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Evolution of Social Structures in India Through the Ages

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By: Prieti Gupta



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Content

EVOLUTION OF SOCIAL STRUCTURES IN INDIA THROUGH THE AGES

Question Paper—June-2024 (Solved).....	1
Sample Question Paper–1 (Solved)	1
Sample Question Paper–2 (Solved)	1
Sample Question Paper–3 (Solved)	1

<i>S.No.</i>	<i>Chapterwise Reference Book</i>	<i>Page</i>
--------------	-----------------------------------	-------------

BLOCK-1: INTRODUCTION

1. Reconstructing Ancient Society with Special Reference to Sources	1
2. Hunting-Gathering, Early Farming Society, Pastoralism	9
3. Harappan Civilization and Other Chalcolithic Cultures	18

BLOCK-2: CULTURES IN TRANSITION

4. Societies Represented in Vedic Literature	25
5. Iron Age Cultures	33
6. Socio-Religious Ferment in North India: Buddhism and Jainism	40
7. Emergence of Buddhist: Central and Peninsular India	49

BLOCK-3: EARLY HISTORIC SOCIETIES: 6TH CENTURY B.C. TO 4TH CENTURY A.D.

8. Urban Classes: Traders and Artisans, Extension of Agricultural Settlements ..	57
9. Chaityas, Viharas and their Interaction with Tribal Groups	65
10. Early Tamil Society: Regions and their Cultures and Cult of Hero Worship	72
11. Marriage and Family Life, Notions of Untouchability,	79
Changing Patterns in Varna and Jati	

BLOCK-4: EARLY MEDIEVAL SOCIETIES

12. Transition to Early Medieval Societies	86
13. The Problem of Urban Decline: Agrarian Expansion,	93
Land Grants and Growth of Intermediaries	

<i>S.No.</i>	<i>Chapterwise Reference Book</i>	<i>Page</i>
14.	Proliferation and Consolidation of Castes and Jatis	100
15.	Religion in Society.....	107
BLOCK-5 MEDIEVAL SOCIETY-1: HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE RURAL SOCIETY		
16.	Village Community	114
17.	Rural Society: North India	121
18.	Rural Society: Peninsular India	129
BLOCK-6: MEDIEVAL SOCIETY-2		
19.	Clans and Confederacies in Western India	139
20.	Urban Social Groups in North India	147
21.	Changing Social Structure in Peninsular India	157
22.	Socio-Religious Movements	166
23.	The Eighteenth Century Society in Transition.....	179
BLOCK-7 MODERN SOCIETY		
24.	Perception of the Indian Social Structure by the Nationalists and Social Reformers	185
25.	Studying Castes in the New Historical Context	192
26.	Pattern of Rural-Urban Mobility: Overseas Migration	199
27.	Social Structure in the Urban and Rural Areas.....	206
BLOCK-8: SOCIAL QUESTIONS UNDER COLONIALISM		
28.	Colonial Forest Policies and Criminal Tribes	212
29.	Gender/Women Under Colonialism.....	218
30.	Social Discrimination	224
31.	Popular Protests and Social Structures	230
32.	Studying Tribes Under Colonialism.....	237
33.	Social Structures in the Northeast India during the Colonial Period.....	243



**Sample Preview
of the
Solved
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QUESTION PAPER

June – 2024

(Solved)

EVOLUTION OF SOCIAL STRUCTURES IN INDIA THROUGH THE AGES

M.H.I.-106

Time: 3 Hours]

[Maximum Marks : 100

Note: Attempt any five questions. All questions have equal marks.

Q. 1. What are the major sources for understanding ancient Indian history?

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-1, Page No. 1, 'Sources'.

Q. 2. Did the Harappan Social Structure reflect its urban ethos? Discuss.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-3, Page No. 19, 'Social Structure'.

Q. 3. How do we interpret the 'early medieval period' in Indian history? Discuss.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-12, Page No. 89, Q. No. 1 and Q. No. 2.

Q. 4. What was the role and functions of guilds in the early medieval period?

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-8, Page No. 59, 'Guild Structure' and 'Functions of Guilds'.

