

Class VII

History : Chapter 1

Where, When and How- The Medieval Period in India

Key Points of the Chapter:

- History is divided into three periods- ancient period, medieval period and the modern period.
- In class VII we will discuss about the medieval period of history.
- The word ‘ medieval’ comes from the Latin words medius and ‘aevum’ which mean ‘middle age’.
- The medieval period of Indian history is taken to extend from 647 CE to 1700 CE, i.e., when the Mughal Empire started breaking up and the British began establishing their power in India.
- The medieval period is further divided into the early medieval period (647CE- 1200CE) and the later medieval period (1200-1700CE).
- The medieval period in India saw many changes in India. Several independent kingdoms had come up after the breaking up of Harsh’s empire. These kingdoms were engaged in frequent battles with one another, each trying to establish its supremacy over the others.
- Taking advantage of the political instability and lack of unity, tribes from Central Asia such as Turkish, Afghan, Persian and Mongol entered India and ruled in India from the 11th to the 18th Centuries CE.
- In the beginning of the medieval period, South India remained unaffected. Cholas and the Rashtrakutas were ruling in the South.
- Geographically India is protected by the Himalayas in the north. But the passes along the ranges allowed the travelers and the invaders to enter India through the north-west.
- Due to the distinct nature of geographical feature of India, India’s history developed differently in its different regions. The Northern Plains, was the seats for many great empires. This was also the region that was under constant threat from invaders. Several waves of invasions during the medieval period made the history of this region eventful.
- On the contrary, the Southern Peninsula faced fewer threats of invasion. The Vindhya and the Satpura ranges acted as a barrier. Hence, the Deccan and the South evolved a unique culture and a history of their own.
- The kingdoms in the south developed strong navies and their kingdoms were extended upto the islands of Sri Lanka and Indonesia.
- Different names of India in different times. During the Vedic Age, India was called Sapta Sindhu or the Land of Seven Rivers. These rivers were the Indus, Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas, Sutlej and the Saraswati.

Another theory says that the word Hindu was derived from the Sanskrit word indu. Indu was another word for soma, the drink of the vedic people. So the people who drank soma and the land where they lived was called Hindustan.

-After the coming of the Aryans and the spread of the Vedic culture, Northern India came to be known as Aryavarta, or the land of the Aryans.

-India was also known as Bharatavarsha, or the land of Bharta, the son of King Dushayanta. Dushayanta, is a mythological king who is believed to have conquered and ruled over the whole of the Indian subcontinent.

-In all Arabic and Persian literature of the medieval period, the Indian subcontinent is referred to as Hind, and the people who live here as the Hindus.

-The Greeks, however, called this land Indica. It is most probably from Indica that the subcontinent got its modern name 'India'.

Sources of Information for Medieval History:

-The main source for the medieval India is the literary source as the writing was discovered by this time.

The different literary sources are the inscriptions, coins, religious and secular writings. The main sources of information that the historians use for the medieval period are-

- epigraphic evidence (inscriptions)
- numismatic evidence (coins)
- archaeological evidence(buildings, sculptures etc.)
- artistic evidence(paintings)
- literary evidence (historical writings)

Inscriptions: Inscriptions are writings engraved on hard surfaces like metal, rock and stone. The study of inscriptions is called epigraphy. Inscriptions may be long or short. The long poems in praise of kings are called prashasti.

Coins: Coins are pieces of metal that are used as money. They were usually issued by the ruler of a kingdom. The study of coins is called numismatics. Coins help a historian clarify any doubt they have about dates and events that are given in books and other sources of information.

Monuments and Buildings: Monuments and buildings often provide information about the period during which they were built. They also tell us about the political, economic and social conditions of the time and the style of architecture followed at that time.

Paintings: Paintings are an important source of information. Paintings serve as a record of the lines of descent of kings and nobles. Also tell us about the nature of the society, dressing, customs(accepted way of doing something specific to a particular society) important events, the life of common people along with other features.

Literary evidence: Literary evidence consists of historical writings, biographies, plays, novels and epics. Literary sources are of two types- indigenous sources (those created within the country, native) and foreign sources (written by foreign travelers)

Indigenous sources- Inscriptions in India were mainly written on palm leaf, cloth, bamboo leaf, birch bark and paper. The subjects were religion, philosophy, systems of science arts and literature. They were composed in different Indian languages and scripts.

Bards (poets) and chroniclers were appointed by the king. Their job was to record all the happenings of the state. The important biographies of the time are- Kalhana's Rajtarangini, Prithviraj Raso by Chand Bardai (written in 12th centuries CE about Prithviraj Chouhan)

Foreign Sources: In medieval India many foreigners entered the land as travellers, as students and as pilgrims. Alberuni came with Mahmud of Ghazni in 11th century and wrote Tahqiq -i-Hind.

Ibn Batuta (a Morocco born traveler) wrote about Muhamad bin Tughlaq.

Marco Polo , the Italian ambassador in the court of the Chinese emperor Kublai Khan wrote about South India. The Baburnama the autobiography of Babur (16th century CE) and Akbarnama ,the biography of Akbar (17th century CE) contain vivid and detailed descriptions of life during Mughal rule.

- After a careful study of these various sources of information, historians have tried to recreate the history of medieval India.