

Strategy for History Optional Paper 1

This post attempts to help the readers with History Optional Paper I.

This is my third in the series of the History Optional post (for first see- <https://selfstudyhistory.com/2019/07/21/detailed-strategy-for-history-optional-paper-ii-by-chitra-mishra-rank-20-cse-2018-marks-in-history-300/> to decode – by discussing important sources, to attach- simplified notes of otherwise big-fat complex book - amidst all the readings, test series, GS- Prelims & Mains, not to forget Essay.

Paper 1- History Optional

Few generic observations:

- This paper, in comparison to Paper II is on a technical side- objective and to-the-point in terms of syllabus division and topic distribution. Implying you ought not to be very analytical in this sub section.
- Two major reasons being – the content and scope of subject has been confined to broad standard divisions

Part A

- **(Indus Civilisation, Vedic Age, Age of Buddha, Iron Debate, Mahajanapadas, Age of Mauryas, Post Maurya Period, Age of Guptas, Feudalism debate) and**

Part B

- **(Origin of Rajputs, Delhi Sultanate(12th to 15th century) and finally Mughal Empire(16th-18th century)- both these phases must be read in terms of administrative, social and cultural and economic perspective, ending with rise of 18th century);**

Ancient India segment, further - crucially is bifurcated into Map in Part A and in Part B about sectional division of topics (You must prepare this part depending on your interest vis-à-vis Medieval).

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For Map, I have tried to analyse previous year papers as well as sectional divisions

- <https://iasbaba.com/2019/08/toppers-strategy-chitra-mishra-rank-20-cse-2018-map-section-history-optional-paper-i-300-500-part-2/>

- In **Medieval India** there is a greater challenge to tackle that set (20+20+10 or 15+15+20 marks combination) of specific topics (and I will show through previous year paper analysis). Along with it, is the significant to handle
 1. 10-mark compulsory questions
 2. 2 set of questions of 50 mark each (if one opts only 1 set from Ancient Indian segment).

Sources:

For this paper, for absolute beginners, OLD NCERT Ancient and Medieval can be a quick start to understand the range and extent of topics to be covered. It will also be beneficial for the prelims section.

Main sources for Ancient India –

1st important source for Ancient India:

NCERT XI – Old Edition by [Ram Sharan Sharma \(This is also India's Ancient Past\)](#). This, as suggested is the best elementary/beginner book for Ancient India.

Also attached is [Early India - R.Thapar](#). (Chapter on [Mauryan Empire](#) is separately attached).

Source- II-

[Upinder Singh- A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: From the Stone Age to the 12th Century, Pearson Publication, 2009.](#)

Contents: Some of the chapters in bold can be focussed:

Introduction: Ideas of the Early Indian Past

- 1 . Understanding Literary and Archaeological Sources
2. **Hunter-Gatherers of the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic Ages**
3. **The Transition to Food Production: Neolithic, Neolithic–Chalcolithic, and Chalcolithic Villages, c . 7000– 2000 BCE**
4. **The Harappan Civilization, c. 2600–1 900 BCE**

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5. Cultural Transitions: Images from Texts and Archaeology, c. 2000–600 BCE
6. Cities, Kings, and Renunciants: North India, c. 600–300 BCE
- 7. Power and Piety: The Maurya Empire, c. 324–187 BCE**
8. Interaction and Innovation, c. 200 BCE –300 CE
9. Aesthetics and Empire, c. 300–600 CE
- 10. Emerging Regional Configurations, c. 600–1200 CE**

Some of the questions like **Aryan Migration Vs Aryan Invasion** debate was directly referred from the reading of this text. This book thus helps you in segments to also handle some tricky questions at the stage of interview; Especially, the section of **socio-cultural history and portion on Early Medieval India**.

Source III

IGNOU BA material and selected Chapters of MA -(attached along with topics)

For the section on Prehistory, the best book to refer is **IGNOU**, BA material; In IGNOU please align with the **exact chapter(attached) to be read for the syllabus**. It is extremely important to read selectively;

In fact, at places, I have also attached chapters of underlined MA Chapters of IGNOU- which helps historiography- for example, **Feudalism debate, Nature of Mughal State, Nature of Chola State etc.**

Finally, the idea to also attach selected sections from **my notes**(scanned), is to emphasize the need to sort out the readings and topics in a manner, that we have a **concise ready sheet for every topic**.

While the optional paper gives the liberty to innovate in terms of writing answers, it is important to have **objective pointers to ensure structured manner of flow in answer writing**.

I improvised it from my mistake of earlier attempt (2016) where I emphasized only on reading maximum. Trust me, the **key is effective consolidation of matter in the best possible way;**

Strategy for Ancient India

For this section, all throughout the topic completion, the most important requirement while preparing notes /reading any standard coaching material is to **visualize the requirement of questions** that would be asked on the final day of Optional paper and in fact the first hour.

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Ancient Indian history as a section, among all four themes (other being Medieval, Modern and World) is the most stratified, topic wise delineated sub section;

Sources:

- **Archaeological sources: Exploration, excavation, epigraphy, numismatics, monuments**
- **Literary sources: Indigenous: Primary and secondary; poetry, scientific literature, literature, literature in regional languages, religious literature.**
- **Foreign accounts: Greek, Chinese and Arab writers.**

Previous Year Questions:

- On the basis of **contemporary sources** assess the nature of banking and usury in ancient India. **2013**
- Evaluate the ownership of land in ancient India on the basis of **literary and epigraphic sources**. **2013**
- Evaluate the **contribution of the Puranas** in disseminating secular knowledge among the masses in ancient India. **2013**
- "While using the accounts of foreign writers, historians must distinguish between statements based on hearsay and those grounded in perceptive observations." Elaborate with examples. **2014**
- How far can the **ancient Indian Sruti literature** be used as historical sources? **2015**
- The copious references to the **preservation of Varnashrama system** by the kings eulogized in inscriptions are mere reflection of the Smriti tradition." Discuss.
- Art and culture are reflected to a far greater extent than political history in the **epigraphic sources**. **2017**
- How did the early Indian historical tradition, as reflected in **Itihasa-Purana**, emerge? What are the distinctive features of this genre? **2018**

Analysis:

In this section, the best reference would be to

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Upinder Singh's Chapter- 1 (primarily because of the information and pictographic attempt to make the process of reading about History writing as well as Historiography very interesting).

