



# TRACING CHANGES THROUGH A THOUSAND YEARS

## HISTORY

**H**istory is the study of past events. **Historians** are those who study history or write history on the basis of information obtained from coins, inscriptions, architecture and textual records. To make the study of history easier the time is divided into three parts—ancient, medieval and modern periods. The ancient **history** goes back to the early man about 10,000 years ago and extends upto about 1400 years ago. It depends upon the things obtained in excavations by the archaeologists like tools, pots and coins or the buildings and inscriptions on them. We do not have any sources to ascertain the dates clearly for the events of the early period. However, the number and variety of textual records increased dramatically during the one thousand years of the **medieval period**. It extends from roughly 700 to 1750 CE (common era or Christian era). The textual records often contain dates. **Modern period** extends from 1750 CE to the present. However, the word 'modern' here does not carry the meaning of material progress and intellectual advancement, as is today, for the entire period. It is just a part of the time frame. We have studied ancient Indian history in the previous class. We shall now read the medieval Indian history.

India witnessed varied political, social, economic and cultural changes during the medieval period (8th to 18th century). Eighth century was chosen as the start of the medieval period because many changes were taking place in the social and political arena. After the death of Harshavardhana in 647 CE, many small kingdoms came into being which fought with one another. Taking advantage of the small kingdoms, several tribes invaded India. The first Muslim invasion began with Muhammad bin Qasim in 712 CE. It started a chain of invasions and occupations until the eighteenth century when the British became the supreme power in India. Thus, the history took a great turn. That is why, the eighteenth century was chosen to the end of the medieval period.

## Historians and their Sources

Historians depend on all types of sources for the study of medieval period also. They still rely on tools, coins, inscriptions, architecture and textual records (written on paper) for information. But 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. So people used it to write chronicles of rulers, letters, petitions, judicial records and accounts. **Chronicle** is a series of historical events, written in the order in which they happened. They also wrote teachings of saints and holy texts on paper.



*Coins of the medieval period*

**Collection and Study of Manuscripts** : The manuscripts were collected by wealthy people, rulers, monasteries and temples. There were no printing press in those days. So, scribes copied manuscripts by hand. These copies, and rarely the original manuscripts and documents were placed in libraries and archives. **Archive** is a place where manuscripts and documents are stored. Nowadays all national and state governments have archives where they keep all their old official records and transactions.



(a) Preparing the paper


(b) Writing the text

(c) Melting gold to highlight important words and passages (if required)

(d) Preparing the binding

*Four stages in the making of a manuscript*

The historians get a lot of detailed information from the old manuscripts and documents. But errors crept in while copying. When the scribes copied manuscripts, sometimes they could not read the handwriting and were forced to guess what was written. As a result small but significant changes — a word here, a sentence there occurred. Centuries of repeated copying developed into great differences. As original manuscript of the author is rarely available today, the historians read **several versions of the same text** to guess what the author might have originally written. Version is a copy of a book or document that has been changed so that it is slightly different.



On occasion authors revised their chronicles at different times and the historians did not know even the existence of the other. And they have to depend entirely on the one version which is available.

The historians try to reconstruct the past with the help of clues provided by both textual and archaeological sources. History, thus takes shape as a sequence of events in the mind of the historians.

**Making of Maps :** As the travellers and explorers began to write the accounts of their journeys, the knowledge about various places of the world increased. Some of them or with their help geographers made maps of different lands or of the regions they believed to combine to be the whole world. An Arab geographer **al - Idrisi** made detailed maps (sketches, in today's context) in 1154 CE. He marked place names in Arabic. In 1720s a French cartographer (a person who makes maps) made a map of the Indian subcontinent (published in the early eighteenth century – Atlas Nouveau of Guillaume de l'Isle). This map details the coastal areas in particular.

When historians read texts, documents and maps from the past, they consider the **contexts** (frame of references)— different historical backgrounds (things, places, people and events) in which information about the past was produced. The context in which information is produced changes with time.

### **New and Old Terminologies**

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Present-day India, together with other countries of the Indian subcontinent— Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh— has been referred to as Jambu-dwipa (the land of the Jambu tree) in ancient Buddhist texts. It was called Bharatavarsha (after the Bharata tribe that existed in Rigvedic times). Around 150 BC the land between the Himalayas and the western Vindhyas was named as Aryavarta (the land of the Aryas). The Persians used the term 'Sindhu' which they pronounced as Hindu. Thus, they called Sindhu + Sthana (place), i.e. the land across the Sindhu river, as Hindustan. The river Sindhu was also called as Indus or Indos. So, the Greeks called the land Inde. The Arabs called it Hind. And it was much later when the British used the word India.

From the above description we can see that different names emerged from different grammar and meanings, i.e., contexts, of different areas. For example, take the term 'Hindustan' :

- (i) In the thirteenth century, Minhaj- i Siraj, a chronicler who wrote in Persian, meant the areas of Punjab, Haryana and the lands between the Ganga and Yamuna by the term 'Hindustan'. He used the term for the part of the subcontinent under the rule of the Delhi Sultan. But the term never included South India.
- (ii) In the fourteenth century, poet Amir Khusro used the word 'Hind' and in the early sixteenth century Babur used 'Hindustan' to



*The Indian Subcontinent*

describe the geography, the fauna and the culture of the inhabitants of the subcontinent.

