

# Inductive and Deductive Methods of Studying History

Introduction to Human Sciences  
History Module: Lecture 1

Aniket Alam  
2019

# What do historians do?

We shall try to answer this question over the next four classes

- **Lecture 1:** Two broad approaches to studying History: Inductive and Deductive. Two most influential “schools” of history in this format: Annales for Inductive and Marxism for Deductive.
- **Lecture 2:** The importance of Fact; “history” of the fact, how is it verified and corroborated, what can it tell us and what it can’t; the play between fact and interpretation. Two Visions of History: Progress v/s Decline.
- **Lecture 3:** Development of the discipline of history in India; older ideas of *itihas*, mythology, ballads and oral traditions, the new history of the British with Orientalism and Liberalism as its defining strands, the discovery of India’s past, the institutions of India’s history research.
- **Lecture 4:** The main features of India’s history through looking at some things like Stone, River, Iron, Horse, Cow, Rice, Cloth, Spices, Labour; (this is an illustrative list). How India’s national movement imagined a nation out of an empire.

# Deductive Method

- From first principles to facts
  - Divine Law => Action
  - Theory => Practice
- How to determine validity of *a-priori* assumption (first principle)
  - Facts to suit the theory (cherry picking)
- Modern method
  - Verifiability
  - Falsifiability
- Marxism, Structuralism, Systems Theory
  - Danger of Determinism

# Marxism

- Materialism
  - Matter primary
  - Ideas secondary
  - Matter in motion
- Dialectics
  - Reality composed of opposites and their relation
  - Thesis -> Anti-thesis -> Synthesis
  - An upward spiral
- Labour
  - Role in development from Ape to Man
  - Embodies the synthesis of matter and idea
  - All human achievements are based on labour; including thought

# Dialectics in History

- Emergence of contradictions
- Base - superstructure
- Surplus (importance of economy and production)
- Class struggle
- History as the resolution of contradictions in society created by the emergence of surplus
  - Slave Society -> Feudalism -> Capitalism -> Communism
- Unprecedented explanatory power
  - Unlike classical deductive theories, this one was not based on divine laws and was amenable to verifiability and falsifiability

# Inductive Method

- From facts to generalisations to theory
- No certainty, only degrees of
  - Probability
  - Possibility
- No *a-priori* assumptions
  - Moves from observable facts to general condition
- Cause and effect are not pre-determined
- Conformation bias, available information bias
  - Difficulty of explanation

# Annales History

- Total History
  - Nothing in the world is outside history
- Quantitative History
  - Build generalisations on large amounts of data and information
- Mentalite
  - Identify the mental architecture of the past
- New conception of time
  - Three rhythms of time move in tandem

# New Sources for historical facts

- Expanding the Historical Archive
- Geography and Climate
- From other disciplines and sciences
- No single cause
  - Not given a priori but has to be ascertained for each instance
- Marc Bloc, Lucien Febvre, Fernand Braudel, Jacques le Goff, Emmanuel le Roy Ladurie



# History of the Fact

Introduction to Human Sciences

History Module: Lecture 2

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# What is a Fact?

- A thing that is known or proved to be true
- Information used as evidence or as part of a report or news article
- Synonyms: Reality, Certitude, Actuality
- Antonyms: Lie, Fiction
- The truth, without any interpretation
- A good fact is devoid of interpretation, perspective, opinion....
- A good interpretation, opinion, perspective should be based on facts!

BUILDING BLOCKS OF KNOWLEDGE

# Importance of the Fact

- Whether Deductive or Inductive, knowledge about the world has to be tested on reality, on data which has certitude, actually happened events
- Reason is also dependant on Facts

# Birth of the Fact: Ancient Greece

- *Historia* : Inquiry, Finding out
- Herodotus
  - Wrote on the history of the wars between Greece and Persia
  - Collect evidence, ask witnesses, systematic narrative of events
- Thucydides
  - History of the Peloponnesian Wars (between Athens and Sparta)
  - Evaluate evidence, neutral position, cause and effect
  - Realism : Evaluate behaviour and outcomes by emotions and self-interest
- Fact based History was forgotten in favour of Revelation

# Fact rises again

Ibn-e-Khaldun (1332 – 1406)

- *Kitab al-Ibar*
  - History of the world
  - Muqadimmah (Introduction)
- Principles to evaluate evidence
- Categorised errors and mistakes in historical investigations
  - Partisanship, beliefs, lack of context, lack of knowledge
- History is a “New Science” to gain knowledge

# Fact wins the Battle

Edward Gibbon (1737 – 1794)

- Made distinction between Primary and Secondary sources
- Primacy of Primary sources for the historian
- Historian's aim: Objectivity;
- But also a lesson from history
- Church and Christianity secularised
- Massive backlash
- *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (b/w 1776-88; 6 vols)

# Fact is Crowned King!

Leopold von Ranke (1795 – 1886)

- Facts, and only Facts
- Banish Interpretation
- Only Primary Source
  - Interrogate the source: how, where, who
  - Builds credibility
- History of the Catholic Popes: “tranquil, objective treatment”  
“without rancour, without enthusiasm”

# How to find Facts

## QUESTIONING THE SOURCE

- When was the source (written or unwritten) produced?
- Where was it produced?
- By whom was it produced?
- From what pre-existing material was it produced?
- In what form was it produced?
- What is the evidential value of its contents?



