

# Recent Trends in Historical Thought

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**Abstract:** The article offers a brief survey of the main currents of historical thought and writing in the West since the eighteenth century. It begins with the emergence of a secular outlook in Enlightenment approaches to history. It then proceeds to the transformation of historical studies in the nineteenth century marked by professionalization. Strongly influenced by the work of Leopold von Ranke, historians saw their discipline as a science (*Wissenschaft*), scientific in the sense of reliance on the critical examination of the sources, distancing itself from nonprofessional amateur historians. Its approach to historical presentation in the form of narrative focusing largely on political events and political leaders differed sharply from broader generalizing approaches as represented in the philosophies of history in very different forms by Georg Friedrich Hegel, Karl Marx, and Auguste Comte. Although Ranke maintained a European perspective, his followers largely saw history in the service of the national state and nationalism. The identity of history as a discipline derives from its distinctive combination of intellectual assumptions, or categories. Many of these categories are shared with other fields of thought, including science, literature, and common sense, but in history are understood in a unique way. A survey of major trends of historical thought and writing since 1970 from a global perspective. The 1970s marked a turning away from analytical social science-oriented historical studies to interpretative cultural approaches. They also saw the inclusion of women, ethnic minorities, and formerly colonial peoples into historical accounts. The end of the Cold War marked a further reorientation in the 1990s and since. For the most part, the focus on culture and on previously neglected segments of the population continued but there was an increased turn away from Eurocentrism to global perspectives in historical writing.

**IndexTerms - Historical Tradition, World History, Historical Thought, Historical interpretation.**

## I. INTRODUCTION

The way we look at the past, and in so doing we are conditioned by time, place, and circumstance. Although we may and do speak of "objective" history, the objectivity is relative: we cannot in this twentieth century write history from the eighteenth-century point of view, much less from that of earlier ages. All written history reflects in some degree the personal, "subjective" point of view of the writer, and, more obviously, all sorts of social, national, political, or religious influences to which we are exposed. Even the recognition of this (which recognition is in itself a part of our view of life today) does not emancipate us from our environment. Hence history cannot be written once for all: it must be rewritten from generation to generation, as time moves on, and the point of view changes. It is therefore worthwhile to ask: how has historical thought developed in recent times, and what are its trends today? For our purpose we need not go behind the eighteenth century, when history, so to speak, grew up. A Scottish historian} Hume, wrote in 1770, "I believe this to be the true historical age and this historical nation." Yet the next century criticized the eighteenth century for its unhistorical character, much as we berate the Whig historians of the nineteenth. Certainly, the era before the French Revolution was unhistorical (or a-historical) in its appeal to reason, to humanity, to natural men and natural rights. But it none the less achieved for historical thought and writing far more than the succeeding age was willing to admit. Thus, it collected and made available large masses of new historical material, as a glance at the foot-notes to Gibbon makes clear. It criticized its sources with a freedom and keenness of scrutiny unknown to earlier ages, and it produced several of the earliest treatises on historical method. It also wrote a good deal of first-rate history, for which Gibbon, again, an example. It developed, primarily in Voltaire, an interest in what has come to be called "cultural" history. And finally, it sought to write universal history, and to arrive thereby at a philosophy of history. These are large and solid achievements, not to be brushed aside because we do not today accept the aforesaid philosophy of history. The historical thought and writing of the nineteenth century were directly and profoundly influenced by the great forces of that complicated period, its liberalism and democracy, its growing nationalism, its science, industrialism, and world expansion. Briefly, we may distinguish three major developments in historical work during this period, all of them closely related to, or affected by, the general influences of the century. In the first place there was a steady and continuous growth of interest in the subject, and, as a result, of historical-mindedness. History, as someone has put it, had its industrial revolution, which brought greatly enlarged production of historical works. The classical revival brought increased interest in "ancient" history; the Catholic revival and what we loosely call the Romantic Movement helped the "middle" ages to live again. Getting away after Hegel from the philosopher-historians, historical writing went forward under its own steam) becoming more professional as the study developed in the universities, plunging with great vigour into the *chasse aux documents* and applying more rigid canons of criticism. Its exponents claimed to be more objective, so that they saw past events "as they actually occurred]" to use the phrase of Ranke, the great master of this whole movement. Yet this growing stream reflected) plainly enough, the nationalism of the age: Guizot saw France as the focus of European civilization, Macaulay found liberty incarnated in English history, Germany had its Prussian school culminating in Treitschke. More than this general interest in historical study is, however, implied here. The growth of historicism (rustorism would be a useful translation of the German *Historismus*) implied an increasing adoption of the historical point of view, of the belief that the study of the past provided the safest guide andForeign scholars have often complained about India's lack of an indigenous tradition of historiography. India possesses an enormous heritage of literature accumulated over the Centuries, much of it relating to past events, yet there has never' been a historian to compare with those of ancient Greece and Rome, or later European scholars who contributed to the development of history as a discipline. Indifference to the western conception of history, to the idea that man can be its subject and agent, actively working to change the human condition, is cited as a distinguishing trait of Indian civilization. Explanations offered for this deficiency are that Indians have no sense of history, are not interested in factual or 'objective' history, or have in any case had such a static society that there has been little in the way of

historical development to encourage its scientific study. Indian religions, besides acting as 'a tremendous force for social inertia' in that they usually adopt a reactionary attitude towards social change, are also blamed for inculcating a world view that has never been conducive to any interest in what westerners know as history.

