

Dr. Rita Sharma
Assistant Professor
History

An Overview of Medieval India

Medieval period is an important period in the history of India because of the developments in the field of art and languages, culture and religion. Also the period has witnessed the impact of other religions on the Indian culture. Beginning of Medieval period is marked by the rise of the Rajput clan. This period is also referred to as Postclassical Era. Medieval period lasted from the 8th to the 18th century CE with early medieval period from the 8th to the 13th century and the late medieval period from the 13th to the 18th century. Early Medieval period witnessed wars among regional kingdoms from north and south India where as late medieval period saw the number of Muslim invasions by Mughals, Afghans and Turks. By the end of the fifteenth century European traders started doing trade and around mid-eighteenth century they became a political force in India marking the end of medieval period. But some scholars believe that start of Mughal Empire is the end of medieval period in India.

Main Empires and Events in Medieval period

Rajput Kingdoms –

Rajput came for the first time in the 7th century AD. But historians gave different theories of their origin.

After the mid-16th century, many Rajput rulers formed close relationships with the Mughal emperors and served them in different capacities. It was due to the support of the Rajputs that Akbar was able to lay the foundations of the Mughal Empire in India. Some Rajput nobles gave away their daughters in marriage to Mughal emperors and princes for political motives. For example, Akbar accomplished 40 marriages for him, his sons and grandsons, out of which 17 were Rajput-Mughal alliances. Akbar's successors as Mogul emperors, his son Jahangir and grandson Shah Jahan had Rajput mothers. The ruling Sisodia Rajput family of Mewar made it a point of honor not to engage in matrimonial relationships with mughals and thus claimed to stand apart from those Rajput clans who did so. The Rana of Mewar Pratap Singh had successfully resisted the efforts of Akbar to subdue the Mewar kingdom.

Akbar's diplomatic policy regarding the Rajputs was later damaged by the intolerant rules introduced by his great-grandson Aurangzeb. A prominent example of these rules included the re-imposition of Jaziya, which had been abolished by Akbar. The Rajputs then revolted against the Mughal empire. Aurangzeb's conflicts with the Rajputs, which commenced in the early 1680s, henceforth became a contributing factor towards the downfall of the Mughal Empire.

In the 18th century, the Rajputs came under influence of the Maratha Empire.

By the late 18th century, the Rajput rulers begin negotiations with the East India Company and by 1818 all the Rajput states had formed an alliance with the company.

The Turkish Invasion (1000 AD – 1206 AD) –

North India during this period was raided by Mahmud of Ghazni. He sacked Somnath temple many a times.

The Battles of Tarain, also known as the Battles of Taraori, were fought in **1191** and **1192** near the town of Tarain (Taraori), near Thanesar in present-day Haryana, approximately 150 kilometers north of Delhi, India, between a Ghurid force led by Mu'izz al-Din and a Chauhan Rajput army led by Prithviraj Chauhan.

Prithviraj Chauhan defeated Ghuri in the first battle of Tarain but was defeated by Ghuri in the second battle. With this comes the rule of the **Sultan of Delhi (Delhi Sultnate)**.

The Slave Dynasty (1206 AD – 1290 AD) –

Ghuri gave the commands of his reign to his slave Aibak. Aibak broke his links with Ghazni to establish Slave Dynasty. Aibak was succeeded by Iltutmish. He **built Qutub Minar** and during this period Delhi became the capital of India.

The Slave Dynasty, directed into India by Qutb-ud-din Aibak, a Turkish general of Central Asian birth, was the first of five unrelated dynasties to rule India's Delhi Sultanate from **1206** to **1290**. Aibak's tenure as a Ghurid administrator ranged between 1192 to 1206, a period during which he led invasions into the Genetic heartland of India and established control over some of the new areas.

