Our past II

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Overview

Our Past II is a history textbook published by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) for Class VII students in India. It provides a comprehensive overview of medieval Indian history, spanning roughly from the 7th to the 18th century. The book delves into the political, social, economic, and cultural developments that shaped the Indian subcontinent during this crucial period. It explores the rise and fall of various dynasties, the establishment and consolidation of major empires like the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire, and the emergence of numerous regional kingdoms.

The textbook emphasizes the dynamic interplay of different cultures, religions, and traditions, highlighting the processes of cultural synthesis and exchange. It covers diverse aspects such as the evolution of administrative systems, architectural innovations, the growth of trade and urban centers, the lives of ordinary people, and the impact of religious movements like Bhakti and Sufism. By presenting a nuanced perspective on medieval India, Our Past II aims to foster a deeper understanding of the complexities and continuities of Indian history, encouraging students to analyze historical events and their long-term consequences. It serves as a foundational text for understanding the historical trajectory that led to modern India.

Key Takeaways

- Understand the political landscape of early medieval India, characterized by numerous regional kingdoms and frequent power struggles.
- Grasp the significant administrative, social, and cultural changes introduced by the Delhi Sultans and the subsequent Mughal Empire.
- Recognize the profound impact of religious movements like Bhakti and Sufism on Indian society and their role in promoting social harmony and reform.
- Appreciate the architectural marvels and artistic innovations that flourished under various medieval rulers, reflecting a rich synthesis of styles.
- Learn about the economic structures, trade networks, and the lives of craftspersons and traders that contributed to the prosperity of medieval towns.
- Identify the diverse social groups, including tribes, nomads, and settled communities, and their interactions within the evolving medieval Indian society.

• Analyze the factors leading to the decline of major empires and the emergence of new regional political formations in the 18th century.

Chapter Summaries

Tracing Changes Through a Thousand Years

This chapter introduces the study of Indian history from 700 to 1750 AD, highlighting the challenges of interpreting historical sources from this period. It discusses the evolution of cartography, with examples like al-Idrisi's map, and the changing meanings of terms such as "Hindustan" and "foreigner" over centuries. The chapter also explores the diverse sources historians use, including coins, inscriptions, architecture, and textual records, emphasizing the rapid technological changes like the Persian wheel, spinning wheel, and firearms. It touches upon the emergence of new social and political groups, the development of new religions, and the increasing complexity of caste systems, setting the stage for the subsequent chapters.

New Kings and Kingdoms

This chapter details the rise of numerous new dynasties across the subcontinent between the seventh and twelfth centuries. It focuses on prominent regional powers such as the Gurjara-Pratiharas, Rashtrakutas, and Palas, who often engaged in the "tripartite struggle" for control over Kanauj. The Chola dynasty, particularly Rajaraja I and Rajendra I, is highlighted for its powerful empire, elaborate temple architecture (e.g., Thanjavur), and sophisticated administration, including land revenue collection and local self-government. Other significant kingdoms like the Chauhans (Prithviraj Chauhan) are also discussed, along with their administrative structures, land grants (brahmadeya), and the constant warfare driven by the desire for resources and territory.

The Delhi Sultans

This chapter chronicles the establishment and expansion of the Delhi Sultanate, beginning with the Ghurid invasions and the subsequent rule of the Slave dynasty (Qutb al-Din Aibak, Iltutmish, Raziyya Sultan). It covers the Khalji (Alauddin Khalji's administrative reforms, market control), Tughlaq (Muhammad Tughlaq's experiments, Firuz Shah Tughlaq's public works), Sayyid, and Lodi dynasties. The chapter describes the Sultanate's administrative structure, including the iqta system, the role of nobles, and the challenges of governing a vast empire. It also discusses the architectural styles developed under the Sultans, such as the Qutb Minar, and the impact of the Sultanate on Indian society and culture, leading up to its eventual decline.

The Mughal Empire

This chapter traces the rise and consolidation of the Mughal Empire in India, starting with Babur's victory at Panipat in 1526. It details the reigns of major emperors: Humayun's struggles, Akbar's expansionist policies, administrative reforms (mansabdari system, land revenue),

religious tolerance (sulh-i kul), and cultural patronage. The chapter also covers Jahangir, Shah Jahan (known for architectural marvels like the Taj Mahal), and Aurangzeb, whose long reign saw both territorial expansion and increasing religious intolerance, contributing to the empire's eventual decline. It explains the complex Mughal administration, the role of jagirdars, and the challenges posed by various regional powers, leading to the fragmentation of the empire in the 18th century.

