

HOW, WHEN AND WHERE

CONTENTS

- Introduction
- Which Dates
- How do we Periodise
- What is Colonial
- Sources of History
- What Official Records Do Not Tell



INTRODUCTION

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



WHICH DATES

- ◆ By what criteria do we choose a set of dates as important? The dates we select, the dates around which we compose our story of the past, are not important on their own, they become vital because we focus on a particular set of events as important. If our focus of study changes, if we begin to look at new issues, a new set of dates will appear significant.



HOW DO WE PERIODISE

- ◆ 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 periodisation came to be widely accepted.

- ◆ Moving away from British classification, historians have usually divided Indian history into 'ancient', 'medieval' and 'modern'. This division too has its 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 - science, reason, democracy, liberty and equality. Medieval was a term used to describe a society where these features of modern society did not exist. *Under* British rule people did not have equality, freedom or liberty. Nor was the period one of economic growth and progress.

- ◆ Many historians, therefore, refer to this period as 'colonial'.



WHAT IS COLONIAL

- ◆ The British came to conquer the country and establish their rule, subjugating local nawabs and rajas. 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. The British rule brought about many changes 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, we refer to the process as colonization.



SOURCES OF HISTORY

- ◆ **Administration produces records**

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 decision, agreement, investigation had to be clearly written up. Once this was done, things could be properly studied and debated. This conviction produced an administrative culture of memos, notings and reports.

- ◆ 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. The village *tahsildar's* office, the collectorate, the commissioner's office, the provincial secretariats, the lawcourts - all had their record rooms
- ◆ Specialised institutions like archives and museums were also established to preserve important records.
- ◆ Letters and memos that moved from one branch of the administration to another in the early years of the nineteenth century can still be read in the archives. You can also study the notes and reports that district officials prepared, or the instructions and directives that were sent by officials at the top to provincial administrators.

◆ **Survey became important**

The practice of surveying also became common under the colonial administration. The British believed that a country had to be properly known before it could be effectively administered.

By the early nineteenth century detailed surveys were being carried out to map the entire country. In the villages, revenue surveys were conducted. The effort was to know the topography, the soil quality, the flora, the fauna, the local histories, and the cropping pattern - all the facts seen as necessary to know about to administer the region.

From the end of the nineteenth century, Census operations were held every ten years. These prepared detailed records of the number of people in all the provinces of India, noting information

on castes, religions and occupation. There were many other surveys - botanical surveys, zoological surveys, archaeological surveys, anthropological surveys, forest surveys.



WHAT OFFICIAL RECORDS DO NOT TELL

Official records tell us what the officials thought, what they were interested in, and what they wished *to* preserve for posterity. These 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 booklets that were sold in the local bazars. As printing spread, newspapers were published and issues were debated in public. Leaders and reformers wrote to spread their ideas, poets and novelists wrote to express their feelings. 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, is a more difficult task