# Empire of Interpretation Strikes Back!

- Facts are not value free
- Facts do not exist outside of our seeing
- Our act of seeing, aka recognising, creates the fact
- What is fact made up of (constituted by)
  - Smaller facts, or
  - Perspective, Interpretation, Seeing
- Which facts we select, out of the universe of all facts, is determined by our assumptions and interpretations, and in turn determines our thinking

# What then is a Fact?

- There can be no Neutral, Objective Fact
- An act, thing, event is recognised as such only within the world of meaning created by humans
- Thus, all facts are created; constituted by human actions
- That does not mean facts do not exist
- Rather, facts exist as human creation
- Fact can be objective and impartial
- Possible to distinguish between fake, erroneous and genuine Fact

# How to Find and Preserve Facts

- Evidence which can be crossed checked
  - Methods which can be scrutinised
  - Open and accessible standards of verifiability and falsifiability
- 
- Facts change
  - Importance of Facts change
  - New Facts emerge and old Fact die

# What is History?

“History is preoccupied with fundamental processes of change.”

~ E. H. Carr, *What is History*

A CONTINUOUS, SYSTEMATIC NARRATIVE OF SIGNIFICANT PAST EVENTS

- Facts:
  - What happened? When did it happen? How did it happen? Where did it happen? Who was involved?
- Interpretation:
  - Why did happen?

# Two Visions of History

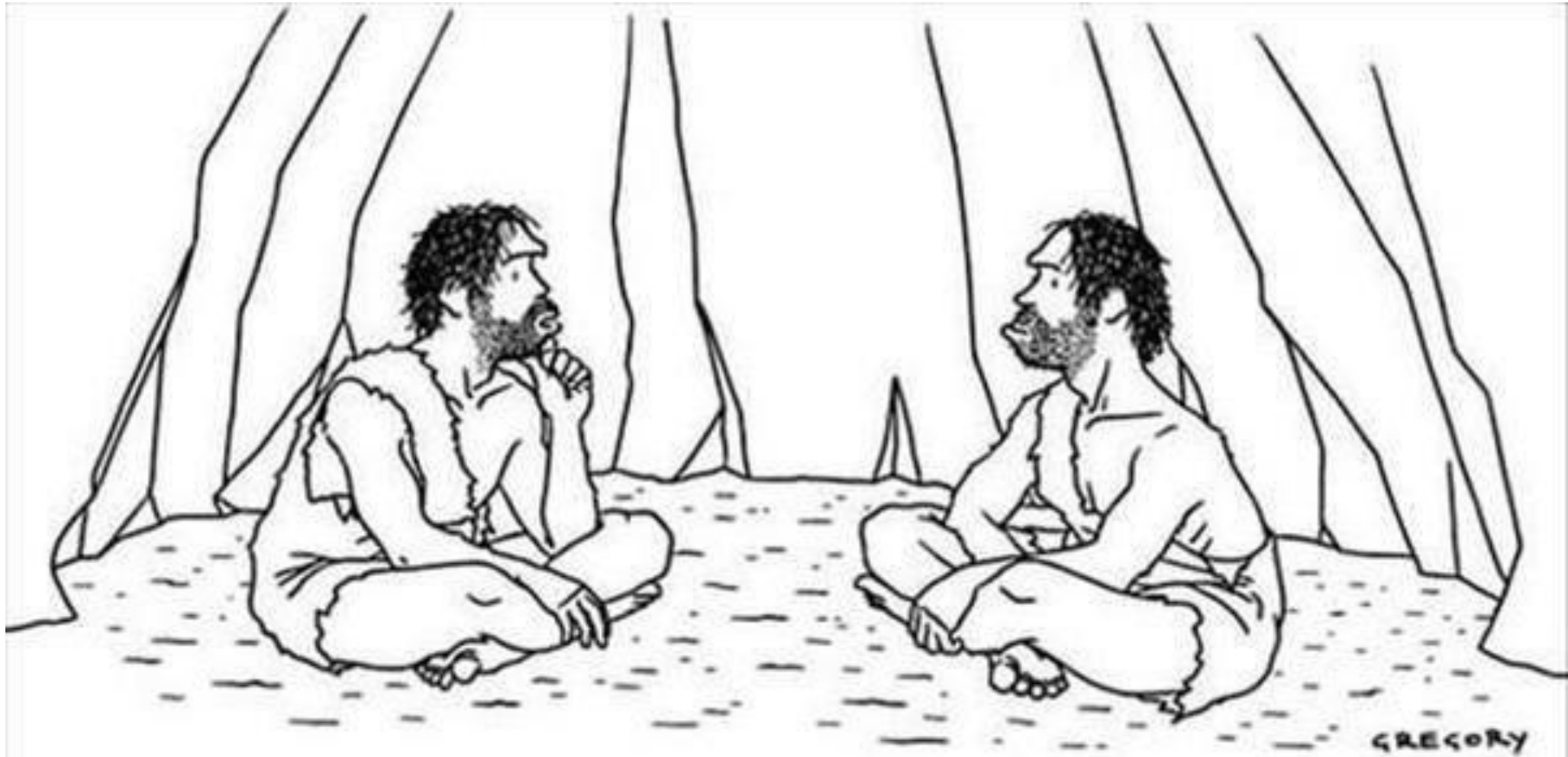
- THE STORY OF DECLINE

- Golden Age in the Past
- Human society is disintegrating and becoming corrupt
  - Non-scientific but aligned with the idea of entropy