Rulers and Buildings

This chapter explores the architectural achievements of various rulers and dynasties in medieval India, focusing on the construction of temples, mosques, forts, and other structures. It distinguishes between "superstructure" and "trabeate" styles, illustrating with examples like the Qutb Minar and the Kandariya Mahadeva Temple. The chapter highlights the engineering skills involved in constructing large temples, such as the Rajarajeshvara Temple at Thanjavur, and the use of new technologies like the arch and dome. It also discusses the symbolic significance of these buildings, reflecting the power and piety of rulers, and the role of water management through stepwells (baolis) and tanks, showcasing the blend of functionality and aesthetics.

Towns, Traders, and Craftspersons

This chapter examines the growth and characteristics of different types of towns in medieval India: administrative centers (e.g., Thanjavur), temple towns (e.g., Somnath, Vrindavan), and commercial towns. It describes the vibrant trade networks that connected India with Southeast Asia, China, and West Asia, involving various communities like the Banjaras, Chettiars, and Marwari Oswals. The chapter details the production of specialized crafts, such as Bidriware (inlay work in copper and silver), textiles (e.g., Surat's zari work), and metalwork. It also discusses the role of guilds, the organization of markets (mandis), and the challenges faced by traders, including taxation and piracy, highlighting the economic dynamism of the period.

Tribes, Nomads, and Settled Communities

This chapter explores the social changes and the coexistence of different types of societies in medieval India, particularly focusing on tribes, nomadic pastoralists, and settled agricultural communities. It explains how many societies did not follow the Brahmanical social order and were organized into tribes, often with their own distinct customs and governance. Examples include the Gonds of Central India, the Ahoms of Assam, and various nomadic pastoralist groups like the Banjaras, who played a crucial role in trade. The chapter discusses how these groups interacted with settled societies, sometimes through conflict and sometimes through integration, and how the caste system evolved with the emergence of new jatis and the increasing differentiation within existing varnas.

Devotional Paths to the Divine

This chapter delves into the rich history of Bhakti and Sufi movements in medieval India, which emphasized personal devotion and challenged orthodox religious practices. It covers prominent

Bhakti saints like Shankara and Ramanuja, who advocated different philosophical paths, and Basavanna's Virashaiva movement in Karnataka. The chapter also discusses the Nathpanthis, Siddhas, and Yogis, and the emergence of popular saints like Kabir and Guru Nanak, whose teachings promoted equality and universal brotherhood, often through vernacular languages. It explores the Sufi tradition, with its emphasis on mysticism, love for God, and the role of Sufi silsilas (orders) like the Chishtis, highlighting their influence on Indian society and culture.

The Making of Regional Cultures

This chapter explores the development of distinct regional cultures across the Indian subcontinent, emphasizing how language, art, and traditions evolved in specific geographical contexts. It focuses on the example of Bengal, discussing the emergence of Bengali as a regional language, the influence of Pirs (Sufi saints), and the construction of brick and terracotta temples. The chapter also examines the Jagannatha cult in Odisha, the Rajput traditions of heroism and valor, and the development of miniature painting. It highlights how various influences, including local customs, religious beliefs, and interactions with other regions, contributed to the unique cultural identities that characterize different parts of India.

Eighteenth-Century Political Formations

This chapter details the political landscape of India in the 18th century, marked by the decline of the Mughal Empire and the emergence of numerous independent regional states. It discusses the rise of successor states like Awadh (Sa'adat Khan), Bengal (Murshid Quli Khan), and Hyderabad (Asaf Jah), which asserted their autonomy while maintaining nominal allegiance to the Mughals. The chapter also covers the powerful Maratha confederacy under Shivaji and later the Peshwas, their expansionist policies, and administrative innovations. The rise of the Sikhs under Guru Gobind Singh and later the misls, and the Jats in the Delhi-Agra region, are also examined, illustrating the complex and fragmented political scenario that preceded British colonial expansion.

Themes

- Medieval Indian History
- Dynastic Rule
- Cultural Synthesis
- Social Structures
- Religious Movements
- Regional Identities

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Our past II about?

Our Past II is an NCERT history textbook for Class VII that covers medieval Indian history from approximately 700 CE to 1750 CE. It explores the political, social, economic, and cultural developments, including the rise of new kingdoms, the Delhi Sultanate, the Mughal Empire, and the emergence of regional cultures and religious movements like Bhakti and Sufism.

