

HISTORY

Chapter 1: How, When and Where



HOW, WHEN AND WHERE

Dates in History

Since long history has been associated with dates. It was because historians and people were mostly concerned with political history emphasising over a king's birth, his coronation, his political and social policies and the wars which were fought during his reign. Dates were therefore necessary to describe the duration and important policies carried out during his reign.

Although dates and the chronology of events are important, it is significant to understand that history as a subject goes beyond political history. It has many dimensions such as the changes in society which took place over a period of time, scientific and technological developments, environmental and forest degradation, loss of tribal autonomy and expansion of agriculture. These events happened over a long period of time, and thus, a single date cannot be attributed to the changes which spanned over a long stretch of time. Thus, though dates are still important, historians have begun to write about subjects apart from the kings. For example, how people earned their living, the development of towns and cities, and the formation of kingdoms.

Which are Important Dates?

Dates become important when we focus on a particular set of events. When events change, new dates become important. For example, for the British historians, the rule of each Governor General was significant. So, the history of British India revolved around the Governor Generals and their achievements. They hardly gave importance to the events which occurred outside this purview. Thus, the importance of the set of dates changes according to the events which are highlighted by the people.

The dates we select and compose our story of the past are not important. They become vital because we focus on a particular set of events as significant. The chronology of different personalities' lives marked the different chapters of the history of British India. It is to give each chapter some coherence. It is to tell a story in a way that makes some sense and can be followed.

Periodisation of History by James Mill

- In 1817, James Mill, a Scottish economist and a political philosopher, published *A History of British India* in three volumes. He divided Indian history into three periods—Hindu, Muslim and British.
- This periodisation of Indian history was widely accepted by British historians and

administrators. However, his division of Indian history sparked wide-ranging debates.

- It has been argued by many historians that it is not correct to periodise Indian history on the basis of religion of the rulers. For example, when the Hindu kings ruled in ancient India, many religions existed peacefully. The same is also true for mediaeval India.
- It was not correct to periodise mediaeval India as Muslim History because people belonging to different faiths existed during this time.
- Such periodisation which was based on the religion of the rulers suggests that the lives, practices and culture of the other people do not matter.
- Mill believed that Asian societies were at a lower level of civilisation. Before the British rule, India was ruled by Hindu and Muslim kings whose reigns were dominated by religious intolerance and superstitions. According to him, only the British could civilise India and she could progress only under the rule of the British.
- Indian historians usually classify Indian history into ancient, mediaeval and modern periods.
- This division of history is also not free from limitations. This kind of periodisation is borrowed from the West where the modern period signifies growth, development, rational spirit, liberty and equality. The mediaeval
- period was largely free of these traces of the modern period. Further, there was no development of the country during the modern period.
- Thus, many historians refer to the period of British rule as the 'colonial' period.



James Mill

Main sources of colonial history are

What is colonial?

By reading this chapter you will understand how the British came to conquer the country and establish their rule, subjugating local nawabs and rajas. How they established control over the economy and society, collected revenue to meet all their expenses, bought the goods they wanted at low prices, produced crops they needed for export, and you will understand the changes that came about as a consequence. You will get to learn about the changes British rule brought about in values and tastes, customs and practices. When the subjugation of one country by another leads to these kinds of political, economic, social and cultural changes, it is referred to as colonisation.

1. When the subjugation of one country by another country leads to change in social, culture, economic and political sphere, it leads to colonisation.
2. British rule brought about changes in values and tastes, customs and practices.

Administrative Records

- Official records of the British administration are an important source of history during this period. The British documented every plan, policy, agreement and investigation. They also preserved documents and letters.
- During the colonial rule, all administrative offices such as the Collectorate, the tahsildar's office, the commissioner's office, the provincial secretariats and the law courts had their own record rooms where all official proceedings and letters of conversations moving from one department to the other were recorded.
- These documents were skillfully copied in the early years by calligraphists. With the spread of printing by the mid-nineteenth century, each document came to be printed by the government department.
- The national Archives of India was established in the 1920s at Delhi. Government records, documents and letters were accumulated.

Surveys

- The British carried out various surveys of the countries which they ruled. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, various surveys were carried out related to the size of the territories in addition to revenue surveys. Besides, the flora, fauna, local histories and cropping patterns were surveyed.
- The British also began to conduct the population census of India which was held after every ten years. It also included information on castes and religions.
- The British preserved the official documents so that important data and recordings

could be studied, debated and used as a point of reference in the future.

- Many other surveys such as zoological surveys, archaeological surveys and forest surveys were also conducted.