Secondly, **my notes attached below** is to emphasize on how during your revision stage, there needs to be a set manner in which you should revise/summarise the content to fuse it down to 150 words/250 words answer format;

Focus areas:

Two primary areas of emphasis:

- One format of questions which is often asked is to cite a particular source(**Eg: Puranas**) to substantiate phase or socio-economic phenomenon;
- Second and perhaps a more direct/straight forward question asked is to analyse the significance of source itself- for example, **assess the contribution of Sruti Literature**;

Sources:

[Souce- IGNOU, Upinder Singh & Notes](#)

II

Pre-history and Proto-history: Geographical factors; hunting and gathering (Palaeolithic and Mesolithic); Beginning of agriculture (Neolithic and chalcolithic).

Megalithic Cultures: Distribution of pastoral and farming cultures outside the Indus, Development of community life, Settlements, Development of agriculture, Crafts, Pottery, and Iron industry.

- In the absence of a written script **Chalcolithic pottery gives us a fascinating insight into the culture and life styles of the people** of those times. Comment critically. 2013
- Delineate and account for the **regional characteristics of the Neolithic period** in India. 2016
- The emergence of **Non-Harappan Chalcolithic cultures in Central India and the Deccan** mark a change not only in the subsistence pattern of people but an overall transition from pre to proto historic period. Critically analyze. 2017

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- Discuss the **extent, settlement patterns and subsistence economy of the megalithic cultures**. 2012
- In what ways can the **Megalithic culture be considered a foundational phase of the history of peninsular India?** 2014

Analysis:

This section requires emphasis

- Geographical Distribution (Draw Maps wherever required- also see notes attached for reference)
- On the various features- settlement pattern/Pattern of life, social organisation, technological upgradation, occupation, domestication of plants and animals (if any) associated with phases (**Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic, Chalcolithic, Megalithic**).
- In this case, it begins with social, politico-administrative (if any), religious, economic, cultural (burial practice)
- Relationship between **Neolithic-Chalcolithic; Neolithic-Harappan Culture;**
- Significance of each phases.

Sources:

Link - [IGNOU, Notes & Upinder Singh's Book Chapter Analysis](#)

III

Indus Valley Civilization: Origin, date, extent, characteristics, decline, survival and significance, art and architecture.

- Trace the development of **urbanization from the third millennium B.C.E.** to 6th century B.C.E. 2011
- Evaluate the significance of **seals and sealings** in the reconstruction of socioeconomic and religious life of the Harappan people. 2012
- Discuss the **water management and its conservation planning** in the Harappan (Indus-Saraswati) cities. 2013

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- Do you think the Harappan civilization had a diversity of subsistence base? 2014
- The **decline of Harappan civilization** was caused by ecological degradation rather than external invasion. Discuss. 2015
- Explain why the majority of the known **Harappan settlements** are located in the semi-arid areas with saline groundwater. 2016
- "Archaeological evidence does not give direct access to the possible social and political dimensions of the **decline of the Harappan civilization**. What it does indicate very clearly is that the Harappan culture underwent a gradual process of **de-urbanization**"? Comment. 2018

Analysis:

This chapter effectively begins the Ancient Indian History and debates. By this I imply that when you read from this chapter onwards, there would be divergent views, due to frequent research, historian's arguments, viewpoint leading to schools of historiography.

To enrich your marks and chances of scoring further, from this chapter, whenever there is topic such as **Decline of Harappan Civilisation or Aryan Invasion theory**, the focus apart from linear narrative should also be upon substantiation of various historiographical debates and interpretations.

It is here, that you stand a chance to outsmart your co-aspirant in an optional paper which otherwise is regarded static, stagnant, fixed, non-dynamic;

Focus Areas:

CSE 2015 and CSE 2018 saw questions being asked on Decline of Harappan Civilisation.

However, if one were to carefully note, the questions in this section are asked from a very specific point of view

- **Seals and Sealings**
- **Water Management**
- **Settlement located in Semi-arid areas**

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So, while reading the chapter, while our general focus would continue on the basic layout of the following points such as

- **Geographical Distribution**
- **Origin- Debates and Theories**
- **Features/Characteristics**
- **Religious Life; Social Life; Political Life; Trade Pattern (Internal and International); Art and Architecture; Town Planning**
- **Elements of continuity of Harappan Civilisation**
- **Decline of Harappan Civilisation**

But as you can see, the framing of the questions are in a slightly, broader, thematic and conceptual zones.

Sources:

- [Upinder Singh – 4. The Harappan Civilization, c. 2600–1900 BCE](#)
- [IGNOU](#)
- [Notes](#)

IV

Aryans and Vedic Period: Expansions of Aryans in India. Vedic Period: Religious and philosophic literature; Transformation from Rig Vedic period to the later Vedic period; Political, social and economical life; Significance of the Vedic Age; Evolution of Monarchy and Varna system.

- Evaluate various views regarding **human settlements** as gleaned from the Vedic sources. **2013**
- “The **Varna** concept may always have been largely a theoretical model and never an actual description of society.” Comment in the context of Ancient India. **2013**
- “The **Upanishadic principles** embody the epitome of the Vedic thought.” Discuss. **2014**

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- “Archaeology knows of no Aryans; only literature knows of Aryans.” Examine critically. **2015**
- In what way was the egalitarian character of the **early Vedic society** changed during the **later Vedic** period? **2016**
- Critically examine various views regarding the **Vedic-Harappan** relationship in light of the latest discoveries. **2017**

Analysis:

Vedic Age - Early and Later Vedic Age requires horizontal and vertical division.

- Political
- Economic
- Cultural - Religious
- and Social Division

Focus Area:

- **Vedic Literature,**
- Relationship between **Harappa and Vedic Age**
- Link to Iron Age and Urbanization;

Sources:

- [Upinder Singh- Chapter 5. Cultural Transitions: Images from Texts and Archaeology, c. 2000–600 BCE](#)
- [IGNOU - UNIT 12 THE EARLY VEDIC SOCIETY & UNIT 13 CHANGES IN THE LATER VEDIC PHASE](#)
- [Notes](#)

V

Period of Mahajanapadas: Formation of States (Mahajanapada): Republics and monarchies; Rise of urban centres; Trade routes; Economic growth; Introduction of coinage; Spread of Jainism and Buddhism; Rise of Magadha and Nandas. Iranian and Macedonian invasions and their impact.