## II. HISTORICAL SENSE IN ANCIENT INDIA

Wherever Scholars, including the historians, Indologists and orientalist, are divided in their opinion about the historical sense of the ancient Indians, particularly the Hindus. It has been said that the ancient Indian had no sense of history and chronology. Alberuni was the first to remark that "The Hindus do not pay much attention to the historical order of things, they are very careless in relating the chronological succession of their kings, and when they are pressed for information and are at a loss, not knowing what to say, they invariably take to tale-telling". He made this remark in AD 1030 in his work *Tehkik-i-Hind*. It is striking to note that the genealogies of kings of different dynasties in the Puranic records, which were the principal sources of information for him for writing his book as admitted by himself, are in proper historical and chronological order, of course, with a few exceptions. It is paradoxical that he calls his own works "a simple historic record of facts", but the sources on which it is based are spoken of as unhistorical. He presents the picture of Indian civilization as painted by the Hindus themselves. He has himself tried to fix the chronology of some historical events with the help of the chronological data furnished by the Hindus in different works, as it appears from his book. S.R.Sharma in an attempt to justify the statement of Alberuni writes that his "version of the lack of historical sense of Indians justified by the paucity of historical works properly so called in our country down from ancient times. Materials from which history can be constructed is undoubtedly available in abundance but very little of it shares the character of regular history". On the other hand, A.K.Majumdar asserts that "... We can't admit that the Hindus had incapacity for writing history and our ancestors have not bequeathed to us any reliable historical work for early period. They know the simple art of writing history.

L.J.Trotter and W.H. Hutton have remarked that "the old Hindus produced, not one historian of even the smallest mark". Any sensible historian will accept such kind of absurd remark. Some scholars have leveled the charges against the ancient Hindus that they wrote no formal history at any period". They did not have capacity to write history. Though genuine materials once abounded in India, yet we find no national history of the Hindus. H. Beveridge opines that "With the exception of a work on Kashmir, the literature of India has failed to furnish a single production to which the name of history can in any proper sense of the term be applied. These biased remarks made within conceptual framework have increasingly given rise to misgivings in the minds of many. However, the subjective elements should not be allowed to influence and overshadow our objective judgment. A.S Macdonell is of opinion that "History is the one weak spot in Indian Literature. It is, in fact, non-existent. The total lack of historical sense is so characteristic that the whole course of Sanskrit literature is darkened by the shadow of this defect, suffering as it does from an entire absence of exact chronology. In the first place, early India wrote no history because it never made. Secondly, the Brahmans whose task it would naturally have been to record the great deeds... have felt but little inclination to chronicle historical events". This is nothing but a total rejection of truth.

## III. CURRENT TRENDS OF WORLD HISTORY

Every day, many events happen around us, all over the world. Such events gradually become a part of the world history and shape the current trends which come to be remembered fondly for the times to come. The current trends of world history are a pathway to understanding what the world has gone through and what likely lies ahead for the future generations to come. Nevertheless, the world history continues to remain a separate experience from any other type of history in a timeless fashion. Let us read more about the world history from the current perspective.

Though writing about the past is a global practice, this class specifically addresses Western historiography – the study of historical thought – from the Classical world to the beginning of the Modern era. In exploring the narratives individuals have used to speak about the past, we will debate the social and political contexts of historical thought, as well as the media through which such thought was expressed. Ancient, Medieval and Renaissance people used multiple forms to record and relate the past, including: artistic and architectural monuments, epic poems, vitae, liturgical offices, and more formal historical writings such as annals, chronicles, gentian more. The varieties of historical genres are matched by the diversity of reasons why people write history. We will learn about how, in the hands of Roman courtiers, medieval Chroniclers, and Renaissance scholars, the past is subjected to many uses and many abuses. The student will engage with these themes through the close reading of four writers of pre-modern history (Herodotus, Tacitus, Geoffrey of Monmouth and Lorenzo Valla). In addition to lectures, the student will participate in intimate seminar discussions. Assignments will consist of critical responses to the assigned readings, a research paper and a final take-home exam.

20%: Participation

24%: Critical Responses

26%: Research Paper

30%: Take-Home Examination

Tudor Historical Thought is a revealing account of vital changes in intellectual orientation. Originally published in 1967, F.J. Levy's seminal work explores the factors – humanism, theology, antiquarianism, Machiavellianism – that brought about the changes in historical thinking from the time of Caxton to that of Bacon, Raleigh, and Camden.

Earlier, the study of the past was justified on utilitarian grounds, and the purpose of history writing was didactic. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, chroniclers exemplified the workings of Providence and taught personal morality; a hundred years later, however, the idea of teaching practical statecraft had been introduced. The Italian humanists emphasized the political aspects of man, and made the active citizen rather than the cloistered monk their ideal. That citizen needed guidance, and it was the duty of the historian to supply it. Questions of politics, which had been important for nearly half a century, suddenly were placed at the centre, and with that a new kind of history writing appeared in England.

