



UGC-NET

History

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HISTORY

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Unit-4

Sources of Medieval Indian History

Sources of Medieval History

Compared to the history of ancient India, a large number of reliable sources are available to provide good deal of insight and knowledge about the conditions of Medieval Indian history. There are plenty of written records, available which deals with the art and architecture, agriculture and industry, commerce and trade, culture and civilization, philosophy and religion of that time.

The period between the 8th and the 18th centuries is termed as the medieval period in India. Sources could be categorized into different categories as follows

Archaeological Sources

Literary Sources

Chronicles

Foreign Traveler Accounts

Archaeological Sources

Archaeological include inscriptions, coins monuments, painting, weapons and other antiquities. They are of immense value in the reconstructions of the socio cultural and political history of Medieval India.

The history of early medieval India witnessed from inscriptional sources, is more realistic and holistic than the literary sources which are inscriptions that offer a view of history, which has far more diverse group of people engaged in a larger range of activities and a broader spectrum of society.

Inscriptions capture and preserve discrete moments in time as a record of specific events. They are almost customarily dated and are generally situated, where they were originally placed.

Inscriptions gives us a diversified picture o society and are a more reliable primary sources of information about the people in this period of time.

Until the 1960 inscriptions were mainly read in order to build a chronological framework for regional dynasties, so it was only the tenure of kings and the important political events mentioned in them, that interested scholars.

Inscriptions

There are many Sanskrit inscriptions, which were inscribed by mercantile community during the reign of various Sultans of Delhi. They had mainly one central concern and that was recording of gift and patronage. However, these inscriptions were slightly different from contemporary chronicles and did not deal with political aspects only.

There are a number of remarkable 13th century epigraphs in Delhi, which have largely composed by the merchant families of the area e.g. the well known Palam Baoli inscriptions of AD 1276. The inscriptions is in Sanskrit and was authored by Pandita Yogisvara. It contains the genealogy of Thakkura Udadhara, a Purapati in Siriyoginipura. He has been credited with having constructed numerous dharamshalas and wells to the East of Palam.

The inscription also mention the contemporary rulers of Delhi, starting with Sihab ud -in and coming up to Ghiyas -ud-din Balban.

A Similar Genealogy is present in the Sarban Stone inscription of AD 1378 found in the Raisina area of Delhi. The inscription mentions that the city of Dilli was built by he Tomaras. Inscriptions are in a sense, literary texts of a particular kind.

Large number of inscriptions have been found from the Mughal building such as Dewan-e-khas of Red fort in Delhi where many phrases are inscribed the roof of the building.

Although they record certain past activates and areas that are likely to be of interest to us, they do so in ways that were considered meaningful and useful to their contemporary audience. To attain best results, inscriptional information should be supplemented with a study of other contemporary sources.

Numismatic Material

Edward Thomas was the first among the modern historiographers of medieval India, to make extensive use of numismatics. Coins are not only a valuable source for reconstructing the dates of historical events, but they also give us and insight into the economic conditions of the period.

Medieval states with their ruling dynasties and kings, issued their own coins. Since these coins were controlled and monitored by the state, they provide us with an almost paralleled series of historical documents.

Coins shed light on diverse facts about rulers, their names, dynasties, their thoughts and actions. However gold coins are rare, silver, coins are few in number and copper coins are even rarer in 12th century India as compared to the Gupta era. This has been attributed to the invasions of Mahmud of Ghaznavi, who may have taken away coins as booty. Apart from history, coins have also an aesthetic and artistic value.

Coinage Advent of the Muslims in India

With the advent of the Muslims in India, coinage assumed an entirely new pattern. The coins of earlier times had pictorial of heraldic devices at least on one side. During the Turkish rule, the Sultanate coins carried inscriptions on both sides either in Arabic or in Persian script.

Muhammad Ghori, after defeating Prithviraj Chauhan and his allies in the second Battle of Thaneswara in 1192 struck gold coins in imitation of the coins that were current in the country. Each coins had the name Sri Mohammad Bin Sam, inscribed in Nagari upon it and on the obverse, was placed an image of the seated Lakshmi.