Q. 5. Discuss the role of the temple in early medieval societies.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-15, Page No. 111, Q. No. 2.

SECTION-II

Q. 6. Comment on the nature of rural elites in medieval north India.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-17, Page No. 121, 'Rural Elites' and Page No. 126, 'Rural Elites'.

Q. 7. How do B.D. Chattopadhyay and Norman Ziegler view the Rajput Classes and Confederacies in Western India? Elaborate.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-19, Page No. 142, Q. No. 1 and Page No. 143, Q. No. 2.

Q. 8. Discuss Caste in the context of colonial India.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-25, Page No. 193, 'Enumerating Castes Under the Colonial Rule' and 'Caste in the Making of Nation'.

Q. 9. What were the main concerns of the socio-religious reform movements of the 19th Century? Elaborate.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-22, Page No. 176, Q. No. 3 and Chapter-29, Page No. 220, Q. No. 1 and Page No. 222, Q. No. 3.

Q. 10. Comment on the social structures of North-East India during the colonial rule.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-33, Page No. 243, 'Introduction', 'Migrants and the Demographic Transition in the Plains' and Page No. 245, Q. No. 1.



Sample
QUESTION PAPER - 1

(Solved)

**EVOLUTION OF SOCIAL STRUCTURES
IN INDIA THROUGH THE AGES**

M.H.I.-106

Time: 3 Hours]

[Maximum Marks : 100

Note: Attempt any five questions. All questions have equal marks.

Q. 1. Using archaeological evidence, how we may distinguish between tribal and state societies?

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-3, Page No. 21, Q. No. 2.

Q. 2. How did the Rajput social structure move from political to social in the early medieval period?

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-19, Page No. 142, Q. No. 1.

Q. 3. Discuss the institution of marriage as understood through various sources.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-11, Page No. 83, Q. No. 3.

Q. 4. How did women of lower castes suffer in Indian Society during 19th century?

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-30, Page No. 227, Q. No. 2.

Q. 5. Discuss the implications of Iron metallurgy in the development of urbanness and state structures.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-5, Page No. 36, Q. No. 1.

Q. 6. Compare Gandhi and Ambedkar's views on caste-oppression.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-25, Page No. 196, Q. No. 5.

Q. 7. Examine the emergence of guilds in this period. What was their structure and organization?

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-8, Page No. 61, Q. No. 2.

Q. 8. How was the cult of Viththala was patronized by the Yadavas?

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-15, Page No. 110, Q. No. 3.

Q. 9. To what extent were the socio-religious movements a protest against the contemporary social structure?

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-22, Page No. 176, Q. No. 3.

Q. 10. Write short notes on the following:

(a) Cult of Hero Worship.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-10, Page No. 75, 'Cult of Hero Worship'.

(b) Rural Elites

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-17, Page No. 122, 'Rural Elites'.

(c) Rig-veda.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-1, Page No. 6, Q. No. 4.

(d) Plain-Hill-Binary.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-33, Page No. 243, 'Plain-Hill-Binary'.

■ ■

Sample Preview of The Chapter

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EVOLUTION OF SOCIAL STRUCTURES IN INDIA THROUGH THE AGES

Reconstructing Ancient Society with Special Reference to Sources

1

INTRODUCTION

The present chapter makes the students familiar with the sources of ancient society. Further, as per need the nature of ancient society is discussed in detail for the help of the students are brought in contact with a kind of historiography to better understand the intelligent interpretation of these valuable sources.

Moreover, in order to achieve the purpose of this chapter, it is divided into five sections and each section is given its due weightage. The introduction basically reflects on the range of sources available. However, there is no denying the fact that these sources are self-explanatory and they do not need the support of other evidences to prove its validity. While utilizing these sources to construct the nature of ancient society, their complexity is also kept in mind. Every possible endeavour has been made to reach at the true colour of the ancient society. The ancient society and its meaning is discussed while utilizing the abundant sources from archaeology to oral traditions. The most important feature of this chapter is that the last section provides us with some satisfactory remarks.