- THE STORY OF PROGRESS

- Enlightenment as Destiny
  - Human progress Inevitable
- Based on science as method but contrary to idea of entropy

# Decline or Progress



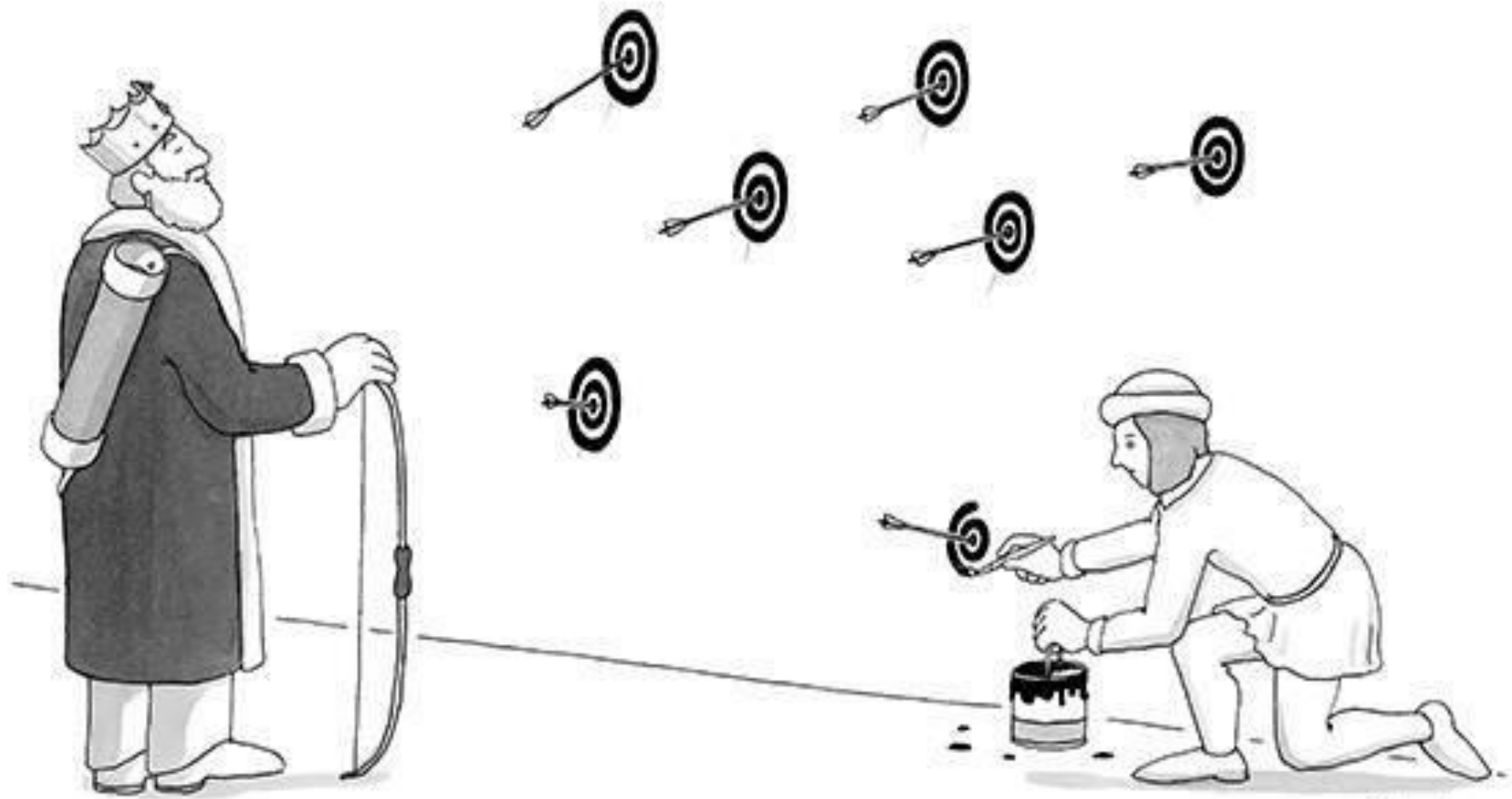
*"Something's just not right—our air is clean, our water is pure, we all get plenty of exercise, everything we eat is organic and free-range, and yet nobody lives past thirty."*

# Fake Sources



*"It doesn't mean a thing, but boy, will it drive them  
crazy a thousand years from now!"*

# Deliberate Errors





Choose  
your  
Fact



# Tragedy of the Historians



**“Those who don’t study history are doomed to repeat it.  
Yet those who *do* study history are doomed to stand by  
helplessly while everyone else repeats it.”**

# History in India

Introduction to Human Sciences

History Module: Lecture 3

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2019

# Itihas

- The Myth of the Eternal Return
- Revealed, not rationally investigated
- Shruti : Oral traditions; Authoritative but Authorless
  - **Vedas, Upanishad**
- Smriti : Written; Author known but text derivative, inexact
  - **Mahabharata, Ramayana, Puranas, Dharmashastras, literature**
- Massive cosmological cycles; no distinction b/w human and divine

# Buddhist Traditions

- Original state
- Process of decay : desire (food and clothes); attachment (property); family; government
- King elected to maintain order; pay taxes for this
- Cosmological but republican influences (elements of modern theories of history and politics)  
~~ ~~
- FEW TRADITIONS OF HISTORY WRITING DIED OUT AND MERGED INTO MYTHOLOGY
- TWO HISTORICAL TRADITIONS REMAINED
  - FAMILY GENEALOGIES AND COURT CHRONICLES

# Orientalists

- Thought highly of Indian society and economy
- Conquerors but eager to know about India's philosophies and history
- Collected Material Artefacts, Texts, Oral Traditions, and Customs
- Asiatic Society formed in 1784 at Fort William Calcutta by William Jones
  - "...enquiries will be extended to whatever is performed by man or produced by nature."
- H H Wilson, 1808, Indians made members
- Asiatic Society Bombay, 1805
- Dominant perspective till 1830s.