Coinage During the Delhi Sultanate

Iltutmish issued silver Coins with several legends inscribed upon the. One of the most important is that, which has the name of the Abbasid Khalifa al Mustansir on one, side. During the Turkish rule, the Sultanate coins carried inscriptions on both sides either in Arabic or in Persian script.

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Ala ud din Khilji, who had enhanced his treasury by his conquests in the Deccan and South India, issued a number of coins. The gold and silver coins, from the very beginning of their issue by Sultans of Delhi are identical of terms of content. They weigh 170 grains, which was the weight of 1 tola of gold.

Ghiyas ud din Tughlaq followed the pattern of the Khilji coinage and issued coins in all three metals gold, silver and copper. But his son, Mohammad Bin Tughlaq was very revolutionary in his ideas.

He surpassed his predecessors in the execution of coins, especially in the matter of calligraphy. His coinage is the expansion of the mint system. His coins are known to have been struck at Delhi, Darul Islam, Dhar, Lakhnauti, Satgaon, Sultanpur, Mulki I tilangana and Deogir.

In AD 1329-1330, Mohammad Bin Tughlaq made a very brave venture of issuing token currency.

Thus coins remain one of the key sources of studying the economic history of the early medieval kingdoms, the Delhi Sultanate and the regional kingdom of the time. They could also be used as a corroborative source for the political and social history of medieval times.

Coinage During the Mughal Dynasty

During the rule of Mughal dynasty coinage witnessed advancement in standard metals such as gold, silver and zinc were used in making coins. According to literary sources of Abul Fazal in 1575 AD there were around 42 mints for making copper coins, 14 for silver coins and 4 for the gold coins.

Babur introduced silver coin Shahrak in Kabul and Babri in Kandhar Shershah stopped minting of mix coin and on the place it introduced coin made up of pure gold silver and copper, gold coin were known as asrafi, silver coin as rupiya and copper as dam.

Under his regime exchange rate of silver and cooper coin was in the ratio of 1:64 First rupee coin was introduced by Shershah which was made up of silver and weight 180 gains.

Gold coins during Akbar reign were as follows

- Muhar was most popular equal to 9 Rupee gold coin
- Sansab largest among gold coin
- IIIIagu was curcykar ub snape
- Rahas ($5\frac{1}{2}$ Tola)
- Binsa (20 Tola)
- Chugal or Lal Jalali was of less weight

Jahangir issued Salami coins. From this time portrait of king was minted on the coins and many Hindu Symbols were also present. Nur Afsafan and Khair were important coin of his reign.

After him Shah Jahan also took interest in coinage, he issued coin named ana. Its value was in between dam and rupee. One rupee was equal to 16 ana.

During Aurangzeb reign large number of coins were minted, poem of Mirabdul Baki were enshrined on the coins.

Coinage During Vijaynagara Empire

Vijayanagara ruler new coins Varah was made up of gold. It had a weight of 52 grains. Many foreign writers have mentioned it in their work. Small coins of gold were known as Pratap and small coin of silver were known as Taar. Images of God and other mythical things were present on the coins.

From the excavation of coasted areas different types of foreign coins have been collected. All these coins gave vivid information about the medieval age.

Monuments

The most important sources for the study of architecture are the surviving remains of the buildings themselves, also referred to as monuments. These enable us to grasp architectural techniques and styles typical to the period. Monuments provide an insight into construction technologies. Of these, mosques are the most representative forms of architecture, as they are primarily a fusion of the Indian and Seljuk traditions, often termed as Indo Islamic.

The monuments of Medieval India are indispensable aid to the proper understanding of artistic cultural and economic history of that time.

The Persian and central influence on early medieval Indian architecture is more than self evident. We find that the concept and designing of the Qutub Minar was considerably influenced by the jam and siah posh minarets in Afghanistan. The earliest evidence of the arch in India is found in the Quwwat ul Islam mosque and later in the tomb of Iltutmish.

