
Chapter 1

Tracing Changes Through a Thousand Years

❖ Maps

- Maps are an important source of information regarding historical changes.
- The degrees of accuracy of maps, such as those from twelfth century to eighteenth century, indicate the advances in knowledge and the information available to the people living in those times.
- Changes in names of geographical places can also be traced through historical maps. The context of the information available in the maps is also important.

❖ Difference in meaning of terminologies

- The significance, usage and meanings of terminologies change over time.
- In thirteenth century, the word Hindustan, used by Minhaj-i Siraj, meant the areas of Punjab, Haryana and lands between the Ganga and Yamuna. In modern times, the same word denotes the modern nation-state of India in its entirety.
- The context changed from geographical and cultural to political.
- In modern context, foreigner means a person who is not Indian. During the medieval period, a foreigner was any stranger who appeared in a village or city. It referred to a person who was not a part of that society or culture.

❖ Historians and their sources

- Different types of sources are used by historians to learn about the past, depending on the period being studied and the nature of the investigation.
- The major sources of historical information are coins, architecture, inscriptions and textual records.
- The period from 700 AD to 1750 AD saw an increase in the number of textual records. The reason was easy availability of paper and its low cost.
- It enabled people to write holy texts, chronicles, letters and teachings of saints, petitions, judicial records, and registers of accounts and taxes. These slowly replaced the older sources of information.
- Wealthy people, rulers, monasteries and temples collected manuscripts which were placed in libraries and archives.
- Manuscripts still had to be copied manually. Variations in handwritten copies of the same manuscript developed due to lack of adequate technologies like printing. This made it difficult for historians to interpret textual records.

❖ Social and political groups

-
- The scale, variety of events and developments that occurred over the period from 700 AD and 1750 AD is enormous, making it challenging for the historians.
 - New technologies in irrigation, agriculture, crafts and warfare were ushered in the subcontinent during this period. New crops like potato and tea, which later became very important, were also introduced with the arrival of new people. As such, it was a period of economic, political, social and cultural changes.
 - Travelling for trade and exploration also increased during this period.
 - Rajputs, a group of warriors who claimed Kshatriya status, gained in importance during this period. The Marathas, Sikhs, Jats, Ahoms and Kayasthas also became important.
 - Clearing of forests in order to expand agriculture, forced many forest dwellers to migrate or become peasants.
 - Societies became complex and acquired hierarchies. Peasants were required to pay taxes and offer goods and services to local lords.
 - Economic and social differences, based upon amount of land, cattle and craftsmanship, emerged amongst peasants.
 - Sub-castes or *jatis* became the primary factor of social differentiation. They had their own rules and regulations, enforced by a *jati panchayat* or an assembly of elders.
 - Ranks varied according to power, influence and resources controlled by the members of the caste.

❖ **Region and empire**

- Various dynasties gained ascendancy over different regions, leading to the rise of kingdoms and empires.
- The notable dynasties of the period were the Cholas, Khaljis, Tughluqs and Mughals.
- The Mughals were the most successful in building a vast empire.
- After their decline in the eighteenth century, regional states re-emerged, but Mughal influence on administration, governance, and economy was still visible.
- The creation of large empires, encompassing various regions, led to a fusion of traits. At the same time, each region was successful in preserving its individual culture.

❖ **Religions**

- Religion was the main force behind social and economic organisation of local communities. Religious beliefs were shaped by social conditions.

-
- Important changes occurred in Hinduism during this period. They included the worship of new deities, royal patronage of temples and growing importance of Brahmanas, the priests, as dominant groups in the society.
 - Knowledge of Sanskrit texts earned the Brahmanas a lot of respect in society.
 - The idea of *bhakti* – of a loving, personal deity that devotees could reach without the support of priests or rituals, evolved during this time.
 - The teachings of Islam were also introduced through migrants and merchants. They were widely interpreted by their followers, leading to the emergence of various sects and schools of law.

❖ **Time and historical periods**

- In the context of history, time reflects changes in ideas, beliefs and socio-economic conditions of people. For making historical assessments convenient, time is divided into periods on the basis of similarities in characteristics of events or phenomena.
- British historians divided India's history into three periods: "Hindu", "Muslim" and "British", giving precedence to the religion of rulers rather than changes in the economy, society and culture. Modern historians focus on economic and social factors, dividing history into ancient, medieval and modern periods.
- The medieval period of Indian history saw the rise of regional states, formation of peasant societies and the influence of Hinduism and Islam.
- The arrival of European trading companies, who were attracted by the economic prosperity of the region, was amongst the most important events of this period.