(iii) However, though the idea of a geographical and cultural entity like 'India' did exist, the term 'Hindustan' was not used in the political and national meaning of today—India, the modern nation-state.

Similarly, Indian subcontinent also does not mean today's India, the modern nation-state. Rather it means South Asia subcontinent.

Many other historical terms also meant different things in the past. The word 'foreigner', in the medieval period, was any stranger who came to a village or town and was not a part of that society or culture, for example, a forest dweller was

a foreigner to them. But the people of different caste or religion living in the same village were not foreigners. Thus, the word 'foreigner' should not be taken in the present meaning or sense of the word—who is not an Indian.

### Time and Historical Periods



*Vasco da Gama*

The study of time is made somewhat easier by dividing the past into large time segments called **periods** that possess shared or common characteristics. Most historians look to economic, social and cultural factors to characterise the major elements of different moments of the past. It is not proper to divide the history only on the basis of the religion of rulers—Hindu, Muslim and British. You have read a wide range of early societies—hunter-gatherers, early farmers, people living in towns and villages and early kingdoms and empires in earlier class. Now you will read more about the spread of peasant societies, regional and imperial state formations, development of two major religions and the arrival of European trading companies.

However, the entire medieval period is not one historical unit. After all, the later centuries of this period were quite different than the earlier centuries. Therefore, medieval period is further divided into two parts — early medieval period and later medieval period. The **early medieval period** lasted from about eighth century to thirteenth century and the **later medieval period** lasted from about thirteenth century to eighteenth century. But developments are not at the same rate over time and area. Therefore, the historical developments need to be studied separately over each century or so and different regions.





## New Social and Political Groups

The medieval period was a period of economic, political, social and cultural changes. Traders and invaders came into the subcontinent with new technologies, new foods and beverages and of course, new ideas. Persian wheel in irrigation, spinning wheel in weaving and fire arms in combat were these new technologies. New foods and beverages arrived in the subcontinent were potatoes, corn, chillies, tea and coffee. The subcontinent already had immense wealth and possibilities for people to find a fortune. So, **groups** travelled long distances in search of opportunity. One group of people who became important in medieval period were the Rajputs (or Rajaputras,


### Famous Rulers and Kingdoms of the Medieval Period

Rajputs	700-
Chauhans	975-1192
Muhammad Ghori	1192 1206
Slave Dynasty	1206-1290
Khaljis	1290-1320
Tughluqs	1320-1414
Sayyid Dynasty	1414-1451
Lodis	1451-1526
Mughals	1526-1857
Pals	750-1120
Pratihars	730-1018
Rashtrakutas	753-973
Cholas	846-1270
Bahmani Kingdom	1347-1537

**Note** Rajput and Maratha power declined in the 18th century but their one or the other smaller kingdoms lasted upto 1947.

meaning the sons of a ruler). They were known for their great courage and bravery and a great sense of loyalty. The term became famous for the Kshatriya caste status. Though they served in the armies of different kings all over the subcontinent as soldiers and commanders, as rulers or chieftains they were settled in certain regions of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Bundelkhand and Delhi. They were the Chandellas of Bundelkhand, Chauhans of Delhi and Ajmer, Solankis of Gujarat and Sisodias of Mewar (Chittor-Udaipur side). Other groups of people such as the Marathas, Sikhs, Jats, Ahoms also used the opportunities of this period to be politically important, i.e., to take part in the rule.

Clearing of forests for the faster extension of agriculture forced many forest-dwellers to migrate. Others started tilling and became peasants. These new peasant groups were gradually influenced by the markets, chieftains and priests. They were required to pay taxes and offer



goods and services to local lords. The old and new peasant groups formed a large complex society. Some possessed more land, others also kept cattle and some combined agricultural activity with artisanal work. Now people were grouped and ranked into sub-castes or jatis on the basis of their backgrounds (resources, power and influence) and occupations. However, the rank and status of the same jati varied in different regions.

The elders of the jatis framed their own rules and regulations to manage the conduct of their members. However, the jatis were also required to follow the rules of their village chieftains.

### Region and Empire

Large states like those of the Cholas, Tughluqs or Mughals covered many regions. By 700, many regions already possessed distinct geographical dimensions and their own language and cultural characteristics. They were also associated with specific ruling dynasties. There was always conflict between these states. Occasionally dynasties like Cholas, Khaljis, Tughluqs and Mughals were able to build an empire that was pan-regional— extending in diverse regions. Not all these empires were equally stable. For example, the rule of the Khalji dynasty lasted for only 30 years while that of the Mughal dynasty lasted for more than 300 years. After the decline of the Mughal empire the regional states re-emerged. But years of the imperial rule left the region with many distinct and shared traditions in the fields of governance, management of the economy, elite culture and language. In 1318, the poet Amir Khusrau noted that there was a different language in every region of the subcontinent. Only Sanskrit was the language that did not belong to any region. It was an old language and common people did not know it, only the Brahmanas did.