The Khilji architecture as revealed in Alai Darwaza at the Qutub complex and the AJamat Khana Masjid at Nizam-ud-din underwent a marked change in style. This phase occupies a key position in Indo Islamic architecture as it is deeply influence by the Seljuk architectural traditions.

The characteristic feature of the Khilji phase include the employment of a true arch, the emergence of a true dome with recessed arches under the squinch and the emergence of new masonry consisting of a narrow course of headers, alternating with a much wider course of stretchers. In addition, the decorative features characterized by calligraphy, geometry and arabesque now became much bolder and profuse.

Important Monuments of the Sultanate Period

Some important monuments of Sultanate period were

Quwwat ul Islam

Quwwat ul Islam built by Qutub ud din Aibak, was the first mosque in India build on Indo Islamic pattern. It was originally a Jain temple and was later converted into a Vishnu temple.

Qutub Minar

Qutub Minar built by Qutub ud din Aibak, completed by Iltutmish, Firuz Shah Tughlaq added two stories and increased its height from 225 to 240 ft.

Tomb of Iltutmish

Tomb of Iltutmish located near Quwwat ul Islam mosque.

Alai Darwaza

Alai Darwaza built by Ala ud din Khilji, this door to the Qutub Minar contains a dome, which was for the first time built on correct scientific lines.

Siri,

Siri Hauz Khas, Mahal Hazar Satoon, Jamait Khana Mosque all built by Ala ud din Khilji.

Tughlaqabad

Tughlaqabad build by Ghaiyas -ud-din Tughlaq.

Jahanpanah

Jahanpanah built by Mohammad Bin Tughlaq.

Firozabad

Firozabad built by Firzo Shah Tughlaq.

Balbab's Tomb

Balbab's Tomb situated near Qila Rai Pithora.

Monumnets of Vijayanagar Empire

Architecturally, Vijaynagara synthesies the centuries old Dravida tmple architecture with Islmaic styles influenced by the neighboring sultanates. The sculpture of Vijayanagara also incorporates the eclectic mix of Chola ideals as well as foreign contribution.

Some Important Monuments of Vijayanagar Empire

Virupakasha Temple

The Virupaksha Temple also called the Pampavathi Temple located in Hampi Bazaar is one of the earliest monuments of hampi even preceding the foundation of the Vijayanagara Empire.

Lotus Mahal

The first glance at this elegant two storeyed pavilion is all it takes to identify the Indo Islamic influences in the architecture. Lotus Mahal is part of the Zenana enclosure and is one of the well preserved monuments in Hampi.

Elephant Stables

Elephant Stables like Lotus Mahal, Elephant Stables appear in good shape. A series of 11 chambers overlook a huge ground which must have been used for royal parades. These domed chambers have high ceilings and are entered through arched gates.

Achyutaraya Temple

Achyutaraya temple is part of a complex which used to be of a huge significance to the royals. Though the temple is named after a king, it was actually built by his brother in law in 1534. The deity here is Tiruvengalanatha a form of Vishnu.

Someshwara Temple

The Someshwara temple is situated in Kolar town of Karnataka state, India. It was constructed during 14th century Vijaynagara era in Dravidian style. The temple is protected by the Archaeological survey of India as a monument of national importance.

Krishna Temple

Krishnadevaraya, the most well known ruler of Vijayanagara, built this temple in 1516 to celebrate his conquest of the hill port of Udaygiri. Though not being functional, this temple is a beautiful monument.

Provincial Architecture

Contemporary to later Sultanate dynasty Bengal, Jaunpur, Malwa and Gujarat saw the emergence of unique and independent provincial styles.

For instance, Atala Mosque Lal Darwaza Mosque etc in Jaunpur, Lal Mosque in Malwa, Fort of Mandu. Teen Darwaza in Gujarat are the example of provincial Architecture. Large Number of mosque and other building were constructed by the provincial kingdom of Bengal Kashmir, Vijayanagara and Bahmani.

Mughal Architecture

The centralization of power during Mughal era is reflected in its patronage of music, dance painting sculpture etc. As a result of this the personal choices of Mughal rulers affected the architecture of their time. Distinct forms of architecture flourished during the reign of Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan.