# Liberals and Utilitarians

- James Mill, *The History of British India*, 1806 to 1817
- Never set foot in India, knew no India language, *thus* claimed objectivity
- Thomas Babington Macaulay
  - Minutes on Education
  - Legal Code
- Argued Indian society and culture was brutish, savage, backward
- British had a civilising mission: Make India Modern
- Based on a vision of equality of (hu)man

# British View

- PERIODISATION: Hindu, Muslim, British
  - Hindu India from beginning of history to Muslim invasions
  - Muslim India from 10<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> centuries
  - British India as modern and progressive
- 1857: Victory of Conservative Liberalism
  - Entrenched a deep fear of Indians AND sense of superiority
  - Gazetteers and Settlement Reports
  - Census 1872; then 1881
- THREE AXIS: Religion, Race (Caste) and Language



# Important Milestones

- Brahmi and Kharoshti script
  - James Prinsep
  - Devanampriya Piyadasi
- Archeological Survey of India (1861)
  - Alexander Cunningham
  - Buddhist traditions, Ashoka, Khajuraho
- History Departments in Calcutta and Bombay University
  - Indian History and “Indology” in English, German and other Western Universities
- Mohenjodaro and Harappa
  - Known since 1856-7, bricks used for building railways
  - 1921-22: full discovery of the two cities
- National Archives of India
  - Imperial Records Department (1891)

# Main “Schools”

- British / Colonial
- Nationalist
- Marxist
- Subaltern

## Differences

- **PERSPECTIVE ON HISTORY: WHAT HAPPENED, HOW AND WHY**
- **METHOD OF DOING HISTORY: WHICH SOURCES, THEIR INTERPRETATION**

# British / Colonial History of India

- Claimed there was nothing called India or Indian
  - Convenient geographical moniker
  - Too many disparities, no unity
  - Empire, not a nation or culture
  - Each community, group, region and caste had separate history
- Identified Oriental Despotism, and Village Community
- Claimed British Rule was *agent* of change as well as unification
- Claimed Indians do not want independence but place at high table
  - Only the elites and not the masses
  - Not nationalism but self-interest; “seditious babu”
- “Cambridge School”
  - John Gallagher, Anil Seal, Gordon Johnson, P J Marshall, D K Fieldhouse

# Nationalist History

- India had History and a tradition of History writing
- Stressed the greatness of UNIFYING EMPIRES...
  - Ashoka, Gupta, Kushan, Mughal
- ...Unifying ideologies
  - Vedas, Buddhism, Shankaracharya, Bhakti
- Sought CAUSES FOR CONQUEST
  - by British or Mughals depending on political tilt
- Worked to write ONE Indian history
- Romesh Chunder Dutt; Jadunath Sarkar
  - Mughals, Rajputs, Shivaji, Bengal, Economic History, Sanskrit sources
- Jawaharlal Nehru
  - Discovery of India
- Romila Thapar, Bipan Chandra

# Marxist Historians

- D. D. Kosambi
  - Materialist analysis
  - Laid down the scientific tools for studying history
  - Example of how to use physical and literary sources
  - Attempted to question British periodisation
- R. S. Sharma, Irfan Habib, Sumit Sarkar...
- Identified economic and social foundations of Indian History
- Fore-grounded class struggle and role of common people
- Freedom Struggle against both British Rule and Indian oppressors
- India became a nation in and through its freedom struggle

# Subaltern Studies

- Post-Structuralist, Post-Colonial
- Influenced by Antonio Gramsci, Edward Said, Michel Foucault
- Based their interpretation on the Elite – Subaltern divide
- Read sources “Against the Grain”
  - From Absences, Silences, What is sought to be denied or erased
- Stressed “Autonomous world” of the peasant and tribal (also women, lower castes...)
- Claimed “Indigenous World-view”; non-colonised
- 1981, *Subaltern Studies* Volume I (total 13 till now)
- Spread from India to the world
- Ranajit Guha, Partha Chatterjee, Gyanendra Pandey, Shahid Amin, David Arnold...