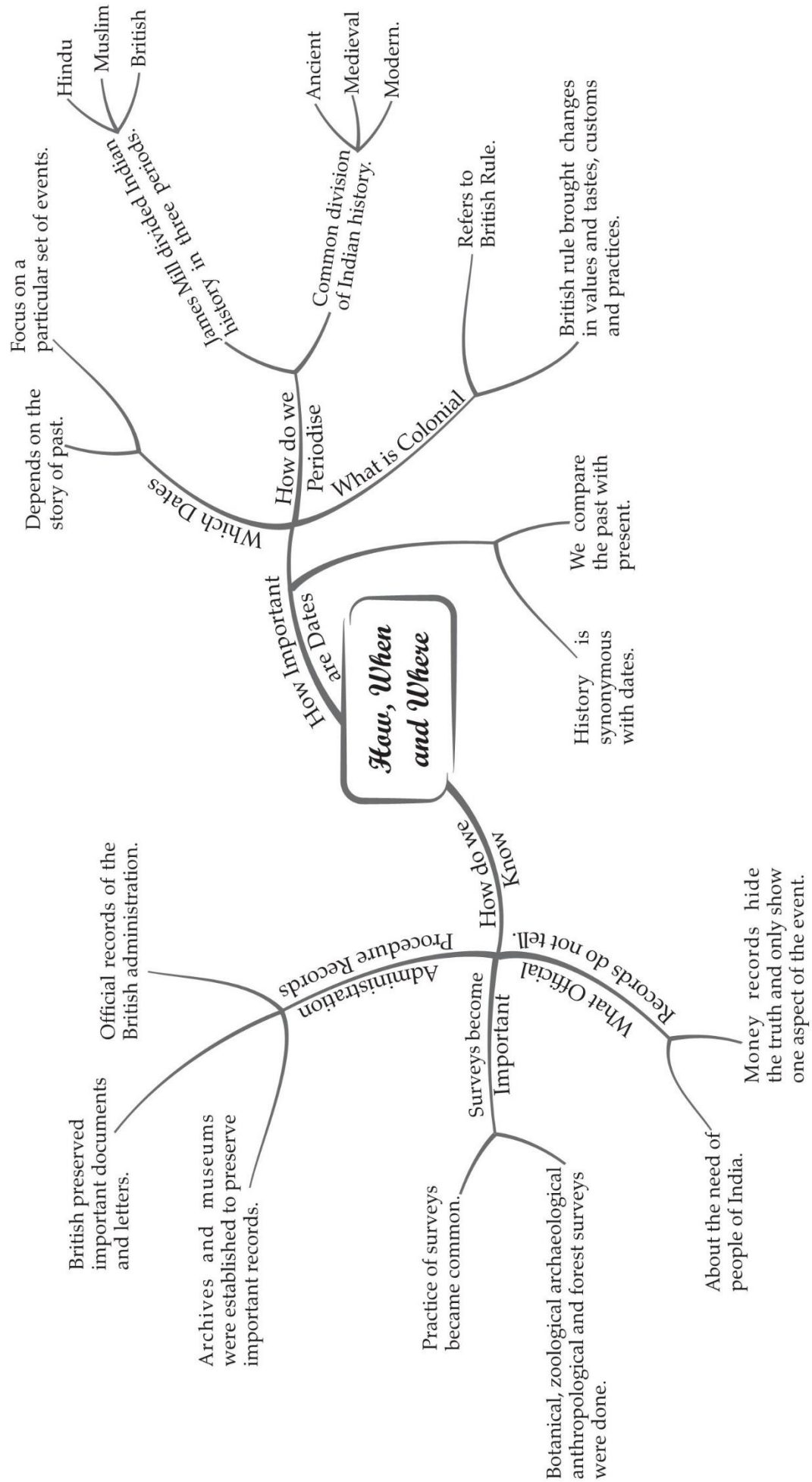
Limitations of the Official Records

- Because these surveys and records were conducted by the British, they reflect colonial thoughts and ideologies.
- These records only tell us about what the British officials thought about the people, their culture and languages. Thus, these records do not tell us about the general notions of the people, their beliefs and ideologies.

Other Sources of the Period

- Apart from official records, there are many other sources which are available in plenty such as people's diaries, accounts of pilgrims, pamphlets, popular booklets, newspapers, speeches of leaders, and writings of the poets and novelists. These sources tell us about the general feelings of the people of the country.
- However, a vast majority of people in India were not literate. Tribals, mine workers, factory workers and sweepers could not record their histories. We largely come to know about them through oral histories, traditions and cultural practices.