Babur

Many of the buildings were repaired by Babur, and hence it is difficult to obtain a true impression of his artistic indulgence. He took special interest in the construction of gardens and gave due attention to the geometry and plan outlay.

Humayun also was devoid of time to construct any significant building. He constructed two mosques remains of which can be found. He laid the foundation of a new city called Dinpanah.

Akbar

The tomb of Humayun is the first distinct example of proper Mughal architecture.

Humayun tomb stands in the centre of a square garden, divided into four main parts by causeways in the centre of which ran shallow water channels. The square red sandstone, double storeyed structure of the mausoleum rises over a high square terrace, raised over a series of cells which are like a musical composition.

Other important monuments of his time were Jahangiri Mahal, Dewan I Aam, Panch Mahal, Jodha Bai Palace, Birbal palaces, Buland Darwaza, Allahabad fort etc.

Jahangir

The architectural activity during Jahangir's reign is comparatively limited. During the reign of Jahangir from 1605-1627 AD the decline in the Hindu influence on the Mughal architecture was witnessed. His style was Persian. His great Mosque at Lahore is a covered tomb of Itimad ud Daula with enameled tiles. Akbar Mausoleum was built during his rule.

Shah Jahan

The golden period of Mughal architecture can be said to start from the reign of Shah Jahan. This period achieved the perfection in the use of marble in architecture. Possibly the marble was imported from the Makaran mines near Jodhpur. Pietra Dura was extensively used for decoration during this period.

Foliated Arches became the specialty of this period. The dome was inflated form outside and was thin necked.

Instead of carving out geometrical shapes, the floral designs became popular during this period. Taj Mahal, Diwan-i-Aam, Moti Mosque, Agra fort etc were the famous buildings in Shah Jahan's reign.

Literary Sources

The literary sources during the Medieval India can be classified as Persian and non Persian i.e. Sanskrit and Regional Literature.

Persian Literature in Medieval India

The diversity and volume of source material suddenly increases for the 13th and 14th centuries.

This was largely because of the fact that during this Persian texts. Persians sources of the Sultanate period are regarded as historical records and have a chronological narrative style and provide us with an accurate description of statecraft of the kings and his subordinates, politics and events of the period.

Some of the important Persian works written in medieval period are mention below

Chach Nama

The Chach Nama was originally writtern in Arabic. Later on it was translated into Persian by Muhammad Ali bin Abu Bakar Kufi in the time of nasir ud din Qubacha. This work gives a history of the Arab conquest of Sindh and is our main source of information of that subject.

Tabquat I Nasiri

The Tabquat I Nasiri was written by Milinhaj us Siraj. It has been translated into English by Raverty. It is a contemporary work and was completed in AD 1260. It gives us a first hand account of the conquest of India by Muhammad Ghori and also the history of the delhi Sultanate up to AD 1260.

Tarikh I Firozshahi

The Tarikh I Firozshahi was written by zia ud Din barani. The author was a contemporary of Ghiyas ud Din Tughlaq, Muhammad bin Tughlaq and Firoz Tughla. Barani brings the story form Balban to Firoz Tughlaq. He gives a very useful account of the history of the Slave dynasty, the Khaljis and the Tughlaqs.

Tarik I Firozshahi

The Tarikh I Firozshahi of Shams I Siraj Afif deals with the history of the reign of Firuz tughlaq. The author was himself a member of the court of Firuz Tughlaq. The work of Afif was written not long after the capture of Delhi by Timur in 1398-99.

Sirat I Forzshah

The Sirat I Firozshahi was written around the year AD 1370. It is contemporary account which was very useful for the reign of Firuz Tughlaq.

Fatawah I Jahandari

The Sirat I Firozshahi was written around the year AD 1370. It is a contemporary account which was very useful for the reign of Firuz Tughlaq.

Fatawah-I-Jahandari

The Fatawah I Jahandari was written by Zia ud uin Barani. This was completed in the 14th century. The author gives his own views about the secular policy of the government. The book gives an idea of the ideal political code which the Muslim rulers to follow.

