**TOPIC NO. 5 RELEVANCE, PURPOSE AND OBJECT OF HISTORY**

**RECAP- Definition of History**

The term ‘history’ holds manifold meanings, all of which are connected to the past. E.H. Carr (1961) defines history as a continuous process of interaction between the historian and his facts, and an unending dialogue between the present and the past. As an academic discipline, it refers to the study and interpretation of not only the events of the past but also their consequences.

W.H. Walsh as cited by Osokoya (1996) asserts that the historian aims at a reconstruction of the past which is both intelligent and intelligible. There appears to be no end to definitions of history because many historians will respond differently when seeking to answer such a question. However, it is conceivable and necessary to identify certain features which may be described as essential characteristics of history. Some of such features include its fragmentary nature, its humanistic nature, its termination in the present, its dynamic nature, and the fact that history is factual.

1. **RELEVANCE OF HISTORY**

To study history is to study change: historians are experts in examining and interpreting human identities and transformations of societies and civilizations over time. They use a range of methods and analytical tools to answer questions about the past and to reconstruct the diversity of past human experience: how profoundly people have differed in their ideas, institutions, and cultural practices; how widely their experiences have varied by time and place, and the ways they have struggled while inhabiting a shared world.

Historians use a wide range of sources to weave individual lives and collective actions into narratives that bring critical perspectives on both our past and our present. Studying history helps us understand and grapple with complex questions and dilemmas by examining how the past has shaped (and continues to shape) global, national, and local relationships between societies and people.

The study of history holds relevance to modern societies in manifold ways, including but not limited to the following:

1. **It Makes Students Critical Readers:** Studying history makes students not only enthusiastic but critical readers. As students of history, **you are trained to read and research extensively, critique, and accurately cite and reference sources**. You also learn to ascertain various lines of arguments and biases, the styles of writers, the ranges and kinds of sources used in research works. It also equips students with the ability to think critically and make informed judgments about human situations.
2. **Offers an in-depth understanding of the Society**

Historical studies also help to offer an in-depth understanding of the world and the society in which we live, including providing us with **a sense of memory and identity**. The presence of historical records is what informed our knowledge of **who we are, how we came to be, and how the society in which we live came about.** If we have no history, we have no memory and subsequently no identity. It is through the events recorded in history that identities such as **ethnicity, religion, and nationality are formed**. Through the study and knowledge of history, a sense of belonging, patriotism, national pride, especially inter-group relations with others, can take root and can be used by leaders to inspire people. In this world that is constantly changing, and understanding of socio-political and economic history can serve as coping mechanisms for individuals. Through history, we get to learn about individuals, societies, and institutions that contributed both positively and negatively to national development.

1. **The Past Teaches Us About the Present:**

History empowers us to understand the present through the light of the past, thereby serving as an important trajectory linking the past to the present and the future. In his well-known novel, Nineteen Eighty-Four, Orwell warned, “Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past” (Orwell 1949: 35). This is true because knowledge of history can shape the way we view the present and dictate the answers we offer for present challenges. If we listen to what history has to say, we can come to a sound understanding of the past in a way that can inform our present actions. Livy cited as one of the greatest historians in Roman history, asserts that the study of history is the best medicine for a sick mind; for in history you have a record of the infinite variety of human experience set out for all to see, and in that record, you can find for yourself and your country both examples and warnings; fine things to take as models, base things, rotten through and through, to avoid. Without a sense of history, our ability to relate to contemporary issues will therefore be limited. Other relevance of the study of history includes the fact that it provides unique insight into human nature and human civilization.

1. **It helps to build skills**

Although some persons may feel that a degree in history is a waste, the benefits of studying history surpass what you read in books or learn in the classroom. The study of history provides **students with several transferable, critical, and analytical skills that can be put to use in a wide range of careers/fields** such as archivists, curator, teacher, researcher, media and advertising sector, public sector, editor, translator, non-governmental and humanitarian sectors, to mention but a few. Although history concerns itself with knowledge about the past, it helps to build skills that are relevant in modern societies, making it one of the most versatile disciplines in the humanities.

B. **PURPOSE OF HISTORY**

1. **Encourage the development of cultural literacy**

The most obvious function of history study is to pass on knowledge of the past. One possible reason for doing so is to encourage the development of cultural literacy – having the ‘traditional literate knowledge, the information, attitudes, and assumptions’ required to understand the conversations of our communities. Cultural literacy is also sometimes seen as a tool for **identity building,** and even a necessary precondition for **national belonging.**

2. **Participation in Governance**: In a pluralist democracy (Pluralist democracy is a form of democracy where governments make decisions as a consequence of the interaction between groups and organisations), History provides students with the understanding and skills necessary to participate as citizens within a democratic society.

