

Lesson 8

INDIA BETWEEN AD 750–1200

Summary

The period between AD 750 and AD 1200 is referred to as an early medieval period of Indian History. Though politically divided, India witnessed a growth of new and rich cultural activities in the fields of art, literature and language. It may be treated as a bright and vibrant phase of Indian history about which you will read in this lesson.

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

- The period between AD 750 and AD 1200 is referred to as an early medieval period of Indian History
- If we divide the period from AD 750 to AD 1200 in two parts-
 - (a) AD 750–AD 1000 (b) AD 1000–AD 1200.
- The first phase was marked by the growth of three important political powers in India- Gurjara Pratiharas in north India, Palas in eastern India and Rashtrakutas in South India
- Armed conflict among these three powers is known as 'Tripartite struggle'
- In the second phase we notice the break up of these powers.
- It resulted in the rise of many smaller kingdoms all over the country.

NATURE OF STATE

- The state structure in this period has often been described as “decentralized” political system
- Decentralized polity is a system in which there is of course a king as the main authority at the top, but he shares his rule with other small chiefs called feudatories or the *samantas*.
- Another aspect the decentralized polity was characterized by the practice of making land grants to Brahmanas and others
- In the Chola kingdom in South India, the structure of administration was slightly different.
- At the village level, a great amount of autonomy was enjoyed by the local people.
- Two types of village assemblies are mentioned in the records.
- These were known as Sabha and Ur. Sabha
- These assemblies looked after the local public works, tax collection, temple management etc.
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SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGES

- Socially, an important phenomenon of medieval period was the proliferation or increase in the number of castes.
- The most important feature of this period was the rise of a new class of people called the Rajputs, such as Chahamanas, Paramaras, Pratiharas, Chandellas etc.
- Economically, the first phase, i.e, AD 750–AD 1000, is believed to be one of decline.
- It is evident from the absence of coins for exchange and the decayed condition of towns in northern India.
- But in the second phase after AD 1000, we notice a revival of trade activities.

CULTURAL DEVELOPMENTS

- The various art forms, languages, literature, etc. that form an important part of our regional cultures today, took their shape around this period.
- A famous work composed in the regional language around this time under the Cholas was the Tamil version of the *Ramayana*, composed by Kampan.
- Similarly in Karnataka, Pampa who is regarded as one of the jewels of Kanada literature composed *Vikramarjuna-vijaya*, known popularly as *Pampa Bharat*, in Kannada.
- Important works composed in Sanskrit around this period were the *kathasaritasagara*, *Rajtarangini*, and the *Gita Govinda*.
- Another activity that received royal patronage was that of temple – building.
- The three types of temple architecture which evolved during the period are known as the Nagara, Dravida and

Vesara (mixed) styles during this period.

- There was also great improvement in the art of making sculptures in this period
- An important contribution of Chola artists in this respect was the bronze images of Nataraja.

CONTACT WITH SOUTHEAST ASIA

- Jatakas the Buddhist texts belonging to this period refer to Indians visiting Suvarnadipa (island of gold), which is identified with Java.
- The Southeast contact was largely on account of trade.
- Southeast Asia is rich in cardamom, sandal wood, camphor, cloves etc. which formed important items of trade between India and the West.
- The most important empire which came to be founded in South East Asia in the 8th Century AD was the Shailendra empire.
- It comprised Java, Sumatra, Malay Peninsula and other parts of the Southeast Asian region.

Evaluate Yourself

Q. List the feature of Nagara style of architecture.

Q. Differentiate between Dravida and Vesara style of architecture.

Q. Mention the social and economic changes in the medieval period.