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TRADITIONS OF HISTORY WRITING IN INDIA

B.H.I.E.- 144

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By: Anand Prakash Srivastava



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QUESTION PAPER

June – 2023

(Solved)

TRADITIONS OF HISTORY WRITING IN INDIA

B.H.I.E.-144

Time: 3 Hours]

[Maximum Marks: 100

Note: Answer any five questions. Atleast two questions from each section. All questions carry equal marks.

SECTION – I

Q. 1. Critically examine the role of the Sangha as the chief protagonist of Buddhism's construction of the past.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-3, Page No. 18, 'The Buddhist Construction of the Past', 'The Buddhist Text', Page No. 19, 'Early History of Sangha' and 'Traces of Historical Thinking'.

Q. 2. In what ways can the *Charita* textual compositions be treated as historical treatises?

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-4, Page No. 30, Q.No. 3.

Q. 3. State the importance of *Rayavachacamu* as an important source of history.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-8, Page No. 68, Q.No. 10.

Q. 4. Write short notes on the following:

(a) Raibhis and Akhyanas

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-2, Page No. 10, 'Raibhis' and 'Akhyanas'.

(b) Post-Sangam age Kavyas from peninsular India.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-4, Page No. 27, 'Kavyas from Peninsular India: Post Sangam Age'.

(c) Types of inscriptions

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-2, Page No. 32, 'Types of Inscriptions'.

(d) Itihasa-Purana tradition

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-2, Page No. 13, Q.No. 2.

SECTION – II

Q. 5. How do *Bakhars* help in understanding the past? Explain with examples.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-11, Page No. 91, 'Bakhar'.

Q. 6. Discuss Firishta's concept of history.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-13, Page No. 107, 'Concept of History'.

Q. 7. What are the salient features of Subaltern Historiography?

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-19, Page No. 151, 'Introduction', Page No. 152, 'Important Features of Subaltern Historiography' and Page No. 153, 'Ranjit Guha'.

Q. 8. Write short notes on the following:

(a) Kulagranthas

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-10, Page No. 83, 'Kulagranthas from Bengal'.

(b) Saint hagiographies

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-9, Page No. 74, 'Saint Hagiographies'.

(c) Fa Hsien/Faxian

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-15, Page No. 119, 'Fa Hsien/Faxian', 'Fa Hsien on Buddhism', 'Fa Hsien on Ashoka', Page No. 120, 'Fa Hsien on Feudalism' and 'Fa Hsein on Outcastes'.

(d) Environmental history

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-20, Page No. 158, 'Environmental History'.

QUESTION PAPER

December – 2022

(Solved)

TRADITIONS OF HISTORY WRITING IN INDIA

B.H.I.E.-144

Time: 3 Hours]

[Maximum Marks: 100

Note: Answer any **five** questions. Atleast **two** questions from each section. All questions carry equal marks.

SECTION – I

Q. 1. How can the Jain Construction of the past be studied through Jain *Paumachariyam*? Elaborate.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-3, Page No. 17, 'The Jaina *Paumachariyam*'.

Q. 2. Write a note on the Ashoka edicts.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-5, Page No. 34, 'Ashokan Edicts' and Page No. 38, Q. No. 2.

Q. 3. "History conveys ethical instructions." Comment in the light of *Rajatarangini*.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-6, Page No. 48, Q. No. 7.

Q. 4. Write short notes on the following:

(a) Embedded historical forms

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-1, Page No. 3, 'Embedded History'.

(b) *Gatha* and *Narashamsi*

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-2, Page No. 10, '*Gatha* and *Narashamsi*'.

(c) *Amuktamalyada*

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-8, Page No. 63, '*Amuktamalyada*'.

(d) Historicity of Sangam age

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-7, Page No. 54, 'Authenticating the Past: Historicity of Sangam Age'.

SECTION – II

Q. 5. Discuss the historical origin of *Buranji*. Explain the historical significance of *buranjis* in the larger context of Indian history.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-11, Page No. 95, Q. No. 4 and Page No. 96, Q. No. 5.

Q. 6. Write a note on Abul Fazl's writings.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-14, Page No. 112, 'Introduction', Page No. 173, 'Bias in Abul Fazl's Writings', 'Rational and Secular Approach in Abul Fazl's Writings' and 'Idea of Time in Abul Fazl's Writings'.

Q. 7. Explain the main arguments of the nationalist historians.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-18, Page No. 147, Q. No. 1.

