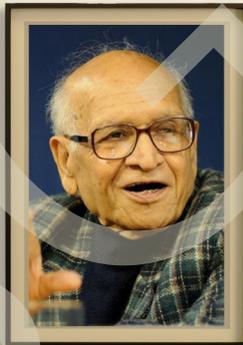
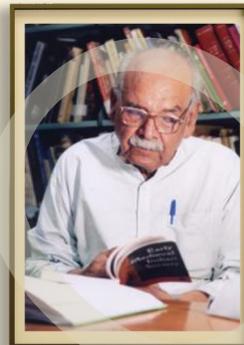


HISTORICAL WRITINGS ON INDIA

POST GRADUATE PROGRAMME IN HISTORY
Self Learning Material

M21HS05DC



വിദ്യാഭ്യാസ സൗകര്യം
SREENARAYANAGURU
OPEN UNIVERSITY

SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

The State University for Education, Training and Research in Blended Format, Kerala

Vision

To increase access of potential learners of all categories to higher education, research and training, and ensure equity through delivery of high quality processes and outcomes fostering inclusive educational empowerment for social advancement.

Mission

To be benchmarked as a model for conservation and dissemination of knowledge and skill on blended and virtual mode in education, training and research for normal, continuing, and adult learners.

Pathway

Access and Quality define Equity.

Historical Writings on India

Course Code: M21HS05DC

Semester- II

**Discipline Core Course
Master of Arts History
Self Learning Material**



SREENARAYANAGURU
OPEN UNIVERSITY

SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

The State University for Education, Training and Research in Blended Format, Kerala

Documentation

Course Code: M21HS05DC

Historical Writings on India Semester II



**SREENARAYANAGURU
OPEN UNIVERSITY**

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced in any form, by mimeograph or any other means, without permission in writing from Sreenarayanaguru Open University. Printed and published on behalf of Sreenarayanaguru Open University by Registrar, SGOU, Kollam.

www.sgou.ac.in



ISBN 978-81-966572-7-7



9 788196 657277

Academic Committee

Dr. M.T. Narayanan

Dr. Vijayakumari K.

Dr. K.S. Madhvan

Dr. K.P. Rajesh

Dr. Muhammed Maheen A.

DR. E.K. Rajan

Dr. C. Haridas

Muhammedali T.

Dr. Parvathi

Dr. Shaji A.

Dr. Deepu J.S.

Development of the content

Hinduja Ramesh, Dr. G. Premkumar, Asha P.P.,
Dr. Sreevidhya Vattamparambath

Review

Content: Dr. K. Sabukuttan

Format: Dr. I.G. Shibi

Linguistic: Dr. K. Krishnankutty

Edit

Dr. K. Sabukuttan

Scrutiny

Dr. Suraj G., Thahani Rezak, Dr. Preethi Chandran P.B.,
Dr. Reeja. R., Zubin Antony Mehar Reynold

Co-ordination

Dr. I.G. Shibi and Team SLM

Design Control

Azeem Babu T.A.

Production

December 2023

Copyright

© Sreenarayanaguru Open University 2023

Message from Vice Chancellor

Dear

I greet all of you with deep delight and great excitement. I welcome you to the Sreenarayanaguru Open University.

Sreenarayanaguru Open University was established in September 2020 as a state initiative for fostering higher education in open and distance mode. We shaped our dreams through a pathway defined by a dictum 'access and quality define equity'. It provides all reasons to us for the celebration of quality in the process of education. I am overwhelmed to let you know that we have resolved not to become ourselves a reason or cause a reason for the dissemination of inferior education. It sets the pace as well as the destination. The name of the University centers around the aura of Sreenarayanaguru, the great renaissance thinker of modern India. His name is a reminder for us to ensure quality in the delivery of all academic endeavors.

Sreenarayanaguru Open University rests on the practical framework of the popularly known "blended format". Learner on distance mode obviously has limitations in getting exposed to the full potential of classroom learning experience. Our pedagogical basket has three entities viz Self Learning Material, Classroom Counselling and Virtual modes. This combination is expected to provide high voltage in learning as well as teaching experiences. Care has been taken to ensure quality endeavours across all the entities.

The university is committed to provide you stimulating learning experience. The PG programme in History is expected to expose the learners to the intricacies of historian's craft through modules on historiography and historical methods. The learners will be trained on the skills for understanding historical forces enabling them to move further in to the complexities of historical narration in order to revisit history with the right perspective. The modules derived multi-disciplinary flavour due to their cross border penetration. We assure you that the university student support services will closely stay with you for the redressal of your grievances during your studentship.

Feel free to write to us about anything that seems relevant regarding the academic programme.

Wish you the best.



Regards,

Dr. P.M. Mubarak Pasha

01.12.2023

Contents

Block-1 Reading India's Ancient Past	1
Unit-1 Discovery of India's Past	2
Unit-2 The Historicity of Early Writings in India	22
Block-2 Writing Medieval Indian History	36
Unit-1 Chronicling Medieval India by British Historians	37
Unit-2 Turko-Persian Historiography	47
Unit-3 Mughal Historiography	61
Block-3 Modern Trends	73
Unit-1 Nationalist Historiography	74
Unit-2 Marxist Approach	92
Block- 4 Recent Trends	108
Unit-1 Intellectual History	109
Unit-2 Postmodern Derivatives	124

SGOU



Reading India's Ancient Past

BLOCK-01



Discovery of India's Past

Learning Outcomes

On completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ understand early Orientalist views on India
- ◆ examine Orientalist attempts to reconstruct India's past
- ◆ assess colonial perspectives on India's historical sense

Background

The 18th century witnessed the emergence of Indology, with European scholars undertaking the study of Indian history and culture. Orientalists, exemplified by figures like William Jones, adopted a sympathetic approach with the goal of uncovering India's illustrious historical heritage through the exploration of its texts and languages. Conversely, Utilitarians, represented by individuals such as James Mill, tended to view Indian culture as stagnant and regressive. These contrasting viewpoints significantly influenced the early Orientalist discourses centred on the reconstruction of India's past. Simultaneously, the British colonial administration acknowledged the presence of ancient Indian literature but generally regarded it as imaginative, lacking a substantial historical context. This dichotomy between the Orientalist assertions regarding India's historical legacy and the Utilitarian dismissal of the Indian intellectual capacity prompted vigorous debates.

It is crucial to recognise that Orientalist discourses had enduring repercussions on Indian historical writings. Furthermore, responses to Orientalism stimulated the development of new perspectives, notably exemplified by the work of Edward Said. His seminal work, *Orientalism*, redefined the term as a Western construct employed to rationalise colonial domination over the culturally perceived 'exotic' East. This unit provides insights into the early endeavours of Orientalists to rediscover India's past and the colonial conceptions of the Indian intellect, which significantly influenced the historiography of the region.



Keywords

Orientalism, Indology, English Education, Civilisation, Periodization

Discussion

1.1.1 Oriental School of Thought

"Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet."

(Rudyard Kipling, "The Ballad of East and West")

◆ Establishment of Indology

In the late 18th century, as the British Empire expanded its control over the Indian subcontinent, there was a significant discussion among colonial authorities and scholars around the question of how India's rich history and culture should be understood and addressed in the context of British rule. This debate focused on the establishment of Indology as a formal academic field driven by the needs of British colonial governance. The dominant group in this academic realm was known as the "Orientalists."

◆ Anglicists and Orientalists

In the historical context of British rule in India, two major schools of thought emerged regarding how the country should be governed. The first group, known as the "Anglicists," believed in prioritising the English language and culture. They aimed to establish a governance system similar to Britain's, especially by introducing English-language education. On the other hand, the Orientalists valued Indian culture highly and wanted to govern India in line with its own traditions. During the late 18th century in the history of British rule in India, the Orientalist approach was dominant, but it later gave way to the Anglicist perspective in the early 19th century. The 18th-century Orientalists held a positive view of India and its historical heritage.

◆ Edward Said on Orientalism

Originally, Orientalism referred to the study of the East in comparison to the West, with "Orient" representing the East and "Occident" representing the West. This term was traditionally associated with scholars who specialised in Eastern languages and literature. However, Edward Said, a prominent figure in literary studies and cultural critique, played a crucial role in redefining Orientalism in



his influential work titled “Orientalism.” Said’s redefinition marked a significant moment in the reassessment of the term. He critiqued the historical, cultural and political perceptions of the West towards the East.

◆ *Edward Said’s assessment*

Edward Said combined ideas from Michel Foucault about “power-knowledge” and Antonio Gramsci’s concept of “hegemony” to criticise the scholarly field of Oriental Studies. Said argued that Orientalism wasn’t a sincere effort by English scholars to understand Eastern cultures. Instead, he believed it was a body of knowledge created to support the power dynamics of colonialism.



Fig 1.1.1 Edward Said

◆ *Influence of Oriental Despotism*

The idea of Oriental Despotism has significantly shaped how Europeans have understood and depicted Asian governments and societies for many years. According to Gramsci’s theory of hegemony, those in power aims not only to control through force but also to gain intellectual and moral legitimacy to ensure stability. Edward Said, however, argues that Orientalism played a crucial role in establishing hegemony over the East. Europeans claimed the authority to pass judgment on the Orient, believing that their knowledge about the East was inherently natural and unquestionably true.

◆ *‘Living Museum’*

Edward Said’s work defines ‘Orientalism’ as a Western construct that created a hierarchical distinction between the Orient and the Occident. The Orient was relegated to an inferior position, serving as Europe’s ‘Other.’ Orientalists portrayed the Orient in essentialist terms, depicting it as a region stuck in history, marked by exoticism and Oriental Despotism, resembling a ‘living museum’. Orientalist works

focused on constructing the Orient rather than objectively studying it.

◆ *Indians as a subject of study*

Said's viewpoint characterises Orientalism as a dominant way of thinking deeply rooted in history, shaping European discussions about the Orient. This influence extended to various figures such as H. T. Colebrooke, Hegel, and Flaubert. Said's framework also had an impact on the examination of Orientalism in the Indian context. Scholars like Gyan Prakash argue that Europeans treated Indians as subjects of study, presenting them as fundamentally different from the rational and materialistic British, which served to justify colonialism. Prakash's analysis highlights essentialism, claims of objectivity, and a focus on contrasting with Europe as key aspects of Orientalist works.

◆ *Foundation of Indian identity*

Scholars like Ronald Inden and Nicholas Dirks argue that British practices, such as the census, played a role in shaping the idea of a 'Hindu' religion based on Sanskrit texts and guided by the Brahmins. This reinforced the Orientalist view, solidifying religious categories like Hindu and Muslim as fundamental to Indian identity. According to Ronald Inden, the emphasis on caste in this discussion replaced individual choices with the impact of caste, suggesting that India's vulnerability to external conquest was simplified to just caste factors. This simplified perspective justified British rule by attributing all Indian actions to caste, society, kinship, or perceived malicious intentions.

◆ *Impact on Indian context*

Several Orientalist scholars, including William Jones, the founder of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, admired Indian culture deeply. In a letter to Warren Hastings, Jones compared those unfamiliar with Asian writings to "savages" who thought the sun existed only for them. Many scholars followed his example, working to rediscover lost Indian documents and reveal the country's rich history. Jones, who also served as a judge in the Supreme Court in Bengal, dedicated himself to the thorough study of India. He became proficient in Sanskrit and explored Indian culture through Sanskrit texts. Jones' perspective on India was mainly religious and Brahmanical, reflecting his sympathetic view of the culture. Importantly, he not only held Indian culture in high regard but also suggested that it shared a common origin with European culture.



1.1.2 William Jones and Asiatic Society of Bengal

◆ *William Jones:
Father of Indology*

William Jones, often referred to as the 'Father of Indology,' was an officer of the English East India Company with a profound interest in Oriental studies. Born to Welsh parents, he received his education at Harrow and University College, Oxford, where he mastered numerous languages, including Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Arabic, and Persian. During his six-month voyage to India, he delved into Eastern world histories and fiction.



Fig 1.1.2 William Jones

◆ *Understanding
Indo-European
languages*

Upon arriving in India in 1783 as a Judge of the Supreme Court of Calcutta, William Jones became a philologist with a keen interest in understanding the relationships among Indo-European languages. He aimed to discover the core that connected these languages. As a judge, he needed to acquaint himself with Sanskrit, and his interactions with Charles Wilkins, who had already mastered Sanskrit, further motivated him to learn the language. He found a close affinity between Sanskrit, Latin, and Greek. He asserted that the Sanskrit language, with its remarkable structure, had stronger affinities with Latin and Greek than could be attributed to mere chance. This realisation led to the discovery of comparative and historical philology.

The Asiatic Society of Bengal was established in Calcutta on January 15, 1784. The presidency was initially offered to Governor-General Warren Hastings, known for promoting knowledge and Sanskrit literature. However, Warren

◆ *Asiatic Society of Bengal*

Hastings preferred to yield the position to William Jones, recognising his expertise and contributions. Thus, William Jones became the first President of the society, leading it until his passing in 1794. The society was modelled after the Royal Society in London, and its objectives and scope were outlined by William Jones himself in a discourse delivered in February 1784. Jones had acquired significant familiarity with some Indian classics and dedicated himself to Oriental studies. He realised the need for an organised association to advance Oriental studies and invited leading Englishmen in Calcutta to join hands in promoting these studies. His initiative received support from thirty distinguished members of the English community in Calcutta, including Robert Chambers, Mr Justice Hyde, General John Carnac and many others.

◆ *Indo-European language family*

The idea of the Indo-European linguistic family and the “discovery” of Sanskrit were the most famous and influential of his achievements. He proclaimed this theory in a paper entitled “On the Hindus,” which he read as the Third Anniversary Discourse at the Asiatic Society in Calcutta in 1786. Jones’s insight paved the way for further investigation into the commonalities between Sanskrit, Persian, Celtic, Romance and the classical languages, which became known as the Indo-European language family. Through his initial comparison of Sanskrit with Latin and Greek, recognising its “wonderful” and “refined” nature, he illuminated the shared cultural origins of India and Europe, subsequently fuelling European interest in India and propelling the advancement of Indian studies.

◆ *Jones’ influential theory*

Jones’ approach to the study of India was not limited to India alone but was deeply connected with an understanding of the West and the whole world. He conducted his comparative study not only in the field of linguistics but in many other realms. Jones viewed Indian laws as being eternal and timeless and thus considered any difference of opinions amongst the scholars as arising from venality or ignorance.

◆ *Dwarkanath Tagore*

In the early days, the society’s meetings were held in the Grand Jury’s room at the Supreme Court. It was only in 1808 that a dedicated building was completed. At first, there were no Indian members due to the limited spread of Western education in India. In 1832, Dwarkanath Tagore became the first Indian member. However, the society was never based



on racial or communal lines. William Jones had envisioned a harmonious intellectual community, irrespective of race, creed, politics or fortune.



Fig 1.1.3 Dwarkanath Tagore

◆ Society's Publications

The society recognised the need for a publication to document its members' research and observations. The *Asiatic Researches* was published, but financial challenges led to its discontinuation in 1839 after twenty volumes. A monthly magazine titled *Gleanings in Science* started in 1839, which allowed the publication of the monthly proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. In 1865, a second part for contributions to Natural History, Anthropology, and proceedings of the society was initiated as the *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*. These two serials were amalgamated in 1905 to create the *Journal and Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, an annual volume issued in parts throughout the year.

◆ Bibliotheca Indica

In addition to the serial publications, the society has published a considerable number of catalogues, dictionaries, miscellaneous works, and a *Catalogue of Scientific Periodicals*. A significant contribution is the *Bibliotheca Indica*, a series of publications containing Oriental texts in Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian and other languages, along with their translations. The society is recognised as one of the largest publishers of Oriental works globally.

The Indian Museum in Calcutta traces its origins to the Asiatic Society of Bengal. The society initiated its museum in 1814, but the collections grew rapidly, and within 50 years, it was evident that the available space could not accommodate

◆ *Origin of Indian Museum*

the extensive collections. The society petitioned the government to subsidise the establishment of a national museum, offering its collections as a starting point. In 1866, the Indian Museum Act was passed, and the Society's collections became a part of the Indian Museum, alongside those of government research departments in Archaeology, Botany, Geology and Zoology.

◆ *Similar societies*

The Asiatic Society of Bengal also played a pioneering role in inspiring similar societies in India and elsewhere. The Royal Asiatic Society of London, founded in 1823 by H. T. Colebrooke, was significantly influenced by the work of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. Additionally, branches in Bombay and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), established in 1827 and 1845, respectively, were inspired by the success of the Bengal society. Another notable achievement is the 'Indian Science Congress', initiated in 1914, which holds annual sessions like the 'British Association for the Advancement of Science'. The administrative and publication work for this Congress is carried out by the Asiatic Society of Bengal, contributing significantly to the development of scientific knowledge in India.

◆ *Eurocentric view*

1.1.3 Colonial Perspectives on India's Sense of History

Colonial perspectives on India's history were significantly shaped during the period of British colonialism, spanning from the 17th to the mid-20th century. This era saw European powers encountering India and engaging in a complex interplay of historical narratives. The European colonists, mainly driven by Eurocentric viewpoints, sought to comprehend, interpret and, at times, manipulate India's diverse history. These colonial perspectives not only impacted how Indian history was perceived but also left a lasting influence on its contemporary understanding. This section paved the way for an exploration of the multifaceted colonial views that continue to influence the discourse on India's historical identity.

1.1.3.1 Horace Hayman Wilson (1786-1860)

Horace Hayman Wilson is renowned for his significant contributions to Sanskrit Studies. After receiving his education in England, he served as the Secretary of the Asiatic Society of Bengal from 1811 to 1833. During this time, he compiled a Sanskrit-to-English dictionary for the East India Company. He later returned to England and in



◆ Director of the Royal Asiatic Society

1833, assumed the position of a Sanskrit Professor at Oxford University, and in 1837, he was appointed as the director of the Royal Asiatic Society. During his tenure, Wilson translated the *Vishnu Purana* and the *Rig Veda* into English. He also authored numerous books exploring Vedic religion and culture.

◆ Controversial views

Notably, his work "Lectures on the Religious and Philosophical Systems of the Hindus" delved into the nature and history of Hindu religion. One of his major contributions was the assertion that the existing Hindu religious practices did not constitute a coherent system but rather a heterogeneous collection of incompatible elements. He also introduced the controversial idea of replacing Vedic religion with Christianity. Additionally, Wilson held controversial views on the historical nature of Vedas, Puranas, and Tantras, suggesting they were not divine but human-authored and unauthentic. To challenge these claims, he offered a prize of two hundred pounds to anyone who could refute them.

1.1.3.2 Henry Thomas Colebrooke (1765-1837)

◆ Scholar in Sanskrit Studies

Henry Thomas Colebrooke was a prominent orientalist who made significant contributions to the rediscovery of India's past. He is widely regarded as one of the first great scholars in Sanskrit studies. After completing his education, Colebrooke ventured to India and secured a position in the accounts department of the East India Company. He later joined the Board of Accounts in Calcutta. Initially focusing on matters of trade, he advocated free trade between Great Britain and India. However, his interests shifted towards cultural and religious studies of the vernacular system.

◆ Translation of Manusmriti

In 1805, Colebrooke was appointed as a professor of Hindu law and Sanskrit at the renowned college in Fort William, Calcutta, under the orders of Lord Wellesley. He further served as the president of the Asiatic Society in Calcutta in 1807. Colebrooke's extensive studies included the origins, history, and grammar of Sanskrit. He edited and translated various ancient texts from the classical period of Vedic Civilisation. Notably, he completed the translation of *Manusmriti*, a significant monograph on Hindu laws concerning inheritance in ancient Vedic society. He also wrote noteworthy articles on traditional religious rituals of Vedic origins, and his detailed introductions to the Vedas in English were considered standard works in the field.

◆ 'Caxton of India'

1.1.3.3 Charles Wilkins (1749-1836)

Charles Wilkins, a key English Orientalist scholar, is renowned for translating the *Bhagavad Gita* into English and pioneering the first typeface in the Bengali language. Wilkins mastered various vernacular languages and played a crucial role in designing the first type for printing Bengali books. His supervision led to the publication of the first book in Bengali typeface. This initiative earned him the title "Caxton of India." He also worked as a translator of Persian and Bengali in the Press Department of the East India Company and translated a Royal inscription in Kutilan text from ancient times. He made significant contributions to the translation of parts of the *Mahabharata*. His 1785 version of the *Bhagavad Gita* promoted monotheism and aimed to discourage polytheism in Vedic practices. Additionally, he wrote about Sikhism in Bihar and the history of Islam in India, along with his explorations of Sufi shrines during his time in India. In 1808, he published his *Grammar of the Sanskrit Language*.

1.1.3.4 Thomas Babington Macaulay(1800-1859)



Fig 1.1.4 Thomas Babington Macaulay

Thomas Babington Macaulay is best known for introducing English education in India and emphasising the importance of implanting Christianity to civilise the Indian population. Throughout his career, Macaulay devoted himself to the study of local cultures, languages and religious practices in Indian civilisation. In 1838, during a special session of

◆ *'White Man's Burden'*

India's Supreme Ruling Council, Macaulay emphasised the duty of the Western world (White Man's Burden) to impart knowledge to Indian society, which he regarded as lacking a coherent system of knowledge. He believed that the British authorities needed to play a substantial role in spreading education and civilising Indian society.

◆ *Promotion of English education*

In Macaulay's view, the British had a responsibility to educate and civilise the Indian population. He saw English education as the means to eliminate idolatry in Bengal, predicting that it would take not more than thirty years to eradicate this practice, at least among respectable families, without advocating religious conversion. Macaulay did not support broad-based proselytisation but believed that the education system could naturally bring about transformation. He believed that Western knowledge could help the Indians to become more civilised. He aimed to create a generation that was "Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, opinion, morals and intellect." To realise his ideas, Lord Macaulay urged colonial authorities to provide interpretations of the Vedic scriptures that would lead to a transformation of Indian culture and civilisation.

1.1.3.5 John Muir (1810-1882)

◆ *Focus on early Indian history*

John Muir, born in Glasgow (1810), arrived in India in 1829 to join the service of the East India Company. In 1853, he left the job and became a Professor of Sanskrit at the University of Edinburgh. He devoted the rest of his life to the study and research of native Indian languages and cultures. Muir's main work focused on the early Vedic religion, Sanskrit and the people of India. He extensively studied important source texts of Indian cultural and religious history and produced English translations of many of these texts.

◆ *Controversial ideas*

Muir's early work examined the origins of the caste system in ancient India, concluding that there was no caste system in the Vedic age. He divided this work into multiple volumes, including a history of early races in India, an exploration of the Vedas, a comparison of Vedic and later Indian history and a volume on Vedic mythology. Muir also wrote about the authenticity of Christianity in comparison with Hinduism, suggesting that both religions could co-exist. He aimed to find commonalities between the two faiths and believed that this could help Christianity gain acceptance within Indian society. However, his ideas faced controversy in India and received criticism from Hindu scholars.

◆ Anti-colonial Indologist

1.1.3.6 Edward Green Balfour (1813-1889)

Edward Green Balfour, a Scottish Indologist, introduced the study of the environment in India to European universities. After arriving in India in 1836, he served in various roles in the European Regiment at Madras and Bombay infantry. He gained proficiency in Hindi and Persian languages, which proved valuable for his later academic pursuits. During his assignments in India, he established museums and zoological gardens in Bengal and Madras. He promoted the idea that public health was closely linked to forest conservation and ecosystem management. He authored a *Cyclopedia of India* and translated several Persian works into English, including *Gul-Dastah*, in 1850. Balfour also established a Mohammedan Public Library in Madras. His most notable contribution was *The Cyclopedia of India and of Eastern and Southern Asia*, first published in 1857. Balfour held anti-colonialist sentiments.

◆ Aryan-Dravidian history

1.1.3.7 Robert Caldwell (1814-1891)

Robert Caldwell, an Irish missionary, arrived in India in 1838 and made significant contributions to the study of South Indian languages and cultures. He proposed that the South Indian languages, specifically Dravidian, were distinct from other languages on the Indian subcontinent, challenging the prevailing belief that they were part of the Indo-European language family. Caldwell focused on proselytising activities and sought to convert the Tamil-speaking community, particularly the 'Chunar' Community, whom he viewed as distinct from mainstream Hindus. He argued that the Brahmanical Aryans had colonised the indigenous Dravidians. Caldwell conducted in-depth research on the history and archaeology of Tirunelveli, drawing from available Sangam literature sources, which culminated in his book *A Political and General History of the District of Tinnevely* in 1881. His work stirred controversy and criticism in India, sparking a counter-movement among Hindu scholars.

1.1.3.8 Monier Monier-Williams (1819-1899)

Monier Monier-Williams, a British Indologist who spent his formative years in Bombay, left an indelible mark on the understanding of Indian culture and religion. His notable achievement was the introduction of the term 'Hinduism' as a recognised nomenclature. After receiving education at the East India Company's College in England, he assumed the role of Boden Professor of Sanskrit at Oxford University.



- ◆ Translation of Sanskrit texts

Monier-Williams was instrumental in translating Sanskrit texts from ancient India into English, facilitating the East India Company's efforts. Notably, he authored a book titled *Hinduism and The Study of Sanskrit in Relation to Missionary Work in India* in 1870, wherein he advocated Christianity as a rational alternative to Vedic scriptures. His scholarly work also encompassed the creation of the *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*. Moreover, Monier-Williams established the 'Indian Institute' at Oxford University with the primary objective of disseminating knowledge about Indian religion, culture and philosophy, particularly to train aspirants of the Indian Civil Service.

1.1.4 Archaeological Advancements in Uncovering India's Past: The Legacy of Prinsep and Cunningham

- ◆ Archaeological Survey of India (1861)

The establishment of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) in 1861, led by Alexander Cunningham as its inaugural director, marked a significant milestone in the pursuit of India's historical heritage. Archaeology, the discipline dedicated to exploring the human past through the examination of material relics left by our ancestors, such as coins, tools, pottery, inscriptions, and artwork, played a pivotal role in unearthing India's rich history. The history of archaeology in India can be traced back to the formation of the Asiatic Society in Calcutta in 1784, a pivotal institution founded by William Jones and other esteemed scholars. This society served as a crucial hub for in-depth research and the dissemination of India's diverse historical narrative.

- ◆ History of British India

During the early 1800s, the government appointed Francis Buchanan to undertake surveys in Mysore. It delved into the exploration of monuments in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, contributing significantly to the nascent field of Indian archaeology. This period coincided with James Mill's efforts in his *History of British India*, wherein he presented a somewhat negative view of ancient Indian civilisation, suggesting it was inferior in many aspects. Nonetheless, scholars like James Prinsep, H. H. Wilson, and Alexander Cunningham played pivotal roles in reshaping India's history.

