

## **8th Standard- Social Science**

### **History-How, When and Where**

In 1817, James Mill, a Scottish economist and political philosopher, published a massive three-volume work—A History of British India. In this, he divided Indian history into three periods – Hindu, Muslim and British. This periodization came to be widely accepted.

We try and divide history into different periods to capture the characteristics of time and its central features as they appear to us.

Moving away from British classification, historians have usually divided Indian history into ‘Ancient’, ‘Medieval’ and ‘Modern’.

One important source of Indian history is the official record of the British administration. The Britishers believed that the act of writing was important. Every instruction, plan, policy, decision, agreement and investigation had to be clearly written up.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, along with the spread of printing, multiple copies of these records were printed as proceedings of each government department.

The practice of surveying also became common under the colonial administration.

These records tell us what the officials thought, what they were interested in, and what they wished to preserve for posterity. These records always help us understand what other people in the country felt, and what lay behind their actions.

As printing spread, newspapers were published and issues were debated in public. Leaders and re-formers wrote to spread their ideas; poets and novelists wrote to express their feelings.

History is about the changes that occur over time. It is about the finding out of how things were in the past and how things have changed in the present. As soon as we compare the past with the present we refer to time, we talk of 'before' and 'after'.

If someone asks you when people began to drink tea or coffee, you would fail to answer this question. It is because people did not begin drinking tea on a one fine day, they developed the taste for it over time. Thus, you can only refer to a span of time, an approximate period over which particular changes became visible.

Still, we have enough reason why we associate history with a string of dates. There was a time when history was an account of battles and big events. It was about rulers and their policies. Historians wrote about the year when a king was crowned, the year he married, the year he fought a particular battle, etc. For such events, specific dates were fixed.

How do we determine that a particular set of dates is important? The dates we select, the dates around which we compare our story of the past, are not important on their own. They became important because we focus on a particular set of events as important.

The histories written by British historians in India, the rule of each Governor-General was important. These histories began with the rule of the first Governor-General Warren Hastings and ended with the last Viceroy Lord Mountbatten.

James Mill was a Scottish economist and political philosopher. In 1817, he wrote a three-volume book, A History of British India. In this he divided Indian history into three periods-Hindu, Muslim and British.

We divide history into different periods in order to capture the characteristics of a time, its central features as they appear to us. So the terms through we periodise, i.e. demarcate the differences between periods, become important.

Mill was of the opinion that all Asian societies were of the lower level of civilisations than Europe. According to his telling of history, before the British came to India, Hindu and Muslim despots ruled the country. Religious intolerance and caste taboos dominated the social life of Indian people. British rule, as Mill thought, could civilise India.

The British were absolutely prejudiced in classifying the Indian history.

So the British classification of the Indian history cannot be justified. It is because a variety of faults existed simultaneously along with Hindus and Muslims in these periods.

Apart from the British classification, historians have divided Indian history into ancient, medieval and modern. This division has problems. It is a periodisation that is borrowed from the West where the modern period was associated with the growth of all the forces of modernity such as science, reason, democracy, etc. Medieval was the term used to describe a society where these features of modern society did not exist. But the features of modern period were not visible in India during the British rule. Many historians, therefore, refer to this period as colonial.

The British established their control over India and made it a colony.

Colonisation is a term that refers to a process in which one country subjugates another and thus brings political, economic, social and cultural changes.

Historians use different sources in writing about the last 250 years of Indian history. One important source is the official records of the British administration. The British believed that the act of writing was important. Every instruction, plan, policy, etc. had to be clearly written up. The British also felt that all important documents and letters needed to be carefully preserved. So, they set up record rooms attached to all administrative institutions. Specialised institutions like archives and museums were also set up to preserve important records.

The practice of surveying also became common under the colonial administration.

By the early 19th century detailed surveys were being carried out to map the entire country.

In villages, revenue surveys were conducted.

From the end of the 19th century, Census operations were held at the interval of every ten years. It prepared all the detailed records of the number of people in all the provinces of India, noting information on castes, religions and occupation.

All these are official records. These records do not always help us understand what other people in the country felt and what lay behind their actions.

To know about these things we have diaries of people, accounts of pilgrims and travellers, autobiographies of important personalities, etc.

All these sources were produced by those who were literate. From these we will not be able to understand how history was experienced and lived by the tribals, and the peasants, the workers in the mines or the poor on the streets.

**Historian:** One who writes about the events of the past, i.e. how things were and how they changed.

**Debate:** Discussion on an important topic of public interest.

**Periodisation:** Pondering any event into periods.

**Ancient:** Very old.

**Medieval:** It refers to the period in which features of modern society did not exist.

**Colonization:** Colonization is a process in which one country subjugates another and thus brings political, economic, social and cultural changes.

**Subjugation:** Gaining control over a country.

**Calligrapher:** One who is specialised in the art of beautiful writing.

**Survey:** The act of examining and recording the measurements, features etc. of an area of land to prepare a map or plan for it.

**Archives:** A place where historical documents or records of a government, an organisation, etc, are stored.

1773 – Warren Hastings became the first Governor-General of India.

1782 – First map produced by James Rennel.

1817 – James Mill published a massive three-volume work, A History of British India.

1920 – The National Archives of India came up.