

# The Medieval Period

## Precap

In this chapter you will learn about :

- ➊ The Medieval Period
- ➋ Sources of History
- ➌ Changing names of India
- ➍ Major Historical Trends
- ➎ India's Geographical Influence



## The Medieval Period

On the basis of changes in social, political and economic organisations and in ideas and beliefs, Indian history is generally divided into the ancient, medieval and modern periods. The actual duration of the period which is historically regarded as 'medieval' is not the same everywhere. While the medieval period in Europe lasted between 600 and 1400 CE, the medieval period in India extended from the 700-1700 CE—which is exactly a thousand years. It is further subdivided into the early medieval period (700–1200 CE) and the late medieval period (1200–1700 CE) respectively.

### ▼ The Early Medieval Period

The early medieval period lasted from the 8th to the middle of the 13th century. The Palas, the Gurjara-Pratiharas, the Rashtrakutas, the Cholas and the Rajputs were the powerful dynasties that ruled during the early medieval period. This period was dominated by struggles for power among regional kingdoms of both northern and southern India which led to the frequent rise and fall of Kingdoms.

### ▼ The Late Medieval Period

The late medieval period extended from the

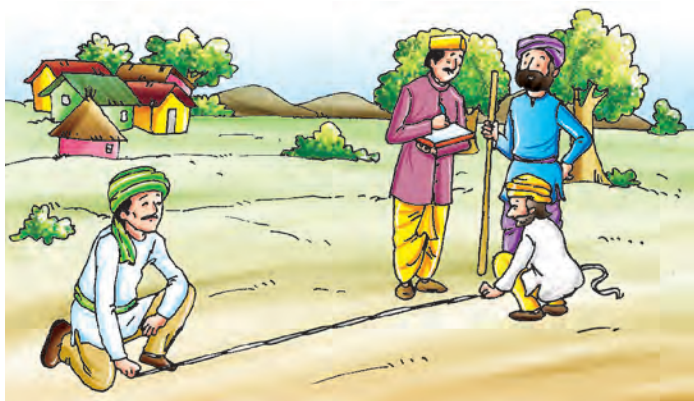
middle of the 13th century to the 18th century. During this period, there were a number of invasions from Central Asia by the Muslims, the Turks, the Afghans and the Mughals. These invaders conquered a large part of India. There were also many wars between the invaders and the regional powers of North and South India. The political, economical, social and cultural life in India was influenced by the Islamic customs under their rule. All these things together left an indelible mark on the Indian culture.

## Major Historical Trends

The initial phase of the period was marked by the emergence of regional kingdoms throughout the country. A powerful group of people rose to prominence during this period, primarily as warriors and kings in northern and central India, called the **Rajputs**. The Rajputs claimed their descent from either the solar family (Surya Vansh) or the lunar family (Chandra Vansh). However, there were four clans which had originated directly from a sacrificial fire conducted by Sage Vashishtha. They claimed descent from Agni Kula. These included the Pratiharas, the Chauhans (Chahamanas), the Solankis and the Pawars (Parmars). These four clans played an important role in the history of this period.



Establishment of the Delhi Sultanate following the arrival of the Turks from the north west and setting up of the Mughal Empire were the two most important political events of the period. The important social trends of the medieval age included the proliferation of new castes, the rise of tribal groups with their own distinctive identities and customs and a sharp distinction between rural and urban areas. The flourishing trade and the introduction of a more systematic assessment of land revenue were the significant economic trends of the medieval period.



The practice of land measurement during medieval period

This period marked the emergence of new forms of Hinduism and Islam. Religious reforms in the form of Bhakti and Sufi movements triggered some of the major developments of the period. In the sphere of architecture, distinctive styles and technologies arose, thereby adding to the grandeur and magnificence of medieval India.



A group of people singing religious songs

In all, widespread cultural diversity was the hallmark of this period which went on to enrich India's culture and history.

## Sources of History

Historians used different types of sources to learn about the past, depending on the period of their study and the nature of their investigation. Medieval Indian history has left behind a rich legacy of archaeological and literary sources which help us reconstruct the history of the period.