MIND MAP : LEARNING MADE SIMPLE CHAPTER-1



Important Questions

Multiple Choice Questions-

1. Who was the Scottish economist and political philosopher during 1817?
 - a. Wellesley
 - b. James Prince
 - c. Canning
 - d. James Mill
2. Other than the keeping Records, the practice which became common in colonial administration:
 - a. Editing
 - b. Reading
 - c. Surveying
 - d. Competing
3. The National Archives of India came up in:
 - a. 1920
 - b. 1910
 - c. 1935
 - d. 1915
4. Those who are specialised in art of beautiful writing:
 - a. Literate
 - b. Calligraphists
 - c. Artists
 - d. Novelists
5. Who was the last Viceroy of India?
 - a. Lord Irwin
 - b. Lord Canning
 - c. Lord Harding
 - d. Lord Mountbatten
6. How did many historians refer British period in India as?
 - a. Modern
 - b. Colonial

- c. Political subjugation
 - d. None of these
7. At present about what Historians do not write?
- a. How people earned their livelihood
 - b. What was produced
 - c. How markets came up
 - d. Kings and battles
8. What do you mean by Colonisation?
- a. Conquest of one country by another.
 - b. Subjugation of two country by another country.
 - c. Subjugation of one country by another
 - d. None of these
9. Who produced first map of India?
- a. James Mill
 - b. James Rennel
 - c. William
 - d. None of these
10. Where was National Archives in India located?
- a. Mumbai
 - b. Madras
 - c. Delhi
 - d. None of these
11. Who was Warren Hastings?
- a. Last Governor General
 - b. First Governor General
 - c. First Indian Governor General
 - d. None of these
12. What are the sources of information of the periods?
- a. Primary sources
 - b. Secondary sources
 - c. Both a and b

- d. None of these
13. Who was James Mill?
- a. Indian economist
 - b. Scottish economist
 - c. British economist
 - d. None of these
14. What do you mean by contemporary?
- a. The term refers to the future period.
 - b. The term refers to the present period.
 - c. The term refers to the past period.
 - d. None of these.
15. What do you mean by Survey?
- a. A study of Animals
 - b. A study or investigation of important facts
 - c. A study of birds
 - d. None of these

Very Short:

1. Name the events for which specific dates can be determined.
2. What was an important aspect of the histories written by the British historians in India?
3. Who was James Mill?
4. What was Mill's opinion about the Asian societies?
5. What evil practices, according to James Mill, dominated the Indian social life before the British came to India?
6. How did paintings project Governor- General?
7. Why do many historians refer to modern period as colonial?
8. Mention one important source used by historians in writing about the last 230 years of Indian history.
9. What is done under census?
10. What do official records not tell?
11. Why do we try and divide history into different periods?

Short Questions:

1. How did James Mill view India?

2. Historians divide Indian history into ancient, medieval and modern. But this division too has its problems. What are these problems?
3. What did the British do to preserve important official documents and letters?
4. What do official records not tell? How do we come to know about them?
5. How did the British conquer India and establish their rule?
6. Moving away from the British classification, how did historians usually divide the history of India?
7. What were the sources used by historians in writing the History at the time of the British rule?

Long Questions:

1. How do the official records of the British administration help historians to write about the last 250 years of Indian history?
2. How did surveys become important under the colonial administration?
3. Why are Dates important in History? And what was there in history written by the British Historians?
4. Who was James Mill, and how did he divide the History India? In what sense did he take Asian Society and Indian society?
5. What is the problem behind the classification of History into Ancient, Medieval and Modern?

ANSWER KEY

Multiple Choice questions-

- 1.(d) James Mill
2. (c) Surveying
3. (a) 1920
4. (b) Caligraphists
5. (d) Lord Mountbatten
- 6.(b) Colonial
7. (c) How markets came up
8. (c) Subjugation of one country by another
9. (b) James Rennel
10. (c) Delhi
11. (b) First Governor General

12. (c) Both a and b
13. (b) Scottish economist
14. (b) The term refers to the present period.
15. (b) A study or investigation of important facts

Very Short Answer:

1. The year a king was crowned, the year he married, the year he had a child, the year he fought a particular battle, the year he died, etc.
2. The rule of each Governor-General was an important aspect.
3. He was a Scottish economist and political philosopher and is known for his book A History of British India.
4. In Mill's opinion all Asian societies were at a lower level of civilisation than Europe.
5. According to James Mill, the evil practices that dominated the Indian social life were religious intolerance, caste taboos and superstitious practices.
6. Paintings projected Governor-Generals as powerful figures.
7. It is because, under British rule people did not have equality, freedom or liberty—the symbols of modernity.
8. The official records of the British administration.
9. It records the number of people living in all the provinces of India and gathers information on castes, religions and occupation.
10. Official records do not tell what other people in the country felt, and what lay behind their actions.
11. We do so in order to capture the characteristics of a time, its central features as they appear to us.