Q. 8. Write short notes on the following:

(a) *Tazkirat*

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-9, Page No. 72, 'Sufi Hagiographic Narratives'.

(b) *Bakhar*

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-11, Page No. 91, '*Bakhar*'.

(c) Early Arabs perception of South Asia

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-15, Page No. 122, 'Arab Perception of South Asia'.

(d) New trends in women's history

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-20, Page No. 159, 'Women's History'.



Sample Preview of The Chapter

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TRADITIONS OF HISTORY WRITING IN INDIA

THEME-1 : PAST AND HISTORY



What is History?

INTRODUCTION

By the twelfth century CE, historiography had grown in significance in Europe. The Judeo-Christian religions demanded that some traditions be proven to be genuine. Thus, History became crucial. History was regarded as being essential to any civilization by the eighteenth century. Any science, including physics and botany, was thought to require a history because that is the way to knowledge. Therefore, any civilization without a past was considered to be ignorant. The continuity from the Greeks to modern Europe led to the formation of a single European identity. The study of its past provided access to this identity. Even the Mesopotamians and the Greeks had historical traditions. Chinese historians began keeping records of historical occurrences based on the cyclical nature of cosmological time and drawing on moral and causality-related issues as early as the second century CE. Because it was founded on facts and logical inquiry, historical writing from the Greco-Roman era was considered to be accurate. The genealogy, causation, sequential storytelling, and time-reckoning were all covered in ancient European records. The search for indigenous histories of early India under colonisation must be based in this body of historical literature from around the globe.

CHAPTER AT A GLANCE

CONSTRUCTIONS OF EARLY INDIAN HISTORY

British colonialists sought historical books in Sanskrit in the 18th century. They claimed to have drawn a blank, hence Indian culture and Hindu civilization were historical. Some Indologists, like William Jones, believed some books contained the core of history, but most disagreed. Kalhana's Rajatarangini, a 12th century Kashmir history, was the exception.

Orientalists believed ancient India had no history because it lacked historical writings. They meant academic history. Ancient Indians lacked historical knowledge and a sense of history. History and

historical texts must be distinguished. Orientalists noted that India's history can be reconstructed from Epics, Puranas, and foreign reports, but there are essentially no historical writings. History writing and historical consciousness are considered to be the signs of true history, and *vice versa*. True history involves self-conscious actors producing something new and without precedent, and history writing is an indication of historical consciousness. (2012) Ancient India's lack of historical records was compared to modern European historiography. The Renaissance emphasized evidence, cause, chronology, and sequential storytelling, they maintained. India was different.

Orientalists influenced by humanism Enlightenment began searching for India's history. First, Hindu law and religious books were read. In the 19th century, utilitarians tried to grasp new Indian history interpretations.

They thought India lacked a history due to its society. Oriental Despotism was applied to India's past. The History of British India (1818-1823) was the first historical study. He separated Indian history into Hindu, Muslim, and British periods. Hinduism was considered backward, illogical, and static. Hegel's historical generalization included this perspective. India's history, he says, is Fore-History. In another passage, Hegel refers to ancient India: 'A nation's actual objective history cannot begin unless it has a written record.' A culture without history has made no true cultural progress [and this applied to India for 3,500 years]. (Trautmann 2012, Hegel) James Mill dismissed Orientalists' claims that Indian history may be gleaned from epics and other sources.

Epigraphy, numismatics, and archaeology helped recreate Indian history. Europe comparisons eclipsed fresh beginnings. In the 1960s, Indian historians realised it would be possible to look for early history. Indian society never remained static; it changed. This was a new perspective on Indian history. D.D. Kosambi and Marxist historians studied historical change.

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Early Indian history was briefly discussed. Early Indian history was weak, according to historians. The ordering of the past varies by culture, and the Indian ordering of historiography wouldn't be clear to Europeans. Indian historiography's problematic nature persisted. V. S. Pathak's Ancient Historians of India explored carita literature. He stated that historical works like vamsavalis had received little attention.

WHAT IS HISTORICAL TRADITION?

Historical traditions develop in communities that have a sense of the past. It is composed of three parts:

(a) Historical awareness of historical occurrences, particularly those that the society deems relevant or important.

(b) These incidents are listed in chronological order and include causality-related elements.

(c) These events are documented in a way that satisfies societal standards.