# Term Paper Assignment (History)

1. Explain in your own words how the historian E.H. Carr explains the relation between fact and interpretation?  
- E. H. Carr, *What is History?* Chapters 1, 2, 3.
2. Read Thomas Babington Macaulay's "Minute on Indian Education" written in 1835. Explain in your own words what you agree with and what you do not.  
[http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00generallinks/macaulay/txt\\_minute\\_education\\_1835.html](http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00generallinks/macaulay/txt_minute_education_1835.html)

Answer any one of these in about 1,000 words and submit by 15 Feb 2019, 11.59 pm

# Some Historical Milestones

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History Module: Lecture 4

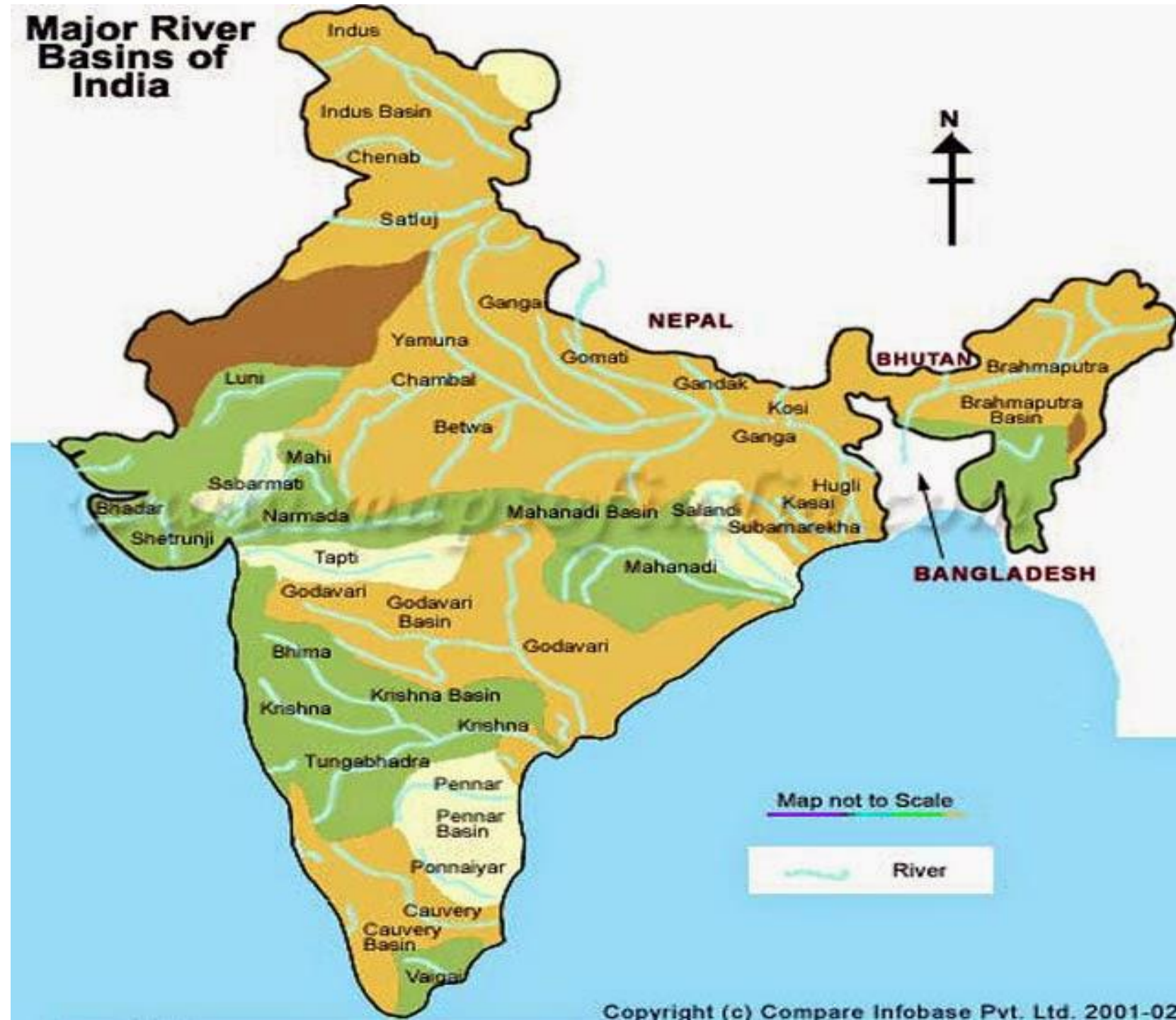
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# River Basins

- Each river basin sustained life
- Self Contained
- Not just water
- Historical units
- Divided by
  - Mountains
  - Forests