CHAPTER AT A GLANCE

SOURCES

The different sources of history which help us in reconstructing the ancient society are discussed here:

Epigraphy

Epigraphy deals with the study of inscriptions. They are, of course, our most reliable source to know about the nature of society which was prevalent in ancient India. Inscriptions are mainly found on the stone tablets, metal plates, pillars and the walls of caves. From these sources we know a lot about languages of a particular period. Besides, they also throw light on the political and social conditions of the period.

The inscriptions like the edicts of Ashoka, the pillars of Samudragupta and Rudradaman-I are famous for their religious and administrative importance. They tell a lot about the conditions of the relevant society also. Apart from this, some inscriptions are found in

the bilingual form also. The inscriptions found at Delhi and Berhampur are the examples of such bilingual inscriptions. Besides, we have the inscriptions related to the musical rules found in the Pudukottai and those inscribed on a tower at Chittor are related to the treatise on architecture.

The relevant information about a particular historical period is also contained in the inscriptions engraved on metal plates. We learn a great deal of knowledge related to taxes, trade and currency from the Mandasor copper plates, the Sohaura plate from Gorakhpur district, the Ailhole inscriptions of Mahendra-Varman and the Uttiramerur inscription of Cholas. Moreover, these inscriptions also give evidence to the boundaries of kingdoms and empire ruled over by the contemporary rulers. Hence, we cannot deny the fact that the epigraphs are our most reliable sources as they cast a flood of light on the social, political and religious conditions of the ancient society.

Numismatics

They are concerned with the study of coins. The economic situation of a particular period can be judged with the comparison of coins which are generally made of gold, silver and copper. Besides, they are of great importance for preparing the chronology of the historical periods on the study of coins. We can discover the relationship of the native rulers with the distant lands. For instance, the presence of the Roman coins in the sub-continent helps us to establish the contact of the Indian rulers with the Roman Empire. Similarly, we know several remarkable facts related to the Puranic accounts of the Satavahanas from the Jogalthambi coins.

The valuable contents of the coins are the symbol of the prosperity of the empire and at the same time, its wide circulation points to the healthy economic condition of the state. Further, on the basis of the study of coins, we can get some remarkable information about the decay of urban cities, trade and the general state of life. Undoubtedly, these facts are deeply related to life and cast light on the relevant society.

2 / NEERAJ : EVOLUTION OF SOCIAL STRUCTURES IN INDIA THROUGH THE AGES

Archaeology

Among the different sources of history archaeology has a great importance. The term archaeology means the study of the material remains of the past. Buildings, monuments and other material relics are the remarkable parts of archaeology. Besides, pots pottery, seals, skeletal remains etc. form the inseparable parts of archaeology which have been discovered at the various places.

The spades of archaeology have brought some remarkable facts of the historical periods. They have also tried to establish the link between the various regions bearing social importance. The rock cut temples of Ajanta and Ellora demonstrate the existence of sculptures and paintings. Moreover, these caves are also famous for the exquisite beauty and artistic style which the contemporary society was endowed with.

Literature

Our ancient literature is the store house of experiences and the rules prescribed for worship. Literature as a remarkable source consists of the *Vedas*, the *Brahmanas*, the *Aryankas*, the *Upanishads*, the epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, the *Brahashastras* and the *Puranas*. These immortal creations are the most valuable sources to know about the existence of the languages like Pali, Sanskrit, Prakrit. Our Vedas are composed in Sanskrit while the Jain and the Buddhist texts are compiled in Prakrit and Pali. We learn lots of things about the traditions prevalent in the co-temporary society from the Jain and Buddhist literature. Moreover, they cast light on music, dance, architecture, painting and administration of the various kings. In connection with the importance of literature as a reliable source. The *Arthasastra* of Kautilya and the Sangam literature is indispensable. We know that the former is a treatise on the statecraft which the latter is a strong source of information related to life in South India.

It is a fact that literature is the autobiography of a nation and the historical importance which is contained in Indian ancient literature is immensely saturated with the impacts of life.