1.1.4.1 James Prinsep (1799-1840)

James Prinsep, a distinguished orientalist, an English scholar and antiquary, assumed the position of Secretary of the Asiatic Society in 1832. He arrived in India in 1799 and



◆ *Deciphering ancient Indian scripts*

initially worked as an indigo planter. But later, he took the role of assay master at the Calcutta Mint in 1819, nurturing his burgeoning interest in architecture. In 1832, Prinsep initiated the journal for the Asiatic Society and authored articles spanning various subjects, including Chemistry and numismatics. His remarkable contributions encompassed the deciphering of scripts like Brahmi and Kharosthi, enabling the interpretation of coins and thereby bridging gaps in ancient history. Prinsep's work not only solidified the chronology of ancient India but also helped to identify the Mauryan Emperor Ashoka as *Devanampiyadesi* (Beloved of the Gods). Notably, he is credited with unravelling the Kharosthi script, one of India's oldest scripts, significantly enhancing the understanding of ancient Indian inscriptions.



Fig 1.1.5 James Prinsep

1.1.4.2 Alexander Cunningham(1814-1893)

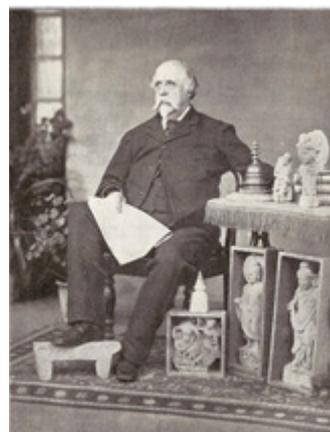


Fig 1.1.6 Alexander Cunningham

◆ *Archaeological Surveyor*

Alexander Cunningham is known as the founder of the Indian Archaeological Survey. He had joined the Bengal Army's engineering wing in 1833. His contact with Prinsep drew him into Indology. Cunningham's monumental contributions included submitting an article in 1834 related to the relics of the Manikyala Stupa, conducting excavations at Sarnath in 1837, and exploring iconic sites such as Sanchi and Sankisa. In 1861, he assumed the official role of Archaeological Surveyor for the Government of India. Cunningham's explorations extended to the identification and study of critical historical sites mentioned in various texts and travelogues, including Aornos, Taxila, Sarnath and many others. His extensive body of work encompassed significant books such as the first volume of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, *Bhilsa Topes*, *Inscriptions of Ashoka*, *Book of Indian Eras*, *The Ancient Geography of India* and *Coins of Ancient India*.

◆ *Discovery of critical historical sites*

Cunningham authored numerous reports and monographs. His writings delved into various facets, including Aryan architecture, the historical narrative of Buddhism based on archaeological findings and the intricate political division of India into myriad small chiefdoms. Through his research, Cunningham proposed the evolution of Brahmanism over time, conducting extensive excavations and studies, notably at Taxila and Gaur. His contributions extended to border demarcation during the Anglo-Sikh wars and the intricate political divisions of India. Following his retirement from the Archaeological Survey in 1865, he was reappointed as its director-general by Lord Mayo in 1870. He solidified his pivotal role in shaping the field, leaving behind a lasting legacy that continues to enrich Indian historical writing and archaeology.

1.1.5 James Mill (1773-1836)



Fig 1.1.7 James Mill

◆ Criticised Indian culture and civilisation

James Mill, a Scottish philosopher and historian, played a significant role in shaping the study of Indian history and culture from the colonial perspective. Despite never visiting India, he extensively studied and wrote about Indian history. His most influential work, *History of British India*, published in 1818, had a profound impact on the governance of India by the East India Company. It influenced colonial authorities' attitudes and justifications for colonial rule. Mill's work criticised Indian culture and civilisation while advocating the civilising mission of British colonialism.

1.1.5.1 James Mill's Periodization of Indian History

James Mill's periodization of Indian history is based on a Eurocentric perspective, reflecting the colonial mindset of his era. He divided Indian history into three primary epochs, each associated with a dominant culture or power. These epochs are as follows:

◆ Periodization of Indian history

1. **The 'Hindu' Period:** According to Mill, the Hindu period covers a vast expanse of time and is characterised by the dominance of indigenous Hindu culture. He believed that this period was marked by stagnation, superstition and the absence of rational thought. Mill portrayed it as a period of despotism and subjugation of the lower classes, with little progress in the fields of science, philosophy and governance.
2. **The 'Muslim' Period:** Mill considered the arrival of the Muslim rulers in India as the second major period. He believed that this era was characterised by oppression and tyranny, citing instances of religious conflicts and intolerance. He often portrayed the Muslim rulers as foreign oppressors who sought to impose their religion on the Hindu majority.
3. **The 'British' Period:** The British period, in Mill's view, marked a period of enlightenment and progress. He saw the British as liberators who brought rational governance, modern education, and economic development to India. Mill argued that British colonial rule brought about positive changes in India, leading to a more enlightened and prosperous society.

1.1.5.2 Criticism

A central criticism of James Mill's periodization lies in its pronounced Eurocentric bias. His viewpoint was



◆ *Eurocentric bias*

inextricably shaped by the British Empire's colonial agenda, portraying British colonial rule as the pinnacle of Indian history. This Eurocentric stance, stemming from Mill's lack of firsthand experience in India and his inability to speak Indian languages, led him to rely extensively on historical accounts by earlier European scholars. These accounts, although pivotal in shaping his periodization, were often tainted by Eurocentric and Orientalist perspectives that aligned with colonial narratives.

◆ *Reliance on biased sources*

Moreover, as a civil servant of the East India Company, Mill had exclusive access to the official documents and reports of the British. These documents provided insights into Indian governance, economic policies and official observations about Indian society and culture. Mill frequently utilised these official reports to buttress his arguments in favour of British intervention, emphasising the perceived deficiencies of indigenous systems. Given his language limitations, Mill leaned heavily on translations of Indian texts, particularly religious and literary works, executed by European scholars. These translations significantly influenced his understanding of Indian religion, philosophy and culture. Still, it is essential to recognise that they might introduce interpretive biases and not fully capture the nuanced essence of the originals. Furthermore, Mill corresponded with individuals who had direct experiences in India. This indirect access to firsthand accounts, though valuable, remained filtered through the perspectives of these individuals, potentially limiting the comprehensiveness and balance of Mill's understanding of Indian society.

◆ *Oversimplified Indian history*

James Mill's characterisation of the Muslim period in Indian history as rife with tyranny and religious conflict has been critiqued for its one-sided nature. Critics argue that, while instances of conflicts existed, this period also witnessed substantial cultural achievements in art, architecture and scholarship. Moreover, his depiction of the Muslim rulers as foreign oppressors oversimplifies their multifaceted interactions with Indian society.

◆ *Motive- To justify British rule*

In addition to this, Mill's work has been charged with serving as a justification for the British colonial rule in India, portraying it as a progressive and enlightened force while downplaying the harsh realities of colonial exploitation and economic drain. Critics have also emphasised the lack of empirical evidence in Mill's periodization, citing a reliance on biased sources and a limited grasp of the intricate details of Indian history, which diminish the validity of his framework.

Summarised Overview

This unit delves into early Orientalist perspectives on India, emerging in the 18th century. It explores the different approaches of Orientalist scholars like William Jones, driven by a profound fascination for India's ancient heritage. These scholars aimed to reconstruct India's glorious past through the study of ancient languages and texts. On the opposing end were colonial officials such as James Mill, who dismissed Indian culture as backward and stagnant, asserting its lack of historical significance.

A central theme of this unit is the significant influence of Orientalist scholarship in reshaping perceptions of India's past. Scholars like William Jones played a crucial role in unravelling India's historical and cultural history. The Asiatic Society of Bengal 1784, under Jones, became a stronghold for promoting Oriental studies and a hub for scholars interested in deciphering India's history.

The unit also explores conflicting colonial views on ancient Indian literature and their impact on subsequent writings regarding India's past. While Orientalists celebrated India's literary achievements as glimpses into a glorious past, colonial officials like James Mill remained sceptical. Mill's dismissal of India's cultural and historical significance, as seen in his work *The History of British India*, highlighted a prevailing bias against Indian civilisation.

Assignments

1. Contrast the Orientalist and Utilitarian viewpoints regarding Indian history and culture.
2. Explore the approach and contributions of William Jones to the study of India's history.
3. Analyse the role and importance of the Asiatic Society of Bengal to encourage oriental research in India.
4. Assess James Mill's perspectives on Indian culture and its influence on British policies.
5. Evaluate colonial perceptions of India's purported absence of historical consciousness. Examine Edward Said's groundbreaking work in redefining Orientalism.
6. Explain how the British colonial interests influenced the study and documentation of India's history?
7. Compare and contrast the Orientalist and Anglicist perspectives in the study of Indian history during the colonial era. Analyse their differing viewpoints on language, culture, and education.



Suggested Reading

1. Elliot, H. M., and John Dowson, *The History of India as Told by its Historians: The Muhammadan Period*, 8 vols. London, 1867-77, Reprint, Delhi, 2001.
2. Hardy, Peter, "Pre-modern Concept of Time in Indo-Muslim," in *Medieval Indian: Essays in Intellectual Thought and Culture*, Vol. I, edited by Iqtidar Husain Siddiqui, Manohar, New Delhi, 2003.
3. Kosambi, D. D., *The Culture and Civilization of Ancient India in Historical Outline*, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1989.
4. Philips, H., *Historians of India, Pakistan and Ceylon*, London, 1961.
5. Thapar, Romila, *History and Beyond*, Oxford, New Delhi, 2000.

Reference

1. Hasan, Mohibbul (Ed.), *Historians of Medieval India*, Meenakshi Prakashan, Meerut, 1968.
2. Hardy, Peter, *Studies in Indo-Muslim Historical Writing*, Routledge, London, 1983.
3. Kosambi, D. D., *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1956.
4. Thapar, Romila, et al., *Communalism and the Writing of Indian History*, Peoples Publishing House, New Delhi, 1969.
5. Thapar, Romila, *Early India: From the Origins to AD 1300*, Penguin and Allen Lane, Great Britain, 2002.
6. _____, *Cultural Pasts: Essays in Early Indian History*, Oxford, New Delhi, 2000.
7. _____, *The Past and Prejudice*, National Book Trust, Delhi, 1975.
8. _____, *The Past Before Us: Historical Traditions of Early North India*, Permanent Black, 2014.
9. Warder, K., *An Introduction to Indian Historiography*, Bombay, 1972.



Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

SGOU





The Historicity of Early Writings in India

Learning Outcomes

On completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ understand the historical value of early Indian writings
- ◆ critically examine the Puranas as historical sources
- ◆ analyse *Rajatarangini* as an early chronicle in reconstructing India's past

Background

Ancient Indian literature offers valuable insights into the historical past of India, although its historical significance was a subject of debate among colonial scholars. The Puranas and Epics contain mythological elements, but they also serve as mirrors reflecting the historical realities of the society. Concurrently, texts such as Kalhana's *Rajatarangini* (12th Century) were among the earliest Indian works that resembled chronicles. Orientalist scholars argued that such texts indicated India's historical consciousness, while Utilitarians dismissed them as imaginative narratives devoid of factual historical content. These debates played a pivotal role in shaping the colonial perspectives on early Indian writings, influencing how both foreign and Indian scholars reconstructed India's historical narrative.

Keywords

Puranas, Mahabharata, Rajatarangini, Itihasa, Rajatarangani, Mushakavamsa Kavya

Discussion

1.2.1 *Itihasa and Purana Tradition*

The historical tradition in ancient India comprised three fundamental elements: *Akhyana* (narratives), *Itihasa* (past events) and *Purana* (ancient tales and lore). These elements



◆ *Itihasa* -Past events

◆ *Puranas* - Ancient lore

served as the foundational building blocks of historical knowledge, containing the embryonic seeds of historical accounts. *Akhyana* represented the art of presenting history in a narrative format. Until the 3rd and 4th centuries CE, Buddhism was at its zenith. Within the *Mahayana* School of Buddhism, the worship of Buddha idols gained immense popularity. Concurrently, the Vedic religion found itself somewhat marginalised and sought to connect with a broader audience. It engaged in introspection and experimental thinking, resulting in the creation of a specific genre of literature designed to make religion more accessible to the masses. This genre came to be known as the “Puranas.”

◆ 18 major texts of Puranas

The Puranas encompass a total of 18 major texts, classified on the basis of the devotional cults that predominated in 3rd and 4th century India. For instance, the *Shaiva Purana* catered to the followers of the Lord Shiva and included texts like the *Shaiva Purana*, *Vayu Purana*, and *Skanda Purana*. Similarly, the *Vaishnavas*, devoted to the Lord Vishnu, revered texts such as the *Vishnu Purana*, *Garuda Purana*, *Matsya Purana*, and *Varaha Purana*. The *Shakti* cult, dedicated to mother goddesses, and the *Ganapatya* cult also developed their own distinct Puranas. These Puranic texts share common sections, such as the origin of the universe, stories pertaining to their respective deities and their divine families, the significance of pilgrimage centres, accounts of political dynasties and myths about lineages (*Vamsha* and *Vamshanucharita*), among other themes. Moreover, over the years, the *Puranas* began to incorporate various related subjects, including iconography, architecture, and more, making them rich repositories of knowledge and cultural history.

◆ *History in a literary form*

1.2.2 Jain and Buddhist Historiography

Buddhist and Jain scholars played a crucial role in shaping the historiographical tradition of ancient India. These traditions were rooted in the recognition of the importance of documenting both past events and contemporary historical occurrences. The scholars of these traditions actively engaged with writing histories and took earnest measures to preserve them, much like their counterparts in the Brahmanical schools of thought. Notably, they presented history in a literary form, offering a unique perspective on historical narratives.

Both Buddhist and Jain scholars have to their credit a substantial body of work that can be categorised as historical or semi-historical in nature. Within their writings, one can find



◆ *Historical or semi-historical works*

a diverse range of historical elements, including narratives that chronicle significant events, dynastic genealogies, chronological records, biographies and chronicles. These components formed integral parts of their historical compositions.

◆ *Distinct schools of historical writings*

It is important to note that there were distinct schools of historical writings within the Buddhist and Jain communities, reflecting the rich diversity of their approaches and perspectives. Historical records were diligently compiled and preserved by adherents of various Buddhist and Jain sects, contributing to the collective heritage of these traditions. Much like the Sanskrit literary tradition, both Buddhist and Jain literature contain a wealth of works that possess historical value, making them invaluable resources for understanding the history of ancient India. The Buddhist and Jain historical traditions have each left their unique imprints on the historical narrative, and they are preserved in different classes of works originating from various periods. These traditions have their own intrinsic authenticity and value, shedding light on the aspects of Indian history that may not have been as prominently featured in other historical traditions.

1.2.2.1 Jain Historiography

Jain Canonical Literature: Ancient Jain literature encompasses a variety of languages, including Prakrit (*Ardhamagadhi, Shuraseni*), Tamil, and Sanskrit. This literature can primarily be categorised into two main components: *Anga* and *Agamas (Purva)*, along with significant additions in the form of *Cheda Sutras* and *Mula Sutras*.

Angas and Agamas: These works provide profound insights into the teachings of Mahavira, the Jain spiritual leader. The *Acharanga Sutra* expounds upon the codes of conduct for Jain monks, while the *Bhagavati Sutra* sheds light on the biography and achievements of Mahavira.

◆ *Jain literature*

Philosophical: This category includes texts like *Samaysar* and *Pravachan Saar*, primarily authored by *Acharya Kundakunda*, which delve into the philosophical aspects of Jain spiritualism.

Puranas: Jain Puranas are structured along the lines of the Vedic epics and Puranas, but they are infused with Jain philosophical content. Notable examples include the *Harivamsa Purana*, *Maha-Purana*, and *Padmcharit*.

Biographies: Biographical works within Jain literature encompass texts such as *Jasahar-Charita*, *Naykumar-Charita* and *Bhadrabahu-Charita*. *Bhadrabahu-Charita*, for instance, provides insights into the events related to the Mauryan Emperor Chandragupta and his teacher, Bhadrabahu.

Additionally, Jain literature comprises a diverse range of other valuable texts, including Harisenacharya's Brihatkathakosh, Hemchandra Suri's Parishishta-Parvan, Dhananjaya's Namamala (a thesaurus), Ajitasena's Alankar-Chintamani (focusing on literature), Mahavir's Ganit-Sarsamgraha (exploring mathematics) and Somdeva's Niti-Vakya-Amrita (addressing political science).

1.2.2.2 Buddhist Historiography

Buddhism emerged as a religion that resonated with the masses. Consequently, its literary works were preserved in various languages, such as Prakrit, Pali, Tibetan, Chinese, and Sinhala, to cater to its diverse followers. Moreover, in a bid to challenge the prominence of the Vedic religion, some of these texts were also composed in Sanskrit. The extensive body of Buddhist literature primarily includes the *Pitakas* and the *Jatakas*.

(i) **Pitakas:** The *Pitakas* are composed of three distinct collections, namely *Vinaya Pitaka*, *Sutta Pitaka*, and *Abhidhamma Pitaka*, collectively referred to as the '*Tri-Pitakas*'.

- ◆ The *Vinaya-Pitaka*, compiled by Upali, consists of five books and serves as a guide for the rules and regulations governing monasteries, Bhikus, Bhikkunis, their daily routines and ethical conduct. It includes sections like *Sutta-vibhanga* (rules for Bhikkus), *Khandaka* (rules for admission to the monastery), and *Parivar*.
- ◆ The *Sutta-Pitaka*, compiled by Ananda, aims to impart the teachings of Buddha through examples, parables and discourses, catering to a general audience. It comprises five books (*nikayas*): *Digha-Nikaya*, *Majjhima-Nikaya*, *Samyutta-Nikaya*, *Anguttara-Nikaya* and *Khuddaka-Nikaya*. The *Khuddaka-Nikaya* is particularly significant and includes works like *Dhammapada*, *Sutta Nipata*, *Theragatha*, *Therigatha* and the *Jatakas*.
- ◆ *Abhidhamma-Pitaka*, while also centred on Buddha's teachings, takes on a more philosophical and scientific form intended for Buddhist scholars. It contains notable

◆ *Tri-Pitakas*



works like '*Kathavatthu*'.

◆ *The Jatakas*

(ii) **The Jatakas:** The *Jataka* Tales are a collection of stories in Buddhist literature that recount the previous lives of Gautama Buddha. Comprising over 500 tales, the *Jataka* stories illustrate moral lessons, virtues, and the path to enlightenment through the experiences of the Buddha in his past lives. Each tale depicts the Buddha in various forms, such as humans, animals, or gods, showcasing his compassionate and altruistic actions that ultimately contribute to his attainment of Buddhism.

Dipavamsa and Mahavamsa: These Buddhist works have their origins in Sri Lanka and provide valuable insights into Ashoka, the Mauryan Emperor and various Buddhist scholars.

◆ *Buddhist literature*

Divyavadana: Originating in Nepal, this Buddhist work presents stories related to Buddha and illuminates the history of northern dynasties, spanning from the Mauryan period to the Sunga period.

Buddhist literature also encompasses other significant works, such as the *Milinda Panho* (a discussion between *Bhikkhu* Nagasena and Milinda, the Greek King who converted to Buddhism), *Ashvaghosha's Buddha-Charita* (a biography of Buddha), *Mahavastu*, *Lalitavistara*, *Manjushri Mula Kalpa*, among others. These texts offer profound insights into the teachings, history, and philosophical dimensions of Buddhism.

◆ *View points on the Mauryan Empire*

1.2.2.3 Evaluation of Historicity

The Mauryan Empire, flourishing in ancient India during the 3rd century BCE., stands as a pivotal epoch in the subcontinent. Buddhist and Jain accounts furnish invaluable insights into this period, presenting unique viewpoints on the Mauryan Empire and its contemporary Indian counterparts. The emergence of both Buddhism and Jainism during this era bequeathed us essential historical resources. This assessment delves into these Buddhist and Jain narratives, scrutinising their narratives, strengths, limitations and their eloquent contributions to comprehending India's ancient past.

Buddhist Narratives

Buddhist depictions of the Mauryan Empire predominantly reside in Pali and Sanskrit texts, with a central focus on Ashoka, a preeminent Mauryan emperor. The *Mahavamsa*,

◆ Sources on Ashoka

a Pali chronicle and the *Divyavadana*, a Sanskrit text, serve as pivotal sources, endowing us with crucial insights into Ashoka's reign and his conversion to Buddhism following the Kalinga War. These records underscore Ashoka's unwavering commitment to non-violence, *Dharma* and his relentless endeavours to disseminate Buddhism across his dominion. An additional significant work, the *Ashokavadana*, accentuates Ashoka's unwavering support for Buddhism and his active promotion of the faith.

◆ Adulation of Ashoka's rule

These Buddhist manuscripts grant us a vantage point through which we can perceive the Mauryan Empire as a proponent of moral values and religious tolerance. Notably, Ashoka's inscriptions, especially the Edicts, serve as tangible evidence of his dedication to non-violence. However, it is imperative to acknowledge that Buddhist accounts, while being of substantial value, often revolve around Ashoka and the sphere of Buddhism, potentially relegating other aspects of the Mauryan governance to the periphery. Moreover, the adulation of Ashoka's rule might inadvertently fashion a somewhat idyllic perception of the empire. Nevertheless, Buddhist narratives provide an exclusive insight into the spiritual and ethical dimensions of the empire.

Jain Perspectives

◆ Influence of Jainism

Jain literature, predominantly in Prakrit and Sanskrit, augments our comprehension of the Mauryan Empire and coeval Indian realms. The Jain Prakrit chronicles, encompassing the *Aupapatika Sutra* and the *Bhagavati Sutra*, proffer historical accounts intertwined with religious doctrines. Jain narratives lay strong emphasis on non-violence, asceticism and ethical conduct, all aligned with Jain principles. Within Jain chronicles, Mauryan emperors like Chandragupta Maurya and Ashoka emerge as figures influenced by Jain ascetics, notably Bhadrabahu and Kalakacharya. Chandragupta's renunciation of the throne is portrayed as a consequence of Jain influence. These accounts underscore the ethical and spiritual dimensions of the Mauryan rulers and their association with the Jain doctrines. Nonetheless, akin to Buddhist narratives, Jain accounts exhibit a propensity to idealise their own religious tenets, possibly marginalising facets of the Mauryan governance unrelated to Jainism. These narratives chiefly prioritise the spiritual and ethical dimensions of the Mauryan rulers, possibly at the expense of a more comprehensive historical outlook.



- ◆ Necessity to supplement with historical artefacts

To attain a more holistic representation of the Mauryan Empire and ancient Indian realms, it is imperative to supplement these religious narratives with secular and archaeological sources. Inscriptions, such as the Edicts of Ashoka dispersed throughout the empire, stand as priceless historical artefacts. The contemporaneous accounts of Greek and Roman observers, including Megasthenes and Pliny the Elder, furnish external perspectives on ancient India. Additionally, archaeological findings, like the remnants of the Mauryan cities and relics, contribute to reconstructing the material aspects of this historical period.

1.2.3 *Harshacharita*

- ◆ Legitimisation of dynasties

In the middle of the first millennium CE, there was a notable shift in the historical context. Multiple political entities emerged, and they required accomplished court poets to compose biographies that would legitimise their dynasties and publicise their achievements. The character of courtly culture evolved from earlier times, becoming more authoritative. The emphasis on individuals in *charita* literature could be associated with the rise of *bhakti* sects, which centred their evaluation of life on individual actions. Biographical traditions gained more prominence toward the end of the first millennium CE, and earlier biographies set precedents for future works.

- ◆ Significance of *Charitas*

Post-Gupta historical writings can be categorised into three main types: *Charitas*, *Prasastis*, and *Vamsavalis*. These types of historical writings are significant because they diverge from traditional religious texts and rituals. *Charitas*, often presented as poetic narratives, are essentially historical biographies. The term *Charita* derives from the notion of “movement” or “activity,” highlighting the life and deeds of individuals. One prominent example of *Charita* is Banabhatta’s *Harshacharita*, which offers insights into the life and reign of Harshavardhana of Kannauj, his endeavours to attain sovereignty and his rule. *Charitas* are linked to individuals in positions of authority and introduce historical consciousness by elucidating their actions and motivations and placing them within specific temporal and geographical contexts. While *Charitas* have elements of imagination, they are not intended as critical historical accounts but are more of a literary nature, though they serve as valuable historical sources.

◆ Historical accuracy of *Harshacharita*

The *Harshacharita*, also known as the *Harsha Charit*, is an ancient Sanskrit biography that plays a significant role in enriching our comprehension of the historical and cultural landscape of ancient India, particularly during the rule of Emperor Harsha (606-647 CE). This historical text is attributed to the renowned Indian poet and scholar Banabhatta, who lived in the 7th century CE. The *Harshacharita* is a valuable literary work that not only serves as a biography of Emperor Harsha but also acts as a historical and cultural record, shedding light on various facets of early medieval India. An important consideration when examining the *Harshacharita* is its historical accuracy. In other words, to what extent can we rely on this text as a faithful historical account of Emperor Harsha's life and the events of his era? To evaluate the historical reliability of the *Harshacharita*, we need to take several factors into account.

◆ Hagiographic work

To begin with, the *Harshacharita* is a hagiographic work, meaning it tends to present Emperor Harsha in an exceedingly favourable and often idealised manner. It accentuates his virtues, achievements and piety, which are typical characteristics of hagiography. This inherent bias in the text raises questions regarding its objectivity and the potential embellishment of Harsha's accomplishments. However, it is important to acknowledge that hagiographies were prevalent in ancient biographical literature, and their primary purpose was to extol the virtues of a revered figure. Despite the presence of elements of idealisation, they can still provide valuable historical insights.

◆ Focus on Harsha's reign

More than that, the *Harshacharita* offers information about the political and social environment during Harsha's reign. It provides insights into the administration of his empire, the governance system, his interactions with neighbouring rulers and the state of society, culture and religion during the 7th century CE. While these details may be influenced by the author's perspective, they can still serve as valuable historical data. Furthermore, the *Harshacharita* is not an isolated source. It can be corroborated or supplemented with other historical and epigraphical evidence from the same period. Inscriptions, coins and accounts of foreign travellers like Huen Tsang, who visited India during Harsha's rule, can validate the information presented in the text. Such corroboration enhances the reliability of the *Harshacharita* as a historical source.



1.2.4 *Mushakavamsa Kavya*

Mushakavamsa Kavya, authored by Atula in the 11th century CE, is regarded as a significant Sanskrit historical *Mahakavya*. Comprising approximately 1000 verses organised into 15 cantos, it stands out as one of the historiographical works that originated from Kerala. It was brought to the attention of the historical world by T. A. Gopinatha Rao in 1916, subsequently prompting a scholarly investigation. In 1977, K. Raghavan Pillai published an incomplete manuscript of the work. *Mushakavamsa Kavya* represents a fusion of poetry, legend, genealogy, and *Purana*, with a particular focus on the Mushaka dynasty in Kolathunadu, located in northern Kerala. The work offers several historical elements that lend it credibility as a historical text. These elements encompass details about the lineage of the ruling kings, the geography of the region, which closely aligns with reality, information about major religions and sects and insights into the socio-economic and political conditions.

◆ Focus on the
Mushaka dynasty

However, when scrutinised from a historical perspective, the work exhibits certain authenticity challenges. It blends facts with myths, and there is ambiguity regarding its purpose. Gaps or missing links are noticeable between the beginning and end of the narrative. The text also attempts to establish pan-India connections by depicting the arrival and relationships of ancestors with other parts of India, notably the central Vindhya region, possibly to assert a superior origin for the dynasty. The author, however, remains silent about the sources for the facts presented, eroding the work's historical validity. One notable absence in the work is criticism, a fundamental element in historiography. Instead of critical evaluation, the text predominantly praises the deeds and policies of the King, which deviates from the norm in historiography. Such bias may stem from royal patronage and the authors working in favour of the king.