# Mountains and Rivers

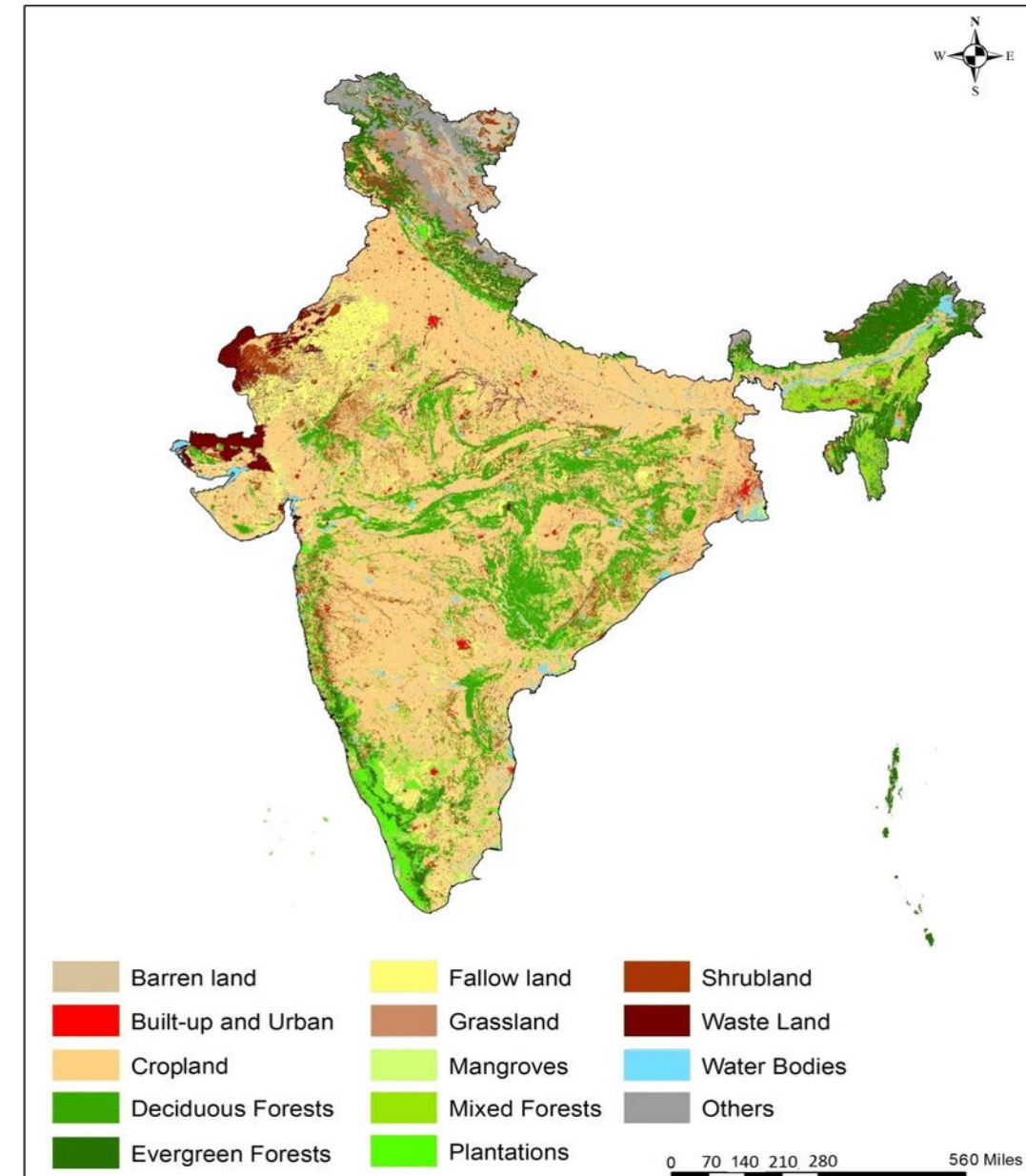
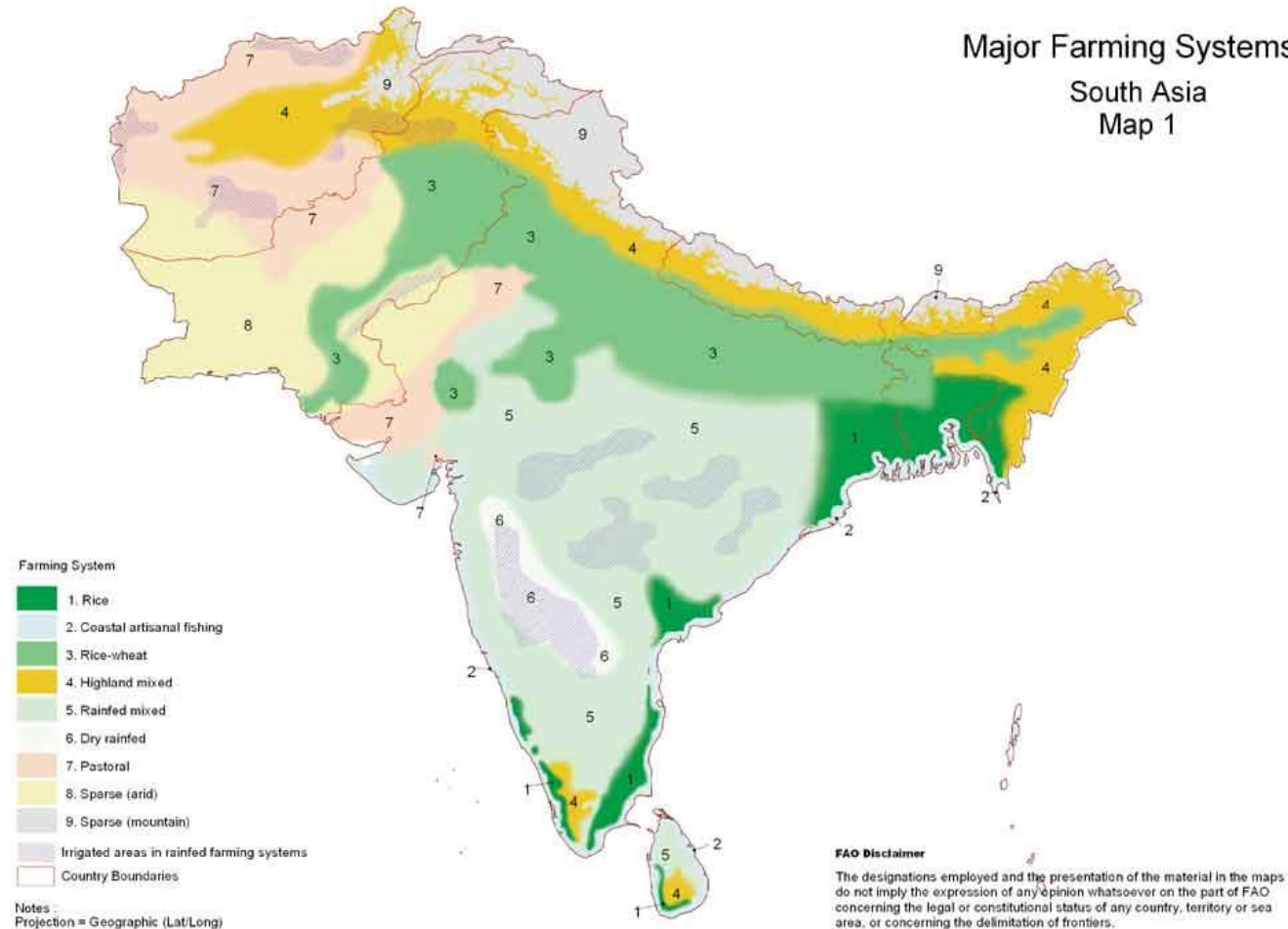
- Notice the size of the Indus and Ganges plains
- River Valleys sustained stable agriculture, manufacturing, trade, cities, and States
- Mountains a barrier to State formation