The historical tradition may be a record of real events that may or may not have taken place, but which still represent held beliefs about the past. Tradition from the past serves a social purpose. Some hints are deemed important when historical traditions form.

1. When did society first feel the need to establish a historical tradition?

2. Who were the tradition's guardians?

3. Is the tradition embedded in secular or religious literature?

4. What genres were created to document the tradition?

5. The historical tradition's composition within a certain social environment.

6. Who was the target audience for the tradition?

7. Social groupings' manipulation of their adherence to tradition.

Therefore, "historical tradition" refers to those elements of the past that have been verbally or written down and have been purposefully passed down from one generation to the next while carrying the sanctity of antiquity and a perceived historicity. 2013 (Thapar).

TOWARDS HISTORICAL TRADITION

Different approaches exist for societies to depict their past. Romila Thapar distinguishes between the essence of its representation and "the past," which can be realized in an abstract sense. This type of representation was first expressed as a narrative "that conveyed what was believed to have occurred in periods anterior to the present" in earlier times.

Three traditions make up the historical tradition of India:

1. Puranic culture

2. Sramanic tradition, especially Jaina and Buddhist

3. Bardic custom

Puranic and Sramanic histories offer different perspectives. Some events are highlighted, some hidden. Mutual borrowing suggests familiarity, while it's not mentioned. Bardic tradition dates to early epics.

Bardic customs practically continue into our times. Bards said they were writing genealogy of high-status

families in the second millennium CE. Puranic and Sramanic historiographies contain historical accounts.

All the stories highlight the past and its role in the present. When a community's objectives are related to history, a unified narrative emerges that justifies a certain perspective of the past. With historical change, new narratives emerge. Some narratives may be more accurate than others. Romila Thapar says history is always a depiction and not the 'ultimate truth'. Time is vital to history. Early Indian history was cyclical. This differs from Judeo-Christian tradition, which emphasizes linear time.

PERCEPTION AND RECORDING OF PAST IN EARLY INDIA

Recently, it's become clear that different communities have different histories. These are imaginative, yet reflect their view of the past. Authors can separate or combine them. Even manufactured historical accounts reveal much about the author and his society. Fabrication must be investigated. However, it's fake.

Historians explore previous awareness and its role in society. It's important to examine how India records its past. Every society has various pasts, hence their records vary. Comparing prior narratives educates us about their nature. A view of the past is vital throughout transition and change, says Romila Thapar. This is when the past is rejected or modeled. It can also justify the changing present. Any historian studying early India's historical traditions must keep them in mind.

1. The majority of early historical texts take the form of declarations from the ruling class and the elite since history has historically been used to legitimise those in positions of authority. It is necessary to deduce from these statements what other people have said.

2. In their history, within the historical tradition of specific groups, perceptions of historical change are offered. It is the idea of change that matters.

3. History is the process of examining the past from a certain viewpoint or moment in time. This implies that the present must also be given special treatment.

4. Historical texts must be contextualized within their current context. It indicates that there is an implicit connection between the past, the work, and its audience.

5. Another technique to make a message is to project time in a specific way. It is impossible to avoid the point of view of those who recorded the events in a chronological order.

DIFFERENT KINDS OF HISTORICAL TRADITIONS

One type of historical thinking was represented by the itihasa-purana traditions. As the tradition is being worked over, it transitions from a heroic to a courtly phase, from clan societies to kingdoms, with aspects of the first phase continuing into the second. A distinct historical tradition that incorporates historical consciousness is the bardic tradition. There was tension between the two forms. The Buddhist and Jaina traditions, which chronicled events and other people in a different framework, served as a representation of the other historical traditions.

WHAT IS HISTORY? / 3

The Sramanic traditions made an effort to give history – as they saw it – centrality despite the fact that they were not free of religious motivation. Some highly powerful viewpoints were stated in Buddhist and Jain literature. The primary institutional sites for preserving their historical traditions were monasteries. They kept records of their religious and monastic activities. The divergent perspective of the Sramanic historical traditions has been explained by a number of factors. Among them are:

1. The founders of these religions are historical figures.
2. Their departure from conventional wisdom or orthopraxy.
3. The significance of eschatology.
4. The patrons' social backgrounds. They primarily belonged to the agricultural and commercial classes.
5. The original urban and educated environment in which they taught.
6. Their sects' institutionalization as orders.
7. The need for these orders to continue their various sectarian battles.
8. The interaction of political and religious authority.