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- Trace the development of **urbanization** from the third millennium B.C.E. to 6th century B.C.E. **2011**
- Evaluate the **introduction of iron technology** in the development of human history of ancient India. **2011**
- Assess the importance of **Jain tenets** and their relevance to humanity. **2011**
- Buddha's teachings to a large extent could be helpful in understanding and resolving the problems of today's society. Analyse critically. **2014**
- How far is it correct to say that **changes in the post-Vedic economy** gave birth to new religious movements in India? **2015**
- Examine the relationship among economic growth, urbanization and State formation from c. 7th century BCE to 3rd century BCE. **2016**
- **Buddhism and Jainism** were social movements under the umbrella of religion. Comment. 2017
- The concept of Shramanic religions, with particular reference to Buddhism, had their roots in Upanisadic ideas. Discuss. 2018
- Give an account of ***gana-sanghas (non-monarchical state systems)***? Why did they decline? **2018**

Source:

- **IGNOU - UNIT 14 JANAPADAS AND THE MAHAJANAPADAS; UNIT 15 RISE OF URBAN CENTRES; UNIT 16 SOCIETY AND ECONOMY; UNIT 17 BUDDHISM, JAINISM AND OTHER RELIGIOUS IDEAS**
- **Upinder Singh's - Chapter 6. Cities, Kings, and Renunciants: North India, c. 600–300 BCE**

Note- for an overview of last three topic also see - [Link](#)

Analysis:

This sub-section in specific, requires two major areas of focus.

1. Emergence of Iron and Phase of Urbanisation (One must include the debate of **Niharranjan Ray and D.Chakrabarti**)

2. Evolution of the religion of **Buddhism and Jainism**, the social context and its impact/ramifications;

VI

Mauryan Empire: Foundation of the Mauryan Empire, Chandragupta, Kautilya and Arthashastra; Ashoka; Concept of Dharma; Edicts; Polity, Administration; Economy; Art, architecture and sculpture; External contacts; Religion; Spread of religion; Literature. Disintegration of the empire; Sungas and Kanvas.

- Examine the role of **adhyaksha** in the Mauryan administration. **2012**
- Social norms for women in the **Dharmasastra and Arthasastra tradition** were framed in accordance with the Varnashrama tradition. Evaluate critically. **2013**
- Discuss different interpretations of historians about the **nature of Asoka's 'Dhamma'**. Did his principle of 'Dhamma-vijaya' render the Mauryan Empire militaristically weak? **2014**
- Delineate the nature and impact of India's contact with **Western Asia and the Mediterranean world** during the Mauryan period. **2015**
- "The concept of **Ashoka's Dhamma** as found through his inscriptions had its roots in **Vedic- Upanishadic** literature." Discuss. **2017**
- Do you agree with the popular view that **Mauryas** established a unitary and highly centralized if not monolithic state system'? **2018**

Analysis:

In terms of relevance, Mauryan Empire forms the locus of this segment. It is the most popular, interesting and significant topic. It should also be kept in mind for beginners, that from **Prelims and Culture - GS Mains**, this section is extremely significant;

If one were to analyse previous year papers, the prominent recurring themes include

- **Policy of Dhamma**
- **Decline of Mauryas (Refer attached Romila Thapar's chapter and Upinder Singh's conclusion.**

- *Arthasastra* as a source to study this period
- Nature of Mauryan State.

Source:

[Link -1](#)

[Link -2](#)

VII

Post - Mauryan Period (Indo-Greeks, Sakas, Kushanas, Western Kshatrapas): Contact with outside world; growth of urban centres, economy, coinage, development of religions, Mahayana, social conditions, art, architecture, culture, literature and science.

- Examine the significance of the deities depicted on coins of the **Kushanas**. **2010**
- Explain as to how the early **Buddhist Stupa art**, while using folk motifs and narratives and common cultural symbols, succeeded in transforming these themes for expounding the Buddhist ideals. **2013**
- Review critically the evolution of different schools of art in the Indian subcontinent between the **second century BCE and the third century CE**, and evaluate the socio-religious factors responsible for it. **2014**
- How does the numismatic evidence of the period reflect the political and economic outlook of the **Kushanas and the Satavahanas**? **2016**
- The changes in the field of art from the **Kushana** period to early medieval period are reflection of changing outlook." Comment. **2016**
- What was the impact of **trans-regional and trans-continental trade** in the post Mauryan period on social and cultural life of India? **2018**

Source:

[Link](#)

Analysis:

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Focus in this topic must be -

- **Rise of Kushanas & Satavahanas,**
- **Schools of Art and Architecture - Gandhara, Mathura, Amaravati**
- **Economy - Growth of Urban Centres;**
- **Mahayana Buddhism**

In addition, one of the ways to deal this topic is to study, polity, society, economy, cultural developments of Post Mauryan Period.

Secondly, have a link-table between changes and continuities of Mauryan Period- Post Mauryan period and Gupta Period.

VII

Early State and Society in Eastern India, Deccan and South India: Kharavela, The Satavahanas, Tamil States of the Sangam Age;

Administration, economy, land grants, coinage, trade guilds and urban centres;

Buddhist centres; Sangam literature and culture; Art and architecture.

- Assess the role of **guilds and trade organizations** in the development of early Indian economy. **2010**
- Justify **Pliny's statement the Rome** was being drained out of its gold by India during the first century of the Christian era. **2012**
- "Not only does ancient **Tamil literature** furnish an accurate picture of widely disparate classes; it also describes the social condition of Tamil country as it was." Discuss. **2015**
- Trace the role of **guilds and trade organizations** in the development of early Indian economy. **2015**
- The accurate picture of the complex **socio-cultural** milieu of Peninsular India is presented in the early **Sangam** literature. Delineate. **2017.**

Analysis:

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The two main areas which is asked on a recurring basis is

- **Sangam Literature.**
- **Role of Guilds and Trade Organisation.**

Source:

[Link](#)

The next two sub-section largely confines to **Gupta-Post Gupta and Age of Harsha**. There should be clarity in terms of topics of relevance, concise handy note of

- Nature of Gupta State
- Rise of Guptas,
- **Role of Samudragupta and Chandragupta Vikramaditya;**
- Politico-Administrative and Economic continuity and changes as compared to Mauryas;
- A significant section is the **Feudalism debate and specific aspect of Land grants;**
- Literature during this period, Art and Architecture, - if this phase is the so-called Golden Period of Ancient Indian History- the problem in this approach, so on and so forth.