◆ Lack of critical
evaluation

In analysing the work, it becomes evident that it was conceived as a *Mahakavya* rather than a pure historical text. This is primarily due to the lack of in-depth exploration of historical aspects, whereas the detailed poetic descriptions of the king were prevalent throughout the narrative. The composition of the work in Sanskrit reflects the influence and dominance of the language and, consequently, the spread of Brahmanism in Kerala during that era. The work occasionally aligns with the positivist concept of European

◆ Historicity of the
work

historiography while, at other times, diverges from it.

1.2.5 *Rajatarangini*

◆ Historical account of Kashmir

Rajatarangini is a historical account of Kashmir authored by Kalhana, who was born in 1100 CE in Kashmir. It is perceived as the foundational work of history in India by modern historiographical standards. Kalhana completed this significant work in two years during the reign of King Jaysimha of Kashmir. Written in Sanskrit, *Rajatarangini* consists of eight *Khandas* (chapters or volumes) and comprises 7826 *shlokas* (verses). It spans the history of Kashmir from the time of the Mahabharata War to the 12th century CE, with more precise historical details emerging from the 9th century onward.

◆ Critiqued the king's rule

Kalhana, an unbiased historian, meticulously utilised a wide array of sources for his historical narrative. His approach combined literary sources and oral traditions collected through extensive fieldwork and interviews with local people. This multi-faceted methodology underpinned the creation of *Rajatarangini*, reflecting his commitment to accuracy in portraying the history of Kashmir. While showing admiration for his beloved Kashmir and respect for his patron King, Kalhana did not shy away from critiquing the negative aspects of his king's rule.

◆ Critiqued Damaras

Rajatarangini also delves into the rise of feudal processes in Kashmir, with the *Damaras* identified as a powerful feudal class. These feudal lords played a significant role in the political instability of Kashmir during Kalhana's time. They aimed to maximise revenue and, at times, gained more power than the reigning King. Kalhana criticised the *Damaras* for their cruelty and wantonness. The work also highlights the role of the priestly community in political instability.

◆ Sources

A true historian's concern for facts is crucial, as demonstrated by Kalhana, who used a wide variety of sources in the twelfth century. These sources included the *Nilamata Purana* of Nila, the patron saint of Kashmir, the *Nripavali* of Kshemendra, the *Parthivavali* of Helaraja, the compositions of Chavillakara and Padmamihira, and a class of writings called *Mahatmyas*. Kalhana also used original authorities like ordinances, edicts, inscriptions, coins, and ancient monuments to verify these sources. He was a master of the topography of the Kashmir Valley and regarded inscriptions and coins as legitimate sources of history.



◆ *Writing style*

Kalhana's *Rajatarangini* is considered a masterpiece in history and literature. The work is a simple, versified prose narrative with neatly ordered scenes, parable-like sayings, anecdotes, and dialogues that add variety and dramatic power. However, the style's major defect is the fatal double entendre, which obscures meaning and reality.

1.2.5.1 Features of *Rajatarangini*

Several key features of *Rajatarangini* underscore its significance as a historical text:

◆ *Historical significance*

- 1. Political Insights:** *Rajatarangini* provides valuable insights into the political conditions of its time, including hostilities between Shaiva Brahmans and Buddhism, land grants and tensions between different religious communities. It also touches upon conflicts involving the Guptas and the Huns.
- 2. Vamsavali:** The text sheds light on the *Vamsavali* system of inheritance, revealing the prevalence of caste hierarchy during that period.
- 3. Public Works:** Kalhana narrates significant public projects carried out under the ministry of Suyya, such as the construction of embankments and dams to mitigate landslides and floods, offering insights into the socio-economic and political factors of the time.
- 4. Use of reliable sources:** Kalhana's reliance on reputable sources, as well as his citation of various chroniclers and inscriptions, reinforces the historical credibility of *Rajatarangini*.
- 5. Acknowledgment of diverse perspectives:** The text's references to various chroniclers and the inclusion of characters and events not mentioned in the Puranas underscore the importance of recognising diverse perspectives when interpreting history.

◆ *Translations*

During the colonial period, various perspectives influenced the translation and study of *Rajatarangini*. Translators, such as R. S. Pandit (an Indian nationalist) and M. A. Stein (a European Indologist), emphasised different aspects of the text, leading to variations in the translated versions. J. C. Dutt's translation arranged the events chronologically, aligning with the European concept of history. This approach aimed to remove mythical elements from the text.

Summarised Overview

This unit delves into the historical significance of early Indian literature, encompassing texts like the Puranas, Epics such as the *Mahabharata* and historical chronicles like the *Rajatarangini*. It explores the ways in which these literary works offer valuable insights into the ancient Indian society, culture and political aspects, even though they contain mythological elements. The unit goes on to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the *Rajatarangini*, highlighting its pioneering role as an early historical work that paved the way for distinctive Indian approaches to chronicling the past.

Furthermore, this unit scrutinises the conflicting viewpoints that emerged during the colonial period regarding the use of literary texts as historical sources. Orientalists championed these texts, contending that they demonstrated India's historical consciousness. Conversely, Utilitarians dismissed them as products of imagination rather than reliable historical documents.

Assignments

1. Discuss the historical insights provided by Puranas and Epics. What do they reveal about ancient India?
2. Critically analyse *Rajatarangini* as a pioneering Indian form of historical writing.
3. Examine the historical value of Jain and Buddhist literature in understanding India's past.
4. Discuss how reassessing India's textual heritage became important for reconstructing its past.
5. Discuss the challenges and methods involved in assessing the historicity of ancient Indian writings. Provide examples from specific texts to illustrate the complexities of distinguishing historical facts from myth and legend.

Suggested Reading

1. Pargiter, F. E., *The Puranic Accounts of the Dynasties of the Kali Age*, Delhi, 1927.
2. Sankalia, H. D., *Ramayana: Myth or Reality*, People's Publishing House, 1973.
3. Singh, G. P., *Ancient Indian Historiography: Sources and Interpretations*, R.K. Print world, New Delhi, 2003.



Reference

1. Chakravarti, Uma, *Everyday Histories: Beyond the Kings and Brahmanas of Ancient India*, Tulika, New Delhi, 2006.
2. Hasan, Mohibbul (Ed.), *Historians of Medieval India*, Meenakshi Prakashan, Meerut, 1968.
3. Pargiter, F. E., *Ancient Indian Historical Tradition*, London, 1924.
4. Pathak, V. S., *Ancient Historians of India*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1966.
5. Stein, M. A. (Tr.), *Kalhana's Rajatarangini: A Chronicle of the Kings of Kashmir, 1-316* (Reprint ed.), Saujanya Books, Srinagar, 2007.

Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

SGO

SGOU



Writings on Medieval Indian History

BLOCK-02



Chronicling Medieval India by British Historians

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ understand the contributions of notable British historians in chronicling medieval Indian history
- ◆ explore the varying viewpoints and interpretations of the colonial historians on medieval India
- ◆ gain insights into the periodization and significant developments of medieval Indian history

Background

The Medieval period in Indian history is a crucial phase known for its significant contributions to art, language, culture, and religion. Historians, both Indian and British, have typically concentrated on this era in terms of Muslim conquests and the rise of Islamic institutions. Historical writings from this period mainly consisted of dynastic and regional histories, biographies, and memoirs. These documents reveal a notable absence of understanding of the social and economic dynamics that are responsible for shaping medieval societies and the fall of kingdoms.

The study of Medieval Indian history, analysed with a modern approach, began with British scholars in the late 18th century. These scholars, often administrators, primarily examined political and administrative aspects, drawing from Persian historical texts and European travellers' accounts. However, this approach often lacked a comprehensive effort to analyse, interpret, and gain a deeper understanding of the historical materials available.

Keywords

Utilitarian, Periodization, Dynastic Lists, Maratha History, Mughal History



Discussion

2.1.1 Elliot and Dowson

- ◆ *The History of India*

Henry Miers Elliot, an English civil servant and historian, served in the Civil Service of the East India Company in India. He was educated at Haileybury College and eventually rose to become the Chief Secretary of the Foreign Department in the Government of India. Elliot acquired proficiency in Persian and dedicated a significant portion of his life to collecting historical accounts from Indo-Muslim chroniclers during the Sultanate and Mughal periods. He is most renowned for his work, *The History of India, as Told by Its Own Historians: The Muhammeden Period*. It was originally published as a set of eight volumes between 1867 and 1877 in London. The translations were in part overseen by Elliot, whose efforts were then extended and edited posthumously by John Dowson.

- ◆ *British governance as fair*

This collection comprises translations of medieval Indo-Persian chronicles. Elliot's primary interest lay in contrasting what he perceived as the fairness and effectiveness of British governance with what he considered the brutality and tyranny of the 'Muslim rule' in India. Additionally, a portion of the work was edited by John Dawson based on Henry Elliot's papers. Elliot had intended to assess the writings of numerous Arabic and Persian historians of India. His main aim was to highlight the violence of Muslim rulers and underscore the significant advantages that he believed were bestowed upon native subjects under British rule, characterised by its leniency and fairness.

- ◆ *Critique of Mughal Rule*

Many Mughal historical texts are known for incorporating numerous verses, whether borrowed from existing poems or authored by historians themselves. In Henry Elliot's *History of India*, he describes Sujan Rai Bhandari's *Khulasatu-T-Tawarikh* as a work that includes various verses, some considered original and others drawn from different authors. These verses were strategically placed within the narrative to enhance its context, and at times, they even included verses from the *Quran*. Notably, Elliot did not write a formal historical account by himself, but in the preface to his volumes, he strongly criticised the administration of the Mughal empire in India, echoing the sentiments expressed by James Mill towards Hindu rule. In doing so, he emphasised the more critical, less sympathetic perspective, similar to that

of Elphinstone. Moreover, throughout his volumes, Elliot aimed to convey the idea that British rule offered significant benefits to the native population through its mild and just governance. Elliot's noteworthy works pertaining to Indian history include the *Bibliographical Index to the Historians of Mohammedan India* and the *Appendix to the Arabs in Sind, Vol. III, Part 1, of the Historians of India*.

◆ Dowson's works

John Dowson, a British Indologist, held positions as a tutor at the East India Company College and as a Professor of Hindustani at University College, London. He was a distinguished scholar of Hinduism and is renowned for his work, *Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology*. Dowson's notable contributions also include editing *The History of India, as Told by Its Own Historians: The Muhammadan Period*. In addition, he compiled works encompassing Hindu mythology, religion, history, and literature. The collaborative efforts of Elliot and Dowson significantly influenced Indian historiography, with subsequent histories of the Mughal rule in India drawing heavily from their works.

2.1.2 Mountstuart Elphinstone (1779-1859)



Fig 2.1.1 Mountstuart Elphinstone

◆ Development of Western India

Mountstuart Elphinstone, a Scottish historian and civil servant of the English East India Company, played a pivotal role in shaping the development of Western India during the British colonial era. He was recognised by the Indian Council of Historical Research as the "maker of modern Western India". Elphinstone held the position of Lieutenant Governor of Bombay in 1819. During his tenure, Elphinstone was a strong advocate for education and local administration of laws, leaving a significant impact on the region.

Elphinstone had a profound fascination with Greek and Roman history. His historical writings introduced a widely

◆ *Periodization of Indian historiography*

accepted periodization of Indian historiography, which classified Indian history into the Vedic, Medieval, Islamic, and British periods. Notably, he dismissed the concept of Aryan invasion, aligning with the views of many Indian scholars who argued no mention of such an invasion in any ancient texts.

◆ *Influence on Indian Historiography*

Elphinstone's *The History of India: The Hindu and Mahometan Periods* is regarded as his *magnum opus*. He began its work 1834. When it was published in 1841, it quickly became a standard text in Indian universities. It remained in use for the Indian Civil Service cadets at Haileybury. Elphinstone earned the moniker "Tacitus of India" due to his significant contributions to historical scholarship. Elphinstone's approach to periodising Indian history into ancient and medieval periods, corresponding to the "Hindu" and "Muslim" periods, profoundly influenced Indian historiography, establishing a lasting convention in the field.

◆ *Elphinstone's approach*

Elphinstone, while sharing some of James Mill's criticism, may have found it prudent not to appear as an outright defender of all aspects of Indian society. A contemporary of James Mill, Elphinstone authored *History of India*, which aligned with the Hegelian dialectic of action and reaction. His work presented a more favourable view of Indian society and demonstrated a sympathetic understanding of the challenges faced by India. James Mill's historical account relied primarily on European sources, much of which was informal. Elphinstone, rightly believing that a work based on native sources might yield different conclusions, embarked on the mission to refute Mill's perspective. Mill's history adhered to the Enlightenment school of historiography, emphasising the subordination of liberty to happiness and placing greater importance on basic needs like food, shelter, and clothing. Elphinstone's approach, while acknowledging Mill's work as ingenious and elaborate, diverged by advocating for a more humane and less logical stance.

◆ *Challenging Mill's utilitarian view*

Elphinstone not only wrote history but also fostered an environment of historical writing around him. He saw the need to counter Mill's utilitarian view of history but faced the challenge of generating interest among the English public, who were largely unfamiliar with the 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' periods of Indian history. Elphinstone's work remained a respected source for the English-speaking people regarding ancient and medieval India. The contrast between Mill's emotional outpouring and Elphinstone's composed and

logical approach is evident. It is widely acknowledged that Elphinstone's history offered a more balanced, sympathetic, and objective interpretation of early and medieval Indian history.

◆ *Assumptions on human nature*

The fundamental distinction between Mill's and Elphinstone's historical approaches lies in their assumptions about human nature. Mill believed in the universality of human nature and the potential for improvement through law and government, with the historian's role being to demonstrate this. In contrast, Elphinstone recognised variations in human nature across regions and periods and viewed the historian's task as primarily describing human nature without passing value judgments. If Mill's work sparked a challenge among Indian historians to engage in argumentative discourse against Western criticism, Elphinstone's approach fostered a more sober, creative, and critical atmosphere that encouraged the Indians to study their country's issues from the right perspective.

◆ *View on Hindu culture*

Elphinstone's familiarity with Hindu culture, complemented by a diligent study of available literature on Indian history and guidance from scholars like William Jones and H. H. Wilson, enabled him to challenge the traditional Hindu concept of the four Yugas and begin the history of Hindus from the earliest composition of the Rig Veda. He sought to establish later chronology with the help of dynastic lists from the Puranas. Although occasional adjustments have been necessitated by archaeological discoveries, the chronological framework he established for ancient Indian history remains generally accepted. Interestingly, neither Mill nor Elphinstone referred to the Sultanate period as a 'dark age', as they consistently made comparisons based on racial and communal criteria.

2.1.3 James Tod (1782-1835)



Fig 2.1.2 James Tod

- ◆ 'Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan'

Lieutenant-Colonel James Tod was an officer of the British East India Company and a scholar with a deep interest in history and geography. He became famous as a disciple of Henry Elphinstone, and his career was unique in that he was deeply involved with the local Indian population. This close connection with the locals eventually led to his relief from official duties during the height of colonial rule. He published numerous academic works on Indian history, with a particular focus on the Rajputana region. His most notable work, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, published in three volumes between 1812 and 1823, captivated readers with its tales of Rajput chivalry and valour. This work left a lasting impact on how both the wider world and present-day Rajasthani people perceive their history.

- ◆ Geographic and Topographic studies

Col. Tod also worked on the translation of a Sanskrit inscription related to the last Hindu King of Delhi, as well as exploring the religious establishments of Mewar and documenting his travels in western India. Tod's map of Central India played a pivotal role in helping the East India Company during the third Anglo-Maratha war of 1817-1818. He accompanied the Court and conducted geographic and topographic studies during the conflict, aiding in intelligence gathering that contributed to the end of the Maratha empire and strengthened the East India Company's control over India.

- ◆ Collection of documents

Tod expanded his responsibilities to cover almost all of present-day Rajasthan, diligently collecting royal genealogies, inscriptions, coins, artefacts, manuscripts, and monument sketches. He saw the Rajputs as potential allies of the British against the Marathas and Mughals, emphasising commonalities through history and mythology. While Tod had his biases, he respected the locals' ways and worldviews. He delved into Hindu texts like the Puranas, worked with local bards, and drew parallels with ancient Greek and Roman mythology. His extensive studies and writings encompassed the state's physical features, structures, and people.

2.1.4 James Grant Duff (1789-1858)

James Grant Duff, a British soldier and historian, was known for his contributions to the understanding of Maratha history. His most noteworthy work, *A History of the Mahrattas*, published in three volumes in 1825, delves into the history of Maharashtra, particularly the Maratha empire,

◆ *Contributions to Maratha history*

which was ruled by a Hindu dynasty. This book provides a detailed account of the socio-political and cultural history of the Maratha empire. It comprehensively covers their vast territory, stretching from the south (Tanjore, Mysore) to the north (Gujarat, Malwa and Bundelkhand).



Fig 2.1.3 – James Grant Duff

◆ *Historical scholarship*

Duff diligently collected materials for his book, benefiting from access to state papers, family and temple archives, and his personal interactions with Maratha chiefs. His work made a significant impact on the historical discourse of the time. His work, along with that of other British historians like William Erskine, who translated the *Memoirs of Babur*, and Captain James Todd, for his *The Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, played a vital role in shaping historical understanding and piquing the imagination of the public.

2.1.5 H. H. Wilson (1786-1860)



Fig 2.1.4 H. H. Wilson

Horace Hayman Wilson was an English Orientalist who initially worked as an assistant surgeon for the English East India Company. He arrived in Calcutta and joined the company's medical service but later transitioned to the position of Assay Master at the Calcutta Mint. Wilson

- ◆ *Wilson's Career*

is renowned for his significant contributions to the field of coinage and numismatics. In India, Wilson held roles as a Secretary of the Public Instruction Committee and supervised studies at the Sanskrit College in Calcutta. His true passion lay in Orientalism and literary activities, with a deep interest in ancient Indian literature, particularly the *Rig Veda*, which he translated into English. Wilson conducted extensive studies on Sanskrit and Indian culture. He was a strong advocate against making English the sole medium of instruction in native schools and faced criticism for this stance.
- ◆ *Wilson's contributions*

Wilson also held positions with organisations like the Asiatic Society of Bengal and the Medical and Physical Society of Calcutta. Some of his most notable publications include *The Vishnu Purana: A System of Hindu Mythology and Tradition*, *The History of British India from 1805-1835*, and *Rig Veda Samhita: A Collection of Ancient Hindu Hymns*. He contributed numerous articles to the journal *Asiatic Researches* and translated works like *Dasakumaracharita*, *Mahabharata*, *Rig Veda*, and *Visnu Purana*. Additionally, he took a keen interest in *Ayurveda*, a text on traditional Indian medical and surgical practices and compiled local observations for his publications.
- ◆ *Emphasis on dynastic lists*

Wilson emphasised the value of dynastic lists of *Kali Yuga* kings preserved in Puranic historical records, highlighting their precision and accuracy. Some rulers mentioned in the Puranas have been corroborated by the inscriptions on stones, rocks, and coins deciphered by archaeologists. Although it is noted that his book had become outdated by the 1840s, it continued to be regarded as a classic, despite its factual errors.

Summarised Overview

In this unit, we explored the perspectives of various British historians who delved into the socio-economic, political, and cultural aspects of medieval India. Elliot and Dowson were British historians who extensively covered the socio-economic, political, and cultural facets of the Mughal period. Henry Elphinstone, a Scottish historian and civil servant of the English East India Company, focused on improving the well-being of the people through education and local administrative laws. Elphinstone faced the challenge of generating interest among the English public, unfamiliar with the Hindu and Muslim periods of Indian history.

James Tod, an East India Company Officer, engaged with the local population and contributed valuable insights into medieval Indian history, particularly regarding the Rajputana dynasty. James Grant Duff primarily concentrated on the Marathas, providing significant historical information on this aspect of medieval

Indian history. H. H. Wilson, known for his contributions to Orientalism and literary activities, played a crucial role in advancing knowledge in these areas. Exploring the views and writings of these British historians helps us to gain an understanding of medieval Indian history from various perspectives.

Assignments

1. Discuss the key contributions made by James Mill to the periodization of Indian history.
2. Distinguish the contributions of James Tod from those of Elliot and Dowson in the study of medieval Indian history.
3. Explain the contrasting views of Elliot and Dawson on Indian history.
4. Discuss the role of British historians in chronicling medieval Indian history.
5. Describe the problems with the periodization of Indian history by the British historians and its response.

Suggested Reading

1. Bhargava, Meena *Exploring Medieval India, Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries: Politics, Economy, Religion*, Vol. I, Orient Black Swan, 2010.
2. Elliot, H.M., *The History of India, as Told by Its Own Historians: The Muhammadan period*, Volume IV, V, VI, VII, VIII, Trubner and co., 1871.

Reference

1. Rosenthal, Franz, *A History of Muslim Historiography*, Leiden, 1952.
2. Sharif, M. M., (Ed.), *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, Adam Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, 2007.
3. Sharma, Tej Ram, *Historiography: A History of Historical Writing*, Concept Publishing Company, 2005.
4. Sreedharan, E., *A Textbook of Historiography, 500 BC. to AD 2000.*, Orient Black swan, 2000.



Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

SGOU



Turko-Persian Historiography

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ understand the significance of the Turko-Persian culture
- ◆ explore Turko-Persian historiography
- ◆ analyse notable historians and their contributions in Turko-Persian historiography

Background

The profound influence of Turko-Persian culture extended deep into India during the thirteenth century, with Muhammad bin Mansur emerging as a pioneering figure in the Indo-Persian literary tradition. This period of historical writings found its roots during the Delhi Sultanate period in medieval Indian history. It gained further prominence in India following the Ghurids' conquest of Ghazni and the establishment of their capital at Delhi, a legacy continued by the subsequent Sultans of Delhi.

In later stages, Indo-Persian historiography evolved into a rich and multifaceted tradition of scholarship, encompassing various forms of literature such as autobiographies, poetry collections, ethical treatises, and conversational discourses. Prior to the rise of the Mughals, medieval Indian historiography was predominantly shaped by historians from the Delhi Sultanate period. These early historians laid the groundwork for the formidable tradition of Indo-Persian historiography, with notable figures like Hassan Nizami, Minhaj-us-Siraj, and even the renowned poet Amir Khusrau serving as pioneers in this field.

Keywords

Turko-Persian, Arab Historiography, Heliocentric Theory, *Tabaqat*, *Tarikh*.



Discussion

2.2.1 Turko-Persian and Arab Historiography

- ◆ Historical influence of Turko-Persian culture

In the earlier stages of Islamic history, Turko-Persia represented a distinct facet of Islamic culture and thought, particularly among the elites. This cultural phenomenon began to take shape in the ninth and tenth centuries, gradually evolving into the predominant culture among the ruling and elite classes in South Asia, Central Asia, West Asia, and other regions. Notably, it bore influences from both the Mongol and Timurid cultures, setting it apart from the Arabic world to the West. Subsequently, in the ensuing centuries, the Ottoman Empire in Asia, Safavids in Persia, and Mughals in India emerged as products of this Turko-Persian culture. However, from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, this cultural influence began to wane due to the European discovery of sea routes.

- ◆ Evolution of Arab historiography

In the realm of Arab historiography during the early stages of Islam, scholars and historians regarded historiography as the third source of knowledge after the *Quran* and *Sunnah*. Consequently, after the compilation and collection of *Hadith* (sayings and actions of the Prophet), scholars began documenting history. Notably, a similar tradition was observed in the collection, compilation, and preservation of both *Hadith* and the history of early Islam. This tradition persisted until the third century after the *Hijra* (the migration of the Prophet Muhammad to Medina). While Arab historiography initially focused on events and religious themes, it gradually expanded to encompass tribal, regional, national, and even world history, ultimately making Arab historiography a significant part of global historiography.

- ◆ Influence of Persian language

Arab historiography not only describes historical events but also establishes connections between causes and effects, featuring in-depth analytical criticism. This approach to historiography was developed by Muslim scholars in the Arabic language, which was the dominant language at that time. In 1258 CE, the Abbasid Caliphate was overthrown, and the Ilkhanid dynasty was established, leading to the prominence of the Persian language. The development of the Persian language continued during the reigns of the Timurids and Safavids. Consequently, Persian language and culture entered into the Indian subcontinent through shifts in political power. As Turkish replaced Persian, historiography

also began in the Turkish language. The Turkish Sultans later supported the Persian language, leading to the continuation of regional and dynastic histories in the Persian language. Arab historiography was influenced by the Persian trends in historiography, with Persian and Turkish cultures carrying central Asian historiographic influences to the Indian subcontinent.

2.2.2 Al-Biruni (973-1048)



Fig 2.2.1 Al-Biruni

◆ *Interest in Indian sciences*

Abu-Rayhan Mohammad, known as Al-Biruni (973-1039 CE), was born in Khwarizm, present-day Uzbekistan, and belonged to the Tajik ethnicity. He embraced Persian culture. Al-Biruni's curiosity led him to study Indian sciences. He embarked on a journey to Western India when Punjab became a part of the Ghaznavid Empire. He spent years studying Sanskrit, religious texts, and philosophy with Brahmana priests.

◆ *Al-Biruni's intellectual pursuits*

Al-Biruni's wide-ranging knowledge and dedication inspired admiration. He excelled in philosophy, religion, mathematics, chronology, medicine, and languages. His works continue to be celebrated for their synthesis, rigour, and perspective. He engaged with the texts in various languages, including Persian, Turkish, Syriac, Sanskrit, and Arabic translations of Indian works. His encounters with Hindu scholars enriched his intellectual pursuits. A prolific writer, he authored numerous books, including *Kitab-al-Hind*, *Al-Qanun-al Masudi*, *Athar-al-Bagiya*, *Tarikh-ul-Hind*, *Kitab-al-Jamahir*, and *Kitab-al-Saydna*. His masterpiece, *Tahqiq-i-*

Hind (1017-31 CE), divided into eighty chapters, covers topics like religion, philosophy, festivals, astronomy, alchemy, customs, law and more. His proficiency in Sanskrit allowed him to translate Sanskrit texts into Arabic.

◆ *Heliocentric theory*

Al-Biruni's contributions spanned astronomy, geography, geodesy, climatology and more. He demonstrated the practical applications of mathematical and astronomical knowledge and aligned them with Islamic principles. His astronomical theories, influenced by Ptolemy's *Almagest*, provided explanations of solar and lunar eclipses, the obliquity of the ecliptic, dawn, twilight and more. He was cautious in accepting the heliocentric theory without substantial evidence. He authored *Kitab-al-Tatbiq fi Tahqiq and Harkatah-al-Shams*, covering topics like the sphericity of the skies, geocentric theory and the nature of heaven. He explored concepts like the poles, the equator, longitudes, latitudes and the zodiac. Al-Biruni also delved into time and dates, various calendars, and the phenomenon of continuous daylight at the poles. He studied the movement of the Sun, believing it to be a fiery body. He used Greek nomenclature for stars and constellations.