3. **Cultivate Reasoned Scepticism**: Through history education, students can develop the tools and understanding that allow them to **separate truth from distortion, to cultivate reasoned scepticism**, and to counter the tendency to confirm their own biases. These important benefits for the individual and for wider society render history more vital than ever before, especially in a post-truth era of ‘fake news’ and unprecedented access to information/disinformation.

4. **Equips for the Work place:** Studying history is largely useful and valuable in the workplace, the skills and understanding gained from it (for example, handling evidence, extended writing, and assessing competing interpretations) are not only vital in navigating the modern world, but also highly desirable in the world of work.

**5. Illuminates students’ understanding of the world, past and present.** Focus on the importance of transferable skills and understanding, others have highlighted the importance of developing metahistorical (second-order conceptual) understanding. Students must come to understand the structural basis of the discipline – the concepts of causation, change, evidence and historical accounts – if they are truly to understand history. Others, while recognizing the importance of second-order conceptual understanding, have emphasized the value of understanding substantive (first-order) concepts. Concepts such as ‘slavery’, ‘peasant’, ‘parliament’ or ‘revolution’ require far more than a dictionary definition to be fully understood. History education illuminates and adds meaning to these concepts, and therefore illuminates students’ understanding of the world, past and present.

In addition to learning about the past, it is also argued that we should learn from the past. Chapman highlights three different types of lessons to be taken from the past.

1. The first are deontological lessons about how one should act, behave, think or feel from a moral or ethical point of view (Chapman, 2020: 56). While some consider such lessons not to be historical concerns, as they are not answerable through empirical research (Fordham, 2020), others include the ‘ethical dimension’ among the essential parts of history study (Seixas and Morton, 2013).
2. The second type of lesson that Chapman (2020) identifies are conseqentialist lessons, addressing the prudential lessons from history about what to do (or not) in order to achieve or avoid a particular outcome.
3. The third type are ontological lessons about ‘the nature of humans, or some social or political reality’ (Chapman, 2020: 56), either in general form about how humans behave in a particular situation (such as, for example, the Hobbesian view of human nature) or about particular socio-economic contexts tending to lead to certain behaviours (for example, economic hardship causing political extremism).

Connecting past, present and future as a possible purpose of history study has been the subject of much discussion in recent years. There have been calls for long-term developmental narratives (sometimes referred to as the longue durée) that might help students better understand the challenges that we and our planet currently face, and better consider possible futures. This ability to orient yourself in time, by understanding your place within a past–present–future continuum, can be described as **historical consciousness**. A final purpose, often overlooked in the relevant literature, is simply its **aesthetic value**. The potential of the subject to move us, to inspire us, or to make us feel some sense of awe, should not be ignored.

# C. OBJECT OF WHAT IT IS, PERIODS THAT IT STUDIES

The **object of study of history:** It is the past of human beings, especially the transcendent events for humanity, including the prehistoric and historical period, after the appearance of writing.

Through scientific methods, history analyzes everything related to the past of all human beings and all the processes that these entail.

The main objective of the study of history is **not simply to record facts and actions, but to try to understand past situations in their context and their causes and consequences,** in order to better understand the present.

History is, then, both the facts and the study of them, and it is constantly being built because the past is expanded at each moment.

## ****i. The object of History****

The main object of history is **to focus on the evolution and transformation of societies over time**, and thereby interpret everything that has happened to humanity, as well as its causes and consequences.

Historians are the professionals who, through methods, manage to develop multiple types of research, inspired by different philosophical currents and focused through different methodologies.

When research is carried out, a fraction of universal history is taken and analyzed, which is properly the work of the historical researcher.

**Historical studies can be oriented in many ways.** All sciences and studies have their history, so it is common to find experts in history of certain areas of thought.

The field of work of historians is vast, since the investigations that are carried out are completely adaptable to the latent needs that they have and the interest that they want to materialize in a work.

**In what is understood by history as the period of time, there is a consensus in dividing it into four large stages.**

The story begins when prehistory ends, with the appearance of writing, in the fourth millennium BC, and protohistory (the period between prehistory and written history) begins, which is quickly replaced by the first age, the Ancient.

From there, the Middle Ages, Modern and Contemporary would continue. This classification has been criticized by pointing out that it can only be applied to Western history and not to that of Eastern civilizations.