IX

Guptas, Vakatakas and Vardhanas:

Polity and administration, Economic conditions, Coinage of the Guptas, Land grants, Decline of urban centres, Indian feudalism, Caste system, Position of women,

Education and educational institutions; Nalanda, Vikramshila and Vallabhi,

Literature, Scientific Literature, Art and Architecture.

- Discuss the **provincial and district administrative** units of the Gupta Empire with the designations and functions of the officers. **2014**

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- What were the privileges granted to the **donees in land-grant charters** of early India? How far were these charters responsible for integration or disintegration socio-political milieu?
- The **second urbanization** gave rise to the organized corporate activities that reached their zenith during the Gupta period. Discuss. **2017**
- Discuss the experimentations with **art and architecture during the Gupta- Vakataka** period. **2018**

Sources:

[Link -1](#)

X

- **Regional States during Gupta Era:**
- **The Kadambas, Pallavas, Chalukyas of Badami; Palas, Senas, Rashtrakutas, Paramaras, Polity and administration; Cultural aspects; The Chalukyas of Kalyana, Cholas, Hoysalas, Pandyas;**
- **Polity and Administration, Trade guilds, Literature;**
- **Growth of Vaishnava and Saiva religions.**
- **Tamil Bhakti movement, Shankaracharya; Vedanta; Institutions of temple and temple architecture;**

I

**"Utpanna dravide bhaktih, Karnate vriddhimagata I
Sthita kinchit -maharashtre gurjare jirnatam gata II"**

- **Padmapurana**. Account for the emergence of bhakti in Dravida desa. **2018**

II

Polity and Administration; local Government;

- How could the **local self-government under the Cholas** adjust with their centralized administration structure? **2015**

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- "Doubtless it was not a free state; it was any rate a state" (K A N Sastri). Reflect upon the nature of **local self-government institutions in the Chola** country. **2018**

This segment is important in both Ancient Indian segment as well as Medieval sub section.

The Cholas and the Vijayanagar State must be read in a logical continuity/sequence, for both these are asked in terms of **Nature of State** module - **Was it centralized or feudal or segmentary state? In case of Vijayanagar, as discussed below, the emergence of nayakas- also must be kept in mind.**

Source:

[Link -1](#)

III

Growth of art and architecture, religious sects, Institution of temple and Mathas, Agraharas, education and literature, economy and society.

- Assess **Ellora as a unique art centre** of the different cultural streams. **2011**
- Analyse the vibrant cultural activities in **peninsular India during 550-750 CE**. Compare and contrast it with the situation in contemporary North India. **2012**
- **Kailasa Temple built at Ellora** marks the culmination of rock-cut architecture in India. Elucidate. **2015**

Source:

[Link](#)

Themes in Early Indian Cultural History:

- **Languages and texts,**
- **Major stages in the evolution of art and architecture,**
- **Major philosophical thinkers and schools, ideas in Science and Mathematics.**

Previous year question analysis:

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- Examine the proficiency of the **ancient Indians in various crafts, science and mathematics. 2002**
- Discuss the major stages in the **evolution of architecture** during the ancient period. **2006**
- Discuss the **types of lands and the Science of agriculture mentioned** in the literature and epigraphs of ancient India. **2011**
- Assess the **educational system in early India** and identify important educational institutions of the period. **2012**

Source:

[Link 1](#)

[Link 2](#)

[Link 3](#)

Additionally,

The following questions are an example of the **broad-thematic questions** which requires panoramic assessment of the topic/ theme concerned. The emphasis here should be to - be able to handle such broad - abstract- complex question with effective 150/250-word presentation.

Some important questions in 2016-17

2016

- Critically evaluate the **theory and practice of land revenue system** in ancient India.
- How did the **temples of South India, as financial institutions, have deep impact on the social institutions** of early medieval period? Critically examine.

2017

- The period of Indian History from **3rd century B.C.E to 5th century C.E** was the period of innovation and interaction. How will you react?

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- Trace the **origin and development of temple architecture in India** with reference to regional styles and variations.

The nature of the questions is broad, generic and not to be found easily, unless we can churn, comprehend and fuse our knowledge of various sub-sections in a selective manner. Such questions then become tricky to handle and hence following articles would help provide a thematic understanding.

[Link](#)

To sum up:

While the idea was to deconstruct the lofty themes to question specific significance of topics, some sources edited, some attached as text- it should help the reader of this post believe that if planned properly, we can easily prepare for History Optional without any coaching/material. For Ancient Indian history, what is thus needed is very specific analysis of pattern, topics and areas of priority to prepare selectively.

Part II

In this part, the idea is to deconstruct Medieval India. For some of the aspirant, this section can be strategically dealt by merely handling Set -I - 5 compulsory 10 mark question and Set II- one set of 3 question (20+20+10) or (15+15+20).

Broadly, the second part of Paper I can be broadly classified into the following

- Origin of **Rajputs**,
- **Delhi Sultanate**(12th to 15th century) and finally
- **Mughal Empire**(16th-18th century)- both these phases must be read in terms of administrative, social and cultural and economic perspective, ending with rise of 18th century);
- In addition, **Marathas and 18th century Debate**

Sources:

- [Selected chapters of Satish Chandra - Medieval India Vol I and II.](#)
- **IGNOU BA material and selected Chapters of MA** -(attached along with topics)

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- Website - <http://www.historydiscussion.net/> (Few references I referred before exam). The main benefit of this website was it makes you give in depth perspective on selected important topic in nutshell.
- <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-assessing-aurangzeb/>
- <http://www.historydiscussion.net/history-of-india/mughal-emperors/rajput-policy-of-the-mughal-emperors-indian-history/6621>
- 1. <http://www.historydiscussion.net/history-of-india/mughal-emperors/deccan-policy-of-the-mughal-emperors-indian-history/6622>
- 2. <http://www.historydiscussion.net/history-of-india/mughal-emperors/religious-policy-of-the-mughal-emperors-indian-history/6620>
- 3. <http://www.historydiscussion.net/history-of-india/mughal-emperors/mughal-emperors-and-central-asia-indian-history/6619>

Topics and Previous Paper Analysis:

Please have a look at selected few general questions - which requires broad understanding of **Medieval Indian development, socio-cultural and politico-economic** analysis. The essential idea to list them upfront is to show the need to also read keeping broader general themes in mind. It can be read from any source of your choice.