◆ *Indian geography*

Regarding the moon, Al-Biruni noted its imperfect circular motion and varying distance from the Earth. He studied lunar phases and their effects on tides and provided vivid descriptions of tides at specific locations. He also explored geomorphology and palaeontology, discussing the formation of the Indo-Gangetic plain and the causes of its floods and springs. Al-Biruni possessed extensive knowledge of Indian geography, offering accurate estimations of India's dimensions, rivers, their origins, courses, and floods. He had insights into the monsoon system and its impacts on India's climate.

◆ *Views on social divisions*

Al-Biruni's study of Hindu society covered the caste system, idolatry, and religious texts. He drew from Sanskrit scriptures and his knowledge of the Vedas to offer an objective description of Hindu beliefs. He noted a duality in Hindu beliefs between the educated and less educated masses, mirrored in their languages. The educated Hindus disapproved of idolatry, while the less educated masses embraced it. Al-Biruni believed that the caste system hindered rapport between the Hindus and the Muslims. He emphasised that social divisions were not unique to India and noted that within Islam, all individuals were considered equal in piety. He criticised Hindu arrogance, believing

exposure to other countries would change their narrow-minded views. He described various Indian kingdoms, castes, social distinctions and marriage systems.

- ◆ *Reliance on Brahmanical texts*

According to Biruni's reports, Caste tensions were evident, and he observed a lack of a unified cause, signalling serious disintegrating tendencies in the community. This disorganisation made India vulnerable to foreign invaders. Al-Biruni also identified several barriers to understanding India, including language differences, disparities in religious beliefs and practices and the insularity of the local population. To overcome these barriers, he heavily relied on Brahmanic works, quoting passages from the Vedas, Puranas, *Bhagavad Gita*, Patanjali's works and the *Manusmriti* to provide insights into Indian society.

2.2.3 *Tabaqat* Forms of History Writing

- ◆ *Tabaqat style of writing*

The term *Tabaqat* in Arabic refers to a specific genre found within Islamic biographical literature, with its origins dating back to the eighth and ninth centuries. This historiographical tradition encompasses various domains within Arab-Islamic and religious studies, elucidating its practical application. Within the twentieth and twenty-first sections of *Tabaqat*, the historical accounts related to India cover the reigns of the Sultans, spanning from Qutb ud- Din Aibak to Sultan Nasiruddin Mahmud Shah. These sections also include comprehensive records of the prominent nobles of Iltutmish's era. Among the notable narratives in this context is the *Tarikh-i-Muhammadi*, authored by Muhammad Bihamad Khani, a resident of Kalpi. This work adheres to the *Tabaqat* format, commencing with the inception of Islam in Arabia. It serves as a condensed rendition of the *Tabaqat-i Nasiri*, Barani's *Tarikh-i Firuz Shahi* and similar works that chronicle the history of Feroz Shah and his successors. During the reign of Sultan Nasiruddin Mahmud, there was a deliberate initiative to document the history of Islam up to the contemporary period. Fakhr-I Mudabbir and Hasan Nizami adopted the *Tabaqat* form of historiography. This *Tabaqat* style involves presenting each ruling dynasty in a discrete *tabaqa* or section, with the project reaching completion in 1259.

2.2.3.1 Minhaj -us- Siraj Juzjani and his *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*

Minhaj -us- Siraj Juzjani, a thirteenth-century Persian



◆ Served alongside Iltumish

historian born in the Ghur region, possessed aristocratic lineage through both birth and marriage. His significance as a historian extended to his role in Mamluk Delhi, North India and his contributions to the documentation of the Ghurid dynasty. His career in India commenced as a Madrasa teacher under Nasiruddin Qabacha and later saw him serving alongside Iltumish, who appointed him as a *Qazi and Imam in Gwalior*. Minhaj was a scholar of profound learning, occupying various administrative posts before his final appointment as Chief *Qazi* in Delhi under Sultan Nasir-ud-Din, after whom the renowned *Tabaqat-i Nasiri* was named.

◆ Objective approach

Minhaj's sources encompassed trustworthy chronicles, personal testimonies, hearsay, and unspecified accounts. Notably, there is no evidence to suggest that he employed *isnad* criticism or the discipline of *hadith* to evaluate the authenticity of his source materials. His approach to the history of Islam and Muslim rulers, spanning from the early Islamic era up to the year 1259 CE, appears to have been influenced by his professional training as a jurist and his interactions with the rulers in Central Asia and India. He hailed from a family of scholars associated with the courts of the Ghurid Sultans in Firozkoh and Ghazni. Before his migration to India, he served under various Ghurid Sultans and nobles. Minhaj's accounts of the Ghurid rulers are characterised by an objective approach.

◆ Use of the term 'Hindustan'

Minhaj is renowned for his writings on the Indian subcontinent. Notably, he used the term 'Hindustan' in a different context from its modern interpretations. In the thirteenth century, he used the term 'Hindustan' to refer to the regions of Punjab, Haryana, and the lands between the Ganga and Yamuna rivers, signifying the political domain of the Delhi Sultans, with no inclusion of the southern regions due to the limited extent of the Delhi Sultan's rule.

◆ *Tabaqat-i Nasiri*

Minhaj's compilation of the '*Tabaqat-i Nasiri*' marked a significant milestone in the realm of historiography. This work is characterised as dynastic historiography and is dedicated to Nasiruddin Mahmud, whom the text portrays as one of the most exemplary *Sultans* of Delhi. The term *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri* implies a class, order, race, or generation. This text serves as a principal source for reconstructing the history of the establishment of the Muslim rule in Bengal and offers the earliest historical account of the Muslim rule in Bengal up to 1259.

◆ *Minhaj's writing style*

Minhaj's work is an extensive universal history of Islam, covering the period from Adam to his contemporary era. It comprises twenty-three volumes, marked by a straight forward writing style. The content spans from the early prophets and the birth of Islam to the history of the Caliphs and Muslim rulers in various regions. Additionally, it gave details about the Ghaznavids, the Ghorids, the Muizzi sultans of Hindustan, the Shamsi Maliks and the Mongol invasions in India. Minhaj's stay in Bengal allowed him to gather materials and gain insights into the establishment of Muslim rule in the region. The work also serves as a platform for Minhaj to convey his religious views and historiographical approach to Islam and Muslim rulers. The work exists in several manuscript copies and is a narrative that weaves together political and biographical aspects, viewing events as part of individuals' lives. Each section, whether dynastic or regnal, is self-contained. Minhaj attributes the causation in history primarily to human actions, occasionally invoking divine will and predestination to explain historical events.

2.2.4 *Tarikh* Form of History Writing

◆ *Meaning of Tarikh*

The term *Tarikh*, which translates to "date, chronology, or era," finds its usage in languages such as Persian, Urdu, Bengali, and Turk. Essentially, it refers to a comprehensive historical account or court chronicle characterised by a chronological narrative style. The *Tarikh* primarily focuses on statecraft, prominent personalities, significant events and the politics of sultans and nobles. It is also referred to as 'Tavarikhs,' signifying the sequence of events, and is considered one of the most vital sources of recorded history. The term *Tarikh* derives from the root word 'arkh,' which implies the recording of the timing of an event. In essence, *Tarikh* represents the time when a particular event occurred.

◆ *Historical periodization*

Furthermore, it is worth noting that the term *Tarikh* was not universally present in the titles of historical works. These works were often identified by their subject matter, such as biography or conquests. Originally, the term indicated a strictly chronological account, but it soon evolved to encompass various types of historical narratives. This style of historiography serves as a valuable source of knowledge concerning the Delhi Sultanate and was authored by erudite individuals who advised rulers on matters of governance. This historical tradition was influenced by the amalgamation of Arab-Islamic and Mongol-Persian traditions and did not employ a concept of historical periodization or *Tarikh*. The

◆ Examples of *Tarikh*

contributions to *Tarikh* or history writing can be traced back to the murids of Muhammad when they recorded his *hadith* in *Mawazhi* literature. This methodology significantly influenced the development of Medieval Indian historiography. According to classical Arabic historiographers, *Tarikh* encompasses knowledge related to a country, the customs and manners of its people, the remnants of bygone civilisations and an account of the actions of contemporary individuals. As explained by Al-Kafiyaji, “Linguistically, *Tarikh* denotes the indication of time, and in customary usage and as a technical term, it represents the comprehensive fixing of time for the purpose of relating it to a specific time-section, whether in the past, present, or future.” Examples of historical writings in the form of *Tarikh* during the medieval period in Indian history include *Tarikh-i Firuz Shahi*, *Tarikh-Ahlul-Hadith*, *Tarikh-al-Fattash* and *Tarikh-al-Tabari*.

2.2.4.1 Ziauddin Barani (1285-1357)

◆ Focus on Delhi Sultanate

Ziauddin Barani was himself a great champion of the Turkish nobles and doyen of the Indo-Persian historians. He was a jurist, historian, political thinker, and writer. He was born into an aristocratic family and associated with the royal court of Delhi for generations; he was obviously concerned with the fate of the Delhi Sultanate. He included one of the Isami family in the list of the leading nobles of Sultan Balban. He was a political thinker of the Delhi Sultanate during the reign of Muhammad bin Tughlaq and Firuz Shah Tughlaq. He himself had been a *nadim* (boon companion) of Sultan Muhammad Tughlaq for more than seventeen years. He was the most important figure in the Indo-Persian historiography in the fourteenth century. Furthermore, his writings focused on the Delhi Sultanate and covered political, social, and cultural aspects.

◆ Change in History writing

Historiography during the Mughal period was marked by notable changes in form, content, and approach. A significant departure from previous eras was the move towards greater secularisation and an emphasis on presenting a more critical account of rulers’ policies and their shortcomings. This transformation in historiography was exemplified by the writings of notable historians like Barani, who rejected the idea of history being inherently tied to religious and theological considerations. Instead, historians sought to link history to philosophy, emphasising a more rational approach to historical narratives.

◆ *Barani's writing style*

During this period, historians expanded the scope of the discipline by incorporating details about the cultural roles played by intellectuals, scholars, poets and saints. Barani's style of history writing served as an inspiration for historians in subsequent periods, shaping the field of historiography. It is important to note that Barani's historical accounts extended beyond political events; he also delved into Muslim political problems, including the implementation of Islamic laws in the newly established states in India.

◆ *Commitment to facts*

Barani's approach to history was distinct, marked by his extensive knowledge and prodigious memory. He recorded what he remembered and what had left a deep impression on his mind. One key element that Barani emphasised was 'truthfulness.' He urged historians to avoid exaggeration and verbosity and to maintain exactness in their statements. He believed that salvation would be denied to a historian who uttered falsehood. Barani's commitment to truth is evident in his work, where he refrained from suppressing facts or distorting them.

◆ *Belief in the didactic nature of history*

However, it is essential to recognise that Barani did not always adhere to a strict chronological order in his historical accounts. He occasionally confused dates and was sparing in providing them. This apparent indifference to chronology was not solely due to Barani's memory lapses but was also a reflection of his belief in the didactic nature of history. He considered history as a medium to convey lessons, and the events described did not need to be ordered chronologically to achieve this purpose.

◆ *Enlightened the ruling elites*

Barani's perspective on history was primarily focused on the royalty and the governing classes. For him, history was intrinsically linked to the history of authority and kingship. He did not separate greatness from kingship but saw them as interconnected. Barani's *Tarikh* represents a unique contribution to the Persian history-writing tradition that prevailed until his time. His work served as an intellectual composition intended to enlighten the ruling elites of his era. The narrative begins with the accession of Sultan Balban to the throne of the Delhi Sultanate in 1266 and concludes with an account of the first six years of Sultan Firoz Shah Tughlaq's reign, covering the period from Ghiyasuddin Balban to Firoz Shah Tughlaq.

One of Barani's works, *Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi* or History of Firuz Shah, is a didactic piece that outlines the duties of

◆ *Critical study of Khalji's reign*

an Indian Sultan towards Islam. Completed in 1357, it was written when the author was seventy-four and reflects a sense of bitterness. Barani commences with references to Iltutmish's reign and the frequent Mongol invasions. He then delves into the rise of Khalji imperialism in medieval Indian history, providing insights into its military, economic and cultural aspects. Barani is critical of Alauddin Khalji's disregard for the *Shariat*, but he acknowledges the significance of Alauddin Khalji's market regulations. His accounts of Muhammad Tughlaq's character, personality, policies, administration, land revenue collection and economic life are valuable historical insights.

◆ *Barani's concept of history*

In addition to his historical works, Barani authored *Fatwa-i-Jahandari*, which promoted a hierarchy among the Muslim communities in the Indian subcontinent. This work provided political ideals for the Muslim rulers to earn religious merit and the gratitude of their subjects. Barani's concept of history, as outlined in his preface to the *Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi*, is pragmatic and characterised by a simple, vivid and imaginative style devoid of ornamental verbiage. He emphasised the noble nature of history, viewing it as a preserve of the nobles and the distinguished. Barani believed that history was primarily about greatness and the depiction of merits, virtues and glories of great individuals in both faith and state.

◆ *Secular and critical*

Barani's work marked a notable shift in the approach to history, moving away from religious and theological constraints and toward a more secular and critical examination of historical events and figures. His impact on subsequent historians is evident in their attempts to follow his ideas and his enduring influence on the field of historiography.

◆ *Afif's administrative career*

2.2.4.2 Shams-i Siraj 'Afif

Shams-i Siraj 'Afif, another historian of the period, was known to have served during the waning years of Firoz Shah Tughluq's reign. Hailing from a noble family with a longstanding tradition of service to the Sultanate dating back to Sultan Alauddin Khalji's era, Shams-i Siraj 'Afif provides valuable insights into his lineage. His great-grandfather, Malik Shihab Afif, held the position of a revenue officer in the province of Dipalpur under Ghazi Malik during Sultan Alauddin Khalji's rule. Moreover, Shams-i Siraj 'Afif's father and uncle were entrusted with the administration of Firuz Shah's royal workshops or *karkhanas*.

Shams-i Siraj 'Afif held Sultan Firoz Shah Tughlaq in the

◆ *Dating of Afif's writing*

highest esteem, considering him the greatest ruler of Delhi. He had the privilege of witnessing the entire reign of Firoz Shah, providing him with first-hand experiences to draw upon in his historical accounts. The exact date of the writing of his history remains unknown, but it was penned several years after the invasion of Delhi by Timur. An analysis of its content suggests that the book was likely composed in the early fifteenth century. Shams-i Siraj 'Afif referenced several volumes of his works, with each dedicated to the reign of specific Sultans. Regrettably, only one of these volumes, focusing on the reign of Firoz Shah, has endured the passage of time. This volume appears to have been completed after Timur's siege of Delhi in 1398.

◆ *Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi*

In his work, Shams-i Siraj 'Afif thoroughly examines Sultan Firoz's reign from a religious perspective and praises his various activities. He delves into the Sultan's initiatives for public welfare, such as the campaigns in Bengal and the defence against the Mongol invasions during his rule, offering detailed accounts of these events. Shams-i Siraj Afif's *Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi* (c.1400) is a historically significant work that provides a detailed account of Sultan Firoz Shah Tughlaq's reign (1351-1388 CE). It stands as the most accurate and authentic contemporary account of this period, offering insights into the life and conditions of the populace.

◆ *Writing style of Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi*

The work encompasses political, economic, and cultural aspects of life under the Tughlaq sultans. Furthermore, it provides detailed descriptions of events, social customs, the political climate and the agricultural, commercial, and industrial conditions during that era. The work is characterised by nostalgia and portrays Firoz Shah as a saintly ruler whose presence on the throne protected Delhi from calamities. Shams-i Siraj Afif composed this volume in the style of a *manaqib*, akin to the spiritual biographies of saints. The title *Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi* was assigned to it by the text's editors.

◆ *Content of Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi*

The book is organised into five parts, each containing eighteen chapters of varying lengths. Unfortunately, the last sections of the printed text containing vivid descriptions of Timur's siege of Delhi appear to have been lost. Timur was an ancestor of Babur. Despite this loss, Shams-i Siraj Afif's work remains vital for understanding the socio-economic life and prosperity resulting from Firoz Shah's policies. It offers essential information about the foundation of new urban centres, canal constructions, water reservoirs and

administrative reforms. Additionally, the author's mention of agrarian reforms sheds light on Firoz Shah's interests in revenue matters.

- ◆ Highlights administrative corruption

Moreover, Shams-i Siraj 'Afif does not shy away from pointing out the abuses and corruption that had infiltrated the administration, with officials in various ministries becoming corrupt. He also provides hints about the degeneration of the central army, once considered the most effective fighting force against Mongol invaders. In short *Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi* it stands as a valuable source of information about life and culture during the Sultanate of Delhi in the latter half of the fourteenth century.

Summarised Overview

During the ninth and tenth centuries in Persia, Islamic culture flourished, exerting significant influence over Muslims in West, South, and Central Asia. Persianised Turkic Muslim rulers sponsored this culture, giving rise to a unique Islamic life and thought. Historical writings of this period took two distinctive forms: *Tabaqat* and *Tarikh*. *Tabaqat* delved into the history of specific religious traditions, while *Tarikh* provided a chronological narrative of general history and court chronicles influenced by Arab-Islamic and Mongol-Persian heritage.

Minhaj -us- Siraj Juzjani, a Persian historian, played a prominent role in this milieu with his *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*. He offered insights into medieval Indian history and detailed Muslim dynasties originating in Iran and Central Asia. His work serves as a crucial source for understanding Muslim rule in Bengal and the socio-political landscape of the Delhi Sultanate.

Ziauddin Barani, a noble and political thinker during the Delhi Sultanate, wrote the first Muslim history of India. His works, including *Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi* and *Fatawa-i-Jahandari*, focused on the Tughlaq era, offering comprehensive perspectives on the Delhi Sultanate. Barani's theories emphasised the hereditary status of the nobility, political expediency, and a disregard for the downtrodden.

In the fifteenth century, Shams-i-Siraj 'Afif, another historian and courtier, contributed notably with the works like the *Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi*, distinct from Barani's. This Persian-language chronicle provided authentic historical accounts of the Firoz Shah Tughlaq during medieval Indian history, showcasing the richness and diversity of historical writings in the influential Islamic period.

Assignments

1. Examine the impact of Turko-Persian historiography on the development of historical writings in medieval India.
2. Analyse key works of the historians who contributed to the Turko-Persian historiography.
3. Examine the role of personal biases, cultural perspectives, and political motivations in shaping the narrative of historiographers in the medieval period.
4. Distinguish the difference between Ziauddin Barani's 'Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi' and the one written by Shams -i- Siraj 'Afif.
5. Explain how the *Tabaqat* form differs from the *Tarikh* form of historical writing in medieval historiography.

Suggested Reading

1. Hardy, Peter, *Historians of Medieval India*, London, 1966.
2. Kemal, Ataman, *Re-Reading Al-Biruni's India: A Case of Intercultural Understanding*, Routledge, 2005.
3. Rosenthal, Franz, *A History of Muslim Historiography*, Leiden, 1952.

Reference

1. Chandra, Satish, *History of Medieval India*, Orient Blackswan, Delhi, 2007.
2. Habib, Irfan, *Medieval India I: Researches in the History of India 1200-1750*, New Delhi, 1999.
3. Sreedharan, E., *A Textbook of Historiography, 500 BC to AD 2000*, Orient Black swan, 2000.



Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

SGOU



Mughal Historiography

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ gain a comprehensive understanding of Mughal historiography
- ◆ appreciate the contributions of prominent historians such as Abdul Qadir Badauni and Abul Fazl
- ◆ recognise the cultural and historical context of Mughal historiography

Background

The Mughals were a prominent and influential dynasty that ruled parts of the Indian subcontinent, primarily from the early 16th century to the mid-19th century. The Mughal Empire was founded by Babur, a descendant of Timur on his father's side and Genghis Khan on his mother's side. He established his rule in India by defeating Ibrahim Lodhi, the Sultan of Delhi, at the First Battle of Panipat in 1526. The principal source materials concerning the Mughal empire encompass chronicles, foreign narratives, imperial edicts, literature and similar documents. Within the historical context of Mughal courts, a notable shift occurred, emphasising the paramount significance of extolling the emperors and manifesting unwavering loyalty. This trend, observed among historians of the era, entailed the integration of their allegiance to rulers within their own works, often introducing a practice of incorporating pertinent poetic quotations.

Keywords

Mughal Historiography, Autobiography, Biography, *Karori*, *Mansabdari*, *Ulema*, *Nama*



Discussion

2.3.1 Overview of Mughal Historiography

◆ *Official Histories- 'Nama'*

During the Mughal era, a unique form of historiography, often referred to as official histories or 'nama', gained prominence in India, significantly influenced by Persian traditions. Mughal historiography demonstrates robust and undeniable ties to broader traditions of Islamic historical writing, particularly in Persian and Arabic traditions. This historical genre encompasses a wide array of subject matter, including the genealogy of Mughal emperors, the activities of Mughal nobility, the status of independent regions, geographic details, governance systems, religious aspects and various other facets of Indian society. Despite instances of excessive flattery towards authority and religious biases within some historical works, these features are not unique to Mughal historiography and can be found in historical accounts from various regions. Furthermore, many historical compositions endeavour to present meticulous and corroborated narratives, drawing from diverse historical sources.

◆ *Characteristics of Mughal historiography*

A notable characteristic of Mughal historiography is the compelling manner in which historical accounts are presented, often blending literary language with visual materials. The Mughal Empire, renowned as one of the most prosperous empires in South Asia, owes a portion of its acclaim to the dedicated efforts of its eminent historians. In the Mughal era, the landscape of historical writings became even more intriguing and, at times, contentious, with a diverse range of sources. The primary source materials are composed in the Persian language, occasionally incorporating Arabic inscriptions, making them invaluable for the study of this period.

◆ *Secularisation of historical narratives*

Historical writing during the Mughal period is often considered a significant departure in terms of form, content and spirit when compared to previous eras. A notable advancement in Mughal historiography was its liberation from religious and theological constraints. Unlike the historiography of the preceding Turko-Afghan period, historical accounts from the Mughal period were not heavily influenced by theological considerations. Abul Fazl, a prominent figure in this era, in particular, rejected the idea of history being inherently tied to religion and theology. Instead, he sought to align history with philosophy, introducing a

more rational approach to the study of the past. This shift emphasised human agency over divine ordination, leading to the secularisation of historical narratives. The increasing secularisation of historical writing meant a heightened emphasis on human actions, individuals, causality and effects, gradually reducing the didactic element that had previously dominated historiography.

Royal Autobiographies and Biographies

- ◆ *Autobiographies of Mughal rulers*

The Mughal era holds a special place in history due to the existence of memoirs authored by rulers and private individuals. While not categorised as conventional historical texts, these writings are invaluable literary works with significant historical importance. Notably, two prominent Mughal emperors, Babur and Jahangir, composed their memoirs. Among these, *Tuzuk* or *Baburnama*, an autobiography penned by Babur in the Turkish language, and *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*, authored by Emperor Jahangir in Persian, are particularly noteworthy.

- ◆ *Significance of the genre*

The authorship of the *Humayunama* is a subject of debate. Some sources suggest that Humayun dictated it, while others claim it was written by Gulbadan Begum, Humayun's sister. Despite her non-imperial status, she provided an insider's perspective from the *harem*. It is essential to recognise that the autobiographies of Mughal emperors are well-documented, offering a clear historical record. In the rich collection of texts from Mughal India, a wide range of life accounts, both concise and comprehensive, can be found. Autobiographical and biographical writings include various genres, playing a central role in the early Mughal historiography. These narratives of lives served as a form of instructive memory, creating a tangible link between lived experiences captured in written form and the connection between the past and the present.

2.3.2 Baburnama

- ◆ *Tuzuk-i-Baburi/ Baburnama*

Babur's memoir, known as the *Tuzuk-i-Babari*, is the autobiography of Babur, the founder of the Mughal empire in India. It offers invaluable insights into the life of Babur and the world of late-fifteenth and early-sixteenth-century Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. Written in the Chagatai language, this autobiography is the first true work in the Islamic literature of the autobiographical genre, providing a comprehensive view of Babur's struggles, ambitions, and his relentless quest to hold Samarkand, the glorious seat of his

ancestor Timur. On the instruction of Akbar, *Tuzuk-i-Baburi* was translated into Persian and named *Baburnama* in 1589 by one of his nobles, Mirza Abdur Rahim.

◆ *Themes of Baburnama*

In 1494, Babur assumed leadership in Fergana as a minor ruler and by his death in 1530, he had established the foundations of the Mughal Empire in northern India. His memoir is not only a historical record but also a glimpse into aristocratic life in Islamic Central and South Asia c.1500. Describing his quest for the throne of Samarkand, his exodus to Kabul, and subsequent journey to northern India, it provides observations about the world he inhabited. Personal character, value judgments, and the historical events in the *Tuzuk* are inextricably mixed with the author's own opinions, sentiments, judgements, and philosophy of life and the events are described chronologically. Alongside political and military accounts, Babur's memoir delves into geography, flora, fauna, nomadic life and urban environments.



Fig 2.3.1 'Babur Reading' (Ca.1613) by Bishandas
Source: British Library Board/Bridgeman images

◆ *Translations of Baburnama*

The *Baburnama* has been translated into various languages and widely studied, making it part of curricula in numerous countries. Notable translations include those by Mirza Abdur Rahim and English versions by John Leyden, William Erskine, and Annette Susannah Beveridge. Though a valuable historical account, the memoir is not without gaps. Despite these lacunae, it provides a vivid picture of the times and a unique perspective on the world from an astute Central Asian Muslim ruler.

2.3.3 Historical Writings on Akbar

- ◆ *Akbarnama and Ain-i-Akbari*

Mughal historians often served as courtiers, scholars, and poets, patronised by emperors and nobles. Akbar, a prominent Mughal emperor, was a subject and patron of numerous Persian language texts, facilitating translation projects spanning various languages. These projects involved translating his grandfather Babur's memoirs from Turkish to Persian and commissioning the translation of Sanskrit texts into Persian. Abul Fazl's *Akbarnama* and *Ain-i-Akbari*, composed in Persian, are pivotal for comprehending the history and institutions of the Mughal Empire.



Fig 2.3.2 Abul Fazal Presenting *Akbarnama*
Source: Chester Beatty Library collection

- ◆ *Insights into Akbar's rule*

The Timurid passion for history flourished during Akbar's reign, resulting in four historical works. Two official histories were authored at the emperor's behest: the *Tarikh-i-Alfi* (Millennial History) and the monumental *Akbarnama*. Additionally, two unofficial histories documented Akbar's reign: *Tabaqat-i-Akbari* by Nizam ud-Din Ahmad and *Muntakhab ut-Tawarikh* by Abdul Qadir Badauni. These works offer valuable insights into Akbar's rule, regional histories,

and chronological accounts, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of this era. Among these historians, Nizam ud-Din Ahmad stands out for his simplicity of language, style and impartial historical accounts.

2.3.3.1 Mulla Abdul Qadir Badauni (1540–1596)

◆ In the royal court of Akbar

Badauni, a notable Indo-Persian historian during the Mughal period, received his early education under the guidance of scholars like Shaikh Hatim Sambhali and the renowned Shaikh Mubarak, along with Faizi and Abul Fazl. Faizi attested to Badauni's extensive and diverse knowledge. In 1574, Emperor Akbar appointed him to a religious role in the royal court and, later, as Imam.

