

1

Beginning of The Modern Period



TIME FRAME OF THE PERIOD

The Modern Period in India extends roughly from the middle of the 18th century to the present time.

Though this period covers the history of only about 250 years, revolutionary changes took place not only in India but also in other parts of the world. This period saw revolutions in the USA, France, Italy, Germany, China, Ireland and Russia also.

This period is also significant as the Indian people awoke to their right to freedom. They strove for freedom and unity and finally became independent in 1947. But these two hundred years were of turmoil, tribulation and suffering.

WHY ARE DATES IMPORTANT?

The idea is problematic because historians cannot reach a consensus as to which are the important dates. The discussion of which are the most significant events is a more interesting and worthwhile enterprise than forcing pupils to memorise dates and events. Having said that, chronology is one of the key concepts of the discipline of history. It can help provide part of a structure for children to make sense of the past, but only if they have some real understanding of the events attached to the dates.

It is possible that a few students nowadays can recite the names of kings, queens and their dates. But a survey of school history revealed that many students regarded the subject as both boring and useless. It is important to teach history in a way that interests and engages students and persuades them to believe the importance and relevance of history to the present and the future. History is definitely about changes that occur over time. The concepts of time and change are central to history. Time in History is measured through a conventional system of dates and the importance of dates is that they

allow students to order past events and processes in terms of sequence and duration.

History is important not for the sake of nostalgia but for understanding the causes behind the events. Teaching children merely names, dates and places will in no way help them to truly understand History. They need to understand that ideas have consequences and that History is shaped by philosophy, whether it's good or bad. As we teach our children about History, we need to show them the connective tissue that links events together; how ideas shape history. Discussing historical events and how they came about will help our children gain wisdom and learn how to keep their fingers on the pulse of society.

How Do We Choose Dates?

We must know that a date becomes important if the event associated with it is significant in some way for us. The choice of dates in History has always been subjective, depending on what issues the historian wanted to focus on, what slant he wanted to give to an issue.

For example, the British, wanted that their conquest of India, their administrative policies and achievements should be the focus of history of modern India. So the dates they chose began with the rules of their first Governor-General, Warren Hastings and ended with the last Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten.

As a consequence, Indian History was divided by the British into three periods - Hindu, Muslim and British. This kind of division was started by a Scottish economist and political philosopher, James Stuart Mill in 1817 and it continued to be accepted till India became independent.

Now, Indian History has been divided into three periods: Ancient, Medieval and Modern. This division too has its problems. It is a periodisation

that is borrowed from the West. Modern period has been associated with the growth of all forces of modernity – science, reason, democracy, liberty and equality. Medieval was a term used to describe a society where features of modern society did not exist. As we shall see in this book, under British rule, people did not have equality, freedom or liberty. Therefore, many historians refer to this period as colonial.



Warren Hastings

What is Colonialism?

Colonialism is the extension of a nation's sovereignty over territory beyond its borders by the establishment of either settler colonies in which indigenous populations are directly ruled or displaced. It is essentially a system of direct political, economic and cultural intervention and hegemony by a powerful country over a weaker one. Colonising nations generally dominate the resources, labour and markets of the colonial territory. It may also impose socio-cultural, religious and linguistic structures on the indigenous population.

We will study in this book how the British slowly and surely subjugated the whole of India, how they gained control over Indian economy and society and brought about great and dramatic changes in our values, customs and practices. Above all how they exploited us in everyway for their own benefit.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Let us find out what sources historians use in writing about the last 250 years of Indian history.

- **Administrative Records** were important source of information. The spread of education inspired

many people to write and this created a rich treasure of documents. With the invention of the printing press, there was great growth in the production of books, magazines, newspapers and journals. This provided the basis of what happened during a particular period.

- The **literary sources** include individual writings as well as government records of the British administration. The British believed that the act of writing was very important. Every instruction, investigation, plan and policy had to be clearly written up. This methodology produced important memos, notings and reports.
- The British also felt the need of preserving important documents and letters. Thus record rooms were set up. The Village Tahsildar's Office, the Collectorate, the Commissioner's office and law courts—all had their record rooms. Museums and archives were also established to preserve important records.
- Newspapers are another important literary source. They are very important as they capture the spirit of the time. The newspapers carry news, cartoons, letters, editorials and even advertisements. Many newspapers have kept their old editions in the form of microfilms in archives.
- In the **National Archives of India** built in the 1920s, there are innumerable documents available for the period under study. There are actual proceedings of meetings of government officials, diaries of officials, letters, eyewitness accounts and records of court proceedings.



National Archives, New Delhi

It has a vast space for preserving and protecting all these invaluable records and uses scientific methods for preservation.

The **National Museum in New Delhi** has preserved many coins, paintings, weapons, jewellery

and other artefacts of the period. When New Delhi was built, the National Museum and the National Archives were both located close to the Viceregal Palace. This location reflects the importance of these institutions.



National Museum, New Delhi

The Salarjung Museum in Hyderabad has a collection of over 43,000 art objects and 50,000 books and manuscripts. The collection includes Indian Art, European Art and Children's Art and a rare Manuscript section.



Salarjung Museum, Hyderabad

Surveying and Mapping

Besides literary sources, maps, photographs, paintings, and statutes also constitute an important part of sources.

Surveying became a common practice under the colonial administration. The country had to be properly known before it could be effectively administered. The Survey of India was set up which made detailed maps of towns, villages, mountains and coasts. The first Surveyor General of India was appointed in 1815.

