovereignty of one God – Allah.

## SOURCES

Information of the Medieval Period can be obtained from various archaeological and literary sources. Archaeological sources include inscriptions, monuments, paintings and coins. Literary sources include chronicles, manuscripts, biographies and other works.

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOURCES

### Inscriptions

Inscriptions were found on coins, pillars, monuments and seals. These provide short but important information on various aspects. For example, several Tamil inscriptions of the Medieval Period show the existence of a social system that was opposed to the caste system based on Brahminical ideologies and principles.

## Monuments

Monuments like tombs, forts, mosques and temples provide a lot of information about the period. The Brihadeshwara temple at Tanjore, the Jain temples at Mount Abu, Taj Mahal, Red Fort etc. are examples of medieval architecture.



Dilwara Jain temple in Mount Abu, Rajasthan

## Paintings

In the Medieval Period, two kinds of paintings emerged. They were the mural and miniature paintings. The latter emerged under the impact of Islam. The most famous school of miniature paintings was the Mughal school.

The miniature paintings mostly displayed religious and mythological themes. We get a glimpse of lifestyle of the people through these miniatures. Natural colours were used in these paintings. These miniatures were usually exchanged as gifts by kings and powerful nobles.



A miniature painting of Kabir

## Coins

Coins provide information about the names and dates of different rulers. They also give us an idea of the economic conditions prevailing during that period.



A coin of the Chola Period

### DID YOU KNOW?

- A cartographer is a person who makes maps.
- An archive is a place where manuscripts and documents are preserved.

## INFOBITS

- ▶ The Chinese invented the art of paper-making and woodblock printing.
- ▶ James Rennell is known as the father of Indian Geography.
- ▶ Al Beruni and Ibn Batuta are two foreign travelers who visited India in the medieval period.
- ▶ The word 'Hindu' with reference to the people of India was used by the Arabs for the first time.
- ▶ Octagonal shape of mausoleums is a distinguished feature of architecture under the Lodhi dynasty.
- ▶ The silver coin 'Rupaya' introduced by Sher Shah was continued by the Mughals.
- ▶ According to Abul Fazal, Mughal ruler Akbar used to play the Nakkara.

## LITERARY SOURCES

### Autobiographies and biographies

The most important autobiographies are:

- *Futuh-i-Ferozshahi* of Feroz Shah Tughlaq, *Baburnama* by Babar.
- *Tuzukh-i-Jahangiri* by Jahangir.

Among biographies, the most well known books of this period are:

- *Prithviraj Raso* by Chandbardai. It describes the life and adventures of Prithviraj Chauhan, a Rajput ruler of Delhi and Ajmer.
- *Humayunama* by Gulbadan Begum throws light on the reign of the Mughal Emperor Humayun.
- *Akbarnama* and *Ain-i-Akbari* by Abul Fazal, describe the events of emperor Akbar's Rule.

### Chronicles

A chronicle is a record of the rule of the kings and it describes life at court. Kings employed chroniclers to record and write in detail about what happened during their reign. The most important chronicles of the Medieval period are

- *Rajtarangni* by Kalhana, a history of the kings who ruled over Kashmir. It was written in Sanskrit.
- *Tarikh-i-Ferozshahi* by Zia-ud-din Barani. This describes the history of the Sultans of Delhi till Feroz Shah Tughlaq, written in 1356.
- *Tarikh-i-Ferishta* by Ferishta. It is a record of the history of Delhi Sultans from the time of

the Turks till the 17th century.

- *Tahkik-i-Hind* by Al-Beruni, a traveller from Central Asia.
- *Khazain-ul-Futuh* and *Tughlaqnama* by Amir Khusrau describe the reign of the Khaljis and the Tughlaqs respectively.

### Archival Records

Royal firmans or decrees, revenue records and other governmental records preserved in the archives are also a rich source of history. They provide a glimpse into the administrative policies of the rulers and the political conditions of the time.

### Travelogues

Many Muslim and European travellers visited India during this period. Muslim travellers visiting India wrote an account of their travels. Ibn Battuta's *Rihla* describes the reign of Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq. Abdul Razzak visited the kingdom of Vijayanagar and wrote about the conditions in the kingdom. Nicolo Conti gives an account of the kingdom of Vijayanagar and its war with the Bahmani kings. Captain William Hawkins stayed at the court of Jahangir. His account describes the hierarchy of imperial officials, the sources of income and the magnificence of the Mughal court.