◆ Criticised Akbar's reforms

Badauni's fervent religious beliefs were intertwined with his strong aversion to Sufism, Shias, Hindus, and the liberal ideas promoted by figures like Shaikh Mubarak and his sons, Faizi and Abul Fazl. He vehemently adhered to orthodox views in contrast to Akbar's more liberal policies. Badauni criticised a wide range of Akbar's initiatives, including religious and social reforms, administrative measures such as the branding of horses, and the *Mansabdari* system. To express his concerns, he wrote the *Muntakhab ut-Tawarikh*, which was kept secret during Akbar's lifetime to avoid the emperor's wrath and later published after Jahangir's accession.

◆ Divisions of Muntakhab

The *Muntakhab* is divided into three parts. The first volume is a formal political history written in the form of reigns in strict chronological order from Sabuktigin to Humayun. However, the narrative is inappropriate to the rulers' importance. Balban receives five pages, while a political non-entity such as Kaiqubad receives eight. Badauni admires Sher Shah, but his reforms are largely ignored. The second volume chronicles the events of Akbar's first forty years in the form of an annual chronicle. The third volume contains biographical sketches of *ulema*, physicians, and poets of Akbar's court. The *Karori* system and branding of horses are described in some detail, but the *Mansabdari* system and revenue administration are only briefly addressed.

◆ Writing style

Badauni's work is a vital contemporary source for understanding religious and philosophical discussions in the 'Ibadat Khana'. It is marked by its extreme subjectivity, shaped by Badauni's emotional distress, stemming from his perception of Akbar and his supporters undermining Islam. His value judgments are overwhelmingly negative, driven by religious convictions. The language is often vivid

and outspoken, at times bordering on obscenity. Badauni's invaluable account sheds light on Akbar's spiritual pursuits and the intellectual depth of his contemplations. This work has been translated into English by scholars such as George S .A. Ranking, W. H. Lowe, and T. W. Haig and published by the Asiatic Society in Calcutta.

2.3.3.2 Abul Fazl (1551-1602)

- ◆ High position at Akbar's court

Abul Fazl, a key figure at Emperor Akbar's court, is celebrated for his comprehensive historical works, the *Akbarnama* and *Ain-i-Akbari*. As a historian and one of Akbar's trusted advisors, Abul Fazl was not only a skilled administrator but also a soldier. His close relationship with Emperor Akbar greatly influenced the emperor's open-minded approach. Abul Fazl inherited a legacy of mysticism, tolerance, universal learning, and cosmopolitanism. Presented to Akbar in 1574 by his brother, the poet Abul Faizi, Abul Fazl's erudition quickly propelled him to a high-ranking position in the imperial court due to his extensive knowledge and unwavering loyalty to the emperor.

Akbarnama

- ◆ Theme of Akbarnama

Abul Fazl's works offer vivid descriptions of the Mughal Empire's administrative, economic, social and political aspects, as well as the remarkable achievements of Emperor Akbar. The *Akbarnama*, known as the "Book of Akbar," serves as the official chronicle of Akbar's reign and presents a rich portrayal of the emperor's role in establishing a flexible diplomatic and economic system that sustained the empire for a century. *Akbarnama* is organised in a regnal style, with each reign treated as a unit and each event treated as an individual entity. When the author gets to Akbar's reign, the book takes on the form of an annual chronicle, with the events of each year described in strict chronological order. The first part of the *Akbarnama* covers Akbar's birth and the reigns of Babur and Humayun, while the second covers Akbar's rule till the end of the forty-sixth year.

Abul Fazl's Idea of History

- ◆ Rational, secular, and liberal approach

Abul Fazl's historical perspective underwent a significant transformation, influenced by his rationalist and liberal approach as well as Emperor Akbar's vision for the Mughal Empire. Akbar's empire diverged from the previous Sultanate era; it aspired to be a genuinely Indian empire, representing a partnership with the Hindu population, in contrast to the sultanate's governance imposed by an alien



racial and religious group. Abul Fazl's intellectual foundation supported the emperor's unconventional policies. Among medieval historians, Abul Fazl stands out for his rational, secular and liberal approach to history.

◆ *Critical examination of local sources*

Abul Fazl initiated a departure from the historiography of the Sultanate period. He introduced a rational approach to history, eschewing the conventional view held by Muslim historians that history primarily served to enlighten and caution believers. His evaluation of the Indian context was rational and political rather than religious, unlike his predecessors. He advocated that Indian history should not exclusively revolve around the achievements of Muslim rulers. Abul Fazl's groundbreaking methodology involved the extensive collection and critical examination of regional sources, representing a significant advancement in Indian historiography. He meticulously collected historical data from the Imperial Record Office, established by Akbar, and subjected each piece of information to rigorous authenticity verification. The result is a genuine research work, *Akbarnama*. It underwent five revisions before submission to Akbar. Abul Fazl's emphasis on historical methodology surpassed that of any historian in India, reaching a level of perfection.

◆ *Content*

Ain-i-Akbari

Akbar's experiments and institutions are described in the works *Ain-i-Akbari*, and *Akbarnama*, which attempts to explain the spirit behind those institutions. The *Ain-i-Akbari*, Akbar's descriptive record, is divided into five books. It is a thorough, descriptive statistical record of the sixteenth-century Mughal empire. Furthermore, the *Ain-i-Akbari* offers a detailed overview of the Hindu culture in all of its facets. It offers a detailed description of the administrative system under Akbar, including statistics, system of taxation and the functions of key government offices. Additionally, it sheds light on the religious and philosophical systems of the Hindus.

◆ *Legacy*

Nature of Abul-Fazl's writing

Abul Fazl's legacy includes not only an account of the political and administrative aspects of sixteenth-century North India but also a comprehensive portrayal of the country, its customs, beliefs and social norms. This marked the first time that the governed classes were brought to the forefront. It is acknowledged that Abul Fazl defied Akbar, yet he depicted him as a real hero and created an epic around

his achievements. He expanded the scope of Indian history by providing an elaborate, sympathetic study of Hindu religious and philosophical systems, as well as their social customs. He sought to understand Hinduism in its proper context and significantly contributed to popularising the secular nature of Akbar's Mughal government and his policy of *Sulh-i-Kul*.

◆ *Subjectivity*

The sympathetic and meticulous attention given to Hindu society reflects the enlightened attitude of Akbar's empire. The *Akbarnama* and *Ain-i-Akbari* together provide the most detailed, comprehensive, and authentic account of the Mughal Empire and Akbar. Nevertheless, a notable limitation in Abul Fazl's historical writings was his subjectivity, which manifested as an overt partiality to his patron. Credulity and flattery marred the *Akbarnama*, turning it into a panegyric due to the author's unwavering belief in Akbar's divine qualities and powers. As a result, Abul Fazl remained silent about the devastation of cultivated lands and the suffering caused by the *Karori* system of land revenue settlement, issues recorded by Badauni and corroborated by Nizam ud-Din Ahmad.

◆ *Criticism*

Abul Fazl's distinctive writing style garners admiration in Oriental literature for its powerful language, sentence structure and elegant prose. However, there are differing opinions about his veracity as a historian. He faces accusations of excessive flattery, suppression of facts and dishonesty, which have led to his history being perceived as not doing justice to Akbar. Abul Fazl, in his idealisation of Akbar, crafted it as a legend for the Indian people.

Summarised Overview

The Mughal Empire, founded by Babur, endured as one of India's longest-reigning dynasties until British colonisation. Mughal historiography, primarily comprising biography and autobiography, evolved over time in response to academic and political shifts. It significantly influenced Indian historiography, marked by numerous works covering diverse subjects such as genealogy, nobility, governance, religion, and society. Autobiographical writings held a crucial place in early Mughal historiography, acting as instructive memory bridging the past and present. These narratives demonstrated the authors' reliance on interpretive frameworks to shape perspectives on the Mughal period. The *Babarnama*, an official chronicle and Babur's memoir, marked the first work in the Islamic autobiographical genre. Written in Chagatai Turki, it covered a wide array of

topics, providing insights into astronomy, geography, statecraft, military affairs, and various facets of life.

During Akbar's reign, courtiers like Abul Fazl and Abul Faizi made substantial literary contributions. Abul Fazl, aligning with Akbar's views, provided a one-sided perspective, while Abdul Qadir Badauni offered a different viewpoint. Neither historian, in isolation, provides a comprehensive picture of Akbar or his reign. However, their works collectively offer a wealth of information about various aspects of Akbar's rule, contributing significantly to our understanding of this historical period.

Assignments

1. Discuss the significance of autobiographies and biographies within Mughal historiography.
2. Describe the role of early Mughal rulers like Babur and Akbar in contributing to Mughal historiography, and discuss their motivations for recording history.
3. Analyse the ways in which the writings of Badauni and Abul Fazl differ, particularly in their depictions of Emperor Akbar.
4. Elucidate the contributions of Abdul Qadir Badauni and Abul Fazl.
5. Explain the key attributes that characterise Mughal historiography.

Suggested Reading

1. Begum, Gulbadan, *The History of Humayun: Humayunnama*, (Trans.), Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2022.
2. Fazl, Abul, *Ain-i-Akbari*, https://ia801404.us.archive.org/1/items/in.ernet.dli.2015.502490/2015.502490.ain-i-akbari-of_text.pdf
3. Fazl, Abul, *Akbar-Namah*, (Trans.), Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2022.
4. Sarvani, Abbas Khan, *Tuhfah-i Akbar Shahi*, S. Gupta, India, 1952.



Reference

1. Bhargava, M., *Exploring Medieval India*, Vol. I, Orient BlackSwan, New Delhi, 2010.
2. Habib, Irfan, *Medieval India I: Researches in the History of India 1200-1750*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999.
3. Mukhiya, H., *Historians and Historiographies During the Reign of Akbar*, Aakar Books, New Delhi, 2017.
4. Sreedharan, E., *A Textbook of Historiography 500 B.C. to AD 2000.*, Orient Black swan, 2000.

Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.



SGOU

Modern Trends

BLOCK-03



Nationalist Historiography

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be able to :

- ◆ understand the nationalist response to colonial historiography
- ◆ analyse the contributions of major nationalist historians
- ◆ compare colonial and nationalist interpretations of Indian history
- ◆ assess the impact of nationalist historiography

Background

The Nationalist School of historiography in India emerged as a reaction to the colonial historical narratives about India's past. Nationalist historians challenged the colonial stereotypes and eurocentric interpretations in the historical writings in India. They highlighted the achievements of ancient Indian civilisation and viewed history from the perspective of Indian society and culture. Major nationalist historians like R. C. Majumdar, R. K. Mookerji, R.C. Dutt, K. P. Jayaswal, Jadunath Sarkar, and K.A. Nilakanta Sastri relied on Indian sources and countered the colonial critique. Their writings boosted national pride and self-confidence among the Indians during the freedom struggle. However, nationalist historians were also influenced by colonial traditions of history writing in their reliance on political narratives and empirical research.

Keywords

Historiography, Nationalism, Orientalism, Colonialism, Theory of Oriental Despotism



Discussion

3.1.1. Colonial Versus Nationalist Historiography

◆ *Nationalist School of Historiography*

The colonial discourses on India's past prompted the creation of the Nationalist school of historiography. The educated Indians aimed to revitalise Indian culture, not to displace their own. This led to a renaissance, fostering self-reliance, respect, and confidence among the Indians. This national self-consciousness eventually led to a desire for freedom from colonial domination.

◆ *Response to colonial discourse*

Nationalist writers used the spiritual heritage of Indian society as a yardstick to define the essence of Indian culture. They unearthed that they were the spokespersons for religion and culture, the driving force behind India's cultural revival. R. C. Majumdar used the term "Nationalist Historians" to describe the Indian historians whose publications were skewed towards nationalism, particularly when the country was under colonial rule.

◆ *The notion of unity*

The nationalist movement influenced Indian academics who questioned the historical paradigms advanced by British historians. They disagreed with Vincent Smith's imperialist viewpoint. The rise of nationalism and the anti-imperialist viewpoints made them acutely aware of the economic exploitation of the British. The early nationalist historians made a deliberate attempt to demonstrate that, even in terms of scientific advancements, ancient India did not lag behind modern Europe. The Indian nationalists responded to the colonial claim that the country had never been united by asserting that the country had been fundamentally united since ancient times. To demonstrate this, R. K. Mookerji wrote a book titled *The Fundamental Unity of India*. He mentioned that the core principles of ancient Indian culture were the unification of religion and spirituality.

◆ *Embraced colonial history*

A nationalist approach to Indian history can be defined as one that aims to strengthen nationalist sentiments and bring people together in the face of linguistic, communal, religious and social divisions. In the 19th century, Indian historians embraced colonial history, viewing it as a scientific method based on fact-finding and focusing on political history



and ruling dynasties. Colonial historians also stressed the division of Indians based on region and religion, similar to the political policies of colonial rulers.

◆ *Opposition to Colonial Historiography*

Indian nationalist historians set out to establish counter-stereotypes, often intentionally aimed to fight against the colonial stereotypes that were thrown at them every day of their lives. Just as the Indian nationalist movement arose to oppose colonialism, so did nationalist historiography emerge in response to and in opposition to colonial historiography as an effort to build national self-esteem in the face of colonial denigration of Indian people. In their every day speeches and writings, both sides made reference to history. Even when dealing with the most complex historical themes, Indians frequently relied on earlier European interpretations in their responses.

◆ *Colonial view on Indian society*

Many colonial writers and administrators argued that the historical experiences of the Indian people made them ill-suited for modern economic development, national unity, the formation of a nation, self-government, democracy, and even defence against foreign invasion. According to this perspective, colonial rule was seen as a necessary preparatory phase, as it was believed to have already fulfilled these responsibilities.

◆ *Orientalist view*

Furthermore, during the latter part of the 1800s, it was occasionally suggested, and at other times openly stated, that the modern development of India required the ongoing presence of colonial administrators and rulers. Indian culture was decried by utilitarians and missionaries, but India's reputation as a country of philosophers and spiritual people was highlighted by the Orientalists.

◆ *Theory of Oriental Despotism*

A few colonial historians also mentioned that, as in other Eastern nations, the Indian rulers were authoritarian or despotic. This was the rationale they provided to justify the autocratic nature of British rule in India. This point of view became well-known as the idea of **Oriental Despotism**. Moreover, these authors contended that India lacked the idea that the welfare of the ruled should be the goal of any ruler. They also promoted the idea that the British were fair and kind, striving to ensure the well-being of their subjects.

Colonial writers contended that Indians were inherently divided, unlike Europeans, as they purportedly lacked a historical sense of nationalism and, consequently, national

- ◆ *Lack of democratic tradition*

unity. According to this viewpoint, Indians were deemed to lack a democratic heritage, in contrast to Europeans, who inherited democratic principles from ancient Greece and Rome. The colonial perspective held that the legacy of the Orient or East, including India, was one of tyranny. Furthermore, it was asserted that Indians lacked the capacity for originality and inventiveness. Consequently, according to this narrative, significant positive aspects, such as institutions, traditions, crafts, and more, were believed to have originated from external sources.

- ◆ *Indians as uncivilised*

For instance, colonialist historians claimed that India benefitted from colonial rule in terms of law and order, equality before the law, economic growth and social equality-based modernisation of society. These colonial concepts not only caused harm to the self-esteem of Indian historians and scholars but also suggested that their growing demands for autonomy, democracy, legislative changes and equal rights were unattainable due to the colonial assessment of Indian history. According to them, democracy was, after all, incompatible with their historical identity and unfit for them.

- ◆ *Emergence of Nationalist writings*

Many Indians and some Europeans began to examine colonial stereotypes almost as a challenge in the second half of the nineteenth century. They did it based on painstaking investigation, which has resulted in finding facts and details, as well as dependence on primary sources, in Indian historical writings.

- ◆ *Indian superiority in 'moral values'*

Indian historians endeavoured to debunk the falsehoods embedded in colonial historical narratives by scrutinising existing historical sources and actively seeking new ones. They were also moved by a sense of betrayed national pride. For decades, their research was limited to the ancient and medieval periods. Indian historians claimed India's spiritual tradition as a mark of distinction and of India's greatness and superiority over the West, particularly in terms of 'moral values' as opposed to the essentially 'materialistic' character of Western civilisation.

- ◆ *Initiatives taken by the scholars*

By the end of the nineteenth century, under the varied influences prompted by British occupation and governance, Indians initiated the process of documenting their country's history. Scholars like Bhagawanlal Indrajī, Bhaṁu Dhajī, and Rajendralal Mitra played pivotal roles in conducting valuable preliminary research and editing crucial historical

materials. The initial historical works, until the 1960s, were predominantly nationalist in nature. They primarily focused on political, dynastic, and cultural aspects of history.

3.1.2 Nationalist Historians

Let us now focus on the writings of Nationalist historians who enriched the understanding of India's ancient past through their meticulous research and insightful interpretations of historical events.

3.1.2.1 R. G. Bhandarkar (1837-1925)



Fig 3.1.1 R. G. Bhandarkar

- ◆ *Early History of the Deccan*

In the realm of Indian historical writings, the foremost figure, both chronologically and in significance, is R. G. Bhandarkar. He was educated at Elphinstone College, Bombay, where he later assumed the role of Professor of Oriental Languages. Bhandarkar was a distinguished member of the Bombay branch of the Royal Asiatic Society. He was renowned for his expertise in Sanskrit. He penned *Early History of the Deccan* in 1884, which, despite being described by the author as a “congeries of facts,” presents a comprehensive historical depiction of Western India from its origins to the era of ‘Muslim Conquest’. This work transcends political history, offering insights into the social, economic, and religious aspects, as well as the levels of literature and art in the Deccan during the period.

- ◆ *Early History of India*

Bhandarkar's other work, *A Peep into the Early History of India*, which was published in 1900, provides a succinct overview of northern India's early history from the Mauryan period to the Gupta Empire. This work enriches political history with a deep dive into the Brahmanical revival under the imperial Guptas, manifesting in the realms of religion, literature, and arts. Both of Bhandarkar's works showcase

a foundational approach characterised by a meticulous understanding of details and critical analysis.

◆ *Rigorous scrutiny of sources*

Bhandarkar garnered immense respect globally, receiving academic honours from America, England, France, and Germany. India recognised his contributions by establishing the 'Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute'. His methodological insights, found in papers like "The Critical, Comparative and Historical Method of Inquiry". His book *A Peep into the Early History of India*, highlight his commitment to historical truth through rigorous scrutiny of sources.

◆ *Objectivity*

Bhandarkar maintained impartiality by never expressing anti-British sentiments in his writings. He was often credited as one of the first Indians to apply Ranke's theory to Indian historical problems. He emphasised a historian's duty to avoid glorifying or despising any race or 'nation'. Bhandarkar ardently asserted that the historian's singular objective should be the pursuit of unvarnished truth, adopting the role not of an advocate but of an impartial judge.

◆ *Impartiality*

Bhandarkar applied an exceptionally rigorous critical technique to sources and surpassed many European historians in scrutinising ancient India. While Vincent Smith's Satavahana chronology, based on the Puranas, faltered under critical examination, Bhandarkar's assertions on the same matter remained unchallenged. Despite a strong religious inclination, he maintained a separation between his religious beliefs and historical convictions, steering clear of attributing historical events to the divine will. He focused on describing factual occurrences instead of delving into speculative reasons. Bhandarkar is considered India's equivalent of Ranke, exemplifying a commitment to historical analysis that remains unparalleled.

3.1.2.2 R. K. Mookerji (1880-1963)



Fig 3.1.2 R. K. Mookerji

- ◆ Mookerji's books on Ancient India

Radha Kumud Mookerji, born into a Bengali family, embarked on a distinguished academic career, choosing to become a teacher at various Indian universities. Despite nationalist training, Mookerji remained unbiased. In his influential treatise, *A History of Indian Shipping and Maritime Activity from the Earliest Times* (1912), he chronicles Indian maritime endeavours from ancient times to the Mughal era. Drawing from diverse literary sources and archaeological data, Mookerji received acclaim from scholars like K. P. Jayaswal, Lord Curzon, and V. A. Smith. His contributions extended to works like *Local Government in Ancient India*, *Ancient Indian Education*, *The Fundamental Unity of India*, and *Men and Thought in Ancient India*.

3.1.2.3 K. P. Jayaswal (1871-1937)



Fig 3.1.3 K. P. Jayaswal

- ◆ Jayaswal's books on Ancient Indian Culture

Kashi Prasad Jayaswal, an Oxford graduate and a lawyer by profession, plunged forward into historical research with the sole goal of regenerating national pride based on an awareness of India's ancient heritage. He was particularly interested in ancient Indian culture and resolved to work on ancient Indian history. Some of his well-known works include *Hindu Polity* and *History of India 150 AD - 350 AD*. He deciphered the Hathigumpha inscriptions as well as several inscriptions of the Mauryan King Ashoka. He had good knowledge of Sanskrit, which made him a sound epigraphist. Jayaswal had deep regard and love for ancient India's cultural heritage, and as such, he felt irritated by the Western scholars who criticised India's past. He tried to convince the people that ancient Indian rulers were not despots but were governed by the laws of *Dharma* and morality.

In addition, Jayaswal was instrumental in the excavation and restoration of historic locations, such as the University of Nalanda in contemporary Bihar. He was also a numismatics

- ◆ *Jayaswal's Contributions to Indian History*

expert. In 1931, the Royal Asiatic Society of London invited him to be the first Indian Speaker after he discovered several coins from the Mauryan and Gupta periods. Historian R.C.Majumdar challenged his theories regarding the history of the Guptas at the same time. He served as the president of the Indian Numismatic Society twice. Patna University and Banaras Hindu University granted him a doctorate in philosophy.

3.1.2.4 R.C. Majumdar (1888-1980)



Fig 3.1.4 R.C. Majumdar

- ◆ *Majumdar's roles*

Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, often referred to as R. C. Majumdar, is the most prominent historian of the older generation following Jadunath Sarkar. Majumdar's contributions extend across various realms of historical study. He served as the Vice-President of UNESCO's International Commission for a History of the Scientific and Cultural Development of Mankind and held the role of chief editor for the Bharatiya Vidhya Bhavan's monumental eleven-volume work, *The History and Culture of the Indian People*.

- ◆ *Important works*

Majumdar's extensive corpus of historical works spanning many stages of Indian history, including the pre-European period of Southeast Asian history and culture. Noteworthy among his significant works are *Corporate Life in Ancient India*, *Outline of Ancient Indian History and Civilization*, *Ancient Indian Colonies in the Far East*, *A History of Bengal*, *The Classical Accounts of India*, *An Advanced History of India*, *Penal Settlements in the Andamans*, *History of the Freedom Movement*, *The Sepoy Mutiny and the Revolt of 1857*, and the aforementioned *The History and Culture of the Indian People*.

In his work *Corporate Life in Ancient India*, he emphasises that religion did not significantly influence the public attention

◆ Themes of Majumdar's works

of the ancient Indians. Majumdar began researching the history and culture of Southeast Asia's Indianised republics. The efforts resulted in a three-volume study, *Ancient Indian Colonies in the Far East*. Besides its inherent value, the work is especially helpful in providing a methodical narrative of ancient Indian activity in Southeast Asia over a thousand years. Majumdar has been accused of having a nationalistic/imperialistic viewpoint for referring to the Indianised states of Southeast Asia as "Hindu Colonies," as Nilakanta Sastri did. Majumdar's work on the Great Revolt of 1857, *The Sepoy Mutiny and the Revolt of 1857*, argues that the sepoys fought against the British for their material gain rather than national, political and religious reasons. He believes that the events were the dying process of an obsolete aristocracy and feudalism. However, Majumdar believed that the event had an indirect importance as the first national war of independence.

◆ Followed objectivity

As a representative of the Rankean School of History, Majumdar placed a paramount emphasis on factual precision and analytical rigour, advocating for the removal of subjectivity from historical explanations. He maintained a steadfast belief that historians should strive to unveil the genuine occurrences of the past, positing the truth as the principal objective of all historical inquiries. Majumdar also critiqued the declining standards and emerging malpractices within historical studies, asserting that history serves as a conduit for the revelation of truth.

3.1.2.5 Romesh Chandra Dutt (1848–1909)



Fig 3.1.5 Romesh Chandra Dutt

Romesh Chandra Dutt (R.C.Dutt), an Indian Civil Service officer, Sanskrit scholar, and master of Indian classics. Dutt was convinced of the significance of literature as a source of information for India's social history. He relied on Sanskrit literature to understand Hindu social institutions and

◆ Important works of R.C.Dutt

discover the Indian mind. Dutt's *A History of Civilization in Ancient India*, published in three volumes, was a nationalist history without extravagant claims. Dutt's *Economic History of India*, published in 1904, took over Dadabhai Naoroji's 'Drain Theory' and investigated the nature of British rule. The work was based on parliamentary papers and official reports supported by statistical material. Dutt was the first Indian analyst to diagnose India's agrarian problem, focusing on the high incidence of land tax and the British colonial economy's objectives of producing raw materials for British industries and consuming British manufactures in India. Dutt's criticism became the economic platform of the national movement, highlighting the annual 'economic drain' in the context of Indian poverty.

3.1.2.6 Jadunath Sarkar (1870–1958)



Fig 3.1.6 Jadunath Sarkar

Jadunath Sarkar served as a teacher and Vice-Chancellor at Calcutta University but declined a second term to pursue his passion for historical research. Sarkar, a highly prolific Indian historian, authored fifty significant works. *The India of Aurangzib* (1901) offers a comprehensive account of the country's physical aspects. Sarkar's exhaustive *History of Aurangzeb*, written between 1912 and 1924, stands as a brilliant and labour-intensive study, revealing the multifaceted personality of the Puritan emperor. This monumental history delves into the war of succession, Aurangzib's administration, the Islamic church-state in India, Sambhaji's death, the subjugation of Bijapur and Golconda, disorder in northern India during Aurangzeb's 25-year absence, and the emperor's death. It concludes with Sarkar's assessment of the profound impact of Aurangzeb's long reign on India's fortunes.

◆ Books on Aurangzib

In 1919, Jadunath Sarkar published *Shivaji and His Times*, a critical examination of the Maratha hero Shivaji, challenging

◆ Important works of Sarkar

nationalist historians' theories by asserting that Shivaji failed to build a nation and establish original institutions. This perspective stirred resentment in Poona. Sarkar's literary contributions extended to *Nadir Shah* (1922) and *The Fall of the Mughal Empire* (1932–50), a four-volume series concluding with the British capture of Delhi and Agra in 1803. His posthumously published *Military History of India* in 1960 further exemplifies his scholarly depth. Sarkar's distinctive approach involved seeking original contemporary material, including letters and diaries, first-hand documents, and visiting historical sites to understand their topography. He lived among the people to gain insights into their character, meticulously collecting contemporary sources and subjecting them to scientific scrutiny through modern textual criticism methods. His works, marked by unity in conception, theme, and presentation, feature a charming style devoid of verbosity and affectation.