ITIHASA AND ITS MANY FACETS

In trying to understand why the past was produced, reconstructed, and portrayed in particular ways, and whether they provide a consciousness of history, we follow the views of prominent historian Romila Thapar, who has extensively written on this topic.

Itihasa and purana refer to historical traditions. Itihasa means 'thus, it was' and is today's definition of history. Old is purana. It tells ancient stories. By the first millennium CE, term was employed for texts on deities, the Puranas. These religious sectarian books describe the deity's tales and ceremonies. Some sections are historical records. Atharvaveda and Satapatha Brahmana mention itihasa and purana. In Brahmanas and Upanishads, these phrases refer to the past. Itihasa-Purana is the fifth Veda, second-order knowledge claiming divine sanction but not divine revelation.

Vedic itihasa includes hymns and hero-praising verses. Buddhists refer to itihasa yet acknowledge its Brahmanical roots. Jinasena, the 9th century Jaina author of Adipurana, defines itihasa as what transpired. Examining itihasa-purana literature shows how the past was rebuilt. Changes in itihasa writing genres are linked to key historical changes from 1000 BCE to 1300 CE, but viewed as two distinct periods: 1000 BCE to 500 CE and 500 CE to 1300 CE.

We begin with the Vedas, especially the Rigveda and the Brahmanas, their hymns and hero stories. Itihasa are segments. The Purana emerges around 1100 CE. Some Puranas are only partially historical.

Early compositions incorporate historical consciousness. These ritual documents must be opened. Despite being ritualistic, the texts contain historical elements. These forms are embedded:

1. Mythology
2. Heroic music
3. Ancestry charts

Later, genres become autonomous and historical, or 'externalized'. Later, historical traditions are developed to document history and are built around author, audience, patron, and event.

Embedded History

The dana-stuti hymns, narasamsis, and akhyanas of the Rigveda are where the itihasa-purana tradition's roots may be found; these texts appear to have been included into the sacrificial ritual. In the Rigveda, these anecdotes served as hymns to the kind patrons (dana-stuti) (narasamsis and akhyanas).

An effort is made to set a precedent for action in the present through these narratives. These forms were later included in the epics, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. The incorporation modifies the shape, though. In comparison to the Vedas, the genealogies in the Epics are more in-depth. The early Puranas' vamsanucarita genealogical parts were later enlarged into succession list patterns. As a result, it "represents a construction of the past referring back to earlier eras and based on older material" because it was written in the first century CE.

After the seventh century CE, genealogical forms were constructed out of embedded forms and were employed in more overtly historical literature like caritas (biographies) and vamsavalis (chronicles).

Externalised Historical Forms

Biographies of kings or authoritative people, chronicles, and inscriptions are separate texts. Inscriptions provide chronology, dynastic history, and economic change information and embody historical consciousness. Early inscriptions and architectural fragments were reused. Why were some items chosen? What meanings do they convey?

"Reuse is both inheriting and translating the past," says Romila Thapar (Thapar 2013: 61).

Buddhist monastic chronicles of Sri Lanka such as Dipavamsa and the Mahavamsa from the mid-1st millennium CE educate us about the early history of Buddhism, connecting India to Sri Lanka. Ashoka is credited with this. In Northern Buddhism's Mahayana, Avadana writings and ruler and teacher biographies provide a clearer picture of Indian history. Asokavadana describes Ashoka's activities from a Northern Buddhist perspective.

Post-Gupta, historical writing emerged without ritual texts. Caritas, prasasties, and vamsavalis are its forms.

Kavyas were Caritas, historical biographies: They used history. Harshacarita is Banabhatta's best. It captures 7th century history. Sandhyakaranandin's Ramacarita is later and describes the landowners' insurrection.

After the 7th century CE, we have dynasty annals. They list dynasty events chronologically. Inscriptions' prasasti part contains dynasty history. It's a eulogy for the kings' achievements.

The vamsavalis are based on historical occurrences. The most famous is Kalhana's Rajatarangini.

SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CONTEXT OF HISTORICAL TRADITIONS

Changes over time altered the legitimacy of power and resource institutionalization. Understanding historical contexts helps understand historical traditions. Understanding the background helps us grasp historical settings and developments.

Early India had two types of society. Clan societies preceded kingdoms. Both existed sometimes. Let's compare clan societies and kingdoms.

Clans determine identity in clan societies. A clan is an actual or fictive group of unilineal kin. People in the same bloodline share an ancestor. Kinship dominated social ties and society's functions. Genealogies, fictitious or real, were significant in royal descent records.