## ****ii. Periods that history studies****

### ****Prehistory- also known as**** pre-literary history the vast period of time before written records or human documentation

The science popularizer Carl Sagan extrapolated the entire history of the universe, from the Big Bang (The big bang is how astronomers explain the way the universe began. It is the idea that the universe began as just a single point, then expanded and stretched to grow as large as it is right now—and it is still stretching ) to the present, into a calendar year for teaching purposes, with midnight on January 1 as the time when the Big Bang occurred.

The appearance of the hominids would only be on December 30, which was what started prehistory, more than two million years ago.

Prehistory has been classified into four major stages: Paleolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic, and the Metal Age.

**In the Paleolithic,** also known as the Stone Age, humans knew and handled fire and began to carve stone. Humans began to gather in hordes and develop language.

**The Mesolithic** was a process of transition to the Neolithic, where hunting, fishing and gathering began to be replaced by agriculture and livestock in small portions. In addition, the groups began to settle in villages and leave nomadism behind.

Subsequently, the Metal Age followed, where humans began to develop technical activities such as plowing or metal processing, that is, metallurgy.

Among the most worked metals at this time were copper, bronze and iron. The villages began to become large towns that came together and formed civilizations, with religion and state.

Then the writing arose and the story began.

### ****Old age****

In its beginnings, protohistory was presented, where writing began to consolidate in a large part of the globe. The beginning of the Ancient Age is understood with the constitution of civilizations, especially in the Near East.

Some of the first were Mesopotamia (Assyria and Babylonia) and Ancient Egypt. The indicative of these civilizations was the development of cities with temples and governments that dominated territories encompassing several cities and towns.

Also in this age arose the culture that became the cradle of Western civilization – ancient Greece. Subsequently, the Roman civilization arose, which absorbed the Greek.

From these empires the concepts of democracy and citizenship were born, in addition to all the approaches in all the sciences made by philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle.

In other latitudes, the Persian civilization was consolidated. Polytheistic religions also arose, and Judaism, which is an Abrahamic religion.

### ****Middle Ages****

The all-powerful Roman Empire was divided into two: the Western and the Eastern. In turn, in the Western Empire the great European monarchies began to emerge, which imposed a feudal system.

Christianity stopped being persecuted and became the official religion of the new governments, which imposed it by force.

The church became the most powerful institution in this historical period, followed by monarchs and feudatories. A society with very determined classes was imposed.

This age ends with the fall of the Eastern Roman Empire or Byzantine Empire, in the fifteenth century, at the hands of the Ottoman Empire, as well as with the discovery of America on October 12, 1492.

### ****Modern age****

Modernity clearly begins with the amplification of the world. Although the Middle Ages were an eminently European process with the emergence of the Modern Age, the world began to be an entity communicated between all its continents.

This fact is reflected especially with the conquest by the European empires of the American continent, bringing with it the imposition of Western civilization in most of the continents.

In addition to this, in the Modern Age the European colonial empires had their maximum splendor, but at the same time they suffered a vertiginous decline at the end, which would end up leaving them with residual colonies in America.

At this stage in history, art was strongly expressed in periods such as the Renaissance and the Baroque. The Church suffered a break with the Protestant Reformation of Martin Luther, which divided Europe.

The culmination of this age is usually placed with the end of absolutism in France, with the French Revolution, although there are also authors who relate it to the independence of the United States or the emergence of the Industrial Revolution.

### ****Contemporary age****

It is the age that is currently underway. The national states expand throughout the planet, originating the independence of the American nations and later, in the 20th century, of the African ones.

It is also the period of the constitution of the different nations and the affirmation of nationalities.

The world is experiencing a demographic explosion, promoted mainly by the economic success brought by the Industrial Revolution and the subsequent use of products such as oil.

Electricity is consolidated throughout the globe and a transition from the countryside to the city begins. In the 20th century, two world-scale wars took place.

The first, from 1914 to 1918, pitted the Austro-Hungarian, German and Ottoman empires against France, Russia, Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States, among others, and which resulted in the latter winning, redrawing the European map.

In 1939 the Second World War took place, which confronted a Nazi Germany, a believer in the superiority of the Aryan race, which allied itself with fascist Italy and the Empire of Japan against the Allies: the United States, the United Kingdom, France and the Union. Soviet.

With the victory of the Allies, the United States and the Soviet Union would become the world’s two superpowers, leading a space race that reached the Moon, and maintaining a risk of nuclear war until the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991.

In the 21st century, the main problems on a global scale are due to the rise of terrorism as the main threat to the stability of nation-states, the consolidation of the capitalist model and the rise of emerging powers such as China.