3.1.2.7 Sardar K.M. Panikkar (1895–1963)



Fig 3.1.7 Sardar K.M. Panikkar

◆ Geo-political perspective

K.M. Panikkar was a prolific historian who wrote extensively, including the monograph *Sri Harsha of Kanauj* in 1922, which depicted Harsha as an enlightened monarch. Panikkar also contributed to the *Origin and Evolution of Kingship in India* (1938), a series of lectures that challenged European scholars' notions that political thought was foreign to ancient Indian genius. His works, *Malabar and the Portuguese* and *Malabar and the Dutch* (1931), traced Europe's connection to India's west coast from the 16th to 18th centuries. Sardar Panikkar was the first Indian to study history from a geographical and geopolitical perspective. His other important work *India and the Indian Ocean* (1945), explores the influence of the Indian Ocean on Indian history and its crucial role in India's future.

In the introduction to the *Geographical Factors in Indian*

- ◆ *Negates Aryan origin of Indian civilisation*

History (1955), Panikkar emphasises that geography forms the basis of a nation's history, governing internal policies and external relations. He highlights the importance of the Himalayas and the sea in Indian life and outlook, emphasising both continental and sea-power perspectives. *A Survey of Indian History*, published in 1947, provides a comprehensive overview of the national heritage of the Indians over five thousand years of development. The author challenges misconceptions about the existence of an entity called 'India' and the Aryan origin of Indian civilisation. He argues that Indian civilisation had a pre-Vedic origin and that the division of history into Buddhist-Hindu, Muslim, and British periods has little meaning. He emphasises the Arya-Dravidian synthesis, beginning at the end of the Rig Vedic age, which created Indian civilisation. The survey also highlights the decadence in Hindu life, undermining national vigour in the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries, as well as the corruption of religion, obscene literature, and temple sculpture.

- ◆ *On Europe's contact with Asian states*

Panikkar's book, *Asia and Western Dominance*, which was published in 1953, critically examines Europe's contact with the Asian states during the Vasco da Gama epoch. The book highlights the Europeans' economic and political dominance, leading to a silent revolution in Asian life. The liberation of Asian countries from Western domination was attributed to the vitality of their old religion and culture rather than Christianisation. Sardar Panikkar defied British historiography by examining India's past from various sources and examining legends, despite criticisms of subjectivity and Hindu bias. His works are characterised by bright ideas rather than record-oriented research.

3.1.2.8 K.A. Nilakanta Sastri (1892–1975)



Fig 3.1.8 K.A.N Sastri

Renowned as a leading South Indian historian,

◆ *Important works on Indian history*

K.A.Nilakanta Sastri held the esteemed position of a Professor of Indian History and Archaeology at Madras University until his retirement in 1947. Additionally, he assumed the role of director at the UNESCO-established Institute of Traditional Cultures of Southeast Asia. Nilakanta Sastri authored approximately 25 significant works, with a primary focus on the history of South India. Noteworthy among his literary contributions are *The History of India* in three volumes (1950-53), *Life and Culture of the Indian People* (1966), and *An Advanced History of India* (1970), the latter co-authored with G. Sreenivasachari. Sastri also played a pivotal role in editing and contributing to seminal works such as *The Age of the Nandas and Mauryas* (1952), *Aspects of Indian History and Culture* (1974), *A Comprehensive History of India: Mauryas and Satavahanas* (1952), and *South India and South East Asia* (1978).

◆ *Contributions to South Indian History*

South Indian history was a relatively overlooked domain in the broader context of Indian history. Specialising in South Indian history, Nilakanta Sastri addressed this gap with scholarly dedication. In response to the prevailing perspectives, V.A. Smith argued for a nuanced consideration of the non-Aryan element, while Sundaran Pillai advocated for a scientific approach to Indian history, emphasising the study of the basins of Krishna, Kaveri, and Vaigai over the Gangetic plain. Sastri's substantial contributions to South Indian history encompass works such as *Pandyan Kingdom* (1929), *Studies in Chola History and Administration* (1933) and *The Cholas* (1935-37).

◆ *Methodological deficiency*

3.1.3 Critique of Nationalist Historiography

Indian nationalist history, in its quest for a national identity and in response to European criticisms of Indian life and culture, at times exhibited a disregard for historical propriety. This lack of appropriateness manifested in various ways, some of which have already been discussed in the preceding narrative. Similar to historiography in general, nationalist historiography in India occasionally erred in methodology and strayed from the ideal of objectivity, the cornerstone of authentic historical inquiry. Such deviations are an inevitable outcome when history is utilised to address contemporary issues. To illustrate the existence of accountable governance in ancient India, Jayaswal reinterpreted certain terms and passages found in literary writings and inscriptions. A. L. Basham highlights Jayaswal's conclusions in his renowned work, *Hindu Polity*.

◆ *Chauvinistic representation*

The transition from patriotism to chauvinism represents a subtle but significant shift in perspective, and in the realm of historical interpretation, this distinction becomes particularly pronounced. While some nationalist historians are inclined to emphasise the positive facets of India's past, showcasing achievements and cultural richness, imperialist historians, in contrast, tend to concentrate primarily on the negative aspects. This divergence in approach often stems from a nuanced interplay of ideological inclinations. Nationalist historians may succumb to the temptation of portraying a glorified narrative that reinforces a sense of pride and identity, potentially blurring a nuanced understanding of historical events.

◆ *Nuanced approach*

At times, nationalist historians were noted for espousing or defending divergent perspectives within their narratives. These perspectives ranged from asserting the perceived superiority of Hinduism over other religions to highlighting the worldly sophistication of ancient Indians. The spectrum included discussions on military prowess juxtaposed with nonviolent values, the assertion of democratic traditions alongside imperial glory, and the depiction of the high status of women during the Vedic period countered by narratives of their subsequent seclusion and relegation to inferior positions on social, economic, religious, and moral grounds. In exploring the multifaceted aspects of India's past, nationalist historians demonstrated a nuanced approach, engaging with contrasting viewpoints on various dimensions of society and culture. Their narratives encompassed the complexities inherent in historical interpretations, shedding light on the diverse and evolving nature of Indian civilisation throughout different periods.

◆ *Rise of communalism*

Nationalist historiography, while aiming to construct a cohesive national identity, unintentionally gave rise to communalism—a consequence that carried potentially harmful effects. The stirring narratives, often emphasising the achievements and heroism of specific religious or ethnic groups, contributed to a divisive atmosphere. The medium of expression extended beyond written accounts to encompass poetry, drama, and various literary works. These forms of cultural expression further stoked animosity among different communities. The seeds of communal tension sown through historical narratives played a significant role in shaping the trajectory of the nation. The emotional and passionate portrayals of historical events, coupled with

the selective emphasis on certain communities, fuelled a sense of exclusivity and contributed to the polarisation that eventually led to the partition of the nation.

3.1.4 Strength of Nationalist Historiography

◆ *Investigation of truth*

In contrast, nationalist historians forged a distinguished academic tradition characterised by meticulous research and an unwavering commitment to truth as they perceived it. Their works were marked by thorough investigation, and each assertion was meticulously and precisely footnoted. Consequently, their writings often rested on a solid foundation of empirical evidence, enhancing our capability for historical interpretation. Beyond their scholarly endeavours, nationalist historians played a pivotal role in cultural resistance against colonial influence. Simultaneously, they contributed significantly to the process of modernisation within Indian society, introducing beneficial transformations. Their collective efforts, carried out concurrently, not only advanced historical understanding but also became instrumental in shaping a cultural identity that resisted external domination and embraced positive facets of modernisation.

◆ *Investigation for new sources*

Historians of this era not only unearthed new sources but also constructed innovative frameworks for interpreting existing historical material. Their work ignited a multitude of new inquiries, disputes, and lively discussions within the scholarly community. Additionally, they advocated for the notion that historical investigation and writing should have relevance to the contemporary context. While their own studies may not have extensively delved into the role of the common people in history, these historians acknowledged and endorsed the idea that the experiences and contributions of ordinary individuals should be a central theme in historical narratives. By promoting this perspective, they laid the groundwork for a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of history, fostering a broader appreciation for the diverse factors that shape the course of human events.

Foremost, nationalist historical writing played a crucial role in empowering the Indian people to resist colonialism by instilling a sense of self-assurance, self-assertion, and national pride. The rectification of regional biases, such as the tendency to treat India as synonymous with the Indo-

◆ *Influence on Indians*

Gangetic plain, was addressed with the contributions of historians like Nilakanta Sastri. Their efforts helped overcome parochial perspectives and fostered a more inclusive understanding of Indian history. Nationalist historical writing in India emerged as a significant unifying force, particularly among the literate population. It not only provided a collective sense of identity but also contributed to the broader cause of national unity. By narrating a history that highlighted India's cultural richness, resilience, and contributions, these historians nurtured a spirit of solidarity among the people, motivating them to assert their distinct national character in the face of colonial challenges.

Summarised Overview

The nationalist school of historiography originated as a response to the colonial historical writings that denigrated India's past. Nationalist historians like R. G. Bhandarkar, R. K. Mookerji, K. P. Jayaswal, R. C. Majumdar and K. M. Panikkar challenged the eurocentric bias and ideological agenda of colonial narratives. Jadunath Sarkar captured the spirit of the time and dedicated himself to the study of Indian historiography. The reliance of Nationalist historians on Indian literary sources countered colonial contempt for indigenous texts. The nationalist focus on India's cultural unity and spiritual heritage boosted national pride during the freedom struggle. However, nationalist historians also imbibed certain colonial influences regarding political frameworks, periodisation and empirical research. While opposing imperial versions of the past, they contributed to the modernisation and unification of Indian historical consciousness.

Assignments

1. Explain the Theory of Oriental Despotism.
2. Discuss the role of Orientalists in Indian Historiography.
3. Discuss the origin of Nationalist historiography in India and the circumstances that led to its emergence.
4. Discuss the main arguments of nationalist historians in response to colonial historical writings.
5. Assess the contributions of R.C. Majumdar and Jadunath Sarkar towards the growth of Nationalist historiography in India.

Suggested Reading

1. Rosenthal, Franz, *A History of Muslim Historiography*, Leiden, 1952.
2. Sharma, Tej Ram, *Historiography: a History of Historical Writing*, Concept Publishing Company, 2005.

Reference

1. Sen, S. P. (Ed.), *Historians and Historiography in Modern India*, Institute of Historical Studies, Calcutta, 1973.
2. Sharif, M. M., (Ed.), *A History of Muslim philosophy*, Adam Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, 2007.
3. Sreedharan, E., *A Textbook of Historiography, 500 B.C. to A.D.2000*, Orient Black Swan, New Delhi, 2000.

Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.



SGOU





Marxist Approach

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ evaluate the Marxist interpretation of Indian history
- ◆ discuss the key concepts of Marxist Historiography
- ◆ analyse the contributions of leading Marxist historians

Background

Marxist historians introduced new concepts and methods such as historical materialism, class conflict and modes of production to interpret Indian history. Pioneers like D. D. Kosambi and R. S. Sharma focused on socio-economic structures and processes. They highlighted issues like feudalism, urbanisation, caste formation and peasant revolts. Marxist scholars like Romila Thapar, Irfan Habib and Bipan Chandra have produced detailed studies on ancient, medieval and modern India. While employing Marxist tools, they tried to avoid dogma and determinism. The Marxist School has widened the themes, sources and interpretative frameworks of Indian historiography. In this Unit, let us discuss the key concepts and features of the Marxist approach in historical writings.

Keywords

Dialectical Materialism, Marxism, Feudalism, Peasantry, Social Formation, Mode of Production

Discussion

3.2.1 Marxist Historiography

The post-nationalist phase of Indian historiography witnessed the introduction of new theories and concepts,

◆ *Origin of Marxist Approach*

techniques and methods, interpretations and evaluations in Indian historical studies. Some of these techniques and theories were already started during the nationalist phase itself. But they received a definite shape and form during the post-independent era. The scholars of the new era were able to access a vast amount of historical material, both literary and archaeological, for undertaking a scientific interpretation using modern tools of analysis with objectivity and without prejudice. The historians began to opt for specialisations instead of writing 'surveys' of Indian history. They started working on particular areas and particular periods. The new trend is called 'scientific', not so much for new evidence as for a re-reading of the sources with a different set of questions in mind.

◆ *Influence of Marxist Approach*

In India's post-independence period, a kind of history emerged that was also deeply rooted in the writings of nationalist historians and arose from an interest in Marxism. The Marxist Phase does not imply that the authors were all Marxists, but rather that they used materialistic interpretation as a method of understanding historical phenomena. Some argue that history, particularly ancient history, is best studied through the lens of a social science discipline. Their interpretation was based on Karl Marx's historical philosophy, specifically dialectical materialism. The new method is centred on the investigation of the relationship between the social and economic organisation and its impact on historical events. It is best exemplified in the work of D. D. Kosambi, *Petrarch of the Marxist School of Indian Historiography*.

Let us focus on some of the important historians and their writings aligned with the Marxist approach.

3.2.1.1 D.D. Kosambi(1907-1966)

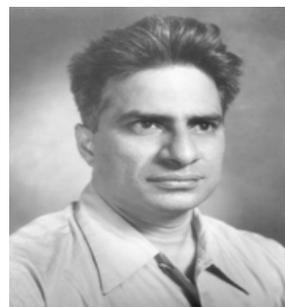


Fig 3.2.1 D.D. Kosambi

D.D Kosambi was an Indian polymath who studied

◆ *Indian Polymath*

philology, history, genetics, statistics, and mathematics. He was the first to use the Kosambi-Karhunen-Loeve theorem in Statistics. His work in numismatics and the compilation of critical editions of ancient Sanskrit texts are also well known.

◆ *Early life*

Kosambi was born in 1907 in colonial Goa. He attended Harvard University after finishing high school in his hometown. He was particularly interested in history and mathematics. He taught at Benaras, Poona, and Aligarh Universities. He was a linguist who spoke Sanskrit, Arabic, French, Latin, English, and Greek, among other languages. He was passionate about numismatics and archaeology. His historical knowledge was extensive and in-depth.

◆ *Kosambi's works*

Kosambi wrote four books and more than 50 research articles. *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, *The Culture and Civilization of Ancient India in the Historical Outline*, *Exasperating Essays: Exercises in the Dialectical Method*, and *Myth and Reality: Studies in the Formation of Indian Culture* are his contributions to Indian history. Through his works, he has talked about the social, cultural, and economic conditions of India. He has given importance to the Indus and Aryan cultures in his works. He has traced the history of India up to the departure of the British from India and also focused on the feudal elements in India.

◆ *Importance to economic aspects*

Kosambi was aware that India's ancient history lacked proper records and sources. His approach was out of the ordinary and he has presented the facts in an easy-to-understand manner. Kosambi gave importance to the economic aspects in bringing historical changes. He stated that wars and religious changes are caused by economic factors and believed that historical changes were the result of economic production.

◆ *"Paradigm shift" in Indian studies*

D. D. Kosambi is credited by Romila Thapar with bringing about a "paradigm shift" in Indian historical studies. She stated that there had only been two previous instances of such revolutionary shifts in Indian historiography. Such paradigm shifts, she implies, were previously affected by James Mill and Vincent Smith. James Mill was disdainful of Indian society and set the standard for historical writing about India with his work *History of India* (1818-23). He believed that pre-colonial Indian civilisation was primitive, superstitious, unchanging and deficient in many areas.

◆ *Application of comparative methodologies*

Kosambi describes history as “the presentation of successive developments in the means and relations of production, in chronological order.” “Dialectical Materialism,” which is often known as Marxism after its founder, is how he characterises his approach to history. Nonetheless, Kosambi applied Marxism in a flexible manner. Adopting Marx’s thesis does not mean blind repetition of all his conclusions. Rather than this, he thought of Marxism as a technique that could be used in the study of Indian history and society. He believed that the lack of trustworthy historical materials would be compensated by the application of comparative methodologies. In his research on Indian society, he used an interdisciplinary approach, which made it possible for him to see reality from a variety of perspectives and have a complete understanding of it.

◆ *Two types of feudalism*

D. D. Kosambi mentioned that Indian society did not observe a comparable growth of various modes of production as happened in Europe, despite assertions made by Marx himself and by several other Marxists. When Kosambi disregarded two major Marxist ideas – the Asiatic Mode of Production and Slave Mode of Production – as being irrelevant to prehistoric Indian society, it was evident how non-dogmatically he approached history. He argued that the slave mode of production was not found in India. Additionally, he disapproved of Marx’s own theory as it was inapplicable in the Indian scenario. But even though he had a different understanding of it, he believed that feudalism existed in India. He was aware that Indian society in the Middle Ages was very different from European society, as it lacked several key elements of European feudalism, such as the manorial system, demesne cultivation and serfdom. He differentiated between two types of feudalism in India – ‘feudalism from above’ and ‘feudalism from below’.

3.2.1.2 R. S. Sharma (1920-2011)

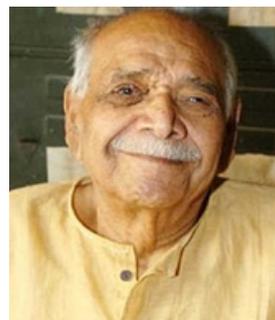


Fig 3.2.2 R. S. Sharma

◆ *Important works*

Ram Sharan Sharma is a notable historian of post-independence India who successfully used the Marxist technique of analysis in historical study. His important works include *Sudras in Ancient India*, *Indian Feudalism*, *Urban Decay in India*, *Material Culture and Social Formation in Ancient India* and *Light on Early Indian Society and Economy*.

◆ *Study on ancient social system*

Sharma's *Sudras in Ancient India*, which was published in 1958, is an early indication of his affinity for the lower orders of society. It is a thoroughly researched study that investigates the relationship of the lower social orders with the means of production and with higher orders from the Vedic age until the end of the Gupta period, relying primarily on literary sources.

◆ *Phases of Indian feudalism*

In his work *Indian Feudalism*, Sharma made a detailed study of Indian feudalism, drawing inspiration from Kosambi's interpretations. His area of specialisation was mainly the socio-economic aspects of ancient and early medieval India. He was well-versed in Vedic and Puranic literature. According to him, feudalism in India, unlike in Europe, began with the land grants made to learned Brahmins, temples and monasteries. Sharma observes three distinct phases for the origin and growth of Indian feudalism. The first phase covers the period between 300 CE to 750 CE, in which the Sudras were transformed into peasants, and the landlords emerged as the dominant section to develop the *Samanta* system. The second phase covers the period between 750 CE and 1000 CE, which witnessed the growth of the feudal system. The third phase covers the period between 1000 CE and 1120 CE marked the culmination in the growth of feudalism. He viewed small-scale peasant production and the absence of manors as the hallmarks of Indian feudalism. In the post-Gupta era, he claims, there was a decrease in trade and an increase in land distribution as charity or ceremonial offerings to the Brahmans and state officials in lieu of salaries. The peasantry became dependent on the landowners as a result of this process, which led to their subjugation.

◆ *Fall of Indian feudalism*

According to R.S Sharma, in India the fall of feudalism followed a similar path as that of Western Europe. The key factors that led to the demise of feudalism in India were the revival of long-distance trade, the growth of towns, the exodus of peasants and the emergence of the monetary economy. According to this paradigm, feudalisation began at some point in the fourth century and started declining in

the twelfth century. Several historians have questioned this understanding of the medieval Indian economy and culture, arguing that Indian society did not develop in accordance with the Western model.

◆ *Material interpretation*

Sharma's other notable work *Urban Decay in India* (1987) confirmed his claims about the origins and evolution of feudalism in India. He provided an astounding array of archaeological data to indicate the demise of early medieval Indian urban centres. Another famous work *Material Culture and Social Formations in Ancient India* (1983), fully follows the Marxist historical analysis and interpretation. It analyses the course of social formations in the Vedic and post-Vedic periods as tribal, class-based and state-based. This book vividly describes the shifts in material culture within society, moving from the cattle-rearing practices of the early Vedic period to the agricultural focus of the late Vedic society and ultimately culminating in the fully developed agricultural society of the later Vedic period.

◆ *Nature of feudal societies*

In his paper titled "How Feudal Was Indian Feudalism?" (1985), he acknowledged that feudalism was not a universal phenomenon, but contends that not all pre-capitalist organisations had this quality. He believed that feudalism existed in India, though it took a very different form. "There could be enormous variations in the nature of feudal societies, just as there could be enormous variations in tribal society," he said.

◆ *Economic interpretation*

Sharma's work, *Light on Early Indian Society and Economy*, explores ancient Indian social and economic history, including promiscuity, slavery, caste, marriage system, land grants and usury. His books have provided an overview of ancient India's social and economic history.

3.2.1.3 Romila Thapar



Fig 3.2.3 Romila Thapar

Romila Thapar, Emeritus Professor at the Centre for

◆ Works of Thapar

Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, is a very competent historian of ancient Indian history. She has to her credit several important works on ancient Indian history like *As'oka and the Decline of the Mauryas* (1960), *Past and Prejudice* (1975), *Ancient Indian Social History: Some Interpretations* (1978), *History of India Volume I* (1983), *Lineage to State* (1984), *Mauryas Revisited, History and Beyond* (2003), *Readings in Early Indian History* (2013), *The Past as Present: Forging Contemporary Identities Through History* (2014) etc. Romila Thapar has successfully tried to provide a materialistic interpretation of the social, economic, political and cultural aspects of ancient Indian history in general and the Mauryan period in particular.

◆ Policy of Dhamma

Romila Thapar's work, *Asoka and the Decline of the Mauryas* (1963), reinterprets the history of Ashoka, the Mauryan Emperor, focusing on his policy of *Dhamma* (Dharma) as a political and social necessity. Ashoka faced a problem with the conquest of Kalinga, which led to the empire's subcontinental limits. To maintain control over the diverse ethnic and cultural elements, Ashoka introduced the policy of *Dhamma*, emphasising social responsibility and a code of social behaviour. This policy was based on high social ethics and civic responsibility, making it highly moral and less sectarian. Thapar argues that the collapse of the Mauryan empire was caused by a centralised administrative system that relied heavily on the ruler's personal ability to function properly. Ashoka's death signalled the decline of the Mauryan Empire and the division of its provinces.

◆ Brief history of India

Romila Thapar's *History of India*, the first volume (1966), is a work aimed at a much larger audience with a basic understanding of history. The book explores the history of the Indian subcontinent from the Indo-Aryans (1500 years before Jesus Christ) to the arrival of Europeans in the 16th century. It covers various aspects of Indian life, including economic, religious, artistic and literary aspects, agriculture, industry, rural and urban life and trade and maritime activity. The book is a systematic study of Indian society over the years.

Thapar's other work, *Ancient Indian Social History* (1978), explores subjects related to the study of ancient Indian social life from prehistoric times to the end of the first millennium CE. The work's opening chapter, "Society and Law in the Hindu and Buddhist Traditions," is a kind of parallel,

◆ Ancient Indian social life

comparative examination of the Hindu and Buddhist socio-religious systems. In general, the Hindu tradition was monarchical and dictatorial in politics and administration, discriminatory in law, caste-ridden and inequitable in social interactions and hostile to human freedom and individual liberty. The study examines Buddhist ethics and religion as forms of social protest in Northern India, opposing caste division, dietary taboos and educational monopoly of the Brahmanical order. The chapter, 'Social Mobility in Ancient India with Special Reference to Elite Groups', challenges the concept that society was frozen between 1000 BCE and 1000 CE, implying that there was genuine mobility in status rather than a theoretical model. The *varna* concept, which was responsible for this assumption, was essentially a theoretical model. Thapar implies that there was mobility in terms of actual, if not ritual, status.

◆ State formation in ancient India

Thapar's *From Lineage to State* (1984) is a comprehensive study of the process of state formation in the first millennium BCE in the middle Ganga Valley. Thapar attributes the emergence of the Ganga Valley state system to the transition from a lineage mode of agrarian production to a peasant economy of private holdings and increasing urbanisation. She refers to the Rig Vedic or pre-state society as 'lineage' rather than 'tribal' because common ancestry was the tying factor. A pastoral and mobile society would be typical of a lineage society. In contrast, a state is neither migratory nor based on lineage descent. The use of iron, plough agriculture, and the rise of *Grahapati* led to the formation of a 'State' in India. This society required a new organisation to protect interests, which could be sustained through taxes. States like Kosala and Magadha emerged, requiring a treasury for officials and a professional standing army. Kinship eroded, allowing for more formal political ties.

◆ Aryan race theory and Oriental Despotism

Romila Thapar challenged two major ideological trends in modern interpretations of early Indian history in *Ideology and the Interpretation of Early Indian History*. These were the theory of the Aryan race and the notion of Oriental Despotism. Thapar questioned the Aryan theory based on evidence from archaeology, linguistics and social anthropology. In the same essay, she questioned the concept of 'Oriental Despotism,' which the Western writers had taken for granted in their understanding of India's past. Romila Thapar's work in the field of ancient Indian history has significantly widened the historical horizon.

3.2.1.4 Irfan Habib



Fig 3.2.4 Irfan Habib

- ◆ *Specialist in medieval Indian history*

Irfan Habib, the renowned Marxist historian in India, is the son of a great historian, Muhammad Habib. He started his professional career as a specialist in medieval Indian history. However, in the succeeding years, the boundaries of professional specialisation were broken, and his intellectual project was widened to cover the entire area of Indian history from the ancient to the modern.

- ◆ *Works of Habib*

Irfan Habib's most important work is his doctoral thesis, *Agrarian System of Mughal India (1556-1707)*. His other works include *Atlas of the Mughal Empire*, *Peasant and Artisan Resistance in Mughal India*, *Interpreting Indian History*, *Essays on Indian History Towards A Marxist Perception*, *Caste and Money in Indian History*, *Problems of Marxist Historiography* and *The Cambridge Economic History of India*. Habib shows that Mughal India had witnessed the growth of commodity production, with its accompanying processes of differentiation within the peasantry and the emergence of trade as a two-way relationship between town and country. He rejected the term 'Asiatic mode of production' by Karl Marx and coined the term 'medieval social formation' for the study of medieval Indian history.

- ◆ *Relevance of historical interpretation*

In his book *Interpreting Indian History*, Habib emphasises the importance of explanation and interpretation in historical reconstruction. He believes that interpretation, rather than narration, is what makes a historian. He mentions that historians must interpret history to understand how and why events occurred, as they cannot recreate and verify them due to limited evidence. The evidence for older times is particularly scanty, leaving large gaps. Such gaps might only be filled by understanding how societies work and what people are driven by and capable of accomplishing

in different situations. In this case, the historian's personal judgment is as important as his knowledge. In the same work, Habib investigates the type of 'social formation' established after the Ghorian-Turkish conquest of northern India (1192-1206) based on the form of labour process, the extraction of surplus value, and the system of surplus distribution.

◆ Readings on caste

In another book, *Caste and Money in Indian History*, Irfan Habib attempts to analyse Indian history through the lens of caste, which he describes as "the single most important divisive factor in our country." Caste was a rigorous kind of labour division that was part of the production relations. Habib believes that the ruling classes, which in medieval India were the nobility and zamindars, benefitted the most from this rigid form of class exploitation. In his work *Problems of Marxist Historiography*, he argues that Marx's followers have been criticised for their rigid classification of societies into primitive communism, slavery, and feudalism, despite Marx's belief that all thought is a reflection of the material world.

