



# Historical Time

History Module

Lecture 2

Introduction to the Human Sciences

Spring 2026



# Outline of Lecture

- What Time Period Does History Inhabit?
- What Are Historical Periods?
- Common Markers of Historical Time.
- How Do We Measure Flow of Time?

# Past is (not) History

- **Past**: Refers to Time which has elapsed
  - Everything that has happened prior to the present is Past
  - Amorphous; Hold-All Category
- **History**: Refers to a Story/Narrative About Something in the Past
  - Beginning and End
  - Common Thread or Anchor to the Narrative: “History of...”
- Past Exists, History is Created by Humans from the Past

# Time Period of History

- History is the Story of Human Society
- Classical Definition: Story of “Civilisation”
  - Settled Life
  - Writing/Script
  - Cities and States
- Pre-History: Society Before Civilisation
  - Mobile Life
  - Oral Knowledge
  - Rudimentary Arts and Creations
- Broadened Definition of History
  - Can we really make a distinction between these two?

# Periods of History

- Historians always divide their Narrative into Periods
  - Pre-History
  - Ancient
  - Medieval
  - Modern
- Based on conception of time as an arrow, and not a cycle, or spiral.
- Christian Periodisation; But Secularised

# Common Markers of Historical Time

- B.C. and A.D.
  - Before Christ, Anno Domini
  - 252 B.C.    A.D. 252
- Secularised to BCE and CE
  - Before Common Era, Common Era
  - 252 BCE    252 CE
- Circa c.
  - Approximate date (c. 250 CE)
- In B.C. / BCE years count down
- In A.D. / CE years count upwards
- Decade = 10 years; Century = 100 years; Millennium = 1,000 years

# Historical Eras and Ages

- Pre-Historic Period
  - Stone Age
    - Paleolithic (from c. 2,500,000 BCE to c. 3,000 BCE)
    - Mesolithic (from c. 25,000 BCE to c. 2,000 BCE)
    - Neolithic (from c. 10,000 BCE to c. 500 BCE)
- Historic Period
  - Chalcolithic Age
    - From c. 3,500 BCE to c. 1,000 BCE: Indus Valley Civilisation and beyond
  - Bronze Age
    - From c. 3,000 BCE to c. 800 BCE: Indus Valley and Early Vedic
  - Iron Age
    - From c. 1,800 BCE to c. 1000 CE: Late Vedic Age Period / First Empires

# Historical Eras and Ages

- **Ancient Period**

- Indus Valley Civilisation; Vedic (Early and Late) Age; Mahavira and Buddha; Mauryan Empire; Saka and Hun Empires; Kushan Empire; Gupta Empire; Harshvardhan...
- Sangam Period; Cholas, Chera, Pandyas; Satvahanas; Chalukyas...

- **Medieval Period**

- Another Long List with regional variations

- **Modern Period**

- 1757: Coming of the British (Battle of Plassey)
- Mughals, Marathas, Mysore, Hyderabad.... All continued



The background of the slide is a collage of various clock faces. Some are large and prominent, while others are smaller and partially obscured. The clock faces have different designs, including Arabic numerals, Roman numerals, and some with red accents. The overall tone is dark and moody.

# What Decides an Historical Era

- Technology
- Social Organisation
- Strength and Spread of Empire / State
- Most of these periods broken into “Early” “Middle” “Late”
- Different Regions, sub-regions have varying periods / eras

# Problems With Historical Periods

- **Universal Categories**
  - Ancient – Medieval – Modern
- But History of something **specific**, something **local**
  - History is of a Place, Person, Dynasty, Event, Process....
- Problems of **Fit**
  - “Ancient” of China, India, Rome, France, Britain may not be aligned
  - What about History of USA? Or Pakistan?
- After “**Modern**” What?!
  - Modern is often seen as a universal period globally

# Historical Time

- Historical Time is confusing
  - Beginning and end of Indus Valley Civilisation = Two Millennia
  - Emperor Ashoka is closer to us than the establishment of Harappa / Mohenjodara cities
  - Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt is closer to us than the Pharaohs who made the Pyramids
  - Satvahana Empire lasted from c. 200 BCE to c. 300 CE = 500 years
  - 500 years before today there was no Mughal Empire in India
- Large chunks of time are difficult to imagine
  - Spend time consciously thinking of historical time and periods
- Chronology is the Spine of the Historical Narrative
  - Chronology is placing events in their order of occurrence in time
  - Assumes an arrow of time