What becomes crucial while handling such question is the art of effective, structured and stratified presentation in limited time frame and wordlimit.

- Critically evaluate the educational development during Sultanate period. **2013**
- Critically analyse the agricultural economy from 750 to 1200 CE. **2014**
- Evaluating the theory of kingship of the Sultanate, discuss the deviations seen in the reigns of different Sultans. **2014**
- Why should the sixteenth century be regarded as the period of Indian Renaissance? **2015**
- Explain the ingredients of the transitory nature of the early medieval India. **2016**

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- Identify the **broad contours of the Mughal foreign policy and their impacts on the Mughal empire. 2016**

[Link -](#)

- Do you think that the economic measures introduced by the Sultanate rulers were beneficial to the common people as well? Illustrate with examples. **2016**
- What **measures were initiated by the Sultans** for the consolidation of the Delhi Sultanate? Discuss. **2016**
- The 11th – 12th centuries C.E saw eventful progression in the cultural history of India. Discuss **2017**
- **Assess the condition of peasantry during 13th to 17th centuries C.E. 2017**
- Critically analyze the changing nature of caste and gender relations during the early medieval period. **2018**

Analysis:

- Such questions needs to be opted in the exam, only if you have substantial content to divide the question into sub-sets.

For example, **Measures that were initiated by the Sultans for the consolidation of the Delhi Sultanate? Discuss.** – This involve careful picking up of crucial steps taken up – political conquest, administrative, economic consolidation from the time of **Balban-Iltutmish, Khaljis and Tughlaqs** and finally, the specific depiction through a flowchart/map to improve the chances of scoring higher.

Polity: Major political developments in Northern India and the Peninsula, origin and the rise of Rajputs

- “The inferior cavalry of the Rajputs was not the only cause of their defeat at the hands of Turko-Afghans and Mughal.” Comment.
- "The battles of **Tarain and Chandawar** laid the foundations of Turkish rule in India". Elaborate. **2018**

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- **Arab conquest of Sind**; Write a short essay on: “**Historical significance of the advent of the Arabs in India**”

This topic requires basic clarity on

- Origin of Rajputs - [Link](#)
- [Arrival of Turks- Reasons and Process of Conquest](#);

In case of Early Medieval India, the following two sub-topics become extremely important.

The Cholas: administration, village economy and society

- How far can the **village assemblies or communities under the Cholas** be really called democratic? **2009**
- Assess the contribution of the **Cholas** in the expansion of Indian culture outside India. **2011**
- Evaluate the **role of nadu and nagaram in the growth of urbanisation** under the Cholas. **2012**
- Evaluating various theories regarding the **Chola State**, throw light on its village assemblies. **2014**
- Analyze the **significance of the Uttaramerur inscriptions** of the Chola King Parantaka I. **2016**

[Link- Cholas](#)

Indian Feudalism; Agrarian economy and urban settlements; Trade and commerce

- To what extent 'monetary anaemia' afflicted the erstwhile commercial economy during the early medieval period? **2010**
- Evaluate the socio-economic conditions from the Gupta period to 1200 C.E. as gleaned from the various types of grants or *dana shasana*. **2011**
- What kind of changes were visualized by historians on **Indian feudalism**? Examine critically. **2012**

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- Critically analyse the agricultural economy from 750 to 1200 CE. **2014**
- Do the evidences of land ownership at our disposal support the theory of the prevalence of feudalism in early medieval India? **2015**

[Link 1](#)

[Link 2](#)

[Link 3](#)

Cultural Traditions in India, 750- 1200

Philosophy: Skankaracharya and Vedanta, Ramanuja and Vishishtadvaita, Madhva and Brahma Mimansa

- Write a short essay on: “**The Vedanta of Sankaracharya**” **2001**
- "The Advaita doctrine of Shankara cut at the very root of Bhaktivada." Do you agree? **2016**

(ii) Religion: Forms and features of religion, Tamil devotional cult, growth of Bhakti, Islam and its arrival in India, Sufism

- Assess the contribution of the **Acharyas** in the development of the ideological basis of Bhakti. **2012**
- **Bhakti and mysticism of Lal Ded** emerged as a social force in Kashmir. Comment. **2013**
- “Sufis and medieval mystic saints failed to modify either the religious ideas and practices or the outward structure of Islamic/Hindu societies to any appreciable extent.” Comment for/against. **2015**
- The 11th – 12th centuries C.E saw eventful progression in the cultural history of India. Discuss **2017**

It must be ensured that the essential terms in Sufi and Bhakti movement, important contributors, are all consolidated to ensure, depending on the question asked- the ability to

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improve your presentation. (A map can be drawn depicting the origin and spread of Bhakti Movement across states with an arrow) – [New NCERT Map](#)

Literature: Literature in Sanskrit, growth of Tamil literature, literature in the newly developing languages, Kalhan's Rajatarangini, Alberuni's India

- Assess Kalhana's views on History. **2009**
- Evaluate Rajatarangini as a source of history. **2012**
- Evaluate the 'Kitab al-Hind' of Alberuni as a source of history of India. **2014**
- Comment on the veracity of Alberuni's account of the Indian society. **2016**
- Do you consider the **Rajatarangini of Kalhana** to be a reliable source of the political history of Kashmir? Why? **2017**

This segment requires us to finalise the selected content, we would memorise for handling 10 mark questions.