◆ From the standpoint of the peasants

Irfan Habib's work, *Agrarian System of Mughal India*, highlights the contradiction between the centralised ruling class and the peasantry in medieval Indian society. The state's primary motive was to collect higher tax revenue, which led to widespread conflicts between the peasants and the ruling class. Habib suggests that economic tyranny was the primary cause of the opposition to Aurangzeb. He viewed medieval north Indian society from the peasant's perspective rather than that of the government and zamindars.

3.2.1.5 K. N. Panikkar



Fig 3.2.5 K. N. Panikkar

K. N. Panikkar, formerly Vice Chancellor of Sree Sankaracharya University, Kaladi, Kerala, is a historian of international repute. Panikkar was born in 1936 at

◆ *Career of Panikkar*

Guruvayoor. He graduated from Victoria College, Palakkad, and obtained his doctorate from Jaipur University. He became a professor of modern history at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi. He has published eight highly-rated books on the ideological, ethnic, socio-political and economic undercurrents of the modernist phase of history

◆ *Works of Panikkar*

Some of Panikkar's important works include *Against Lord and State: Religion and Peasant Uprisings in Malabar* (1989), *Culture and Consciousness in Modern India* (1990), *Culture, Ideology and Hegemony- Intellectuals and Social Consciousness in Colonial India* (1995) and *Before the Night Falls* (2002). He has also edited a number of books, including *India's Guide to Communalism* (2000), *Colonialism, Culture and Resistance* (2009) and the ICHR Volume *Towards Freedom 1940*, a documentary history of the freedom struggle.

◆ *An outstanding academic luminary*

An outstanding academic luminary, he holds a prestigious visiting professorship in many universities in India, Europe and America. As an acknowledged scholar and resource person of history, he has been officiating as the Chairperson of expert Committees and Councils of establishments and institutions as varied as IGNOU, ICHR World Book Encyclopedia, JNU and National Archives. He is the Chairman of the Kerala Council for Historical Research and a member of the Indian Council of Historical Research.

3.2.1.6 Bipan Chandra

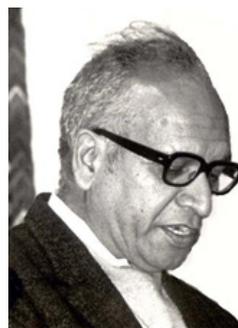


Fig 3.2.6 Bipan Chandra

Bipan Chandra is another prominent member of the Marxist school of Indian historians. He started his historical writings as a liberal Marxist in the 1960s and made a drastic shift in his approach towards the 1980s. He has made some in-depth studies on the national movement of India. The publication of '*Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism*', his

◆ Principle of nationalism

doctoral thesis, in 1966, and '*Nationalism and Colonialism*', in 1979, represents his earlier phase as a liberal Marxist. He argued that nationalism in India was an entirely new organising principle and an ideology which did not exist in the past. The most important factor in the rise of the national movement was the ideology of the middle-class intelligentsia, who had analysed the real nature of imperialism and how it contradicted the interest of all classes of Indians. The propaganda of anti-imperialist ideology by the middle-class intelligentsia represented the common interest of all classes, which gave rise to the nationalist movement.

◆ Development of economic nationalism

Bipan Chandra's book, *The Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism*, explores the economic policies of the Indian National Movement before the Swadeshi agitation. Bipan Chandra, a realist, considered ideas to be direct agents of historical evolution, arguing that men's understanding of these relations is crucial for their social and political action. He included various fora, such as the National Congress, legislative bodies, speeches, and writings, as voicing nationalist opposition to British economic imperialism. He also revealed the capitalist outlook of Indian national leaders. Bipan Chandra claims in his book, *Nationalism and Colonialism in India*, that the independent capitalist class that emerged in India after 1857, notably after 1914, did not form an organic link with British or other foreign capitalism and did not become an ally of the British authority in India. Indian capitalism was characterised by a colonially subjugated and structured economy.

◆ Shift in approach

Bipan Chandra adopted a different approach towards the Indian national movement from the 1980s onwards. This was an important shift from his earlier Marxist approach. The new approach was initiated in his article "The Long Term Dynamics of the Indian National Congress" in 1984 and was elaborated on in the work *India's Struggle For Independence (1857-1947)*, published in 1988, of which he is the main author. He began to characterise the Indian national movement as a 'multi-class' movement and the Congress as a 'people's party.' He equated the Congress with the national movement and as the only representative of the anti-imperialist struggle. He denied the class character of the Congress and so the national movement. He criticised the Cambridge School's argument that the Indian national movement was a product of elite interests. At the same time, the nationalist school acknowledged colonialism's

exploitative nature but attributed the movement to the spread of nationalism and liberty. According to him, unlike the Imperialist School, Marxist historians clearly understand the main contradictions as well as the process of the nation-in-the-making. Unlike nationalists, they also take full account of Indian society's underlying conflicts.

◆ *Evaluating communalism*

Bipan Chandra's *Communalism in Modern India* argues that communalism is not a historical accident but a result of multiple forces and is influenced by colonialism. He argued that communalism is characterised by individual struggles for positions and often misrepresents social tensions into communal conflicts. He concluded that communalism is an extreme reaction that must be fought on all fronts.

3.2.2 Cambridge School of Historiography

◆ *Neo-Imperialist approach*

During the late 1960s, a new school of historiography presented a formidable challenge to the prevailing nationalist and Marxist perspectives on Indian nationalism. A cohort of historians intentionally embarked on reexamining the national movement through a neo-imperialist lens. These scholars, having received training in universities in England, America, and Germany, systematically approached the source materials such as official records, diaries, and police reports to offer fresh interpretations to the Indian national movement. This innovative approach, known as Cambridge School of Historiography, became evident in the literature published during the late 1960s and gained significant momentum in the subsequent decades, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s.

◆ *Focus on the struggle among Indians*

The Cambridge School of Historiography, emerged in 1973, considered that the Indian society during the colonial era was divided with factional rivalries among local and regional leaders. They also argued that the fundamental contradictions under colonial rule were between the Indians themselves, not between imperialists and the Indians. Cambridge historians argued that Indian nationalism was not a product of the Indian people's struggle against colonial exploitation, but between the Indians for the opportunities provided by the British rulers and the leaders of the national movement fought for power and material benefits. However, many historians criticised the Cambridge school of historiography.

The works of the Cambridge school include Ronald

◆ Important works

Robinson and John Andrew Gallagher's *Africa and the Victorians*, Anil Seal's *Emergence of Indian Nationalism* (1968), J. H. Broomfield's *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society* (1968), D. Rothermund's *The Phases of Indian Nationalism* (1970), Judith Brown's *Gandhi's Rise to Power* (1972) and *Gandhi and Civil Disobedience* (1972), John Gallagher, Gordon Johnson and Anil Seal (eds.), *Locality, Province and Nation* (1973), Gordon Johnson's, *Provincial Politics and Indian Nationalism: Bombay and the Indian National Congress 1890 to 1905* (1973), C.A. Bayly's *The Local Roots of Indian Politics: Allahabad 1880–1920* (1975), D.A. Washbrook's *The Emergence of Provincial Politics: Madras Presidency 1870–1920* (1976), C.J. Baker's *The Politics of South India 1920–1937* (1976) and C. J. Baker, Gordon Johnson and Anil Seal (eds.) *Power, Profit and Politics* (1981). The school focused on the formation of English-educated elites and the rivalries within each region between castes and communities for opportunities. Despite criticism from Marxist and liberal historians in India, the Cambridge School had a significant impact on Indian historiography.

Summarised Overview

Marxist historians revolutionised the writing of Indian history by shifting focus to economic factors, social conflicts and material conditions. D. D. Kosambi pioneered the Marxist analysis of ancient India, while R. S. Sharma studied the nature of Indian feudalism. Irfan Habib examined Mughal India, and K. N. Panikkar wrote on culture and ethnicity in India. Romila Thapar produced authoritative works on ancient India. Marxist scholars have generated intense debates on concepts like feudalism, peasant consciousness, ideology and class formations. Despite internal differences, they have enriched historical research through interdisciplinary approaches, emphasis on socio-economic contexts and study of marginalised groups. Marxist historiography has moved away from dogma and contributed immensely to the growth of Indian historical scholarship.

Assignments

1. Assess the impact of Marxist historiography on the growth of Indian historical writings.
2. Explain the Marxist approach to historiography with reference to its key concepts and methods.



3. Analyse D. D. Kosambi's contributions in pioneering the Marxist interpretation of ancient Indian history.
4. Discuss the key contributions of Romila Thapar to the study and interpretation of ancient Indian History.
5. Describe in what ways Irfan Habib has significantly contributed to the field of medieval Indian history.
6. Mention the contributions of Bipan Chandra to the study of modern Indian history.

Suggested Reading

1. Chandra, Bipan, *The Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism in India*, People's Publishing House, New Delhi, 1991.
2. Chandra, Bipan., et al., *India's Struggle for Independence, 1857-1947*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 1988.
3. Panikkar, K.N., *Culture, Ideology, Hegemony: Intellectuals and Social Consciousness in Colonial India*, Tulika, New Delhi, 1995.
4. Sharma, Ramesh Chandra., et al, *Historiography and Historians in India since Independence*, M. G. Publishers, Agra, 1991.

Reference

1. Kosambi, D.D., *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1985.
2. Mukhia, Harbans, (Ed.), *The Feudalism Debate*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, 2000.
3. Sreedharan, E., *A Textbook of Historiography, 500 B.C. to A.D. 2000*, Orient Longman, New Delhi, 2004.
4. Thapar, Romila, 'The Contribution of D. D. Kosambi to Indology', in Romila Thapar, *Cultural Pasts: Essays in Early Indian History*, OUP, New Delhi, 2000



Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

SGOU



Recent Trends

BLOCK-04



Intellectual History

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ understand the development of writing subaltern histories
- ◆ learn about the aims and objectives of subaltern historiography
- ◆ acquire knowledge about the contributions of various subaltern historians, particularly Ranajit Guha and Partha Chatterjee

Background

The post-colonial period witnessed the introduction of new ideas and ideologies across various fields of knowledge. One of the key developments in post-colonial studies was the emergence of the Subaltern Study Group. It comprises scholars dedicated to reshaping historical narratives. Subaltern Studies emerged as a pathbreaking movement within the field of historiography during the 1980s. It marked a departure from conventional historical approaches and prioritised the history of marginalised communities or 'history from below.' The Subaltern group aimed to concentrate on the history of the oppressed, poor and other forgotten people excluded from the power hierarchy. This unit aims to delve into this transformative intellectual movement, exploring its key proponents, ideas, and contributions to historical discourse. It will also spotlight the contributions of scholars such as Ranajit Guha, Barun De and Partha Chatterjee, among others, to the historical writings in India.

Keywords

Intellectual History, History from Below, Subaltern, Subaltern Studies, Nationalism, Marxism



Discussion

4.1.1. Emergence of the Subaltern School of Historiography

◆ Formation of the Subaltern Study Group

Subaltern history is the idea that developed in the 20th century that focuses on studying the history of marginalised groups, often referred to as the 'people from below'. It was influenced by the "history from below" approach of cultural studies scholars from the 1960s, such as E. P. Thompson, Raymond Williams, and Eric Hobsbawm. With this notion, a group of scholars formed the Subaltern Study group, aiming to highlight the issues faced by underprivileged communities and offer such a perspective of history. The Subaltern studies group focused on historical narratives of the working class and peasants within colonial and post-colonial India. The inception of the Subaltern study group can be traced back to the publication of the series titled *Subaltern Studies* in 1982, which introduced a new genre of history writing in India.

◆ Origin of the term 'Subaltern'

The term 'subaltern' finds its origins in an Italian Marxist scholar, Antonio Gramsci's manuscript, 'Prison Notebooks'. Partha Chatterjee explains that Gramsci used the term 'subaltern' as a replacement for 'proletariat' in his writings. He used this particular term due to the constraints of writing under strict censorship while in prison. He avoided using traditional Marxist terminology and thus coined the term 'subaltern' for this purpose.

◆ Broader meaning of the term

The term 'Subaltern' used by Gramsci had a comprehensive meaning. By subaltern, he referred to all non-hegemonic classes that did not hold a dominant position within a socially stratified society, as they were subordinated by the more powerful upper class. Partha Chatterjee argued that by substituting the term 'proletariat' with 'subaltern', Gramsci implied that the classical Marxist division of European society into classes was insufficient. The classical Marxist understanding of the class did not adequately apply to South European countries like Italy, where society was primarily agrarian, and the most exploited sections were the peasants. He argued that the term 'proletariat' was not suited to the political situation prevailing in Italy. Therefore, he opted for the term 'subaltern' to incorporate the peasants within the larger political strategies of the Left Movement.

◆ *Definition of the term 'subaltern'*

The term gained prominence within academia with the publication of a series of essays titled 'Subaltern Studies.' In the preface to the Subaltern Studies, Volume I, Guha defined the term 'Subaltern' as it is given in the Concise Oxford Dictionary. Accordingly, the term 'subaltern' means 'of inferior rank.' While according to Guha, the term is articulated in terms of class, caste, age, gender and other aspects, he further clarified the term in the later volume as follows. The terms "people" and "subaltern classes" have been used synonymously. The social groups and elements included in this category represent the demographic difference between the total Indian population and those described as the "elite." Gyan Prakash remarked that, unlike the British and U. S. Social History, the Subaltern Studies is based on anti-humanist structuralist and post-structuralist writings.

◆ *Evolution of the term*

Initially, it was primarily used to refer to individuals in inferior positions. However, over time, the term evolved to encompass people from lower social categories, irrespective of their economic status, gender, ethnicity, and other factors. Consequently, Subaltern histories aimed to comprehend society from the perspective of those at the margins. Later, Ranajit Guha used the term 'subaltern' specifically to represent peasants and tribal communities.

◆ *Subaltern classes*

While examining the emergence of subaltern studies in India, Partha Chatterjee highlighted that in the early 1980s, a substantial portion of the country was characterised by agrarian structures, with most of the Indians being peasants. The introduction of the term 'subaltern classes' in India occurred as subaltern historians aimed to reformulate the challenge of documenting the history of the 'people'. They consciously avoided relying solely on the conventional Marxist classification of social classes.

◆ *Tribal and peasant histories*

The scholars of the Subaltern Studies considered that the contributions of the tribals and peasants in the colonial period had been largely overlooked or omitted in historical narratives. Consequently, subaltern historiography focuses on restoring the historical narratives of the lower sections of society and reconstructing history by emphasising the participation of these marginalised groups. This facet had been disregarded by elitist historians.

4.1.1.1 Subaltern Studies Series

The Subaltern Studies formed as an intervention in South Asian historiography when the idea of the nation-state

◆ *Intervention in South Asian historiography*

dominated the political discussions and discourses. In the field of historical scholarship, the nationalist historiography was attacked by the “Cambridge School”, which exposed the elitist analysis of history by the nationalist historians. With the intervention of Marxism, both Nationalist and Cambridge School were challenged. However, the Marxist school could not deal with the ‘backward ideologies of caste and religion’ or ‘lived experience of religion and social custom.’ This means that the Marxist scholars viewed peasant rebellions as merely a ‘stage in the development of revolutionary consciousness’.

◆ *Series of volumes*

The *Subaltern Studies* entered this historiographical contest over the depiction of the culture and politics of the people. This new form of historical writing critiqued the Cambridge, Nationalist and Marxist scholars for neglecting the common people. It was started by an editorial collective comprising six scholars of South Asia. The *Subaltern Studies* is a series of volumes published from 1982 to 2005 under the editorship of Ranajit Guha. It was originally planned as three volumes. But, with the interest in this publication among South Asians, it continued. Guha edited the first six volumes of the *Subaltern Studies*.

◆ *History of ‘people from below’*

The *Subaltern Studies* showed adherence to a new field of history writing, criticising the conventional traditions of writing history in India. The *Subaltern* historians who were dissatisfied with the old tradition of writing history collectively contributed to the volumes. Guha declared in the preface of the first volume of the *Subaltern Studies* that the publication aimed to discuss and study the *Subaltern* themes in South Asian studies. The basic premise, therefore, was to look at the history of ‘people from below’.

◆ *Subaltern historians*

4.1.1.2 Contributions of Subaltern Historians

Some of the prominent advocates of the *Subaltern* histories were Ranajit Guha, Partha Chatterjee, David Hardiman, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Shahid Amin, Sumit Sarkar and others. The *Subaltern Studies* in India gained a new outlook with the work of Gayatri Spivak. Later works in *Subaltern* studies showed the intervention of language, representation and ideology in subalternity.

Ranjit Guha

Ranjit Guha was a prominent figure in the *Subaltern Studies* group and was the editor of the *Subaltern Studies*

◆ *History of Indian peasants*

series. Guha focuses on the history of Indian peasants by investigating the relationship between the domination and subjugation relations in the context of India from 1783 to 1900. It is mentioned in the introduction and preface of the *Subaltern Studies*. Ranajit Guha and his colleagues Partha Chatterjee, Shahid Amin, Gyanendra Pandey, Sumit Sarkar, David Hardiman and Dipesh Chakrabarty initiated the Subaltern Studies project. Subaltern Studies emerged in India as a post-colonial theory that intended to rewrite the history of 'people from below'.

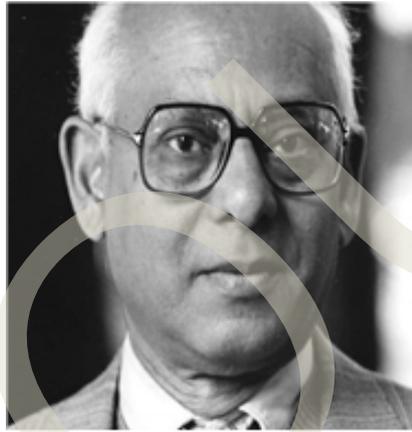


Fig 4.1.1 Ranajit Guha

Source: thewire.in

◆ *Elitist tendency in Indian historiography*

Ranajit Guha drew on his reading of Ferdinand de Saussure, Claude Levi-Strauss, Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault. He critiqued the Indian historiography for being prejudiced and showing elitist tendencies - colonialist elitism and bourgeois nationalist elitism. According to Guha, subaltern historiography focuses on the history of peasants and the tribal movements during the colonial period. He argues that the nationalist historians ignored these topics, and hence, it is necessary to uncover the ignored history of the 'people'. The elitist history of the Indian National Movement projected the struggle for independence as a struggle led by the elites. Such history focuses on the role of mainstream leaders, popular struggles, organisations and institutions. Guha, therefore, argues that the elitist historiography of Indian nationalism tends to provide "a personal account of the goodness of the native elite who had opposed relations with the colonial regime."

Guha authored the work *A Rule of Property for Bengal* (1963), which is a classic work on the history of colonial India.

◆ *A Rule of Property for Bengal*

Through this work, Guha examines the British establishment of the Permanent Settlement of Bengal. He traces the origin of the permanent settlement to the anti-feudal ideas of Philip Francis. The work primarily examined how the British permanent settlement became instrumental in developing a neo-feudal organisation of landed property.

◆ *The Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*

Guha, through his work, *The Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (1983), seeks to recover the role of the 'peasant class' from the elite projects. To define the logic of rebel consciousness as insurgency and agitation, Guha develops a conceptual apparatus under the headings of negation, modality, solidarity, ambiguity, transmission and territoriality. He tries to explain "the logic of consciousness which informed a series of historic insurgencies aimed at turning the rural world upside down." Guha criticises the bias within the historiography and the government documents of Colonial India, which are regarded as authentic. He contends that any colonial historical accounts of Indian peasants are influenced by a bourgeois perspective, whether through colonial or nationalist agendas. Guha's aim is to uncover daily actions that have been suppressed in favour of major events. He challenged the idea that Indian colonial subjects were entirely powerless and rebelled blindly against Colonial oppression and landlord exploitation. Instead, he concentrates on examining the intricate dynamics of subordination, dominance, and rebellion from the viewpoint of the peasants.

◆ *The Prose of Counter Insurgency*

In his essay titled *The Prose of Counter Insurgency*, Ranajit Guha offered a critique of prevailing historical writings on Indian peasants and tribals. He pointed out their tendency to depict peasant uprisings as spontaneous and unplanned events while overlooking the consciousness and intentions of the rebels themselves. Guha argued that throughout history, these rebels have often been portrayed merely as individuals or representatives of a social class rather than being recognised as entities with will and reason for rebellion. Guha accused all accounts of rebellions, including official reports, of creating narratives aligned with counter-insurgency perspectives that fail to acknowledge the insurgents as the subject of their own history. In 2013, Guha published the work titled *Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India*, which critiqued the elitist tendency of the nationalist historians and portrayed the involvement of the common people, peasants and tribals.

Partha Chatterjee

◆ Idea of a 'nation'

Partha Chatterjee is one of the founders and contributors to the Subaltern Studies group. His work primarily concentrated on Indian nationalism and identity. He has also analysed how the idea of a nation is connected to colonisation, modernity and Western philosophical thoughts.

◆ 'Passive revolution'

Partha Chatterjee identified the process and effects of subordination in his work, *Nationalist Thoughts and the Colonial World* (1986). The work focuses on how Indian nationalism achieves dominance by critically tracing the shifts in nationalist thoughts. He believes the shifts lead to a "passive revolution." The term 'passive revolution' was the concept that he drew from Gramsci to interpret the achievement of Indian independence as a mass revolution. While interpreting the shifts in nationalist thoughts, Chatterjee stressed the problem of representing the masses. The colonial discourses by the nationalist historians have ignored the problems of minority representation in the Indian independence struggle.



Fig 4.1.2 Partha Chatterjee
Source: <https://blogs.law.columbia.edu>

◆ The Nation and its Fragments

Partha Chatterjee's *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (1993) focuses on how the nation was imagined in the domains of culture and prepared for the political contest by the elitists. These elitists have normalised the issues of the Subaltern on the notion of creating a modern nation-state.

Some Works of Subaltern Historiography

Now, let us explore some more works that aligned with the subaltern historiography and published in the series of *Subaltern Studies*, including Gyan Pandey's *Peasant Revolt and Indian Nationalism, 1919-1922* (1982), Dipesh Chakrabarty's

- ◆ Works of Subaltern Historians

Conditions for Knowledge of Working-Class Conditions: Employers, Government and the Jute Workers of Calcutta, 1890-1940 (1983), David Hardiman's *Adivasi Assertion in South Gujarat: The Devi Movement of 1922-3* (1984), David Arnold's *Famine in Peasant Consciousness and Peasant Action: Madras, 1876-8* (1984), Sumit Sarkar's *The Conditions and Nature of Subaltern Militancy: Bengal from Swadeshi to Non-Cooperation, 1905-22*, (1984), Shahid Amin's *Gandhi as Mahatma: Gorakhpur District, Eastern UP, 1921-2* (1984) and so on.
- ◆ Gayatri Spivak

Gayatri Spivak's article "*Can the Subaltern Speak*" underscores the lack of platforms available for the poorest and most marginalised members of society, i.e., the subalterns, to voice their concerns. Spivak's central focus revolves around agency and examines how 'dispossessed indigenous individuals' in colonial societies can attain it. She highlights the inadvertent reproduction of hegemonic structures in the work of Western scholars.
- ◆ David Arnold and Gyan Pandey

David Arnold's work on Indian famine and peasant revolts highlights the disturbances and rebellions of hillmen in Andhra from 1839-1924. He also discusses the peasant consciousness and action during the Madras famine. He criticises the literature on famine for not considering the phenomenon in terms of human experience and reducing peasant experiences to state policy and relief administration. Gyan Pandey examines the peasant revolts of Awadh during 1919-22 and its impact on Indian nationalism. Stephen Henningham explains the 'Quit India' movement in Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh as a dual revolt, combining an elite nationalist uprising with a subaltern rebellion.
- ◆ Shahid Amin

Shahid Amin, one of the founding members of the Subaltern Studies collective, in his essay on Gandhi, explores how the Mahatma's charisma was registered in peasant consciousness, highlighting the belief in superstition and miracles. In his work, *Event, Metaphor and Memory: Chauri Chaura, 1922-1992*, he explores the 1922 arson of the Chauri Chaura police station, which happened as a result of the actions of a mob of "peasants" in the name of Mahatma Gandhi and the Non-Cooperation Movement. Amin investigated colonial, judicial, and national accounts, as well as oral histories of surviving residents or relatives associated with the incident. He broadened the narrative by incorporating diverse viewpoints and interpretations of the event, as well as the underlying local political context leading up to it.

◆ David Hardiman

David Hardiman, one of the founding members of the Subaltern Studies group, authored several books on the subaltern themes. Some of his major works include *Gandhi in His Time and Ours: The Global Legacy of His Ideas*, *The Coming of the Devi: Adivasi Assertion in Western India*, *The Nonviolent Struggle for Indian Freedom, 1905-19*, *Peasant Resistance in India 1858-1914*, *Feeding the Baniya: Peasants and Usurers in Western India*, *Non Cooperation in India: Nonviolent Strategy and Protest, 1920-22* and *Histories for the Subordinated*. Hardiman's essay on the Devi reformist movement among tribals in south Gujarat provides insights into tribal consciousness. Some of his other works assert that an autonomous political movement emerged among the subaltern classes against the elites. He brings the evidence in various instances, such as the tribal resistance in South Gujarat, the Bhil Movement in Eastern Gujarat, and the radical activism of agricultural labourers during the Civil Disobedience Movement.

◆ Sumit Sarkar

Likewise, Sumit Sarkar, in his work *The Conditions and Nature of Subaltern Militancy*, argued that the Non-cooperation movement in Bengal showcased a scenario where the masses surpassed their leaders. He argued that these subaltern groups formed a relatively independent political domain with specific features and collective mentalities, distinct from the domain of elite politicians in early twentieth-century Bengal. His essay on the anti-Partition agitation (1905) in Bengal reveals that the anti-Partition movement did not arouse as much popular enthusiasm as the Non-Cooperation Khilafat movement of 1921-22. The former focused on Hindu upper-class *bhadralok* groups, while the latter was influenced by popular initiative.

◆ Dipesh Chakrabarty

Dipesh Chakrabarty is one of the forerunners of Subaltern Studies and post-colonial theories. He edited the Subaltern Studies Vol. 9 (1997) along with Shahid Amin. Some of his major works include *Rethinking Working Class History* (1989), *Minority Histories, Subaltern Pasts* (1998), *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies* (2002), *Provincializing Europe-Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (2007), and *The Crises of Civilisation: Exploring on Global and Planetary Histories* (2018). Dipesh Chakrabarty stated that Subaltern Studies aim to produce historical analyses that view subaltern groups as subjects rather than objects of history.

In his work, *Provincializing Europe-Postcolonial Thought*



◆ Chakrabarty's works

and *Historical Difference*, Chakrabarty aims to re-investigate the means of writing Indian histories from the standpoint of subalternity, where India and Europe are 'hyperreal' constructs, with Europe portrayed as the dominant figure. This viewpoint signifies Europe as a representation of completeness, modernity, and the bourgeoisie. At the same time, India is depicted as a symbol of deficiency, historical primitivism, and peasantry, even within the framework of subaltern studies. Dipesh Chakrabarty also researched the condition of the Calcutta jute mill workers between 1890 and 1940. One of his essays, focusing on the jute mill workers during 1920-50, reveals how the elitist attitude influenced socialist and Communist ranks. The leaders treated unions as their 'zamindari', leading to hierarchical relationships with workers.

