

INDIAN HISTORY AND PERIODISATION

In a strictly logical view, the history of any country is an indivisible unity in which ideas, events, and personalities act and react on one another, often in an obscure and intangible manner. But such complex wholes do not lend themselves to clear exposition or convenient study until they are broken up into manageable units, and this process is bound to be somewhat arbitrary and conventional. Indian history is broadly divided into ancient, medieval and modern periods. However, there are further divisions of these periods. Man lived through scores of centuries in India as elsewhere before recorded history begins. And though the Indus Valley Civilisation has yielded some hundreds of pictographs, particularly on seals, they have not yet been deciphered, and therefore historians generally include that civilisation also in pre-history or, better, proto-history. Though that civilisation may be shown to have contributed some notable elements to the historic civilisation of India, the continuous history of the country is seen as beginning mainly after the settlement of the Aryans around 1500 BC. The Aryanisation of the Deccan and the Far South must be put much later. The period 1500-1000 BC is called the early Vedic period, the details of which we get from the Rigveda. Then starts the later Vedic period (Circa 1000-600 BC) in which the rest of the three Vedas (Sama, Yajur and Atharva), the Brahmanas, the Aranyakas, the Upanishads, etc. were composed. Around 600 BC starts the Buddha period or the period of Mahajanapadas when small kingdoms appeared, and this continued till the establishment of the Mauryan empire (322 BC). The Mauryan period (322 BC-185 BC) was followed by the period of foreign invasions (Greeks, Shakas, Pahlavas, Kushanas, etc.). This period is mainly known for the Shaka, Kushana and Satavahana rules. The following period is known as the Gupta period (320 AD-600 AD). In the post-Gupta period (600-1206 AD) there appeared and disappeared numerous dynasties including those of the Rajputs, Palas, Pratiharas, Rashtrakutas, and Senas, among others. It is difficult to say whether the medieval period began with the establishment of Muslim rule in India. Many scholars believe that certain characteristics of the medieval period, e.g., feudalism, appeared towards the end of the Gupta period. The period in which India had Muslim rulers can be broadly divided into the Delhi Sultanate (AD 1206-1526) and the Mughal period (AD 1526-1857). But there is overlapping between the medieval period and the modern period. By the time of the Battle of Plassey (AD 1757), Mughal rule had almost decayed, and towards the end of the 18th century modern education, and modern political and socio-economic ideas had begun to percolate into the country. The period AD 1857-61 is significant in that British paramountcy came to be clearly established. British rule in India came to an end on August 15, 1947, and with that ends our concern for periodisation.