

## **A Perspective Approach on Periodization and Unity in Diversity in Indian History and Culture**

*S.M. Gulam Hussain, Lecturer in History  
Dept. of History, Osmania College (A), Kurnool, Andhra Pradesh*

### **ABSTRACT:**

*India has a rich, glorious and long cherished history. India occupies an important place not only in Asia but also in the Western countries from the historical and cultural points of view. The historiography of India reveals many significant changes over time. Historically and Archaeologically India is one of the richest sub-continent in the world. The archaeological wealth, scattered all over the country, speaks about the ancient glory. This land was important not only in the pre-historic period but also in the subsequent history even up to the British rule. The method of living and habits of the pre-historic folk was mainly based on the geographic, climatic and ecological factors, which are helpful to know something about the primitive man. Geographically India is situated between Arabian Sea in the west, Indian Ocean in the south, Bay of Bengal in the east and the mighty Himalayan mountain range in the north and Pakistan and Afghanistan on the North- West. The geography of any nation plays an important role in shaping the destiny of the nation. History relating to society, economy, culture and religion was explored and inter connections between them created interest. Historical research required technical expertise in the handling of a range of source materials from artefacts to texts, in addition to some understanding of theoretical procedures of analysis. This paper gives a perspective approach on the periodization and Unity in Diversity in Indian History and Culture.*

**Keywords:** *Historiography, Archaeology, Geography, Periodization, Unity in Diversity*

### **INTRODUCTION:**

The English word 'history' comes from the Greek historia (enquiry or investigation). History is essentially a discipline that enquires into the experiences of people who lived in the past. India is the name given to the vast peninsula which the continent of Asia throws out to the South of the magnificent mountain ranges that stretch in a sword like curve across the southern border of Tibet. This vast expanse of territory, which deserves the name of a subcontinent, has the shape of a quadrilateral. Ancients referred to it as being "constituted with a four-fold conformation, on its South, West and East is the great ocean, the Himavat range stretches along its North like the string of a bow". Politically, the Indian empire as it

existed before independence, extended beyond these natural boundaries at several points and included not only Baluchistan beyond Kirthar range, but also some smaller areas lay scattered in the Bay of Bengal and the area lay between Long. 61 and 96 E and Lat. 8 and 37 N. Its greatest length was about 1800 miles, and its breadth not less than 1360 miles. It was known as Bharatavarsha in Jambu-dwipa. The name "India" was applied to the country by the Greeks and medieval writers called it "Hindusthan". India is divided primarily into four distinct regions. They are:

- The hill country of the North
- The great northern plain
- The Deccan plateau of the South-Central India
- The long and narrow maritime plains containing the rich ports.

These territorial compartments marked by the hand of nature do not exactly coincide with the traditional division of the country known to antiquity. Geographically India is situated between Arabian Sea in the west, Indian Ocean in the south, Bay of Bengal in the east and the mighty Himalayan mountain range in the north and Pakistan and Afghanistan on the North- West. The geography of any nation plays an important role in shaping the destiny of the nation.

#### **SIGNIFICANCE OF HISTORY:**

History is a record of the achievements of man. The history of India, like the annals of every other country, should therefore begin with an account of the times when men first settled in this land. History was pivotal, since there was always a curiosity to compare the past with the present. History relating to society, economy, culture and religion was explored and inter connections between them created interest.