Is Our past II worth reading?

Yes, Our Past II is highly worth reading, especially for students and anyone interested in a foundational understanding of medieval Indian history. It provides a well-structured and accessible overview of a complex period, covering key dynasties, administrative systems, cultural exchanges, and social changes that shaped the subcontinent.

How does Our past II end?

Spoiler: Our Past II concludes with the political formations of the 18th century. It describes the decline of the mighty Mughal Empire and the subsequent rise of various independent regional states and powers, such as the Marathas, Sikhs, Jats, and successor states like Awadh and Bengal, setting the stage for the modern period of Indian history.

Who should read Our past II?

Our Past II is primarily designed for Class VII students in India as part of their school curriculum. However, it is also an excellent resource for anyone seeking a clear, concise, and reliable introduction to medieval Indian history, including competitive exam aspirants or general readers interested in the subject.

How long does it take to read Our past II?

Reading Our Past II typically takes about 6 to 10 hours for a focused reader. As a textbook, it is often read over several weeks or months as part of a curriculum, allowing for deeper study and revision of each chapter.

Questions & Answers

What was the primary motivation behind the British East India Company's presence in India?

The British East India Company's primary motivation was trade, specifically to acquire spices, textiles, and other valuable goods from India to sell in European markets. Over time, this evolved into a desire for political control to secure trade monopolies, protect their commercial interests, and extract revenue, leading to the gradual establishment of colonial rule.

Explain the impact of the Permanent Settlement introduced by Lord Cornwallis.

The Permanent Settlement, introduced in 1793, fixed the land revenue that zamindars had to pay to the Company. While it aimed to ensure a regular revenue flow, it had significant negative

impacts. Zamindars often exploited peasants by demanding high rents, leading to widespread indebtedness and displacement. Many zamindars also lost their lands if they failed to pay the fixed revenue, leading to new landlords and further instability for cultivators.

What were the main causes of the Revolt of 1857?

The Revolt of 1857, also known as the First War of Independence, had multiple causes. These included widespread resentment against British economic exploitation, high land revenue demands, the Doctrine of Lapse, religious interference (like the greased cartridges rumor), and the declining power of Indian rulers and zamindars. Discontent among sepoys over pay, promotions, and service conditions also played a crucial role.

How did the British administration in India change after the Revolt of 1857?

After the Revolt of 1857, the British Crown took direct control of India from the East India Company. A Secretary of State for India was appointed in Britain, and the Governor-General was given the title of Viceroy, representing the British monarch. The army was reorganized to include more European soldiers, and policies were adopted to avoid further religious interference and to secure the loyalty of Indian princes.

Describe Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of Satyagraha.

Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of Satyagraha, meaning "truth-force," was a unique method of non-violent resistance. It emphasized the power of truth and the need to appeal to the conscience of the oppressor rather than inflicting suffering. Satyagraha involved peaceful protests, civil disobedience, non-cooperation, and fasting, aiming to convert the opponent through moral persuasion and self-suffering, rather than coercion.

What was the significance of the Dandi March (Salt March)?

The Dandi March, led by Mahatma Gandhi in 1930, was a pivotal act of civil disobedience against the British salt tax. It symbolized the broader struggle against colonial rule, as salt was a basic necessity for all. By openly manufacturing salt from seawater, Gandhi defied an unjust law, mobilizing millions across India and drawing international attention to the Indian independence movement.

Why was the partition of India in 1947 a complex and tragic event?

Spoiler: The partition of India in 1947, creating India and Pakistan, was complex and tragic due to its hasty implementation and the resulting communal violence. Millions of people were displaced, leading to one of the largest migrations in human history. Widespread riots, massacres, and atrocities occurred along religious lines, causing immense loss of life, property, and deep-seated communal tensions that continue to affect the subcontinent.

What challenges did independent India face immediately after 1947?

Immediately after independence in 1947, India faced numerous challenges. These included the massive task of rehabilitating millions of refugees displaced by partition, integrating over 500 princely states into the Indian Union, drafting a constitution, establishing democratic institutions, and addressing widespread poverty, illiteracy, and social inequalities. Building a unified nation from diverse linguistic and cultural groups was also a major hurdle.

Who were some prominent social reformers mentioned in the book and what were their contributions?