Short Answer:

Ans.1: James Mill did not cherish any positive idea about India. He was of the opinion that all Asian societies were at a lower level of civilisation than Europe. According to his telling of history, before the British came to India, the Hindu and the Muslim despots ruled the country. Religious intolerance, caste taboos and superstitious practices dominated social life. He felt that only British rule could civilise India. He suggested that the British should conquer all the territories of India to ensure the enlightenment and happiness of the Indian people. For India was not capable of progress without the help of the British.

Ans.2: This periodisation has been borrowed from the West where the modern period was associated with the growth of all the forces of modernity such as science, reason, democracy, liberty and equality. Medieval was a term used to describe a society where these

features of modern society did not exist.

It is difficult for us to accept this characterisation of the modern period. Here, it is worth-mentioning that Indians did not have equality, freedom or liberty under the British rule. The country also lacked economic growth and progress in that period. It is therefore many historians refer to modern period as colonial period.

Ans.3: The British felt the need to preserve all the important official documents and letters. For this, they set up record rooms attached to all administrative institutions. The village tahsildar's office, the collectorate, the commissioner's office, the provincial secretariats, the lawcourts—all had their record rooms. The British also established specialised institutions such as archives and museums to preserve important records.

Ans.4: Official records do not always help us understand what other people in the country felt, and what lay behind their actions. For that we have diaries of people, accounts of pilgrims and travellers, autobiographies of important personalities, and popular books, etc. that were sold in the local bazaars. With the spread of printing press, newspapers came to be published and issues began to be debated in public. Leaders and reformers wrote to spread their ideas, poets and novelists wrote to express their feelings.

Ans.5: The British conquered India in the following ways:

- (a) They subjugated local nawabs and rajas.
- (b) They established control over the economy and society collected revenue to meet all their expenses, bought goods they wanted at lower prices and produced crops they needed for export.
- (c) They brought changes in rulers and tastes, customs and practices.
- (d) Thus, they moulded everything in their favour and subjugated the country very soon.

Ans.6: When we move away from the British classification, historians usually divided the Indian history into three categories that are:

1. Ancient
2. Medieval
3. Modern

Ans.7: The historians used the following sources in writing the history:

1. The official records of the British administration.
2. The letters and documents that were preserved carefully.
3. Records being preserved from the administration offices.
4. Letters and memory that were kept in the archives.

Long Answer:

Ans.1: The British believed that the act of writing was important. Hence, they got written up every instruction, plan, policy decision, agreement, investigation, etc. They thought that once this was done, things could be properly studied and debated. This conviction produced an administrative culture of memos, noting's and reports.

The British were very interested in preserving all important documents and letters. For this, they established record rooms attached to all administrative institutions such as the village tahsildar's office, the collectorate, law courts etc. They also set up archives and museums to preserve important records.

Letters and memos that moved from one branch of the administration to smother in the early years of the 19th century can still be read in the archives. Historians can also take help from the notes and reports that district officials prepared or the instructions and directives that were sent by officials at the top to the provincial administrators.

Ans.2: The British gave much importance to the practice of surveying because they believed that a country had to be properly known before it could be effectively administered. Therefore, they carried out detailed surveys by the early 19th century in order to map the entire country:

- They conducted revenue surveys in villages.
- They made efforts to know the topography, the soil quality, the flora, the fauna, the local histories and the cropping pattern.
- They also introduced census operations, held at the interval of every ten years from the end of the 19th century. They prepared detailed records of the number of people in all the provinces of India, noting information on castes, religions and occupation separately.
- The British also carried on several other surveys such as botanical surveys, zoological surveys, archaeological surveys, forest surveys, etc. In this way, they gathered all the facts that were essential for administering a country.

Ans.3: In History, the dates are really important because the dates focuses on a particular set of events and changes that took place during a particular period of time.

The History that was written by the British historians in India had considered the rule of Ist Governor-General, Warren Hastings which extended till last Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten. In brief, we can say that the British historians wrote only those points which were important to them and have only glorified their deeds and events in their historical accounts.

Ans.4: James Mill was a Scottish economist and a political philosopher, who had published a massive three-volume work i.e. "A History of British India. James Mill divided the history of

India in three periods – Hindus, Muslims and British. Mill thought that the Asian Society was at a lower level of civilization than that of Europe. According to him before the rule of the British, the Indian Society was ruled by Hindu and Muslim despots and religious intolerance, caste taboos and superstition were spread.

Ans.5: The problem behind the classification is that the periodization has been borrowed from the west where the Modern Period was associated with the growth of all the forces of modernity – science, reason, democracy, liberty and equality. Medieval was used to define society where there was absence of modern forces. So this was unacceptable as British rule was the period in which all liberty, equality, freedom were taken from Indians.