INTERPRETATION

It is a fact that discussions with open minds gives a vent to the historical problems. Further, we know that the writing of history is not a static process, but certainly a continuous process. While rewriting the history of a particular age, the historians, of course, employ a certain methodology and try to give conclusion a sound base. Similarly, the students of history are not expected to provide any definite conclusion, but they should drive home some suggestive possibilities and they must be based on the sound reading of the evidences. As far as the modern writing of Indian history is concerned, it is nothing but the colonial reconstruction of India's past. Moreover, from the colonial point of view, there are two modes of writing Indian history which have deeply influenced the modern trends of historiography. The systems are as follow:

- (a) The Utilitarian Theory.
- (b) The Oriental Despotism.

Under the Utilitarian perspectives we study the changeless nature of Indian society. But it is also pointed out that by the force of legislation this backward society can be altered. James Mill was the first western scholar who gave force to the negative aspects of Indian society. He, further, divided the Indian history into the Hindu and Muslim periods and tried to incorporate the social cultural and political aspects of Indian society into these divisions. Really, his views better expresses the colonial thoughts. Tragically, the Indian historians adopted his view without analysing the facts and the history of India was expressed through a series of stereo-types rooted in religious identity. Moreover, it so happened that no aspect of society or polity could escape the adverse effects of this colonial interpretation.

On the other hand, the Oriental despotism speaks in favour of the existence of a system of ruling under this governance, a despotic ruler with absolute power is visualized at the top and the self-sufficient villages at the bottom. The most shady picture of this system is that the surplus produced by the villages are appropriated by the despotic ruler and his associates.

Later, more reflections were carried out on the nature of ancient society by the nationalist school of historians as well as the Marxists. They, of course, rejected the view held by the colonialists. We can say that the ancient society of sub-continent began to be analysed in a new light scientifically. Between 1960s and 70s Indian history took a shift from the merely body of information on dynasties and a recital of glorious deeds to the broad study of social forms. In this study focus was concentrated on religious movements, patterns of the economy and cultural articulations. The role of the multiple Indian cultures was discovered in the building of great Indian civilization. Every aspect of Indian culture from forest dwellers, Jhum cultivators, pastoralists, peasants, artisans to the merchants, aristocracies and specialists of ritual and belief was given a room in the reconstruction of ancient Indian society.

**THE ANCIENT SOCIETY:
ANTHROPOLOGICAL READINGS**

The Romans had acquired most of the information related to India between the 6th and 4th centuries B.C. by the Greeks. We also learn a lot from the writings of four men: Scylax of Caryanda who was a Greek officer, was sent by Darius, the ruler of Persia to survey the Indus valley around 515 B.C. Half a century later, Herodotus wrote about India in the histories which express the Persian wars. Ctesias of Cnidus was the critic of Herodotus. His works also help us in our endeavour to understand the ancient society of India. But we are greatly supported by the writings of Megasthenes who was a Greek ambassador to the court of the Mauryas and he lived in the Gangetic plain. Of course, the Indian institutions and customs around 300 B.C. find a remarkable room in his relevant writings. These sources can be relied upon to know about the great past of India.

RECONSTRUCTING ANCIENT SOCIETY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SOURCES / 3

We already know that the existence of society can not be expected at the stage of hunting and gathering foods. It was a strange kind of society. Generally, the units hunted together for a while and dispersed. In such a society no body can hope for permanency in social relationships. However, with the domestication of plants and animals the first settlements of human beings also came to the fore. Hence, the domestication of plants and animals paved the way for the emergence of the tribal worlds.

Of course, the tribal stage of life represented a condition and there were three elements like production of consumption, community ownership and the absence of power marked the conditions of life at this stage. According to Prof. Shereen Ratnasar, a tribe is not just a group of people that shares a common culture, a name, an ethnic identity, and a language/dialect, but more important was even if its members live in dispersed villages as pasture grounds, they believe they are one people because they find their origin to a common ancestor. However, in the tribal world the descent is generally determined by the male line, but there are some tribes like the Khasis who seek their base in the female line.

The common ancestry has several advantages in the tribal world. The members of a tribe are regarded as related to one another by blood. An individual becomes the member of a tribal society by virtue of birth. The resources of nature are held by the groups as a group in trust for future members. They are also inherited from the ancestors as group and hence they are not alienable. Sometimes, a tribe with a large population undergoes the internal divisions and they follow the same pattern of inheritance over the areas where they dwell in. Their inter-relatedness also point to the duties and obligations for which the members of one tribe are responsible for the others in the tribe.