The book highlights several social reformers. Raja Rammohun Roy campaigned against Sati and advocated for women's education. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar worked for widow remarriage and girls' education. Jyotirao Phule championed the rights of lower castes and established schools for untouchables. Savitribai Phule was a pioneer in women's education. These reformers challenged orthodox practices and worked towards a more equitable society.

How did the British economic policies exploit India's resources?

British economic policies systematically exploited India's resources. They transformed India into a supplier of raw materials for British industries and a market for British manufactured goods. High land revenue demands, de-industrialization of Indian crafts, and the promotion of cash crops over food grains led to impoverishment, famines, and the drain of wealth from India to Britain, hindering India's economic development.

What was the impact of colonial education on Indian society?

Colonial education, primarily introduced by the British, had a dual impact. It aimed to create a class of Indians loyal to the British administration and proficient in English. However, it also exposed Indians to Western ideas of liberty, equality, and nationalism, which inadvertently fueled the independence movement. It created a new educated middle class that played a crucial role in social and political reforms.

Explain the 'Doctrine of Lapse' and its consequences.

The Doctrine of Lapse was an annexation policy implemented by Lord Dalhousie. It stated that if an Indian ruler died without a natural male heir, their kingdom would "lapse" or be annexed by the British East India Company. This policy was used to annex several states like Satara, Sambalpur, Udaipur, Nagpur, and Jhansi, causing widespread resentment among Indian rulers and contributing to the causes of the 1857 Revolt.

What were the main demands of the early Indian nationalists?

Early Indian nationalists, often referred to as Moderates, primarily demanded greater Indian representation in legislative councils, reforms in the civil services (including simultaneous exams in India and England), reduction of military expenditure, and economic reforms to alleviate poverty. They believed in constitutional methods and gradual reforms, aiming for self-governance within the British Empire.

How did the British try to suppress the nationalist movement?

The British employed various methods to suppress the nationalist movement, including repressive laws like the Rowlatt Act, censorship of the press, banning public meetings, and imprisoning leaders. They also used force, as seen in the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. Additionally, they attempted to divide Indian society along communal lines through policies like the 'divide and rule' strategy and separate electorates.

What is the significance of the Indian Constitution?

The Indian Constitution, adopted on January 26, 1950, is the supreme law of India. It establishes India as a sovereign, socialist, secular, and democratic republic, guaranteeing fundamental rights to its citizens, ensuring justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity. It provides a framework for governance, defines the powers of the government, and protects the rights of minorities, serving as the bedrock of Indian democracy.

What was the role of women in the freedom struggle?

Women played a significant and diverse role in the freedom struggle. They participated in protests, marches, and civil disobedience movements, often facing lathi charges and imprisonment. Figures like Sarojini Naidu, Annie Besant, and Rani Lakshmibai inspired many. Women also organized secret societies, spread nationalist messages, and contributed to social reform movements that intertwined with the broader struggle for independence.

How did industrialization under British rule affect Indian artisans?

Industrialization under British rule severely impacted Indian artisans. The influx of cheap, machine-made British goods led to the decline of traditional Indian handicrafts and industries. Artisans lost their livelihoods as their products could not compete with factory-produced items. This de-industrialization resulted in widespread unemployment, poverty, and a significant shift of the population from urban craft centers to agriculture.

What were the main features of the Non-Cooperation Movement?

The Non-Cooperation Movement (1920-22), led by Mahatma Gandhi, aimed to resist British rule non-violently by withdrawing cooperation from the government. Its main features included boycotting British goods, institutions, and elections; surrendering titles and honors; and promoting Swadeshi (indigenous) goods and institutions. It mobilized a wide cross-section of Indian society, demonstrating the power of mass protest.

How did the British 'divide and rule' policy manifest in India?

The British 'divide and rule' policy manifested by exploiting existing social, religious, and regional differences in India to maintain control. They often favored one community over another, encouraged communal tensions, and introduced separate electorates for different religious groups. This strategy weakened the unity of the nationalist movement and ultimately

contributed to the partition of India.

What was the significance of the Vernacular Press Act of 1878?

The Vernacular Press Act of 1878 was enacted by Lord Lytton to suppress dissent and control the Indian-language press. It allowed the government to confiscate the printing press and property of any newspaper that published "seditious" material, without prior warning. This act was a direct attack on freedom of speech and aimed to stifle the growing nationalist sentiment expressed through regional newspapers.