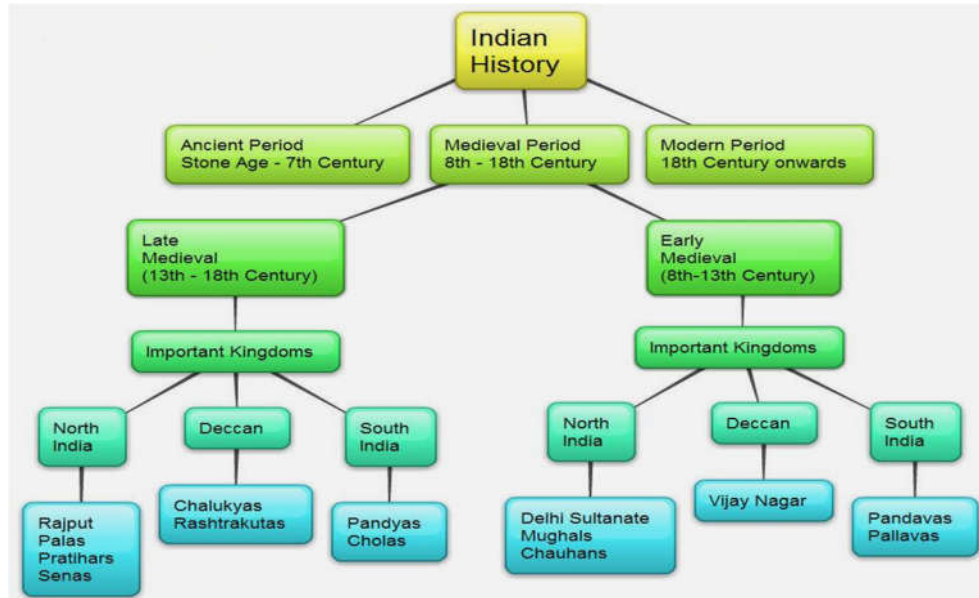
As G. R. Elton the historian, says "History treats fundamentally of the transformation of things (people, institutions, ideas, and so on) from one state into another, and the event is its concern as well as its instrument." In a sense, the study of history is a search for the truth and different cultures are the valuable repositories of different facets of the truth, seeing and appreciating it will enable us to understand the way we were, what we are today, and where we must go tomorrow.

#### **PERIODIZATION:**

Defining periods in history is important. But it is equally important to determine the cause of change, a question some time referred to as that of the transition from one period to other. The nature of transition is therefore becomes a significant aspect of periodization. Historians often classify the Indian history past by dividing it into different periods. For a long time, historians divided the Indian history into Hindu, Muslim and British periods. Later the Periodization of Indian history has been made as Pre-history, Proto-history, Early history, Medieval history and Modern history. The dividing lines may vary, but ancient period stretching roughly from earliest times to 6th century C. E. , the early-medieval from the 6th to 13th centuries C. E, the medieval from 13th to 18th centuries C. E, and Modern from 18th century to the present. The ancient history of the human past can be further divided into prehistory and Proto history.

The distinction between different periods is determined by the characteristics of polity, economy, technology, society and religion that were prevalent at the time, as well as some reference to the makers of events wherever available.

- The earliest traces of human existence in India, so far discovered, go back to the period between 3, 00, 000 and 2, 00, 000 BCE. A large number of primitive stone tools found in the Soan Valley and South India suggests this fact. The modern man being ( Homo Sepiens ) first appeared around 36, 000 BCE.



*Fig.1. Concept Map about Medieval Period Indian History [source: www.eduvictors.com]*

- Primitive man in the Paleolithic Age, ( Old Stone Age ) which lasted till 8000 BCE prepared tools of rough stone and used them for hunting the animals. Initially he was a food gatherer and depended on nature for his food. This Age covered the long period from the time the first ancestors started living in the rock shelters.
- The Archaeologists divided it into three phases –the Lower or Early, the Middle and Upper Palaeolithic Ages- according to the nature of the stone tools used by the people. He learnt to control fire, which helped him to improve his way of living. During the Early Stone Age, the principal tools were the handaxes, and cleavers, core tools made in a manner similar to handaxes, chopping tools of various types and flakes. Derived from those of Early Stone Age industries included flake tools, cores, and various kinds of scrapers.
- From 8000 BCE, the Mesolithic Age began and continued up to 4000 BCE. It is the intermediate or transitional stage between the Paleolithic and Neolithic Ages. The tools of this Age are called microliths (Small stone tools). During this time sharp and pointed tools were made for killing fast moving animals. Chotanagpur plateau, Central India and South of the river Krishna are some of the various Mesolithic sites.
- Third in the sequence is the Neolithic Age or New Stone Age that covered the period roughly from 4000 BCE to 1800 BCE and was marked by the use of polished stone tools. The man began to domesticate the animals and cultivate plants, settling down in villages to form farming communities. Wheel was an important discovery by him.

