

## **WHAT, WHERE, HOW & WHEN**

### **WHAT IS HISTORY?**

Herodotus, the Greek historian, is regarded as the father of History. It was he who invented the word "history". He said history meant 'study' or 'investigation of past time'.

According to Leo Tolstoy, "The subject of history is the life of the peoples and of humanity."

History is not just a record of kings and queens. It comprises the study of human culture and civilisation of all ages.

And the scholars who describe the past are often called historians.

Archaeology is that branch of knowledge that examines the physical remains of the past and gathers evidence.

### **HISTORY AND ITS IMPORTANCE: WHY DO WE STUDY HISTORY?**

History is the life story of man from the earliest period to the present day. Now a question generally arises as to why we study history.

The study of history is important in so many, ways:

- (1) It helps us to know our past. Through it we come to know about our ancestors, their struggle for existence and the great achievements they made.
- (2) Through its study we come to know about kings and statesmen as well as ordinary people who have shaped the pages of history.
- (3) It enables us to gain knowledge of the continuous development of man's culture and civilisation. It includes the study of art, architecture, literature, religion , etc.
- (4) It is from-the study of history that we come to know the origin and evolution of different languages that we speak today.
- (5) The study of history helps us to understand the basic nature of our society.

### **TIME FRAME**

#### **◆ WHAT IS MEANT BY B.C. AND A.D.?**

History deals with the complete story of man, his past, present and future. How to measure this long period is a problem. But historians have solved this problem too by introducing the concepts of B.C and A.D.

The birth of the Christ is the focal point from which we count the dates. If an event happened 100 years before the birth of Christ we say that event happened in 100 B.C and if, on the other hand, any thing happened 100 years after the birth of Christ we say that it happened in 100A.D.

The letters B.C stand for Before Christ and A.D. stand for 'Anno Domini' which in simple language means 'the year of the Lord'.

Thus, while dealing with any date before Christ we add B.C. to that year and likewise if we deal with any date after Christ we add A.D. to that date. If we say Alexander invaded India in 326 B.C. and the Guptas ruled over India between 320 AD. to 540 A.D., it simply means that Alexander's invasion took place 326 years before Christ and the Guptas ruled some 320-540 years after Christ.

If we add Circa with any date, it means that such a date is not the right or exact one but quite close to that. It is an approximate date.

## NAMES OF THE LAND

Our country was known by different names from time to time. But two of them, i.e. Bharat and India, are the most well known. The name Bharata is mentioned in Rigveda the earliest work in Sanskrit dated about 3500 years ago. Initially the name Bharata was used for those people who lived in the north-west part of the country but later on it began to be used for the whole country. The name India comes from the Indus, called Sindhu in the Sanskrit language. Both the Iranians and the Greeks who came to this country from the northwestern side of the country about 2500 years ago were familiar with the Indus which was sometimes called the Hindos or the Indos. The land to the east of the Indus came to be called as India. These two names Bharat and India still exist in our literature and history.



A page from a palm leaf manuscript.

## THE GEOGRAPHICAL FRAMEWORK



### HOW IS GEOGRAPHY HELPFUL IN SHAPING THE LIFE AND HISTORY OF THE PEOPLE

People of any country of the world are greatly influenced by their country's geographical features. Their style of living, wearing clothes, food habits are all influenced by it. People living in cold regions, like Siberia, would naturally wear woollen clothes while those living in hot countries would wear loose clothes, like in Arabia.

The following physical or geographical divisions of India have affected Indian people and their history in their own way :

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|------------------------|---|
| 1. The Great Himalayas | 2. The Great Northern Plains                |
| 3. The Deccan Plateau  | 4. The Eastern and Western Coastal Regions. |

The Great Himalayas have always been a barrier for invaders from the north. Hence very few invasions have taken place from this side.

India was invaded again and again from the northwestern side simply because of the presence of so many low-lying passes such as the Khyber, the Kunlun, the Gomal, Trichi and the Bolan, etc. in the north-west.

The vast and fertile plains of north India formed a base for the establishment of the vast empires like that of the Mauryas, the Guptas and the Mughals.

Have you ever thought why Pataliputra was the capital of the two great empires of the Mauryas and the Guptas though the gap between the existence of these two empires was more than six centuries? This was because Bihar (including Jharkhand) was and it still is the storehouse of iron-ore. It was with the help of this iron that weapons of war could be manufactured in abundance which facilitated the establishment of two great empires, both with their capital at Pataliputra.

The Deccan provided a good military base, so even the mighty empires of the north could not easily win and keep those areas under their control for a long time. This was the main reason why the Marathas with their scanty military power could successfully challenge the mighty Mughal empire.

A very long coastline along the western and eastern coastal plains enabled the Indians, especially the southern powers, to establish strong commercial relations both with the South-East Asian states as well as with the African and European countries.

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The eighteen Puranas, though full of mythology, still provide useful information regarding certain historical dynasties and their rulers.

The Tripitakes and jatakas of the Buddhists and Angas of the Jains contain some very useful references to the contemporary society and the political and economic conditions of those days.



**A pot from an old city.**

### **Secular or Historical Literature:**

The Arthashastra by Kautilya gives us information about Mauryan administration and the contemporary society. The Mudra Rakshasa by Vishakhadatta yields valuable information regarding the Nandas and the Mauryas, particularly the overthrow of the Nandas by the Mauryas. Bana's Harsha Charita, which has been compared by Dr. VA Smith with Abul Fazal's Akbarnama, gives accurate and valuable information regarding Harsha, his conquests and administration. Rajtarangini by Kalhan traces the history of Kashmir from the earliest times to the 12th century A. D. The dramas of Kalidasa -Shakuntala Meghaduta and Malvikagnimitra -shed light on the social life of his age and also on the early Sungas. Historians have also derived important historical information from such literary works as Panini's Ashtadhyayi and Patanjali's Mahabhashya.

### **Travellers' Accounts:**

A number of foreign travellers -Greeks, Romans, Chinese, Tibetans, Muslims, etc. -visited this country from time to time and have left valuable political and social accounts. Herodotus in his book "Histories" supply much information regarding the Perso-Greek War and the political connection of north-west India with Persia in the fifth century B.C. Megasthenes in his book Indica throws a good deal of light on the Mauryan administration and society, and also the geography and products of India.

### **Why did Some Travellers Go to Distant Lands?**

Some people travelled to distant lands in search of livelihood and better service opportunities, while others travelled to avoid natural calamities like earthquakes and floods. Merchants travelled with caravans to sell their valuable articles at high prices while religious leaders travelled for preaching their own faith and bettering humanity. Certainly some conquerors marched to other lands to conquer them and win military laurels. Last but not the least, there were certain persons who went to distant lands driven by the spirit of adventure.

Similarly, the Chinese Pilgrims, especially Fahein (A.D. 399-414), Hieun Tsang (A.D. 629-45) and Itsing (A.D. 673-95), who visited this country in search of knowledge and Buddhist literature, have left valuable accounts about the religious, social and political conditions of India. Fahein's description of Pataliputra and Gupta administration, and Hieun Tsang's account of the political, religious and social conditions of India towards the middle of the 7th century A.D. have proved very useful to us in reconstructing the history of India from A.D. 400-700.

### **(b) Archaeological Sources:**

The archaeological sources like inscriptions, coins, monuments and artefacts have a significant effect on the writing of ancient history.