# Forest, Agriculture and Land Use

Major Farming Systems  
South Asia  
Map 1



# River, Field, Forest, Mountain

- Conflict between Forest and Field (Agriculture)
- Complementarity between Forest and Field
- River as life sustaining and uniting
- River as life threatening and dividing (border)
- Mountains as protectors, as landmarks, as boundaries

INTERACTIONS BETWEEN THESE FOUR HAVE DEFINED INDIA'S PAST

# Movement and Stability

- Human movements within the Indian Sub-continent
- First humans (hominds) traced back 1.5 million years (if not more)
- Ancestral North Indians and Ancestral South Indians; Tibeto-Burmese; Austroasiatic
- Present day human populations dated to 50,000 to 75,000 years
- Populations grew in places with river, field, forest, mountains
- Settled agriculture spread to river flood-plains only 2,500 years ago
- Settled and nomadic populations: a constant dialectic

# Migrations and Travel

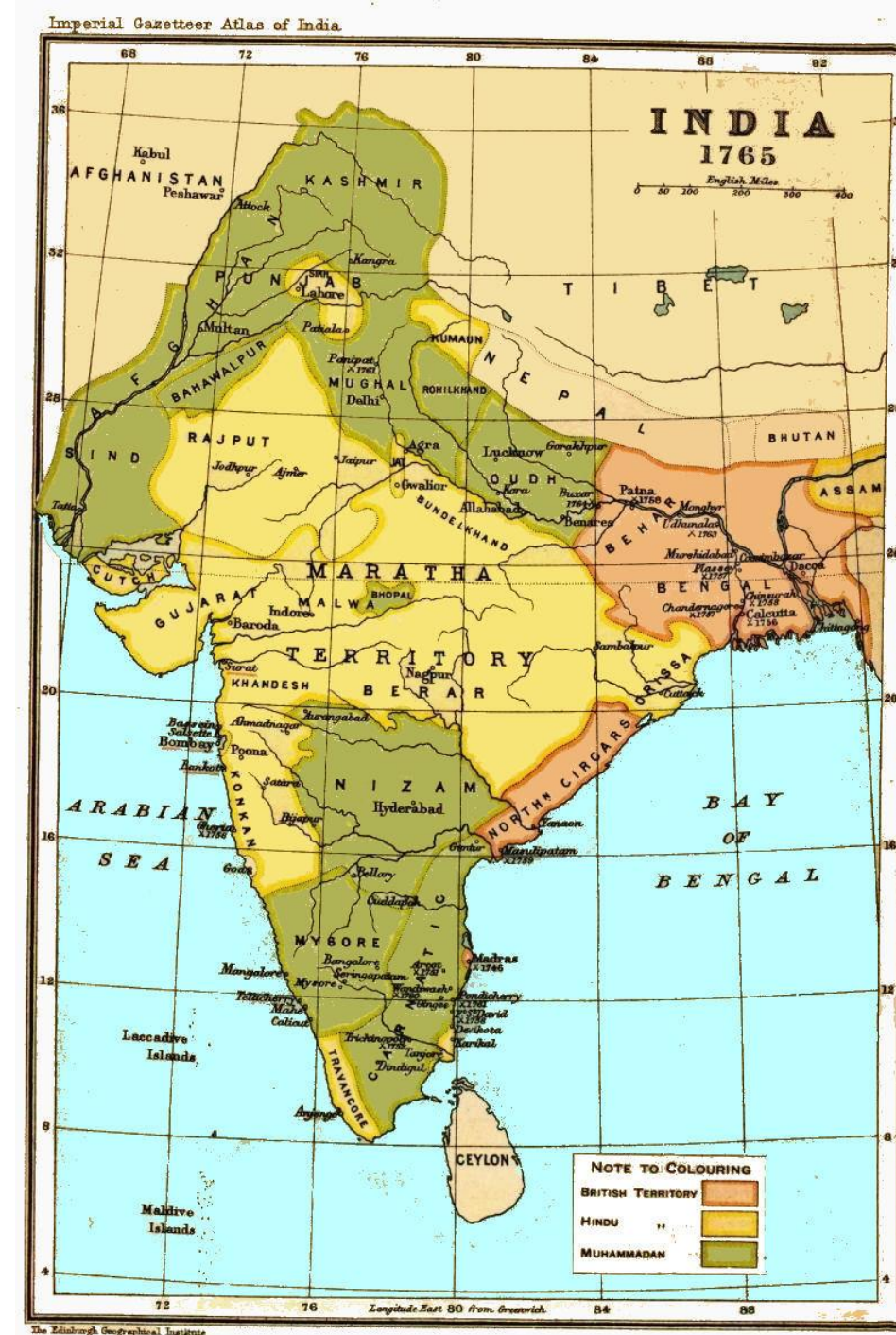
- Endogamous communities emerged with settled agriculture
- Yet constant movement of people
  - In search of better conditions
  - Escaping State power
- Trade emerged with settled populations and States
  - Exchange of commodities based on mobile populations
- Pilgrimage
  - A Sacred Geography
  - Linked to Agriculture, Trade and State power