- Towards the end of the Neolithic period metals like, copper and bronze began to be used and this period was known as Chalcolithic Age and covered the period from 1800 to 1000 BCE. This period is marked by the use of copper as well as stone.

The general chronological sequence of the evolution of early man's culture in India was in the order of Early Stone Age to Late Stone Age through Middle Stone Age, it is important to remember that there has always been a considerable cultural overlap in this subcontinent. This means that the chronology of a culture in one region might not be the same chronology in another region. Some general characteristics of Indian prehistoric cultures have, however, been recognized. The territorial spread of such cultures, differing from one another in time and regional characteristics, covered the entire subcontinent from Kashmir to Karnataka Tamilnadu and Andhra. In these regional cultures lay the roots of the future formation of Indian village communities because their total cultural assemblage was certainly extremely significant in the context of the early historical settlements of the Iron Age.

#### ***Continuity with Change in Indian Civilization:***

The civilization of India has always been steadily changing. The civilization of Guptas was different from that of Mauryas, as that of medieval times was different again. The Muslims altered conditions considerably, and the high flowering of Indian Muslim civilization under the great Mughals brought yet more changes. The religious life of India, for all her ancient wisdom, has changed greatly over the centuries. Between the time of early Greek philosophers and that of St. Thomas Aquinas, Buddhism developed into a great religious movement in India, changed its outlook almost completely, declined finally sank back into the Hinduism from which it has emerged, but only after Buddhist missionaries had spread their message throughout Asia.

Political developments over the preceding period led to the first great empire of India, that of Mauryas, when for the first time most of the subcontinent was united under a single government. This period ( 320- 185 BCE ) produced the Machiavellian system of statecraft associated with the name of the minister Kautilya, the reputed author of the famous "Arthashastra". From the Mauryas also come the earliest surviving stone sculpture of India, the oldest artificial caves, and the most ancient caves, and the most ancient Buddhist Stupas. Under Asoka (272- 232 BCE), Buddhism increased its influence and spread to Ceylon.

The 500 years between the Mauryas and the Guptas saw tremendous developments in Indian civilization, partly due to fresh influence brought in by various invaders and traders, and partly the result of internal developments.

The period from Guptas to the death of Harshavardhana can truly be called the classical period of Indian civilization. In this age the greatest sculpture of ancient Indian as produced, the finest literature written, in the poems and plays of Kalidasa. This was the time for the excavation of cave temples in the Deccan, best Indian mural paintings, typified by Ajanta. Stone built temples appeared throughout the land.

The Sultanate period saw the introduction of new styles of architecture, bringing the dome and arch, which was hither to unknown in India and new schools of miniature paintings, both Muslim and Hindu. Sufi teachers disseminated the doctrines of Islam and helped in making the religious climate of Northern India favourable to the spread of popular

devotional Hinduism from the South. Paper was introduced replacing the traditional Indian writing materials – palm-leaf and birch-bark. The Urdu language began to appear as the lingua franca of Northern India and poets began to compose in the everyday languages instead of classical Sanskrit. The great days of Mughal Empire witnessed the perfection of the schools of Islamic architecture and miniature paintings, with the construction of splendid buildings like the TajMahal at Agra and other monuments at Delhi and at other places. Sikh religion was born at this time as a martial race to play an important part in the confused political life of the following century.

The 18th century saw the break-up of the mighty Mughal empire and the steady expansion of the power of the British East India Company. It was a time of general cultural decline in India, but the genius of the land was still at work. With the 19th century, the sub continent was exposed to the full force of Western influence, and innovations were too numerous to list. The East India Company was replaced by the British rule through the Governor- Generals or Viceroys upto 15th August 1947 the day on which India was given independence. India was declared Democratic Republic on 26th January 1956. This cursory survey of the history of India is sufficient in itself to show that, as long as civilization existed there, the country has never been stagnant, but has steadily developed through the ages. India has enjoyed itself over 4000 years of civilization, and every period of its history has left something to the present day.