### Old and New Religions

Over the thousand years of the Medieval period, the religious traditions and beliefs altered a lot as their social worlds altered. People's belief in the divine was sometimes deeply personal but more usually it was collective. In Hinduism important changes like the worship of new deities, construction of temples by royal people occurred. Besides, the Brahmanas, the priests grew as dominant groups in society. Their position became dominant by the support of their patrons— new rulers searching for prestige. The idea of bhakti—of a loving personal deity that devotees could reach without the aid of priests or elaborate rituals, developed well. The religion of Islam too flourished in the subcontinent in this period.



### Key Words

- » Textual records : records written on paper.
- » Manuscript : a handwritten book.
- » Jati : sub-caste.

- » Archive : a place where documents and manuscripts are stored.
- » Chronicle : a series of historical events, written in the order in which they happened.
- » Pan-regional empires : empires extending in diverse regions.
- » Document : a piece of paper that has official information on it.
- » Imperial : relating to an empire or to the person who rules it.
- » Architecture : the style and design of a building.

## SUMMARY

- ▶ History is the study of past events.
- ▶ The medieval period of Indian history extends from 700 to 1750 CE.
- ▶ The manuscripts and documents were placed in libraries and archives.
- ▶ The historians read several versions of the same text to guess what the author might have originally written.
- ▶ Historians consider the contexts (frame of references) in which information about the past was produced.
- ▶ The same term might mean differently in different contexts.
- ▶ One group of people who became important in medieval period were the Rajputs.
- ▶ After the decline of the Mughal empires, the regional states re-emerged but with many distinct and shared traditions of the years of imperial rule.

## Exercise Time

### A. Tick (✓) the only correct choice amongst the following :

1. When did the medieval period begin in Indian history?
  - a. 9th century
  - b. 10th century
  - c. 8th century
  - d. 7th century
2. Who made a map of the subcontinent in Arabic language
  - a. al-Idrisi
  - b. Minhaj-i Siraj
  - c. Nouveau of Gvillaume
  - d. Amir Khusrau
3. Which was the new weapons introduced in the medieval period ?
  - a. Swords
  - b. Daggers
  - c. Firearms
  - d. Missiles
4. Persian wheel was used for
  - a. making chariots
  - b. irrigation
  - c. spinning
  - d. making carts
5. Which dynasty lasted for more than 300 years ?
  - a. Mughal dynasty
  - b. Khalji dynasty
  - c. Slave dynasty
  - d. Chauhans

### B. Fill in the blanks :

1. The medieval period in India is deemed to have started in the \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Archives are places where \_\_\_\_\_ and documents are stored.
3. Potatoes, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, tea and coffee were new crops introduced into the subcontinent during the medieval period.

4. The historians read several \_\_\_\_\_ of the same text.
5. The same term might mean differently in different \_\_\_\_\_.

**C. Match the Following :**

- |                  |                                     |
|------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Jambudwipa    | a. The land of Bharat tribe         |
| 2. Bharatavarsha | b. The land of Aryas                |
| 3. Hindustan     | c. The land of the Jambu tree       |
| 4. Aryavarta     | d. The modern nation-state          |
| 5. India         | e. The land across the Sindhu river |

**D. Write true (T) or False (F) against the following statements in given brackets :**

- |  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| 1. Historians consider the contexts (frame of references).                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Persian wheel was used for making carts.  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. We do not find inscriptions for the period after 700 CE.                                | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. The Marathas used the opportunities to be politically important during medieval period. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. Forest-dwellers had to migrate because of the spread of agricultural lands.             | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**E. Define the following terms :**

- |            |               |                        |            |
|------------|---------------|------------------------|------------|
| 1. Archive | 2. Historians | 3. Pan-regional empire | 4. Context |
|------------|---------------|------------------------|------------|

**F. Answer in one word or one phrase :**

1. How did India came to be known during the medieval period ?
2. What are the two ages in which we can divide the medieval period ?
3. Under what kind of sources should we include the travellers' accounts ?
4. Who used the word 'Hind' for the subcontinent ?
5. By what word a forest dweller was called by a villager ?

**G. Answer these questions briefly :**

1. What are the difficulties historians face in using manuscripts ?
2. How do historians divide the past into periods ? Do they face any problems in doing so ?
3. How India was called Hindustan in the medieval period ?
4. List some of the technological changes associated with the medieval period.
5. Who was considered a 'foreigner' in the past ?

**H. Answer these questions in detail :**

1. In what ways has the meaning of the term 'Hindustan' changed over the centuries?
2. Discuss the changes that were taking place in India in the medieval period.
3. Why were the eighth and eighteenth centuries chosen as the start and the end of the medieval period?
4. How copies of manuscripts have great differences? What do historians do to overcome this difficulty?

**PROJECT WORK**

1. On an outline map of Indian subcontinent shade and label the countries which formed a part of Indian territory in the medieval period.
2. Collect pictures of the buildings constructed in the medieval period.