### Archaeological Sources

Archaeology is the study of history through the material remains of human life. Archeological sources may include monuments, paintings, sculptures, inscriptions and coins.

#### Monuments and Buildings

Historical monuments and buildings such as palaces, temples, forts, mosques, tombs, clock towers, etc help to reconstruct the past in many ways.

They provide invaluable information regarding the architectural skills of workers, the materials used to construct these monuments and the mode of transportation in use, besides the cultural and religious beliefs prevalent during the period under study.

These buildings reveal the architectural styles and cultural influence of the period. The famous monuments of the medieval period include the Humayun's Tomb, Qutub Minar, mosques such as Quwwat ul-Islam and Jama Masjid, the Red Fort in Delhi and Agra, the Taj Mahal, Hoysaleswara Temple, etc.



Jama Masjid

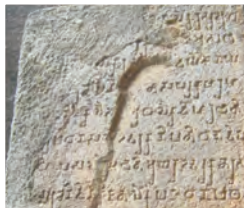
Taj Mahal

#### Inscriptions

Inscriptions are writings engraved on solid surfaces like rocks, metals, pillars and stone



tablets and other structures. These are written in various languages and scripts. These inscriptions record royal proclamations, religious instructions and gifts to temples, people or villages. Many of these, available even today, are attributed to the Rajput and to the Chola rulers. Besides, there are several inscriptions on the walls of the Taj Mahal, the Red Fort and other palace walls. All these inscriptions usually tell us about the social and economic conditions of the people and sometimes even provide dynastic lists of kings or their genealogies.



Inscriptions

### Coins

Coins give us invaluable information about the polity and economy of a period. The writing on the coins generally convey the names, date of issue, titles and portraits of kings and occasionally even their dynastic emblem. Coins throw light on art, religion, economic conditions, trade, etc. The composition of the metal or alloy used in the coins tells us about the scientific advancement attained during the corresponding period. Moreover, the distant places where the coins are excavated give an idea about the extent of the empire. The Sultans of Delhi, the Mughal emperors, the Cholas and other regional rulers issued many coins.



Medieval coin

### Paintings and Sculptures

The paintings reflected themes of religion, forest life, court scenes, mythological stories, lifestyle of the period and food habits of the times. Different styles of miniature painting also evolved during this period. Various schools of painting flourished during this period. Medieval paintings feature various mythological tales, palace scenes and forest life. Wall paintings known as **murals**, were masterpieces of this age.

Tanjore paintings are known for the use of semi precious stones and rich vibrant colours. The bronze sculpture of the Nataraja, the dancing Shiva, is representative of the sculpture produced during the period. The sculptures were made of bronze, wood or stone.



A Tanjore painting

The perfection of stone-cutters and sculptors was amazing. Figures of kings, queens, gods and goddesses are depicted in these sculptures.

### Literary Sources

Much of our understanding of the medieval period of Indian history comes from a **plethora** of written sources. These include both religious and non-religious sources, available in the form of **biographies** and **autobiographies**, **court chronicles** (at times called **names in Persian**) and historical accounts by pilgrims, traders and royal ambassadors. The literary sources usually catergorised into indigenous and foreign writings.



A medieval manuscript

Palm leaves, bark of birch trees and animals' skins were used as materials for writing. It was only in the late medieval period that paper became the main writing material.

Literary sources of medieval history can be divided into following categories :

#### Court Chronicles

A number of scholars belonging to this period wrote about history of dynasties of the period. These are known as **court chronicles**. One well known example of a court chronicle is Abd



al-Qadir Badauni's [Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh](#) or Selection of Chronicles, a work in three volumes that deals with the reigns of Babur, Humayun and Akbar. Barani's [Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi](#) (an account of Firoz Shah Tuglaq's reign) is another famous court chronicle which describe the history of the Delhi Sultanate. [Rajatarangini](#), authored by Kalhana in the 11th century, provides information about the history of the rulers of Kashmir.