In 1821, H W Voysey made the map of the Hyderabad region. This was the first proper geological map made in India. The year 1851 marked the establishment of the Geological Survey of India. It started with the survey of the Himalayan ranges between the rivers Ravi and the Ganga. The British

also took elaborate steps to map the coastal areas as these were to be their new settlements.

By the early nineteenth century, surveys were being carried out to map the entire country. In the villages, revenue surveys were conducted. The purpose was to know the quality of the soil, the cropping pattern and the topography of the region.

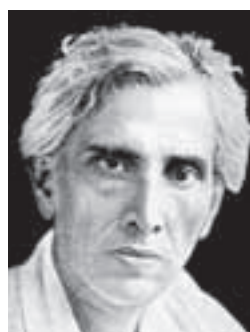
The 1871 India Census was the first comprehensive census of India. The census has been held every ten years following, with the 15th national census held in 2011. The first modern census of India was conducted in 1881. The census helped in preparing detailed records of people in all the provinces of India. Besides revenue surveys, many other surveys took place all over India. For example, botanical surveys, zoological surveys, archaeological surveys, forest surveys etc.

Official Records

These records tell us a lot about what the officials thought, what they were interested in and what they wished to preserve for posterity. These records do not tell us what other people in the country felt or what lay behind their actions.

There are other sources which we find in plenty. These are diaries of people, accounts of travellers, autobiographies, magazines and journals. There were biographies such as that of Gandhi written by William Shire, who spent time with him during the Dandi March. Rassundari Devi was the first woman to write an autobiography; it was in Bengali. There are many short stories, novels which reflect the times in which they were written.

There are also hundreds of travellers accounts. Sarat Chandra Chatterjee and Premchand wrote about the peasants and the downtrodden. The play *Neel Darpan* written by Deenabandhu Mitra was based on the exploitation of workers on indigo plantation.



Sarat Chandra Chatterjee



Premchand

Many books were written on the history of India by Vincent Smith. For the first time books on the economic history of India were written in this period. Many newspapers were published in India

not only in English, but also in Tamil, Gujarati, Bengali, Urdu and Persian. The most famous were Bal Gangadhar Tilak's *Kesari* and *Mirat-ul-Akhbar* of Raja Rammohan Roy.

Points to Remember

- The Modern Period in India extends roughly from the middle of the 18th century to the present times.
- History is definitely about changes that occur over time.
- Time in History is measured through a system of dates.
- The literary sources include individual writings as well as government records of the British administration.
- Another important literary source are the newspapers. The newspapers carry news, cartoons, letters, editorials and even advertisements.

Glossary

- CONSENSUS** : General agreement.
HEGEMONY : Authority over others.
RAVAGED : To wreak havoc on.
TRIBULATION : Suffering resulting from oppression.
TOPOGRAPHY : The art of graphic delineation in detail usually on maps to show their relative positions and elevations.

TIME TO LEARN

TASKS FOR SA

A. Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)

1. The Modern period in India covers the history of last
(a) 250 years (b) 150 years (c) 350 years (d) 450 years
2. Who started the division of Indian History into three periods – Hindu, Muslim and British?
(a) Vincent Smith (b) James Stuart Mill
(c) H.W. Voysey (d) Warren Hastings
3. Which institution in India is responsible for keeping historical documents, records, letters, etc?
(a) National Archives of India (b) National Museum
(c) Salarjung Museum (d) All of these
4. What is the theme of the book 'Neel Darpan' written by Deenabandhu Mitra?
(a) Exploitation of glass workers (b) Exploitation of workers on indigo plantation
(c) Exploitation of tenants by landlords (d) All of these
5. When was the first ever census held in India?
(a) 1871 (b) 1971 (c) 1921 (d) 1951

B. Match the following

1. Warren Hastings (a) Last Viceroy of India
2. Government Records (b) Scottish Economist
3. James Mill (c) New Delhi
4. National Museum (d) Literary Sources
5. Lord Mountbatten (e) First Governor-General

C. State whether the following statements are True or False.

1. The Modern period in India began from the middle of the 18th century.
2. Chronology is not one of the key concepts of the discipline of History.
3. The first map of Hindoostan was prepared in 1785.
4. The Salarjung Museum is located in New Delhi.



D. Short answer type questions.

1. Why is the Modern Period in India significant to the Indian people?
2. How are newspapers important as a literary source?
3. Why do we divide History into different periods?
4. What do we understand by the term colonialism?
5. Why did the British introduce a special kind of mapping?

E. Long answer type questions.

1. Why did the British preserve official documents? Why did they undertake surveying and mapping on a large scale? **[HOTS]**
2. How important are dates in history?

TIME TO DO

TASKS FOR FA

F. Activity

Interview a member of your family and find out about his/her life.

Then divide his/her life into different periods and list out the significant events in each period. Explain the basis of your periodisation.

G. Assignment

Imagine yourself as a historian. You are assigned a task to find out how agriculture changed in a particular tribal region after independence. Mention different ways in which you would gather information.

H. Picture Analysis

Write which period of Indian history do the following pictures/photographs belong to.



1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

LIFE SKILLS

Read these words from a great saint of our country —

Life is a song – Sing it.

Life is a game – Play it.

Life is a challenge – Meet it.

Life is a dream – Realise it.

Life is a sacrifice – Offer it.

Life is a love – Enjoy it.

Which challenge would you like to face in your life? Why? How will you prepare for it?