Art and Architecture: Temple architecture, sculpture, painting

- How far do you agree with the view that temples in early medieval period were catalysts in spreading education? **2010**
- Discuss the **Caurapancashika** and Jain styles of paintings. Can the **Caurapancashika** style truly be called the precursor of pothi format? **2012**
- Give a brief account of the early medieval temple architecture of Kashmir. **2015**
- Why is **Mamallapuram** famous? **2015**

[Link](#)

In this section, attempt should be to draw diagram wherever possible. Even basic block representation. (Use of wood; shifts in the use of material from earlier period)

The Thirteenth Century

(i) Establishment of the Delhi Sultanate: The Ghurian invasions – factors behind Ghurian success - Economic, social and cultural consequences

(ii) Foundation of Delhi Sultanate and early Turkish Sultans - Consolidation: The rule of Iltutmish and Balban

- Assess the **contribution of Iltutmish** for the expansion and consolidation of the Delhi Sultanate. **2011**
- How did the **Mongol invasions** affect the Delhi Sultanate and the north-western frontier policy of the Delhi Sultans? **2012**
- Analyze the **steps taken by Razia Sultan** to strengthen her position as an independent ruler despite various obstacles. **2013**
- What measures did **Balban** adopt to combat the Mongol menace? **2015**
- What measures were initiated by the Sultans for the consolidation of the Delhi Sultanate? Discuss. **2016**
- Evaluate the contents of the **Tabaqat-i-Nasiri as a source of medieval history**. **2016**
- Critically examine the **'blood and iron' policy of Balban**. **2017**
- To what extent was the Caliphate the source and sanction to the legal authority of the Sultans of Delhi? **2017**

In this section, one must have a brief concise note of

- **Origin and emergence of Delhi Sultanate (Mahmud of Ghazini, Ghori, Aibak and the struggle for consolidation)**
- **More importantly, contributions of Iltutmish and Balban**
- **Theory of Kingship in specific, creation of departments/Diwan;**
- **Early threat of Mongol Invasion**

Read IGNOU chapters for brief understanding of narrative and for revision purpose, it is advisable to make a flow chart of major steps on a single sheet.

The Fourteenth Century

(i) "The Khalji Revolution" - Alauddin Khalji: Conquests and territorial expansion, agrarian and economic measures

- Examine critically the **agrarian and economic reforms of Alauddin Khalji**. How did it strengthen the Sultanate? **2011**
- Analyse the ordinances mentioned by Barani which Alauddin Khalji promulgated for market control. **2014**

Khalji's Urban Revolution and his [market reforms](#) along with the administrative measures taken up during his time becomes important (as it is then linked in continuities with measures taken by Sher Shah Suri and subsequently Akbar).

Muhammad Tughluq: Major projects, agrarian measures, bureaucracy of Muhammad Tughluq

- Write a short essay on: "The Token Currency System introduced by Muhammad Tughluq." **2004**
- Write a short essay on: "**Muhammad Tughluq as an agrarian innovator.**" **2009**
- Do you agree that the schemes of Muhammad bin Tughluq were correctly conceived, badly executed and disastrously abandoned? Discuss **2017**
- "The policy of creating heterogeneous nobility by Muhammad Tughluq started the process of **disintegration of Delhi Sultanate**". Explain **2018**

Apart from tracing the legacy of MBT and its impact on decline of Delhi Sultanate- we must also focus on his innovations be it in field of agriculture as well as [Architecture](#)

Firuz Tughluq: Agrarian measures, achievements in civil engineering and public works, decline of the Sultanate

- Form an estimate of the personality of **Firoz Shah Tughlaq with special reference to his religious policy and public works.** **2000**

Foreign contacts and Ibn Battuta's account

- What is your assessment of **Ibn Batutah's Rehla** as an important source of Indian history? **2011**
- Discuss evidence on slavery provided by Ibn Batuta with special reference to female slaves. **2018**

For all the aforementioned topics - [Link](#)

Society, Culture and Economy in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries

(i) Society: composition of rural society, ruling classes, town dwellers, women, religious classes, caste and slavery under the Sultanate

- Analyse the social composition and the role of mobility under the successors of Iltutmish. How did it affect the contemporary politics? **2012**

(ii) Culture: Persian literature, literature in the regional languages of North India, literature in the languages of South India, Sultanate architecture and new structural forms, painting, evolution of a composite culture

- Give a critical assessment of the **contributions of Amir Khusarau and Barani to Indo – Persian Literature**. **2009**
- Trace the technological and stylistic development in the architecture of the Sultanate period. **2014**
- Describe the new architectural features added by successive Sultans' in the construction of Tombs in India. **2018**
- What was the role of Sufi Folk literature in the diffusion of Islam in India in general and in Deccan in particular? **2018**

(iii) Economy: Agricultural production, rise of urban economy and non-agricultural production, trade and commerce

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- Examine the increasing **importance of maritime trade** of India during thirteenth to fifteenth centuries. **2010**
- Evaluate the conditions of **industries** in India from 1200 to 1500 CE. **2013**
- Evaluate critically the **conditions of labour** from 1200 to 1500 CE on the basis of historical sources. **2013**
- Discuss in brief the **land-revenue system and judicial administration** of the Delhi Sultanate. **2015**
- Do you think that the economic measures introduced by the Sultanate rulers were beneficial to the common people as well? Illustrate with examples. **2016**
- Delineate **non-agricultural production and urban economy** in the 13th and 14th centuries C.E. **2017**
- Discuss the **advancement made in Textile Technology** under the Delhi Sultans. **2018**

Link 1- [Society and Culture](#)

Link 2- [Economy](#)

The Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Century

I

Political Developments and Economy: - Rise of Provincial Dynasties: Bengal, Kashmir (Zainul Abedin), Gujarat, Malwa, Bahmanids

- Assess the **Lekhapaddhati** as an important source for evaluating the society and economy of the thirteenth century CE with special reference to Gujarat. **2013**
- Discuss the **state of society and economy of the Bahmani kingdom** as gleaned from historical sources. **2013**
- Assess the **contribution of Firoz Shah Bahamani and Mahmud Gawan in the field of education**. **2016**
- Evaluate **Jonaraja's account of the reign of Zain-ul-Abidin**. **2016**

[Link -1](#)

[Link 2](#)- To be read along with Vijayanagar Empire (attached below)

II

The Vijayanagar Empire

- On the basis of contemporary sources evaluate the system of **agriculture and irrigation of the Vijayanagara 2013**
- To what extent is '**Segmentary State' model** relevant for defining the Vijayanagar State? Critically examine. **2014**
- Mention the salient features of the **polity of Vijayanagara Empire under Krishnadevaraya. 2015**
- Evaluate the accounts of **foreign travellers about Vijayanagar Empire. 2017**
- Do you agree that convergence of political vacuum and impact of Islamicate culture and polity in peninsular India has much to do with the **growth of Vijayanagara kingdom? 2018**

[Link](#)

The Fifteenth and early Sixteenth Century – Society and Culture

(i) Regional cultural specificities -Literary traditions - Provincial architecture

(ii) Society, culture, literature and the arts in Vijayanagara Empire.