A poet reciting lines from his *prashasti* in a royal court

Usually, historians travelled with the ruler and recorded the events. Abul Fazl's [Akbarnama](#) is a fine example of such work. [Ain-i-Akbari](#) highlights the salient features of Akbar's mode of governance and statical reports of his empire.

### Travelogue

A number of foreign travellers, scholars, pilgrims and royal ambassadors visited the courts of different rulers during the medieval period and left behind accounts of the period. They also focused on the life of the common people. Ibn Battuta, the Moroccan traveller and scholar, visited India during the rule of the Tughlaqs and wrote the [Rihla](#) (travels) that tells us about the geography of India. Al-Biruni's [Tarikh al-Hind](#), written around 1030 CE, when he accompanied Mahmud Ghaznavi on his campaign into northern India, is regarded as one of the finest foreign accounts of medieval India.

Abdur Razzaq was sent by the ruler of Persia to the kingdom of Vijaynagar.

Many travellers came from Europe. Their writings and letters are considered valuable sources to know the history of the medieval period.

### Autobiographies and Biographies

Autobiographies are the self-written accounts of some important kings of those times. Biographies were the accounts of a king's life written by court writers.

Biographies including [Prithviraj Raso](#) by Chand Bardai and [Humayun Nama](#) by Gulbadan Begum as well as autobiographies such as Babur's [Baburnama](#) (also known as [Tuzuk-i-Babri](#)) in Turkish and Jahangir's [Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri](#) in Persian were written during this



A scene from Baburnama

period. The Baburnama provides detailed information about the flora and fauna of Hindustan while the Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri provides a fascinating insight into the court politics during this period besides giving details of the emperor's personal life. Firoz Shah Tughlaq also wrote his autobiography titled [Futuh-at-i-Firoz Shahi](#).

### Writings of Foreign Travellers

The writings of many European travellers like Duarte Barbosa and Domingo Paes of Portugal, Ralph Fitch, William Hawkins and Sir Thomas Roe of England, Niccolo Conti and Niccolao Manucci of Italy, Bernier and Tavernier of France also serve as valuable source for the history of the medieval period.

Athanasius Nikitin's visit to India is described in his book, [The Journey Beyond Three Seas](#). Sidi Ali Reis, an Ottoman admiral, was another important foreigner whose travels to India and other countries



Athanasius Nikitin



are recorded in the book, *Mirat ul Memalik* or *The Mirror of Countries*.

### Translations

Many works of autobiography, religion and philosophy were translated into different languages. These helped in spreading our culture and history far and wide. For example, *Baburnama* was originally written in the Turkish language, but later it was translated into Persian. Many Sanskrit scriptures like the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Upanishads* were also translated into Persian. It was during this period that the religious texts, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* were also translated in regional languages.

### Music

Most of the Mughal rulers were great lovers of music. Tansen was one of the chief singers in the court of Akbar. The verses and hymns used in this period are also a good source of historical knowledge.

### Religious Literature

The medieval period of Indian history was also the period of the Bhakti and Sufi movement. The saints and sages associated with these movements composed poems, songs, dohas, etc. in the local languages. They reflect the period during which they wrote.

### Regional Literature

Regional literature of the period was highly acclaimed in the form of stories, poems and dramas such as Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda* and Chand Bardai's *Prithviraj Raso*. During this period, texts were composed in different languages such as Marathi, Urdu, Tamil, Persian, Kannada, Arabic and some European languages as well.

### Calligraphy

The art of writing alphabet in an artistic manner

is known as *calligraphy*. It was a common feature of the manuscripts written during the medieval period of Indian history. Floral and geometric motifs were used to decorate books and monuments of the period. Although the knowledge of calligraphy had already existed in India, it was only with the Persian influence that a distinctive style emerged.



A medieval monument showing the skill of calligraphy

### Archival Records

Apart from various literary sources discussed above, government documents or archives in the form of royal 'farman' or decrees issued by rulers, treaties or agreements between different kings, chronicles of court and records of revenue also serve as important sources of information for this period. They throw light on the administrative policies and the political system of the kingdoms.