Ruler	Reign	Notes
Qutb-ud-din Aibak	(1206–1210)	Slave of Muhammad Ghori and founder
Aram Shah	(1210–1211)	Eldest son of Aibak
Shams-ud-din Iltutmish	(1211–1236)	Son-in-law of Aibak
Rukn ud din Firuz	(1236)	Son of Iltutmish.
Razia Sultana	(1236–1240)	Daughter of Iltutmish, Grand Daughter of Aibak.
Muiz ud din Bahram(child hood name Nasir)	(1240–1242)	Son of Iltutmish.
Alauddin Masud	(1242–1246)	Son of Rukn-ud-din Firuz.
Nasiruddin Mahmud	(1246–1266)	Youngest son of Nasir-ud-din Mahmud (Grandson of Aibak, Iltutmish's eldest son, and Razia's Brother who had died in 1229).

The Khiljis (1290 AD – 1320 AD) –

Delhi Sultanate was taken over by Jalaluddin Khilji. But he was murdered by Alauddin Khilji who then took over his position. Khilji ruled most of the South India.

The Khilji who ruled large parts of South Asia from **1290 - 1320**. They were the second Muslim dynasty to rule the Delhi Sultanate of India. Led by their powerful ruler, Ala-ud-din Khilji, they are noted in history for repeatedly defeating the warring Mongols.

Ruler	Reign	Notes
Jalal ud din Firoz Khilji	1290–1296	Son of Qaim Khan (Yulak Khan of Qunduz), and also the founder of the Khilji Dynasty.
Ala-ud-din Khilji	1296–1316	Nephew of Jalal ud din Firoz Khilji and the most powerful ruler of Khilji period.
Qutb ud din Mubarak Shah	1316–1320	Nasiruddin Khusro shah

The Tughlaqs (1320 AD – 1412 AD) –

The Tughluq dynasty of north India started in 1321 in Delhi when Ghazi Tughluq assumed the throne under the title of Ghiyas ud-Din Tughluq. The Tughluqs were a Muslim family of Turkic origin. Their rule relied on their alliances with Turkic, Afghan, and other Muslim warriors from outside South Asia.

Sayyid Dynasty-

The Sayyid dynasty ruled Delhi sultanate in India from 1414 to 1451. They succeeded the Tughlaq dynasty and ruled that sultanate until they were displaced by the Lodi dynasty. This family claimed to be Sayyids, or descendants of Muhammad. The central authority of the Delhi Sultanate had been fatally weakened by the successive invasion of Timur (Tamerlane) and his sack of Delhi in 1398. After a period of chaos, when no central authority prevailed, the Sayyids gained power in Delhi. They remained a vassal of the Timurid of Central Asia. Their 37-year period of dominance witnessed the rule of four different members of the dynasty.

Ruler	Reign
Khizr Khan	1414–1421

Mubarak Shah	1421–1434
Muhammad Shah	1434–1445

Lodi dynasty –

Lodi dynasty was a Ghilzai Afghan dynasty, who ruled over the Delhi Sultanate during its last phase. The dynasty was founded by Bahlol Khan Lodi (the Governor of the Punjab he had origins or was from an Afghan tribe) ruled from **1451 to 1526**. The last ruler of this dynasty, Ibrahim Lodi was defeated and killed by Babur in the first Battle of **Panipat** on April **20, 1526**.

Ruler	Reign	Notes
Bahlul Lodi	1451–1489	Founder of the Lodi Dynasty
Sikander Lodi	1489–1517	Most prominent ruler of the Lodi Dynasty who founded Agra city
Ibrahim Lodi	1517–1526	Defeated by Babur in the First battle of Panipat in 1526 and thus ending the Delhi Sultanate. He was the only ruler of the Delhi Sultanate to die in battle. All others, either died of health issues or accidents

The Mughal Empire (1526 AD – 1857 AD):

The Sultans of Delhi were replaced by the Mughals who were great patronage of art, music, culture and architecture. They ruled strongly till **1707** and after this the Mughal Empire weakened and disintegrated. Zahir-ud-din Muhammad Babur founded the Mughal Empire by defeating Abraham Lodhi at Panipat in 1526. Babur recorded all his experiences in Tuzuk-i-Baburi. The word Mughal has its origin in Babur's Mongol ancestry. In **1530** Babur's son Humayun came into power. A battle at Kanauj in **1540** brought Sher Shah into power but again Humayun recaptured Delhi and Agra. He re-established Mughal rule in India. He was succeeded by his son Akbar. He was the great emperor and brought almost entire India under his rule. Jahangir, Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb are the other Mughal kings.