Make an estimate of **Rana Kumbha as a patron of literature and art. 2015**

III

Mughal Empire, First phase: Babur and Humayun

- Comment on the **Turko-Mongol theory of sovereignty**. To what extent was it adopted by Babur and Humayun? **2010**

[Link](#)

IV

The Sur Empire: Sher Shah's administration

- “Sher Shah combined in himself qualities of lion and fox.”

V

Portuguese Colonial enterprise

- How was cartaz system used by the Portuguese to maintain their control over the oceanic trade? **2014**

[Link](#)

[Link 2](#)

V

Bhakti and Sufi

- Assess the **contribution of the Acharyas** in the development of the ideological basis of Bhakti. **2012**
- Discuss and evaluate critically various trends in the **historiography of Bhakti**. **2013**
- Evaluate the **Malfuzat texts** sources of medieval history. **2013**
- **Bhakti and mysticism of Lal Ded** emerged as a social force in Kashmir. Comment. **2013**
- Evaluate the contribution of **Vaishnava saints** to the growth of medieval Bhakti literature. **2014**
- “Sufis and medieval mystic saints failed to modify either the religious ideas and practices or the outward structure of Islamic/Hindu societies to any appreciable extent.” Comment for/against. **2015**
- “Tantrism, if not in practice, at last on conception level challenged patriarchy.” Examine Tantrism specially keeping in mind the above context. **2015**
- “**Bhakti and Sufi movements** served the same social purpose.” Discuss **2017**

Source:

[Link 1](#)

[Link 2](#)

Akbar

(i) Conquests and consolidation of the Empire

- Analyze how the political processes of state formation of Mewar, from 10th-15th century CE was challenged in the 16th century CE by the imperialist policy of Akbar. **2013**

(ii) Establishment of Jagir and Mansab systems

- Examine the *Mansab* and *Jagir* system by Akbar and its subsequent failure in the 18th century. **2011**
- How was Iqta system of the Sultans different from the Jagir system under the Mughals? **2014**

Source:

[Link 1](#)

[Link](#)

(iii) Rajput policy

- Describe the **Rajput policy of the Mughal emperors**. Do you agree with the view that the reversal of Akbar's Rajput policy by Aurangzeb was responsible for the disintegration of the Mughal Empire?
- Do you think that **Akbar's Rajput policy** was conscious attempt to incorporate the Indian ruling elite with Mughal Imperial System? **2017**

Source: [Link](#)

(iv) Evolution of religious and social outlook, theory of Sulh-i-kul and religious policy

- Write a short Essay on: "Implications of Akbar's notion of Sulh-i-kul." **2009**

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- “In medieval Indian history Akbar was unique for his religio-political ideas and policies.” Analyse this statement. **2015**
- "Akbar wished to assert his strong belief in God, but his concept of the way God is to be worshipped was independent of either orthodox Islam or Hinduism". Comment **2018**

(v) Court patronage of art and technology

- Give an estimate of Akbar as a promoter of technology. **2009**

Mughal Empire in the Seventeenth Century

(i) Major administrative policies of Jahangir, Shahjahan and Aurangzeb

(ii) The Empire and the Zamindars

(iii) Religious policies of Jahangir, Shahjahan and Aurangzeb

(iv) Nature of the Mughal State

(v) Late Seventeenth century crisis and the revolts

(vi) The Ahom Kingdom

(vii) Shivaji and the early Maratha Kingdom.

Analysis:

This section deals with the second part of **Mughal Empire – the phase post Akbar**. From this section, the key idea is to then, approach this section through previous year papers.

One major topic is to study the reign of Aurangzeb at detailed length and other being, topics such as foreign policy of Mughal, Architecture during reign of Shah Jahan; Painting during the reign of Jahangir. (these were asked in **2016 and 2018** respectively).

- Changes in the **composition of nobility from Akbar to Aurangzeb**.
- Analyze the religious policy of the Mughal emperors from Akbar to Aurangzeb. How did it affect the stability of the Mughal Empire?
- **“Spanish ulcer ruined Napoleon Bonaparte, the Deccan ulcer ruined Aurangzeb.”**
- In what ways were Aurangzeb's Rajput and religious policies different from those of his predecessors? What were the consequences of the changes made by him? **2004**
- Write a short essay on: “Dara Shikoh” **2006**

II

In this subsection, **Irfan Habib's Agrarian Crisis theory** is one of the main area of focus.

- The causes of revolts with **Jats, Marathas** must be traced alongside the analysis of agrarian structure of Mughal India in a teleological manner.
- Changes from the time of Akbar- (continuities if any from Alauddin Khalji and Sher Shah Suri).
- Also how was the crisis gradually, expanding from periphery to core- its impact on state treasury;
- Role of Aurangzeb's Deccan campaign, impact on weakening the central Mughal Empire and finally
- the rise of regional autonomous states.

Late Seventeenth century crisis and the revolts

- "The major cause of revolts against the Mughal Empire during the latter half of the 17th century was economic, rather than religious." Discuss. **2009**
- On the basis of the accounts of Europeans bring out the agrarian crisis of the 17th century CE India. **2013**

The Ahom Kingdom

- Give a brief account of resistance offered by Ahom State against the Mughal rule. **2014**

Satish Chandra's book – has a chapter on Ahom Kingdom. It in a lucid manner deals with the topic;

III

Source: [Satish Chandra's chapter - attached](#)

[Link- 2](#)

Rise of Marathas- It is one of the major last topics of Medieval Indian History. The topic requires analysis in two major ways.

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- Political Narrative – **Shivaji- Rise of institution of Peshwas**- The Confederacy (Bhosle, Gaikwad, Holkars, Scindia)
- The economic changes and continuities, especially **Chauth and Sardeshmukhi**.
- The **Third Battle of Panipat, 1761** and eventual phases of Anglo-Maratha war- factors that led to it.