### Religious and Regional Literature

The medieval period saw the growth of bhakti and sufi movements. These saints composed poems and songs in local languages which are a valuable source of information of the medieval period. The epics Mahabharata and Ramayana were composed during this time. Jayadeva's Gita Govinda and Chand Bardai's Prithviraj Raso are examples of regional literature. Books were written in languages such as Marathi, Tamil, Kannada, Urdu, Persian, Arabic and other languages.

#### Calligraphy

Calligraphy or the art of writing in an artistic manner was a common feature of manuscripts of the medieval period. Two types of calligraphy existed in Persian and Arabic scripts. These were the nastaliq, which was cursive and easy to read, and shikaste, which was denser and more difficult to read. Floral and geometric designs were used in the calligraphy done to decorate the monuments of the medieval period.

## POINTS TO REMEMBER

- The Medieval Period stretched from the eighth to the eighteenth century.
- During this period, India witnessed many changes in society, economy, politics, religion and culture.
- India was earlier called Bharatvarsha, or the land of the Bharatas. The Muslims called the subcontinent Hindustan.
- The period following the death of Harshavardhana came to be known as the Rajput period. Apart from the Rajput kingdoms, the other powerful kingdoms were those of the Palas, Rashtrakutas and Cholas.
- One of the major developments of this period was the Bhakti Movement.
- Information about the Medieval Period can be obtained from archaeological and literary sources.

## GLOSSARY

- MEDIEVAL** : Middle
- CHRONICLE** : Record of historical events
- BIOGRAPHY** : Account of a person's life written by a different person
- TRAVELOGUE** : Account written by a traveller

## TIME TO LEARN

### A. Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)

1. Which of the following is not an archaeological source?  
(a) Inscription (b) Monuments (c) Coins (d) Autobiography
2. What was the basic idea behind division of Indian history into 'Hindu', 'Muslim' and 'British' periods by British historians?  
(a) Imperialist notion (b) Religion of the rulers was the only important historical factor  
(c) Socio-economic changes were not important (d) None of these
3. Which of these books is not an autobiography?  
(a) Futuhat-i-Firoz Shahi (b) Baburnama (c) Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri (d) Padshahnama
4. Ibn Battuta's *Rihla* describes the reign of  
(a) Alauddin Khilji (b) Firoz Shah Tughlaq (c) Muhammad Bin Tughlaq (d) Balban

### B. Match the following

- |                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| 1. Muslims       | (a) Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri                           |
| 2. Coins         | (b) Middle                                      |
| 3. Rajatarangini | (c) Information about names and dates of rulers |
| 4. Medieval      | (d) Holy Quran                                  |
| 5. Jahangir      | (e) Kalhana                                     |

### C. State whether the following statements are True or False

1. The Early Medieval Period includes the Palas, Cholas and the Rajputs.
2. The Bhakti Movement was a major development of this period.
3. "Hindu", literally means 'a native of Hindustan'.
4. Archaeological sources include inscriptions, monuments and temples.
5. Babur wrote his memoirs *Padshahnama*.

### D. Fill in the blanks with the words given below

Bhakti Movement    Rajatarangini    Political stability    Sultanate    Persian wheel    Sanskrit

1. The period CE 700 to 1750, saw new technologies like the \_\_\_\_\_ in irrigation.
2. The \_\_\_\_\_ spread the message of devotion to God.
3. The Mughals gave \_\_\_\_\_ to India for many centuries.
4. Kalhana wrote \_\_\_\_\_.
5. During the \_\_\_\_\_ period, books were written in Persian and \_\_\_\_\_.

### E. Short answer type questions

1. What do literary sources include?
2. Into how many periods can the Medieval Period be divided?
3. Who wrote Prithviraj Raso? What does it describe?
4. Why was Bhakti Movement considered a major development in India?

[Value Based Question]

### F. Long answer type questions

1. Briefly describe the archaeological sources.
2. How do travelogues help in reconstruction of history? Give examples.
3. Who were the Rajputs?
4. Discuss the religious developments of the medieval period.

[HOTS]

### G. Project

Prepare a project report on the sources of medieval history of India.

### H. Activity

Write a thank you note for your teacher in beautiful calligraphy.

## LIFE SKILLS

Find out where records are kept in your panchayat/municipality. Who writes these records? Is there an archive? Who manages it? What kinds of documents are stored there? Who are the people who use it?



## MIND MAP