Hence, it can be said that the earlier society was the hunter-gatherers. This society was lacking in any permanent settlement and well defined social relationship. Periodic movements marked their life. However, as the society became more stable, the family emerged as the dynamic unit of the social life and the sense of cooperation became the guiding principle of life. But when agriculture began to be practised, people started settling down at a particular place to cultivate the land. The new pattern of social life encouraged the development of the stable villages. The deep sense of cooperation among the people resulted in the birth of new economic system which further had an immense impact on the social life of the people. In this way, the society was transferred from the stage of hunter-gatherers to the stable village life.

NATURE OF ARCHAEOLOGY

The absence of hard data and scientific precision is the demerits of archaeology. The sub-discipline of history mainly deals with the material remains left by the people who were using them. However, these things cannot be solely relied upon outside of the context in which they are found. Still the historians try

to understand the archaeological data by observing the attributes of excavated materials.

Moreover, these materials cannot be treated as the self-explanatory proofs. Albeit they do point to the existence of some groups in the way the materials are excavated, the historians utilize the other sources like, coins, seals, etc. to give a definite sense to these evidences. Hence, the importance of archaeology greatly depends upon the intelligent corroboration from the other sources. Besides, the richness of material remains may challenge the historians and its proper interpretation may become a difficult task for them. But a balanced interpretation of facts can be arrived at by the historians in the centred of the remains which holds an important point from the historical point of view. For instance, when a typical chalcolithic settlement is excavated, a variety of artifacts are discovered. Besides, pottery, animal bones, grain, burial and a host of other things are also the inseparable products of this excavation. The historians try to analyse these materials in the context in which they are found and give a proper sense to them. Therefore, we need to study these materials intelligently and establish a strong relationship among them to drive conclusion home.

By observing the function of archaeology it can be said that the historians have accepted and are utilizing it as a discipline. They have also developed a certain techniques to use this subject as a pure discipline. Besides, the branches of study like epistemology and historiography have further reinforced the validity of archaeology as a discipline. However, it absolutely depends on the kind of techniques which the historians are using to study the materials remains of the past. Similarly, there is a deep relationship among archaeology, epigraphy and numismatics. Of course, they are interdependent on one another.

TEXTUAL SOURCES

Rig-veda is the earliest of the textual sources. Rig-veda was compiled around 1500-100 B.C.

Rig-veda is a different kind of literature. It is also different from the *Arthasastras* or the *Puranas*. Yaska had lived before Panini (400 B.C.) and compiled the earlier commentary with the text of Rig-veda. However, the present form of the text that we have today has been compiled by Sayana who lived around 1387 A.D.

Rig-veda is the rarest form of earlier textual resources. So, it is not easy to understand Rig-veda. The Vedic language that is Sanskrit, is the vehicle of expression for Rig-veda. Around 1028 hymns in praise of God have been stored in Rig-veda and they serve special purpose. Besides, there are some specific ways prescribed to recite these hymns.

Rig-veda presents a different kind of society. We come to know from this source that it was pastoral in nature. It means that the society had tribal social structure and the cow was revered in such a society. According to Rig-veda, house and the chariot had great importance during the war times. Rig-veda also mentions the existence of Gods like the Indra and Agni.

4 / NEERAJ : EVOLUTION OF SOCIAL STRUCTURES IN INDIA THROUGH THE AGES

Besides, the wealth in the society was measured in terms of the number of cattle that the individual human being had possessed. Hence, Rig-veda unfolds before us the layers of the pastoral culture and the picture of early society that evolved in the sub-continent.