Genealogies document contemporary and past identities. Genealogies and clan mythologies monitor clan fission and fusion. Fission is when a huge clan splits into smaller clans, some of which move. When clans fuse, they establish a huge bloodline. Romila Thapar says, "Lineages were ordered hierarchically, and if needed, this ordering may be recorded or reformed in genealogical or other forms." Some lineages had better resource access due to the hierarchy (Thapar 2013: 67). Lineage-based societies record heroes and events. Early agro-pastoral India valued livestock.

Some subsistence farming was done. Produce was offered to ruling families. Chiefs received prestations, offerings, and gifts. The ceremony participants ate much of the produce. Priests legitimized the chief and received gifts in return. As the clans' importance grew, ritual specialists emerged. Some memorized prior customs and retold them on significant occasions. Perhaps bards or poets.

Priest hailed the powerful chief as a hero. Hero-lauds and ballads are significant in this environment. These little poetry boosted the chief's status. The clan's identity was reaffirmed through its poems. Chief and clan valued hero-lauds.

Clan societies varied. The gana-sanghas/gana-rajyas were early north Indian oligarchies and chiefships. The societies of the Vedas and Mahabharata were simpler. The Pali Buddhist Canon depicts these societies, and the Buddha belonged to the Sakyas. The Mahabharata and the Ramayana show the resulting struggle for control, authority, and power.

By 1200 BCE, the middle Ganga Plain had a ruler. The chief gained power through wealth acquisition, which was no longer bestowed or spent on sacrifices. Agriculture and iron technology spread, causing oversupply and urbanisation. Sudras and untouchables became the working class when caste was introduced. Complex social organisation requires central leadership. Kingship became common. The King represented the state. Kingship marginalised clan society. When kingdoms developed, gana-sanghas were hostile. Vrijjis, a confederacy of gana-sangha tribes, fought Magadha in eastern India in the 5th century BCE. Arthashastra discusses animosity.

Unlike clan groups, kingdoms relied on regular taxes and land ownership was no longer common. By the Gupta period, intermediaries indicate a numeric and qualitative change in state authority and governance.

Post-Gupta brahmanas received land for legitimizing the king's reign. Brahmanas, religious institutions, and bureaucrats soon received land allocations. The outcome was a class of cultivator-to-king intermediates. They got king's revenue. Powerful mediators considered themselves as monarchs and contended for the throne. 'These relationships and claims relied heavily on historical traditions to legitimise control' (Thapar 2013: 73).

Clans' egalitarian society became tiered and convoluted. Now authority was up for grabs. Mythic origins and lineages legitimized. Controlling past narratives became important. Post-Gupta kingdoms expanded, according to historical traditions. Conquered and annexed new regions. Kingdoms turned clan societies to caste societies. Caste culture integrated hunter-gatherers, forest-dwellers, pastoralists, shifting cultivators, and peasant groups. The historical tradition remembers kingdoms and communities (which were to be absorbed through resource appropriation and caste conversion) encountering one other in clashes, even though the evidence in the texts is not so clear.

Ideology influenced these processes. Coercion was usually done through a religious sect's hegemonic ideology. This is obvious in several prior constructions and representations meant to legitimise an established or upcoming power. Past construction was slow. Clan-based communities proceeded to become kingdoms throughout the 2nd millennium CE. By then, kingdoms were common and clan groups emerged in remote locations.

SOME REFLECTIONS

How cultures understand and present their pasts reflects their historical consciousness. All societies have it. The Rigveda hero-lauds show how historical traditions can take entrenched forms. Ritual writings contain past patterns. In Buddhist and Jaina historiographies, monastic Elders and Sangha history are essential. These are linked to kings and influential sponsors, making history a forceful declaration of a different tradition. Post-Gupta works including inscriptions, carita literature, and chronicles follow the same pattern.

Texts highlight how authors interpreted the past. The history and its relationship to the texts' composition period should also be studied. The Romila Thapar says the narrative was revised in the embedded tradition. When different historical writings appeared, updating and changing the text became unnecessary. No longer sacred, texts could be written to confirm or dispute earlier ones.

There can be more than one historical tradition that records identities. A society's prior perceptions may change with time. Historical awareness is important for comprehending a society's culture.

Relevant past events are known to society. It fits society's needs. The form is founded on intellectual