

## Introduction

- People often say “History is all about memorising dates” — but this is only partially true.
- History is actually about understanding how things changed over time.
- We ask historical questions like:
  - When did tea-drinking begin in India?
  - When were railways introduced?
  - How did people get news before newspapers?

✓ History = Understanding “before” and “after”.

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## How Important Are Dates?

- In earlier history books, rulers and battles were the main focus.
- Historians would note:
  - When kings were crowned
  - When wars happened
  - When kings died

✓ Dates helped build chronology of such events.

But now, historians study:

- How people lived
  - What they ate
  - How towns and markets developed
  - Cultural and social changes
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## Which Dates Are Considered Important?

- Depends on what is being studied.
- If we focus on economy, society or people's lives — we need new sets of dates.

► Example:

- British historians focused on Governors-General like Warren Hastings to Lord Mountbatten.
- Every chapter = One ruler's achievements

But that left out the lives of ordinary people, so historians today choose new themes → new dates become important.

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## How Do We Periodise?

- James Mill (Scottish thinker) wrote A History of British India (1817).
- He divided Indian history into 3 periods:
  - Hindu
  - Muslim
  - British

Problems with Mill's periodisation:

- Focuses only on religion of rulers
- Ignores diversity of society
- Shows pre-British period as dark and uncivilised

⚠ Mill believed British rule was progressive and necessary for India's growth.

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► Modern Historians' Approach:

- Usually divide Indian history into:
  - Ancient
  - Medieval
  - Modern

But even this has issues:

- “Modern” in Europe means: science, freedom, equality, progress
- In India under British rule — there was inequality, no freedom, and exploitation

✅ So, many historians prefer the term “Colonial” —

When one country subjugates another and brings political, economic, cultural changes.

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## What is Colonial Rule?

- British came to India → defeated kings, collected taxes, exported goods, imposed laws
- Also changed:
  - What people wore
  - What they ate
  - What they valued

✅ These changes happened differently for different groups of people.

Hence, this book is called Our Pasts (plural) — because every group had a different experience.

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# 📖 How Do We Know About the Past? (Sources)

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## 📁 1. Official Records

- British believed in recording everything in writing:
  - Instructions
  - Letters
  - Investigations
  - Policies
- All departments had record rooms.
- Archives & museums were built (e.g. National Archives, New Delhi)

✅ These documents tell us what officials thought — not what common people experienced.



*National Archives of India came up in the 1920s. When New Delhi was built, the National Museum and the National Archives were both located close to the Viceregal Palace. This location emphasised the importance these institutions had in British imagination.*

## 🌍 2. Surveys

- British carried out many surveys to understand India:
  - Mapping the land
  - Revenue surveys
  - Census (every 10 years)
  - Botanical, zoological, archaeological and forest surveys

▶ Purpose: Know the land to rule it better.

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## ✍️ 3. Non-Official Sources

- Diaries of people
- Autobiographies
- Letters
- Newspapers
- Books sold in local markets
- Poems, novels, stories by reformers & writers

✅ These show how Indians viewed the British and how they lived daily life.

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🚫 **Limitation:** These were all written by literate people — peasants, tribals, labourers had no written records.

✅ **But by studying newspapers, images, folk songs, and oral traditions — historians can still learn about them.**

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## 🎨 **Visual Sources**

- Images & paintings were also tools of power.
- Example: Picture of Brahmans offering books to Britannia (British rule shown as protector of Indian culture).

▶ After the 1857 Revolt, British published illustrations calling rebels greedy and brutal.

✅ Images reflect how the creators viewed events — they must be studied carefully.

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## 🧠 **Activities (As per book):**

1. **Fig.1: Brahmans offering books to Britannia**
  - 👉 Reflects how British saw themselves as superior — taking control of Indian knowledge
2. **Fig.2: Lipton Tea Advertisement**
  - 👉 Shows how markets were created using royal imagery — to promote British products in India
3. **Fig.3: Warren Hastings Image**
  - 👉 Shows glorification of British rulers — ignores Indian resistance
4. **Activity – Periodising someone's life (e.g. your mother's)**
  - 👉 Helps understand how we break history into phases and what events we choose as important
5. **Source 1 vs Source 2**
  - 👉 Source 1: Military report (dry, factual)
  - 👉 Source 2: Newspaper (emotional, critical tone)
  - Newspapers give more human perspective than official files