EXERCISES

Q. 1. Discuss the various sources of reading India's past.

Ans. India is placed with the various sources to know about the past. The relevant sources of India can be studied under the headings of epigraphy, numismatics, archaeology and literary texts. These sources are useful in their respective ways. Among them, the historians have accepted the epigraphical sources as the most authentic resources. The epigraphs are inscriptions mostly found on the stone tablets, metal plates, pillars, wall of caves, etc. The edicts of Ashoka, the pillars of Samudragupta and Rudradaman-I are remarkable for religious as well as administrative point of view. Besides, the inscriptions found at Delhi and Berhampur are bilingual in nature and caste light on the position of languages in the area. We have also inscriptions related to musical rules found at Pudukottai and treatise on architecture on the tower of Chittor which could be placed in a special category. Moreover, the Mandasor copper plates, the Sohgaura copper plate from Gorakhpur district, the Aihole inscriptions of Mahendra- verman, the Uttiramerur inscriptions of Chola are best sources to know about the position of trade, taxes and the coinage system of the relevant period. The wide circulation of coins in the reason also helps in determining the boundary of kingdoms. It is a fact that these inscriptions are very remarkable to know about the life lived in the past and the nature of society and economy.

Apart from epigraphy, numismatics are also reliable sources to reconstruct the society which prevalent in ancient India. Various kinds of coins made of gold, silver and copper are found in the different parts of the country. The economic condition of the empire is better expressed through the coins. The presence of the high content of valuable metal in the coins undoubtedly fix the prosperity of the kingdom. Besides, these coins are embossed with some special signs. Sometimes, the rulers are also expressed on these coins bearing the relevant period. Hence, the coins are of great help in solving the chronological issues. Moreover, on the wide circulation of coins we can discover the link between the native rulers with the distant lands. For example, the presence of the Roman coins points to the fact that India had trade relation with the great Roman Empire. Therefore, the value of coins cannot be counted in a little sense.

The material remains of the past have several stories to narrate. We study these remains under a special branch of history known as archaeology. This branch of history which is treated as science concentrates on the remains of historical buildings, monuments and the other things with which the people

of that period were acquainted. Moreover, pots, pottery, seals, skeletal remains have undisputable value to reconstruct the ancient society of India. The spades of archaeologists have dug out several facts related to the ancient society. The similarity which we find in the monuments excavated in India and abroad, of course, has established a strong relationship between these two countries. The rock cut temples of Ajanta and Ellora are fine specimens of archaeology. The paintings and sculptures engraved on its walls express the exquisite beauty of artifacts popular in the respective period. Besides, we cannot deny the historical importance which is contained in them.

The ancient literature of India has some significant value and throws a flood of light on the ancient society. Our ancient literature is, of course, a store house of experiences and rules of worships the *Vedas*, the *Brahmanas*, the *Aryankas*, the *Upanishads*, the epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, the *Brahashastras*, the *Puranas* form the body of our great ancient literature. Besides, we learn several facts of ancient society from the Jain and Buddhist literature. From the language point of view our ancient literature are very remarkable as they better express the popularity of Sanskrit, Pali and Prakrit. Further, these textual sources are our reliable sources to know about dance, painting, music, architecture and the ruling of the empire. The *Arthasastra* compiled by Kautilya is a treatise on statecraft and throws a good light on the administrative system of the Mauryas. In the same fashion, the Sangam literature can be treated as the most dependable source to reconstruct the society which was established in the specific period of South India. Therefore, nobody can deny the fact that India has a strong supply of resources related to the society or social life prevalent in ancient India.

Q. 2. Why is interpretation important? Discuss in the light of the explanation offered above.

Ans. The history of any country changes fast. Rewriting the history of any nation is certainly a continuous process and requires new techniques to solve the historical problems. With regard to their, interpretation with open minds greatly help the historians to arrive at some definite solutions. On the interpretation, moreover, the historians apply not only new methodology, but some new/fresh insights drawn from the various facts known earlier. According to More Bloch the craft of historians lies in their intelligent treatment of the historical issues which can be regarded as a discipline or methodology of the subject. Hence, the historians strict adherence to discipline is the base of interpretation they employ while judging the historical issues. Moreover, the validity of any method applied by the historians is insignificant unless it is tested by the weight of discipline. When the methodology differs basically, the historians prefers to depend upon the common grounds and bring their own insights into interpretation. Therefore, in such a situation the students of history should keep themselves driving home some definite conclusion. But they should prefer