### India's Geographical Influence

Geography is one of the most significant drivers of history. The three major physiographical divisions that have played an important role in the history of the Indian subcontinent are the Himalayan uplands, the Indo-Gangetic Plains and Peninsular India.

The Himalayan uplands consists of a chain of lofty mountains. The three great perennial river systems—the Indus, the Ganga and the Brahmaputra are fed by the Himalayan snows. The alluvial plains of northern India appear on the map like a huge arc extending for about 3200 km from the mouth of the Indus to the mouth of the Ganga. The Ganga Plains have sustained and nurtured city life, state, society and imperial rule from the first millennium BCE.

The northern plains and Peninsular India are separated by a large intermediate zone, called central India. The Aravalli hills in Rajasthan



Kabir composing his doha



separate the Indus plains from the peninsula. The intermediate zone is characterised by the presence of the Vindhya and Satpura ranges and the Chota Nagpur plateau covering portions of Bihar, Bengal and Orissa. This region can be subdivided into four sub-regions: the land of the Rajputs between Udaipur and Jaipur; the Malwa plateau around Ujjain, more popularly known as Avanti in ancient India; Vidarbha or the sub-regions around Nagpur; and the Chhattisgarh plains in eastern Madhya Pradesh or Dakshina Kosala.

On the southern edge of central India begins the formation called **Peninsular India**. The rocky formation gently slopes from west to east, and four major rivers flow into the Bay of Bengal. These four rivers—(Mahanadi, Godavari, Krishna and Kaveri) has produced alluvial plains and helped the certain of nuclear areas in the plains and deltas enabling cultural growth to be sustained for prolonged periods through history.

The Narmada and the Tapti, however, have a westward flow and run into the Arabian Sea in Gujarat. The Deccan plateau is the well known feature of the region. It extends from the Vindhya in the north to the southern limits of Karnataka. The black soil in Maharashtra and in the adjoining parts of central India is especially rich. The soil yields good crops of cotton, millets, peanuts and oilseeds. It was this reason why the early farming

cultures (Chalcolithic) in western and central India emerged here. In the west, the plateau terminates with the Western Ghats and in the east its contours are marked by the Eastern Ghats. The Nilgiris and the Cardamom hills are regarded as offshoots of the basic peninsular formation.

The course of Indian history has largely been shaped by the geographical features of India. The Ganga-Yamuna Doab, the Middle Ganga Valley, Malwa, Northern Deccan, Andhra, Kalinga (coastal Orissa) and the Tamil plains are the major perennial nuclear regions which emerged as bases of power quite early. Smaller



A map of India and its neighbours during the early medieval period



areas such as the Konkan, Kanara and Chhattisgarh have also made a mark.

At most periods of its history, India, though a cultural unit, was torn by internecine wars. Famine, floods and plague killed millions of the people. Inequality of birth was given religious sanction, and the lot of the humble was generally hard.

Unlike Egypt, Mesopotamia and Greece, however, the traditions of India has been preserved without a break to the present day. To this day, legends known to the humblest Indian recall the names of shadowy chieftains who lived nearly a thousands years before Christ, and the orthodox Hindus in their daily worship repeat hymns composed even earlier. India and China have, in fact the oldest continuous cultural traditions in the world.

## Changing Names of India

Throughout its history, the Indian subcontinent has been known by varied names. During the ancient period it was referred to by such names as **Bharatvarsha** and **Jambudwipa**. The Vishnu Purana says, 'The country lying to the north of the ocean and south of the Himadri, i.e. the Himalayas, is called **Bharatavarsha**. This name is also mentioned in the Rig Veda. South Asia was also called **Jambudwipa**. The term **Aryavarta** or **land of the Aryans** is said to have been used by

Patanjali to denote the northern part of India lying between the Himalayas and the Vindhayas.

The Zend Avesta, the sacred book of the Parsees, described the sub-continent as **Sapta Sindhu** or **the land of seven rivers**. The ancient Greeks referred to the Indians as **Indoi** or **People of the Indus**. During the medieval period, the name that gained popularity was **Hindustan**.