Shivaji and the early Maratha Kingdom

- How did Shivaji organize his administration and finances to consolidate his power? **2010**
- Give social background to the rise of the Maratha movement during the seventeenth century. **2012**

Maratha ascendancy under the Peshwas

- Compare the Peshwas' bureaucratic management with that of the Imperial Mughal **2015**
- How will you view the Maratha policy of expansion? Delineate. **2017**

The Maratha fiscal and financial system

- Write a short answer on: "**Chauth and Sardeshmukhi of the Maratha rulers.**"

Emergence of Afghan Power, Battle of Panipat: 1761

- Write a short essay on: "**Consequences of the Third Battle of Panipat.**" **2002**
- How was the Afghan nobility responsible for the decline of the Afghan Empire? Discuss. **2012**
- Is it true that the court intrigues and weak revenue system led to the **collapse of the Maratha empire**? Comment **2016**
- "The Afghan invasions in the Eighteenth Century not only signified the military irrelevance of the Mughal Empire but also hastened its **decline**". Explain. **2018**

[Source- Link](#)

The Eighteenth Century

- (i) Factors for the decline of the Mughal Empire**
- (ii) The regional principalities: Nizam's Deccan, Bengal, Awadh**
- (iii) Maratha ascendancy under the Peshwas**
- (iv) The Maratha fiscal and financial system**
- (v) Emergence of Afghan Power, Battle of Panipat: 1761**
- (vi) State of politics, culture and economy on the eve of the British conquest**

Factors for the decline of the Mughal Empire

- “The Battle of Plassey that decided the fate of Bengal was won by Clive through intrigues.” Explain. **2014**
- Do you think that the **agrarian crisis of the 17th century** led to the disintegration of the Mughal empire? Discuss. **2016**
- Was it the weakening of the Mughal empire or the rise of regional powers that led to the British conquest of India? Discuss. **2016**
- “The political disintegration was responsible for the socio-economic decline in India during the 18th century.” Comment; **2017**

The regional principalities: Nizam's Deccan, Bengal, Awadh

- Discuss the causes of the rise and growth of regional kingdoms with special reference to **Deccan** in the 18th century. **2011**

[Link- Eighteenth Century](#)

As mentioned in case of Modern India, this section needs –

- **To understand period of 1707-1757 (Phase of decline of Mughal Empire)**
- **To also trace the trajectory of rise of East India Company, factors, causes and consequences.**
- **The manner of emergence of regional autonomous states.**
- **Also trace the Maratha's in this period.**

Economy and Society in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries

(i) Population, agricultural production, craft production

(ii) Towns, commerce with Europe through Dutch, English and French companies: a trade revolution. Indian mercantile classes, banking, insurance and credit systems

(iii) Condition of peasants, condition of women

State the structure of medieval village society in Northern India.

- What were the **passive forms of resistance of the peasants in the medieval period?** 2012
- Will it be correct to say that the rural economy in Mughal India was relatively self-sufficient? 2015
- "An important feature of agriculture in Mughal India has been the large number of crops raised by the peasants". Illustrate by giving examples.
- Discuss the working of Zamindari System under the Mughal rulers. Also describe the **role played by the Zamindars in the agrarian economy of Mughal India.** 2018

Towns, commerce with Europe through Dutch, English and French companies: a trade revolution. Indian mercantile classes, banking, insurance and credit systems

- **Critically evaluate various approaches to study medieval Indian towns.** 2010
- Discuss the different types of Karkhanas in Mughal India. How was the production organized in the different Karkhanas? 2010
- Medieval Indian towns were merely as extension of villages. Comment. 2012
- Give a sketch of **Indian trade with Europe during the Mughal period.** 2013
- "India had been for hundreds of years the Lancashire of the Eastern world." Critically examine this view. 2014
- Analyse the Mughal monetary system and examine their policy of minting of coins. 2014

Source: [Link](#)

Culture in the Mughal Empire

(i) Persian histories and other literature. Hindi and other religious literature

Part A

Evolution of the Sikh community and the Khalsa Panth

- Write a short essay on: “**Evolution of the Khalsa Panth**” Comment. **2008**
- The religion of Sikhs was the main force of their unity. Comment. **2017**

Part B

- How does **Tuzuk-i-Babri** testify that Babar had been a cultured man? **2015**
- Discuss the literature written in Hindi in Mughal India. **2018**

Mughal architecture

- Explain the principal features of architecture during Akbar’s rule. What **changes were made in them by Shahjahan?** - Such a question requires careful-if possible, in the real exam time, a tabular distinction of differences/changes as well as continuities.
- "The art of building was carried to highest degree of perfection under Shahjahan". Illustrate by giving architectural details of two of his most celebrated buildings. **2018**

Mughal painting

- Write a short essay on: “During the reign of Jahangir, Mughal painting reached its zenith.”
- Mughal paintings reflect the contemporary socio-political conditions. - Discuss. **2011**
- Delineate the development of the Mughal painting during the reign of Jahangir **2016**
- “Mughal paintings reflect social harmony in contemporary society.” Discuss **2017**

Science and technology

- What was the Indian response to European Technology? **2010**
- Assess the development of **Science and Technology** in the Mughal period. **2013**

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[Comprehensive Link- Chapter wise.](#)

Concluding note:

The idea to analyse **History Optional (Paper I and II)** along with Map Section- mainly was an attempt to reorient all its readers, the effective layer by layer - understanding of

- Best Sources, in the most simplified form- Chapter wise and Questions- Topic wise;
- Previous Year Paper analysis (while the main focus has been post 2012, in Map it was from 1979 onwards)
- Section wise analysis of key areas to prepare and focus topics.

On Presentation of Optional Paper:

In the end, no amount of strategy, sources will suffice or enable us to guarantee a 300+ score, if it is not coupled by effective presentation of the answer with prescribed word-limit. Instead, even if some of you are planning to merely refer **Baliyan Sir** Class notes photocopy from **Karol Bagh or Mukherjee Nagar**, trust me- even that is good source.

However, what will ensure a 300+, is definitely the **framework, format, clarity, flowchart**- Use India Map, Show major sites in **Neolithic - Chalcolithic - Harappa**- wherever required); Even extent of **Mauryan Empire**- for instance in 2018, the question of Mauryan state can show the extent of expansion through a map; if there is a question on **Tomb architecture, or Stupa**, try depicting it by a basic picture- ensure your presentation fetches you that extra 2 marks in each question.

Finally, never get bogged down by the massive syllabus, multiple sources (all the links, notes, summary chapters are indicative- you are free to selectively read the areas as per the requirement, preparation level, stage or time before the Main exam.

Please feel free to ask any doubt- my email id being chitra159@hotmail.com.