List of Mughal emperors

Emperor	Birth	Birth	Death
Babur	23 February 1483	23 February 1483	30 December 1530
Humayun	6 March 1508	6 March 1508	Jan 1556
Sher Shah Suri	1472	1472	May 1545
Islam Shah Suri	c. 1500	c. 1500	1554
Humayun	6 March 1508	6 March 1508	Jan 1556
Hemachandra Vikramaditya	Unknown	Unknown	1556
Akbar	14 November 1542	14 November 1542	27 October 1605
Jahangir	Oct 1569	Oct 1569	1627
Shah Jahan	5 January 1592	5 January 1592	1666
Aurangzeb	21 October 1618	21 October 1618	3 March 1707
Bahadur Shah I	14 October 1643	14 October 1643	Feb 1712

The Great Marathas (1674 AD – 1819 AD) –

The Maratha Empire or the Maratha Confederacy was an Indian power that existed from 1674 to 1818 and ruled over much of the Indian sub-continent. The Marathas are credited to a large extent for ending the Mughal rule in India. The Marathas are Hindu warrior group from the western Deccan Plateau (present day Maharashtra) that rose to prominence by establishing a Hindavi Swarajya. The Marathas became prominent in the seventeenth century under the leadership of Shivaji who revolted against the Adil Shahi dynasty and the Mughal Empire and carved out a kingdom with Raigad as his capital. Known for their mobility, the Marathas were able to consolidate their territory during the Mughal–Maratha Wars and later controlled a large part of India.

Chhatrapati Shahu, grandson of Shivaji, was released by Mughals after the death of Emperor Aurangzeb. Following a brief struggle with his aunt Tarabai, Shahu became ruler and appointed Balaji Vishwanath and later, his descendants, as the peshwas or prime ministers of the empire. Balaji and his descendants played a key role in expansion of Maratha rule. The empire at its peak stretched from Tamil Nadu in the south to Peshawar (modern-day Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan in the north, and Bengal and Andaman Islands in the

east. In 1761, the Maratha Army lost the Third Battle of Panipat to Ahmad Shah Abdali of the Afghan Durrani Empire which halted their imperial expansion into Afghanistan. Ten years after Panipat, the young Peshwa Madhavrao I's Maratha Resurrection reinstated Maratha authority over North India.

Bhakti Movement

Sufis and saints were famous religious gurus in medieval period. Along with them were the Bhakti saints whose teachings were also very popular. GuruNanak dev ji, Ramanuja, Ramananda, Kabir, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Mirabai, Namadeva are few of the great saints of that time. Almost every saint in Medieval period challenged the caste system, emphasized oneness of God, brotherhood of all human beings. Under Bhakti movement no one was discriminated on the basis of caste or gender.

Art and painting

Painting was another important area that was flourished to a great extent during this period. Persian art came to India with Humayun who brought painters with him to India. Most of the art got influenced by the Islamic culture. Mughal School of painting kept flourishing under the rule of Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan. Jahangir was a great painter and under his rule the Mughal School of painting reached at its peak. He had many famous painters in his court. Along with the Mughal School of painting, the Rajput and the Pahari schools of painting also got support. Beautiful landscapes were introduced by the Mughals. Rural art and social scenes from daily life became prominent.

Medieval period was the marvelous period and an era of wars and great architecture in India. Also most of the regional languages of today have evolved during this period. This period is also important from the religious point of view because of many Bhakti movements and saints such as Guru Nanak Dev ji, Ramananda, Kabir etc. Suffi saints such as e Chishti, Firdausi, and Nizam-ud-din Auliy were also there during medieval period. Regional as well as folk traditions developed to a great extent.

Conclusion -

Medieval period in an important period of India because of the development in the field of art and languages, culture and religion.

Akbar's reign is known as the **Golden age** of the Mughal Empire. He laid the foundation of a secular state based on the principles of religious tolerance, universal brotherhood and political unity.