**Sindu** was an ancient Aryan name which could not be pronounced correctly by people who invaded or visited India from northwest; In their language the 's' became 'h' So, they pronounced the river's name as Hindu.

The terms **Hind** and '**Hindustan**' were used in both Persian and Arabic languages after the Islamic conquests of the 11th century. Thus, the rulers of the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughals called their Indian empire by the name of **Hindustan**. The term came to be used for the region of India between the river Indus and Brahmaputra and the Himalayan and Vindhya mountain ranges.

During the early medieval period, for instance, the name denoted the land lying between Indus and its five branches and the land between rivers. In the late medieval period, the name came to denote much of what modern India is today including south India.

## Terminology

<b>emblem</b>	: a symbol or figure used as a mark of identification for something
<b>plethora</b>	: a large amount of something
<b>biography</b>	: an account of a person's life
<b>autobiography</b>	: the biography of a person written by himself/herself
<b>chronicle</b>	: a historical account of events arranged in the order in which they happened

## Recap

- ❖ Indian history is generally divided into the ancient, medieval and modern periods.
- ❖ The initial phase of the period was marked by the emergence of regional kingdoms throughout the country.



- ❖ The flourishing trade and the introduction of a more systematic assessment of land revenue were the significant economic trades of the medieval period.
- ❖ Medieval Indian History has left behind a rich legacy of archeological and literary sources.
- ❖ Archaeological sources may include monuments, paintings, sculptures, inscriptions and coins.
- ❖ Literary sources include religious and non-religious literature like biographies, autobiographies, court chronicles, travelogues, etc.



### Objective Type Questions

#### A. Tick (✓) the correct option :

1. The early medieval period :  
 (a) 700-1200 CE  (b) 600-1400 CE  (c) 1200-1700 CE  (d) 1300-1900 CE
2. The early medieval period dynasties were :  
 (a) Palas  (b) Cholas  (c) Rajputs  (d) all of these
3. The Chauhans were also known as :  
 (a) Solankis  (b) Chahamanas  (c) Pawars  (d) Parmars
4. This is an archaeological source :  
 (a) literature  (b) coins  (c) chronicles  (d) travelogues
5. Domingo Paes was a/an traveller of :  
 (a) Dutch  (b) Portugal  (c) English  (d) Chinese

#### B. Fill in the blanks :

1. Coins throw light on \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, etc.
2. \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ were used as materials for writing.
3. Medieval paintings feature various \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Baburnama was originally written in the \_\_\_\_\_ language.
5. The alluvial plains of northern India appear on the map like huge arc extending for about \_\_\_\_\_ from the mouth of the \_\_\_\_\_ to the mouth of the \_\_\_\_\_.

#### C. State true or false :

1. The Rajputs claimed their descent from the Solar Family or the Lunar Family.
2. Archaeological sources include literature, travelogues, chronicles, translation, etc.
3. The sculptures were made of bronze, wood or stone and depicted figures of gods and goddesses, queens and kings.
4. The saints and sages associated with the Bhakti and Sufi movements composed poems, songs etc. in Sanskrit.
5. The Zend Avesta, the sacred book of the Parsees describes the subcontinent as India.





## Subjective Type Questions

### D. Very short answer type questions :

1. Who claimed their descent from Agni Kula?
2. Give examples of the archeological sources.
3. What are murals?
4. Who wrote 'Prithviraj Raso'?
5. Write the different names of India.

### E. Short answer type questions :

1. Write a note on the early medieval period.
2. What are the archeological sources?
3. What do the coins tell us?
4. Explain the literary sources in brief.
5. Give an account of translations.

### F. Long answer type questions :

1. What are the sources to know about the past? Explain the archaeological sources.
2. What are the court chronicles? Discuss.
3. Give an account of the religious and regional literature.
4. How did India's geography influenced India?
5. Give an account of the different names of India.



### To Do Hour

Make group of four and discuss the sources to learn about the past.



### Net Check

Browse the internet and know more about the paintings of the medieval period.

[www.essential-humanities.net>medievalpainting](http://www.essential-humanities.net>medievalpainting)



### Think and Answer

If there were no sources, how could we know our past?