# Geography, History, Society

- Rivers, mountains, deserts, forests, etc have defined human experience in the Indian sub-continent
- Provide determining factors and limiting conditions
- The Indus-Ganges valley has been the centre
  - Geographical determinism?
  - But based on the mastery of horse, fire and iron
- Mountains have proved inhospitable to State and civilisation
  - Till the 19<sup>th</sup> Century
- Similarities among river plains and highlands, forests, deserts

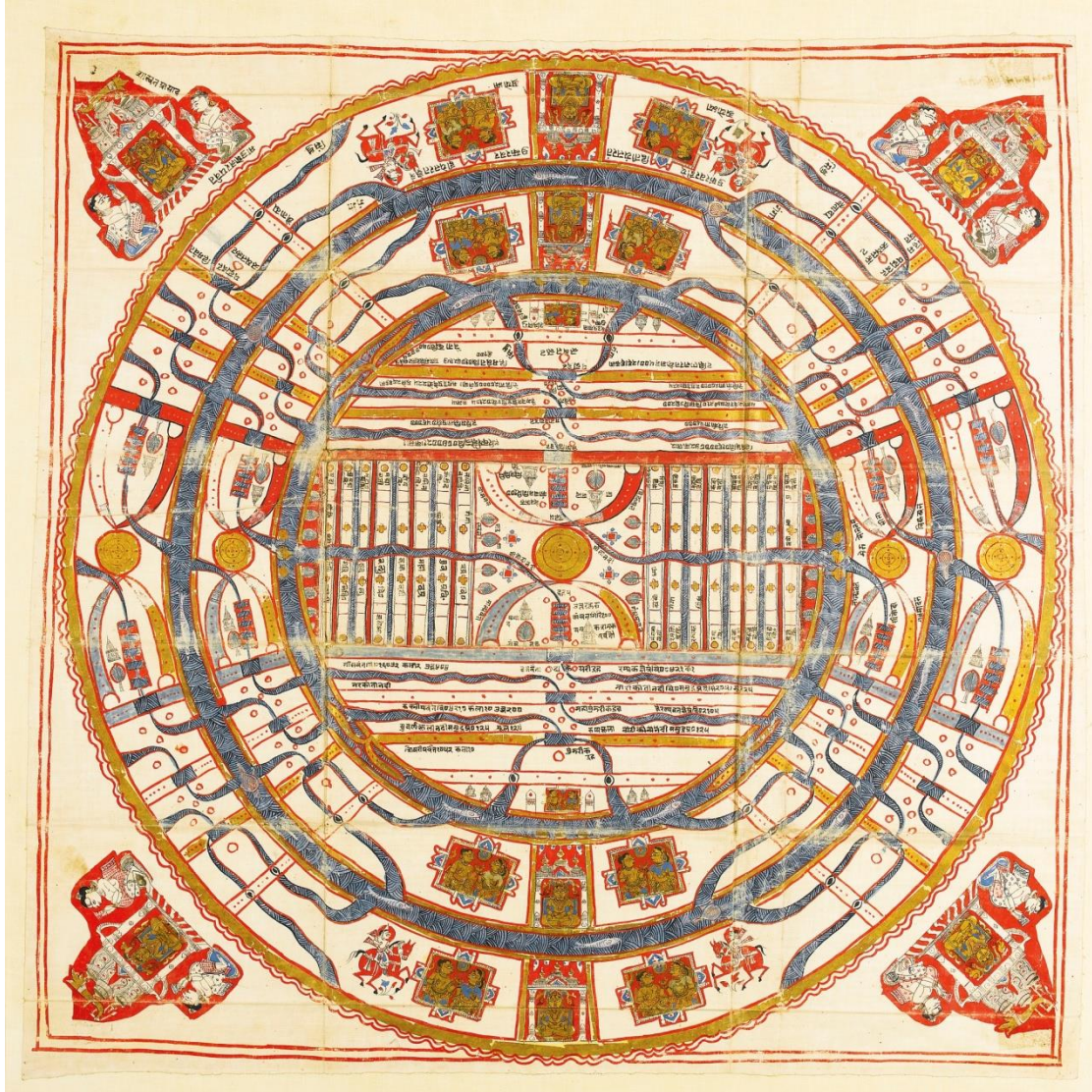
# India as Nation

- Similarities within populations around river flood-plains
  - Family
  - Caste
  - Religious practices
  - Languages
  - State structures
- State Anchored in the River
- British changed this political geography which had held since the beginning of History
  - Grew from sea-coast
  - Falling importance of River flood-plain
  - New routes of trade and travel opening up





# Idea of India over History





# End of the History Lectures

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