#### **IMPORTANCE OF ANCIENT INDIAN HISTORY:**

The study of Ancient Indian History is important for several reasons. It tells us how, when and where people developed the earliest cultures in our country. It indicates how they started agriculture which made life secure and settled. It shows how the ancient Indians discovered and utilized natural resources, and created the means for their livelihood. We come to know how they took farming, spinning, weaving, metal working and so on, how they cleared forests, and found villages, cities, and finally large kingdoms.

The people are not considered civilized unless they know writing. The different forms of writing prevalent in India today are all derived from the ancient scripts. This is also true of the languages that we speak today. The languages we use have roots in ancient times, and have developed through the ages.

#### **UNITY IN DIVERSITY IN INDIAN HISTORY:**

Indian history has exhibited unity in diversity inspite of the existence of different races, communities, Tribes, food habits, dress, castes, languages, religious faiths, Customs and traditions in the sub- continent. These people live side by side harmoniously respecting the sentiments and religious beliefs of other communities. Since ancient times, India has been the land of several religions. Ancient India witnessed the birth of Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism; but all these cultures and religions intermingled and acted and reacted upon one another. Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and different tribal people have been living peacefully for several centuries in the sub-continent. Our country shows a deep underlying unity in spite of great diversity.

The unity of India was also recognized by the foreign invaders. They first came into contact with the people living on the Sindhu or the Indus, and so they named the whole country after this river. The word 'Hind' is derived from the Sanskrit term 'Sindhu' and in course of time the country came to be known as India, which is very close to the Greek.

Ancient Indian history is interesting because India proved to be a crucible of ethnic groups. The Pre-Aryans, the Indo-Aryans, the Greeks, the Scythians, the Huns, the Turks etc., made India their home. Each ethnic group contributed its might to the evolution of Indian culture. All these peoples mixed up so inextricably with one another that at present none of them can be clearly identified in their original form.

In Indian history, we find continuous efforts made through the ages for the linguistic and cultural unity of the country. In the 3rd century BCE, Prakrit served as the lingua franca of the country. Throughout the major portion of India, Ashoka's inscriptions were written in Prakrit language and Brahmi script. Later Sanskrit acquired the same position and served as the state language in the remote parts of the country. Another notable fact is that the ancient Epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata were studied with same zeal and devotion throughout the country. Indian history deserves our attention because of a peculiar type of social system developed in this country. Although the Indian values and ideas were expressed in different forms, the substance remained the same throughout the country.

The most important feature of the Indian climate is the monsoon which varies from region to region. Except along the West- Coast little rain falls from October to May, when cultivation can only be carried by carefully husbanding the waters of rivers and streams, and raising a winter crop by irrigation. The temperature of North India varies from the South India during summer months. It has been often said that the scale of natural phenomena in India, and her total dependence on the monsoon, have helped to form the character of her people. However, the underlying unity in integrity and the plural character of Indian society remain the real strength for the development of the country.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

From the above perspective, it is clear that India's enduring inheritance of climate, land, and people, the basis on which its high civilization has been built, and which will remain, more or less unchanging, to condition the lives of her people in all their triumphs. Hence, India has emerged as a multi religious and multi cultural society. The great achievement of India is its immense irrigation works and splendid temples, Mosques and Churches, Buddhist Stupas and Viharas and the long campaigns of their armies – do not suggest a devitalized people. The magnitude of the population of India is quite in keeping with the immensity of its geographical dimensions. This unity was undoubtedly nurtured in the nineteenth century by a uniform system of administration and the spread of education on modern lines. The success of the ancients in surmounting the difficulties presented by nature and human factors can build our hope and confidence in future. We have many survivals of ancient, medieval and later times persisting in the present day society.

#### **REFERENCES:**

1. Mazumdar, R.C. - An advanced History of India , New Delhi.
2. Romila Thapar- The History of India, New Delhi
3. Rao, G.R.S. - Regionalism in India. New Delhi. 1975.
4. Basham, A. L. – The wonder that was India
5. Gulam Yazdani - Early History of Deccan, Hyderabad.
6. Habib - Comprehensive History of India.
7. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Periodization & Unity in diversity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Periodization_%26_Unity_in_diversity)
8. <http://www.historydiscussion.net>
9. <https://www.inflibnet.ac.in/>