Futuh- al- Salatin

The Futuh al Salatin was written by Khwaja Abu Malik Isami in AD 1349. It was intended to be the Shah Nama of Hindustan. The author migrates from Delhi to Daulatabad during the reign of Muhammad Tughluq.

Tarikh I Salatin I Afghan

The Tarikh I Salatin I Afghan was written by Ahmad Yadgar. It deals with the history of the Afghans in India. It was very useful for the rule of the Lodhi dynasty. The author commences his work with the accession of Bahlol Lodhi in 1451.

Tarik I Muhammadi

The Tarikh I Muhammadi was completed in 1438-39 by Muhammad Bihamad Khani. The author did not belong to the Ulema class but was a member of the military class. It also contains the history of the Sultans of Delhi Timur, biographies of Saints and the struggles of the Sultans of Kalpi with their Hindu and Muslim neighbours.

Tuzuk-i-Baburi

It is the autobiography of the Mughul emperor Babur, written in Turkish, It was translated by several persons in Persian during the period of the Mughals. Afterwards, it has been translated into several European languages including English and French.

The Tuzuk-I-Baburi or Baburnama has provided us information not only concerning the events of life of Babur but also about his character, personality, knowledge, capability, weakness, merriments etc.

Tarikh-I-Rashidi

It was written by Mirza Mahammad Haider Dughlah who was a cousin of Emperor Babur. It was written in Persian. Mirza Haider was a witness to many events during the reign of Babur and Humayun, Fought with Humayu, against Sher Shah at the battle of Kannauj, conquered a part of Kashmir on the direction of Humayun and finally died there.

Humayun nama

It was a written in Persian by Gulbadan Begum the daughter of Babur and real sister of Prince Hindal. It was written during the reign of Akbar at his instructions. She described the later events of the rule of Babur and the events of the reign of the emperors but emphasized on the character, personalities and family relations of the emperors. Therefore, the historical importance of the text is reduced.

Tarikh-I-Sher Shahi or Tauhfa-I-Akbar-Shahi

It was written by Abbas Khan Sarwani in Persian at the instruction of Akbar. Only a part of it is available. Abbas Khan Sarwani described only those events which he could come to known from those of his close relatives or other people who were in known of things.

He Also described the source material of every event which he mentioned in the text so that its readers might not doubt the authenticity of his writing. Therefore, Tarikh-I-Sher Shahi has been regarded as an authentic source material.

Waqiyat-I-Mustaq

Shaikh Rizakullah Mushtaqi wrote it in Persian. Mushtaqi did not write elaborately concerning Sher Shah though he certainly described the important events of his reign. We however find the description of Islam Shah and his successors in his text.

Tarikh-I-Firishta

Firishta wrote this text while he was in the service of Adil Shah II, the ruler of Bijapur. His text is a history of India during the medieval period. Firishta consulted several Persian texts while preparing his text. Tarikh-I-Firishta has been regarded as a renowned historical text and an authentic one.

Akbar Nama

It was written by Abul Fazal in Persian. It has been divided into three parts. The first part deals with the history of the Mughals from the reign of Amir Timur to the reign of Humayun. The second and the third parts has been given the history of the rule of Akbar up to the year AD 1602.

While describing the events Abul Fazal gave an introduction to each of them in which he referred to the cause of that event. Describing the history of the reign of Babur, he tried to cover the gaps of Tuzuk-i-Baburi.

The Akbar Namas is a very useful source material of knowing the history of the Mughals. But it suffers from certain defects also.

Ain Akbari

It has also been written in Persian by Abul fazal. In it Abul fazal has not described the political events of the reign of Akbar but his administration, laws, rules regulations, etc. It has also been divided into three parts.

Abul Fazal narrated in it the facts concerning the royal treasury, the coinage, the Harem, the royal stable, court ceremonies, salaries and status of civil and military officers, justice and revenue administration. The Ain-I-Akbari has been regarded as a precious source material of knowing the culture and administration during the reign of Akbar.