4.1.1.3 Nature and Critique of Subaltern Historiography

◆ Importance to 'neglected histories'

The essays in *Subaltern Studies* aimed to uncover the histories of the lower classes. It highlighted the history of the lower sections of society, which are the 'neglected histories.' Ranajit Guha, in Volume II of *Subaltern Studies*, remarked that it "addressed a range of topics extending in time from the Mughal period to the 1970s, in themes from communalism to industrial labour and manner from the descriptive to the conceptual." According to E. Sreedharan, the nature of *Subaltern Studies* is Marxist in tone, premise and analysis. The subaltern historiography has focused on the activities of the peasants, factory workers and others.

◆ On revolts and rebellions

According to Guha, the major themes of subaltern historiography were revolts and their impact on Indian nationalism. He affirmed that revolts were how the lower classes tried to improve their condition. Rebellion and revolt, therefore, became a 'deliberate, desperate way out of an intolerable condition of existence created by landlords, usurers, dishonest traders etc.'

◆ Critiques of Subaltern Studies

Subaltern Studies emerged initially from historical and cultural studies, but its interpretation has expanded to include any disenfranchised population unreachable due to hegemonic oppression. Scholars have applied subaltern perspectives across various disciplines such as literature, anthropology, women's studies, gender studies, and sexuality studies. Subaltern Studies often intersect with postcolonial studies, sharing similar goals and projects.

◆ *Deconstructing
the dichotomies*

However, criticism of subaltern studies has arisen from various perspectives. Among these critiques, Rosalind O’Hanlon and others have highlighted the Subaltern Studies collective’s failure to integrate gender considerations adequately. Another criticism faced by the collective was its oversimplification of class dynamics into binary categories.

Following Edward Said’s influential work ‘Orientalism’, Subaltern Studies have sought to deconstruct binary perceptions prevalent in nationalist discourses, particularly the self/other dichotomies, which often delineates ‘us versus them’ mentalities and the rhetoric of inclusion inherently tied to exclusion. In response to these critiques, Scholars like Gyanendra Pandey, Partha Chatterjee, and Shahid Amin challenged the notion of a single national narrative. Instead, they advocate for more diverse and pluralistic representations, embracing the ‘fragment’. They question the idea of a unified nation or a comprehensive narrative of belonging within nationalism, striving for a deeper understanding of the diverse experiences and perspectives inherent in history and society.

4.1.2 Contributions to Intellectual History: Barun De and Tapan Raychaudhuri

Let us now explore the contributions of the economic historians Barun De and Tapan Raychaudhuri within the context of intellectual history.

4.1.2.1 Barun De

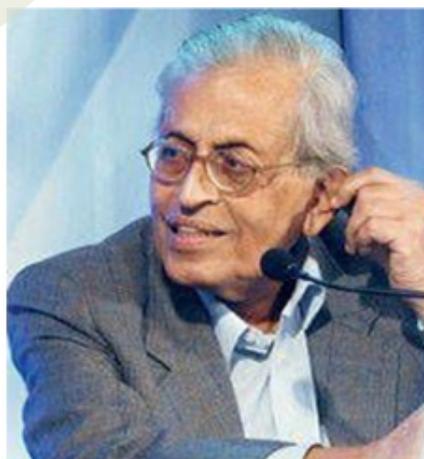


Fig 4.1.3 Barun De

The scholarly contributions of Barun De, a prominent

◆ *Barun De's works*

economic historian, were significant in three major areas. First, on the policies of the English East India Company in the 18th century. Second, the regional history of Bengal. Third, on the issues of nationalism and colonialism in India. He specialised in India's social and economic history during the 17th and 18th centuries, including the Constitutional history of the British and the Bengal Renaissance. He was commissioned to co-author the work *Freedom Struggle* with Bipan Chandra and Amal Tripathi (1972). He opposed the kinds of neo-colonial and communal interpretations of Indian history. He edited the work *Essays in Honour of Professor S. C. Sarkar* (1976) and published articles, including "A Historiographic Critique of Renaissance Analogues for Nineteenth-Century India." From 1979 to 1983, he served as the State Editor for the West Bengal District Gazetteers. He also assumed the role of Chairman at the West Bengal State Archives in Calcutta. He was honoured with membership on the NCERT textbook review committee in 2004. The renowned Marxist historian penned an autobiographical work, *Secularism at Bay: Uzbekistan at the Turn of the Century* (2005).

4.1.2.2 Tapan Raychaudhuri



Fig 4.1.4 Tapan Raychaudhuri

◆ *Raychaudhuri's works*

Tapan Raychaudhuri has specialised in British Indian history, economic history and the history of Bengal. His major works include *Bengal Under Akbar and Jahangir* and *the Jan Company in Coromandel 1605-1690*. The work *Bengal Under Akbar and Jahangir* focuses on the social history of Mughal India. He showed that Mughal India looked different when we studied social relations and political and administrative affairs. He then concentrated on India's economic history.

Tapan Raychaudhuri touched on a wide range of issues from social and economical to intellectual history, from Mughal history to colonial and post-colonial Bengal and the partition of India.

One of Tapan Raychaudhuri's significant contributions was his collaborative work as a co-editor alongside Irfan Habib on Volume 1 of *The Cambridge Economic History of India*. This volume, published in 1982, delved into the economic history of India from approximately 1200 to around 1750. At its publication, this project marked a crucial turning point in the revival of the study of India's economic history, which had long suffered from neglect. In addition to this, Raychaudhuri's scholarly endeavours also include *Europe Reconsidered: Perceptions of the West in Nineteenth-Century Bengal*, published in New Delhi in 1988. Another notable publication, *Perceptions, Emotions, Sensibilities* (1999), featured a collection of essays exploring three distinct themes: the mental landscape of the colonial middle class in India, reevaluations of British rule, and the implications of communal chauvinism in contemporary South Asia. His work mirrored the growing interest in emotional history. Raychaudhuri's personal reflections and experiences found a platform in his book *The World in Our Time* (2011), where he candidly shared his encounters with racial and class discrimination in Bangladesh, India and Britain.

◆ Economic historian

Summarised Overview

The unit explores the development of the subaltern historiography that critiques the existing historiography in India, which often overlooks the voices of the common people. These new trends in history thus focus on the life, culture and social aspects of marginalised groups, often referred to as the 'people from below'. The Subaltern Study Group was influenced by 1960s cultural studies scholars like E. P. Thompson, Raymond Williams, and Eric Hobsbawm. The group was formed to highlight the issues faced by underprivileged communities and focuses on historical narratives of the working class and peasants in colonial and post-colonial India. The inception of the Subaltern Study Group can be traced back to the 1982 publication of the *Subaltern Studies Series*, which introduced a new genre of history writing in India. Prominent advocates of the Subaltern histories include Ranajit Guha, Partha Chatterjee, David Hardiman, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Shahid Amin and others. In the unit, the contributions of historians such as Barun De and Tapan Raychaudhuri within the context of the intellectual history of India are also discussed.



Assignments

1. Describe the emergence of Subaltern Studies in India.
2. Discuss the emergence of Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial criticism.
3. Briefly explain the critique of Subaltern Studies.
4. Elucidate the contributions of Gayatri Spivak on subaltern histories.
5. Discuss the response of subaltern historians towards the criticism.
6. Mention the major focus of the subaltern historiography.
7. Explain Ranajit Guha's view on the peasant revolts in India.
8. Discuss the contributions of Barun De and Tapan Raychaudhuri in the intellectual history of India.

Suggested Reading

1. Chakrabarty, Dipesh, "Subaltern Studies and Post-colonial Historiography", *Nepantla: Views from South*, Vol. 1, Issue 1, 2000.
2. *Subaltern Studies*, 12 volumes, (1982-2005)

Reference

1. Amin, Shahid, *Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura, 1922-1992*, University of California Press, 1995.
2. Guha, Ranajit and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Ed.), *Selected Subaltern Studies*, 1989.
3. Ludden, David (Ed.), *Reading Subaltern Studies: Critical History, Contested Meaning, and the Globalisation of South Asia*, Permanent Black, Delhi, 2001.
4. Prakash, Gyan, "Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism", *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 99, No. 5, 1994.

Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

SGOU





Postmodern Derivatives

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ get acquainted with various postmodern discourses of history
- ◆ understand recent approaches in Indian historiography
- ◆ learn the relevance of people and environment in writing history

Background

The emergence of subaltern studies brought about significant changes in history writing. Scholars began to consider the history of underprivileged people seriously, delving into the histories of tribes and peasants. However, akin to any other trend, subaltern histories were not exempt from criticism. Scholars within the subaltern school began critiquing the nature of Subaltern Studies. Scholars such as Gayatri Spivak have highlighted that there is a 'subaltern within subaltern.' At this juncture, new schools of thought emerged, focusing on the issues concerning Dalits, women, environment, literature and so on. Scholars advocating for these new histories argue that these topics require proper attention and in-depth studies. This unit will provide more insights into such new trends in Indian historiography.

Keywords

Dalit Historiography, Gender, Feminist Histories, Environmental History, Literary Histories

Discussion

4.2.1 Dalit Histories

We have seen that over the period, numerous shifts and changes occurred in history writing. Historians have



◆ *Exploring Dalit experiences*

challenged the conventional notions of writing history and focused on marginalised people and groups. One of the positive trends that emerged was the development of Dalit and feminist histories. Dalit histories challenged the social power of the upper caste, while the feminist histories contested against the patriarchal authority. Dalit historiography has critically engaged with dominant histories in order to explore the Dalit experiences. Indian historiography was dominated with the histories of the powerful class and the saga of upper caste and male heroes. Ranajit Guha has remarked that the 'History of Indian nationalism has been written up as a sort of spiritual biography of the Indian elites.' For example, in the field of Indian nationalism and renaissance, the role of B. R. Ambedkar, Jyotibha Phule, Ayyankali, Sree Narayana Guru, and Ramaswamy Naikar were not included for a long time. Later, the involvement of Ambedkar began to be noticed.

◆ *Dalit intervention in history writing*

The intervention of Dalits in history writing is crucial in many aspects. The themes of history writing began to include the Dalit struggles, their lives and cultures. Since most of the histories were written by the dominant class, Dalit histories, including the history of oppression and exploitation, remained missing. This means that the stories of struggle and cultural and religious identities remained in the dark. The lack of formal documentation of their history was one of the major challenges faced by Dalit historians.

◆ *Role of Dalit Historians*

Dalit historians, therefore, looked at the sources of Indian history from the Dalit point of view. They started to contest the dominant histories and their negligence towards the Dalit histories. One of the significant shifts in historiography was the popularity of vernacular languages. This changed the perspective towards considering oral history as a source of history. The Dalit historians and scholars often reproduce the history from the oral narratives.

◆ *Ambedkar's efforts*

Some of the prominent historians who addressed the Dalit issues include B. R. Ambedkar, Uma Chakravarti, Ramnarayan Rawat, Satyanarayan, Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, Susie J. Tharu, P. Sanal Mohan, K. S. Madhavan and others. Ambedkar's role was significant in the emergence of the new school of writing history. We know that Ambedkar was one of the leaders who worked to achieve the Dalit rights. He gained attention in the academic field with his intensified struggle for the Dalits. Since then, significant scholarships have come up for the Dalits to write their own history.



Ambedkar's notion of history comprises the principles of equality, liberty and fraternity. He was influenced by the principles of Marxism to understand ancient Indian history and society. Ambedkar found history from the perspective of religion and brought the aspect of religion to explain the caste system. His *Annihilation of Caste* is an important work that suggests various steps to defeat the caste system and reform Hinduism and its existing discrimination.

◆ Works on Dalits

Some of the prominent works which dealt with Dalits include Charu Gupta's *The Gender of Caste: Representing Dalits in Print* (2015), Sanal P. Mohan's *Modernity of Slavery: Struggles Against Caste Inequality in Colonial Kerala* (2014), Anupama Rao's *The Caste Question: Dalits and the Politics of Modern India* (2009), Gail Omvedt's *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution: Dr Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India* (1994) and Eleanor Zelliot's *From Untouchable to Dalit: Essays on the Ambedkar Movement* (1992).

◆ Gopal Guru and Sundar Sarukkai

The Cracked Mirror: An Indian Debate on Experience and Theory, co-authored by Gopal Guru and Sundar Sarukkai, is another major work related to the Dalits in India. In this work, the authors engage in a dialogue regarding the significance of Dalit experiences in shaping innovative theoretical frameworks in Indian Social Sciences. This work centres around the complex issues surrounding the Dalit experiences and untouchability. Guru contends that authentic representation of subaltern lives can only come from those who have personally experienced them. In contrast, Sarukkai posits that individuals from outside the community can also effectively represent these experiences. Guru's publications include *Humiliation: Claims and Context, Atrophy in Dalit Politics* and his work on non-Brahmanic cultural movements of Maharashtra.

◆ Emergence of feminist historiography

4.2.2 Feminist Histories

Despite the development of new genres of history writing, women and their contributions have remained overlooked. Historical sources predominantly reflect the perspectives of those who hold power, making it challenging to uncover the role of women in shaping history. In this context, the emergence of feminist historiography has become increasingly relevant. Feminist historiography refers to the study of women's experience and their participation in the making of history of nations. It intends to critique male-centric historical narratives. Consequently, feminist historians strive to unveil

the histories, narratives and voices of marginalised women. Their works highlight the contributions of these women to society, politics, economy and culture.

◆ *Feminist historians*

Feminist historians have critiqued the oppression and exploitation of women by society. They have also focused on issues related to gender, caste, class, and religion that shape women's identities and experiences. Some of the notable feminist historians in Indian history include Uma Chakravarti, Kumkum Sangari, Aloka Parasher, Kumkum Roy, Vijaya Ramaswamy, Janaki Nair, Tanika Sarkar, Nayanjot Lahiri, Charu Gupta and others. These historians have tried to uncover the involvement of women based on historical sources spanning from ancient to modern times. It should be noted that these sources significantly lack references to women on a broader scale. The narratives predominantly revolved around kings, conquests, invasions, and political institutions. However, over the years, the feminist perspective achieved great momentum. Through the efforts of these scholars, references to women have been gleaned from works such as *Jataka*, *Therigatha*, *Panchatantra*, *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and other Brahmanical texts.

◆ *Issues within Marxist and Subaltern approaches*

In modern Indian history, the period till the 1950s was dominated by nationalist history focusing only on political history, colonial history, colonial administrators and cultural history. A shift in history writing occurred with the intervention of the Marxist approach. Histories began to be viewed through the lens of social formations. The pioneering works of D. D. Kosambi on Indian feudalism and modes of production are significant. Even in heated debates, women's issues in feudal society were missing. No attempts were made to explore modes of production in terms of class and gender. The issues of such history writing were somewhat explored by the 'subaltern studies.' Though they brought light to the lives of ordinary people, they too focused on peasant men and tribal men. Feminist historians, therefore, viewed that there is a 'subaltern within subaltern.'

Another shift in the focus occurred in the 1970s when feminist studies were given importance. According to Tanika Sarkar, "women's history as a sustained and self-conscious tradition developed from the 1970s when many feminist scholars started to raise their voices against rape, dowry and domestic violence". Some of the features of feminist historiography are as follows:



◆ Features of feminist historiography

- ◆ Dismantled the dominant nationalist narratives glorifying the Hindu womanhood during the ancient period. The feminist historians who studied the ancient sources considered women as 'Aryan' and not as 'Hindu' or 'Vedic' women. Importance was also given to the *dasi* women.
- ◆ The social histories of women were highlighted.
- ◆ Compiled the archives of women's writing. They put together the sources for better accessibility.
- ◆ Focused on the relationship between caste, class, state and household in India.
- ◆ Explored women's histories by understanding the relationship of gender, issues of prostitution, motherhood labour, and economic aspects of women and women as rulers.
- ◆ Feminist history studied how gender shaped society.
- ◆ The historiography intends to study how colonial laws shaped the lives of women. The writings have examined specific laws like the Widow Remarriage Act and customary and statutory laws.
- ◆ The issue of women's education was another subject matter of feminist historiography.
- ◆ The history of working-class women was also included in feminist history. The participation of women in agrarian struggles and organised sectors like textile and jute industries, as well as the issues and exploitations of women labourers, were also discussed.

◆ Contributions of the feminist historians

Some of the contributions of the feminist historians include Kumkum Sangari and Uma Chakravarti edited *From Myths to Markets: Essays on Gender* (1999), Uma Chakravarti's *Rewriting History: The Life and Times of Pandita Ramabai* (1998), Vijaya Ramaswamy's *Divinity and Deviance* (1994) and *Walking Naked: Women, Society, Spirituality in South India* (1997), Janaki Nair's *Women and Law in Colonial India* (1996), Aloka Parasher's *Women in Nationalist Historiography: The Case of Altekar,* in Leela Kasturi and Vina Majumdar (ed.), *Women in Indian Nationalism* (1994), Rosalind O'Hanlon's *A Comparison Between Men and Women: Tarabai Shinde and the Critique of Gender Relations in Colonial India* (1994), Nivedita Menon's *Seeing Like a Feminist* (2012), and *Recovering Subversion: Feminist Politics Beyond the Law*, J. Devika's 'Kulastreeyum' 'Chanthapennum' Undayathengane? and *Womanwriting = Manreading?* (2013), Anupama Rao's edited work *Gender and Caste: Issues in Contemporary Indian Feminism*

(2005) and G.Arunima's *There Comes Papa: Colonialism and the Transformation of Matriliny in Kerala, Malabar, c 1850-1940* (2003).

4.2.3 Environmental History

◆ Definition of Environment History

Environmental history is a subset of history which tries to understand the relationship between human societies and nature. According to Donald Worster, environmental history is the "interaction between human cultures and the environment in the past." J. R. McNeill defined environmental history as "the history of the mutual relations between humankind and the rest of nature." Environmental history emerged in the United States from the environmental movements of the 1960s. The term 'Environmental History' was first used by an American historian, Roderick Nash, in his '*Wilderness and the American Mind*.' The work is considered a classic text of environmental history. The work *Wilderness and the American Mind* is a classic work of changing attitudes towards wilderness in American history. The work has also focused on the origins of the environmental and conservation movements in America.

◆ Concern of Environmental History

According to Donald Worster, there are three major concerns of environmental history. Firstly, material environmental history focuses on the biological and physical environment. Secondly, cultural environmental history focuses on the representations of the environment and society. Thirdly, political environmental history focuses on government regulations, laws and policies. The studies on environmental history have created a rich source of historiography on forests, animals, tribal rights, environmental degradation, pollution, displacement, famines etc.

◆ Ramachandra Guha's works

In the Indian scenario, the works of Ramachandra Guha, Mahesh Rangarajan and K. Sivaramakrishnan contributed to environmental history. They have taken up the issues of climate change, ecology, flora, fauna, tribals, pollution, water resources, technology, colonialism and ecology, environmental laws and policies. Guha's research interest lies in environmental, social and political history. He wrote on the social history of forestry in Uttarakhand, focusing on the 'chipko' movement. His works include *The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalayas* (1990), *Environmentalism: A Global History* (1999), and *How Much Should a Person Consume* (2006).



◆ More works of Guha

One of his celebrated works of Guha is *Environmentalism: A Global History* (1999). This work is a survey of the history of environmental thoughts. The book introduces the discussions of environmental issues from Brazil, the United States, China, India, the Soviet Union and Africa. The systematic beginning of environmental history writing in India started with the work of Ramachandra Guha and Madhav Gadgil, *This Fissured Land*, in 1992. The authors suggest that in pre-colonial India, the utilisation of resources was in harmony with nature. The resources were cordially shared during the period with various strata. Various environmental movements were explained as disruptions caused by the British.

◆ Study on climatic changes

The work '*India's Environmental History*' edited by Mahesh Rangarajan and K. Sivaramakrishnan, published in 2011, is another prominent work in this sphere. The work is compiled in two volumes, covering the themes from ancient times to the colonial period. Irfan Habib, in his book *Man and Environment: The Ecological History of India*, discusses how, during the medieval period, the ports in Gujarat showed the influence of the seashore changes. The work showed the importance of climatic changes in studying the history of the environment. The work also systematically analyses the interrelationship among man, animal and vegetation.

◆ Study on ecology

The work *Cochin Forests and the British Techno-ecological Imperialism in India* by Sebastian Joseph shows how the colonial administration in Kerala affected the local economy and environment. The economic motivation of the British resulted in the maximum exploitation of forest resources. The state legislated forest reforms that introduced scientific forestry and new resources of extraction technologies. The book traces the forest reforms and their impact on ecological life.

According to Micheal H. Fisher, the pattern of writing the environmental history of India was explained through three waves.

◆ Waves of writing Environmental History of India

- i. The first wave of formal environmental historians studied the local movements and resisted the exploitation of natural resources. For example, the environmental activists who wrote about the Chipko movement will come under the first wave of writers.
- ii. The second wave developed when scholars added historical knowledge to studying the environment and its interactions. Scholars of this wave analysed

the historical development of ecological awareness, scientific means of controlling natural resources and the measures to protect those resources from degradation, government policies *etc.* The works of Madhav Gadgil, Ramachandra Guha, and Sumit Guha can be considered in this wave. Most of this kind of environmental history concentrates on the exploitation of the British period.

- iii. The third wave of environmental historians began to analyse the discourse of powerful people.

4.2.4 Literary Histories

India's literature has not gained attention like other arts like music or sculpture. Indian literature was not appropriately documented like other sources because of its vastness. The multiplicity of languages, the size of the literature and the unequal development of Indian languages could be the reasons for the difficulties. Though some texts were preserved and documented, the literature of vernacular languages did not receive much attention.

When we look at the literary histories of India, there are many pioneering works done by Western Orientalists and Indologists. Some of them are Albrecht Weber's *The History of Indian Literature* (1852) and Robert Watson Fraxer's *A Literary History of India* (1897). All these compilations were in the form of descriptive accounts. The Orientalists and Indologists were more interested in the languages of India than the literary works.

The British initiated the formal study of literature in the country when they established universities in India. The study of English literature in these universities provided encouragement for the study of Indian literature. Sujit Mukherjee has explained various tasks of literary historians to achieve new dimensions in literature.

- i. The first is to rectify the problem of nationality in literature. Considering language and literature as the special possession of a nation will produce disadvantages to the people whose linguistic history and nationhood have not matched.
- ii. The second task of the Indian literary historian is to determine the conditions of the development of India's literary culture.
- iii. The third task is to overcome the use of Western tools.

◆ *Documentation of Indian Literature*

◆ *Pioneering Works of Indian Literary History*

◆ *Tasks of literary historians*



- Indian literary historians must overcome the Western literary culture.
- iv. The fourth task is in the field of literary theory and criticism. Indian literature should not be confined only to literary scholars. All social sciences relating to India must collaborate in rediscovering the literary tradition.
 - v. Lastly, to yield more information about literature from the text.

Summarised Overview

The unit discussed new trends in history writing, addressing issues in various areas such as Dalit studies, feminist histories, literary history, and environmental history. Dalit histories emerged as a response to upper-caste hegemony in historical narratives, while feminist histories critiqued patriarchal norms. The unit discussed the oppression and exploitation experienced by these sections. Environmental history became important in understanding the relationship between man and the environment. Furthermore, the unit highlighted the relevance of literary history within the context of historical writings in India.

Assignments

1. Discuss the features of feminist historiography in India.
2. Explain the relevance of Dalit and feminist histories in the historical writings in India.
3. Discuss the role of the women's movement in shaping feminist history.
4. Mention the role of Uma Chakravarti in gender history.
5. Analyse the significant contributions of the postmodern historians.
6. Trace the important feminist historians and discuss their significant works in feminist historiography.
7. Evaluate Dalit history and its contributions to Indian historiography.
8. Discuss the criticism of feminist and Dalit histories.

Suggested Reading

1. Chakravarti, Uma, "Beyond the Altekarian Paradigm: Towards a New Understanding of Gender Relations in Early India", *Social Scientist*, Vol. 16, No.183, 1988.

2. _____, *Rewriting History: The Life and Times of Pandita Ramabai*, Zubaan, Delhi, 1998.
3. Omvedt, Gail, *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution: Dr Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India*, Sage, New Delhi, 1994.
4. Sangari, Kumkum, and Uma Chakravarti (Ed.) *From Myths to Markets: Essays on Gender*, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, 1999.

Reference

1. Fisher, Michael H., *An Environmental History of India: From Earliest Times to the Twenty-First Century*, Cambridge University Press, 2018.
2. Frazer, R. W., *A Literary History of India*, T. Fisher Unwin, London, 1907.
3. Mukherjee, Sujit, *Towards a Literary History of India*, *New Literary History*, Vol. 8, No. 2, Winter 1977.
4. Rangarajan, Mahesh, and K Sivaramakrishnan, *India's Environmental History*, 2 Volumes, Orient Blackswan, 2013.

Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.



SGOU

സർവ്വകലാശാലാഗീതം

വിദ്യാൽ സ്വതന്ത്രരാകണം
വിശ്വപൗരരായി മാറണം
ഗ്രഹപ്രസാദമായ് വിളങ്ങണം
ഗുരുപ്രകാശമേ നയിക്കണേ

കുരിശുട്ടിൽ നിന്നു ഞങ്ങളെ
സൂര്യവീഥിയിൽ തെളിക്കണം
സ്നേഹദീപ്തിയായ് വിളങ്ങണം
നീതിവൈജയന്തി പാറണം

ശാസ്ത്രവ്യാപ്തിയെന്നുമേകണം
ജാതിഭേദമാകെ മാറണം
ബോധരശ്മിയിൽ തിളങ്ങുവാൻ
ജ്ഞാനകേന്ദ്രമേ ജ്വലിക്കണേ

കുരിപ്പുഴ ശ്രീകുമാർ

SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

Regional Centres

Kozhikode

Govt. Arts and Science College
Meenchantha, Kozhikode,
Kerala, Pin: 673002
Ph: 04952920228
email: rckdirector@sgou.ac.in

Thalassery

Govt. Brennen College
Dharmadam, Thalassery,
Kannur, Pin: 670106
Ph: 04902990494
email: rctdirector@sgou.ac.in

Tripunithura

Govt. College
Tripunithura, Ernakulam,
Kerala, Pin: 682301
Ph: 04842927436
email: rcedirector@sgou.ac.in

Pattambi

Sree Neelakanta Govt. Sanskrit College
Pattambi, Palakkad,
Kerala, Pin: 679303
Ph: 04662912009
email: rcpdirector@sgou.ac.in

Historical Writings on India

Course Code: M21HS05DC



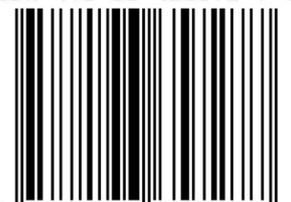
SREENARAYANAGURU
OPEN UNIVERSITY



YouTube



ISBN 978-81-966572-7-7



9 788196 657277

Sreenarayanaguru Open University

Kollam, Kerala Pin- 691601, email: info@sgou.ac.in, www.sgou.ac.in Ph: +91 474 2966841