Padshah Nama

It was written when Muhammad Amin Qazuini ws asked to discontinue the writing of the history of the regin of Shah Jahan, Abdul Hamid lahauri was assigned his task. He divided his text into two parts. When a later, the responsibility of completing the history of the rest of the period of Shah Jahan was assigned to his disciple Muhammad Waris. Muhammad Waris wrote the complete history of the reign of Shah Jahan.

Sanskrit and Regional Literature

(Non Persian)

The regionalization of Indian culture began with the emergence of various regional kingdoms. Regional languages had rich repositories of literature, which challenged the monopoly of Sanskrit literature.

Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, Marathi, Bengali, Assamese and Oriya attained their specific regional identity. During the Chola Period, education was based on the epics and the Puranas was imparted through temple discourses.

This period marked by the growth of Tamil classics like the *Sibakasindamani*, *Kamban Ramayana* and others. *Rajarajeshwara Natakam*, a play and *Rajaraja Vijayam*, a poem were based on Chola king *Rajaraja I*.

The Chalukya period also witnessed a phenomenal growth in literature, both in Sanskrit and in Kannada. *Bilhana*, the court poet of *Vikramaditya VI* was amongst the most eminent Sanskrit writers of the period. *Bilhana Vikramanka Charita* is an epic. The Great jurist *Vikramaditya* penned *Mitaksara*, a commentary on the *Yajnavalkya Smriti*. *Someswara II* was the author of an encyclopaedic work entitled *manasolasa*.

Kannada

Kannada literature reached its zenith under the Chalukyas. *Pampa*, *Ponna* and *Ranna* were the most worthy Kannada writers of the 10th century. *Nagavarma I* authored *Chandambudhia* prosodic work. He also wrote the *Karnataka kandambari*, which is based on *Bana* celebrated romance in Sanskrit. Another writer of note was *Dugasimha*, who wrote *Anchatantra*.

The Senas

The Senas gave a great impetus to the development of Sanskrit literature. *Bhaskaracharya* the famous astronomer and mathematician wrote *Sihant Siromani*, a treatise on algebra, composed in Sanskrit in 1150 and *Karankuthuhala*. The *Kakatiya* rulers extended liberal patronage to Sanskrit, Several eminent Sanskrit writer and poets authored inscriptions, which could well be understood as *kavya* works. Of these writers, *Achintendra* was commissioned by *Rudradeva* to compose the *Prasati* embodies in the *Anumakonda* inscription.

Telugu Literature

Telugu literature also flourished in the Kakatiya Kingdom. Several works on the Ramayana and Mahabharata were produced during this period. The earliest and the most popular work on the Ramayan is Tikkan Nirvachanoltatra Ramayanam.

Hindi originated as a language between the 7th and 10th centuries. Major literary works were made by the nirguna and Saguna saint poets and the mystic poets. Kabir, Guru Nanak, dadu and Sundaradasa were some of the nirguna poets. Tulsidas, Surdas, Mirabai etc were some of the pre eminent saguna poets.

Chronicles

The distinctive feature of the sources of the medieval period, especially after the establishment of Delhi Sultanate is that the number and variety of literary or textual records increased noticeably during this period. One of the possible reasons was that during this period, paper gradually became cheaper and was easy enough to procure.

Chronicles used it to write about the tenure of rulers, the events and political intrigues, petitions, judicial records, accounts and revenues. The teachings of saints and trader transactions were also duly recorded.

Medieval chronicles were authored either by court historians or by freelancers. Some of them came as travelers and wrote about India.

Foreign Traveler Accounts

Alberuni His real name was Abu Rehan Mahmud and he came to India along with Mahmud of Ghazni during one of his raids. He authored the book Kitab al Hind, which is a survey of Indian life based on Alberuni study and observations in the period between 1017 and 1030. Kitab al Hind also describes Indian customs and ways of life, festivals ceremonies and rites. It is and important source for studying society during the early years of the Turkish invasion.

Nicolo Conti

A venetian traveler he gave a comprehensive account of the kingdom of Vijaynagara.