#### IV. HISTORY OF HISTORIOGRAPHY

All human cultures tell stories about the past. Deeds of ancestors, heroes, gods, or animals sacred to particular peoples were chanted and memorized long before there was any writing with which to record them. Their truth was authenticated by the very fact of their continued repetition. History, which may be defined as an account that purports to be true of events and ways of thinking and feeling in some part of the human past, stems from this archetypal human narrative activity.

While sharing a common ancestry with myth, legend, epic poetry, and the novel, history has of course diverged from these forms. Its claim to truth is based in part on the fact that all the persons or events it describes really existed or occurred at some time in the past. Historians can say nothing about these persons or events that cannot be supported, or at least suggested, by some kind of documentary evidence. Such evidence customarily takes the form of something written, such as a letter, a law, an administrative record, or the account of some previous historian. In addition, historians sometimes create their own evidence by interviewing people. In the 20th century the scope of historical evidence was greatly expanded to include, among many other things, aerial photographs, the rings of trees, old coins, clothes, motion pictures, and houses.

Modern historians have determined the age of the Shroud of Turin, which purportedly bears the image of Jesus, through carbon-14 dating and have discredited the claim of Anna Anderson to be the grand duchess Anastasia, the daughter of Tsar Nicholas II, through DNA testing. Just as the methods at the disposal of historians have expanded, so have the subjects in they have become interested. Many of the indigenous peoples of Africa, the Americas, and Polynesia, for example, were long dismissed by Europeans as having no pre-colonial history, because they did not keep written records before the arrival of European explorers. However, sophisticated study of oral traditions, combined with advances in archaeology, has made it possible to discover a good deal about the civilizations and empires that flourished in these regions before European contact.

Historians have also studied new social classes. The earliest histories were mostly stories of disasters—floods, famines, and plagues—or of wars, including the statesmen and generals who figured in them. In the 20th century, however, historians shifted their focus from statesmen and generals to ordinary workers and soldiers. Until relatively recent times, however, most men and virtually all women were excluded from history because they were unable to write. Virtually all that was known about them passed through the filter of the attitudes of literate elites. The challenge of seeing through that filter has been met by historians in various ways. One way is to make use of nontraditional sources—for example, personal documents, such as wills or marriage contracts. Another is to look at the records of localities rather than of central governments.

Through these means even the most oppressed peoples—African-American slaves or medieval heretics, for example—have had at least some of their history restored. Since the 20th century some historians have also become interested in psychological repression—i.e., in attitudes and actions that require psychological insight and even diagnosis to recover and understand. For the first time, the claim of historians to deal with the feelings as well as the thoughts of people in any part of the human past has been made good.

None of this is to say that history writing has assumed a perfect or completed form. It will never do so: examination of its past reveals remarkable changes in historical consciousness rather than steady progress toward the standards of research and writing that represent the best that historians can do today. Nevertheless, 21st-century historians understand the pasts of more people more completely and more accurately than their predecessors did. This article demonstrates the scope of that accomplishment and how it came to be achieved.

#### V. Significance of Historiography

Historiography refers to the development of history as a discipline or to a body of historical works on a specialized topic. In the early modern period the term historiography tended to be used to mean simply the writing of history. It should be noted that historiography is not the study of events in the past directly, but the changing interpretations of those events in the works of individual historians. While history is considered as the 'study of the past' in its broadest sense, historiography tries to understand how the past has been studied by different historians and what prompted a particular historian to adopt a particular line of thought in the writing of a particular topic in history.

It as an independent branch of history and as a separate discipline emerged in the 19th century Europe. It came into being as a part of the epistemological resurgence of 19th century European enlightenment. Since then many numbers of works have been produced on historiography all over the world. These works trace the successive stages of development in historical writing from ancient to the modern period. These include the evolution of ideas of the historian, changing techniques in historical writing and transformation in the attitude towards the nature of history itself. It is the study of the theoretical approach of the historian and the historical context which had prompted him into conceive that particular theoretical approach.

It is a fascinating area of debate and argument about previous and current representations of the past. Understanding historiography is to do with understanding about how the past is represented. It is necessary for the history teachers, to be on top of their professional strata, to have reasonable understanding of how individual topics that they are discussing with the students have been approached in the past and how they are explained in the present. One should have a broader and deeper understanding of the relevant historiography, otherwise advances in historiographical knowledge that has taken place over the past two or three decades may be all but ignored.

The never-ending development of historical interpretation is familiar to historians and teachers of history. Most commonly this is revealed as a dialogue 'between the present and the past'. New generation often interpret evidence in the light of recent events and regularly re-evaluate the thinking of previous generations. Historians also constantly discover new evidence and often historiographical change comes with an increased emphasis on this new information. Historian often emphasis certain aspects of historical events because they study particular topics or figures, resulting in constant process of reinterpretation and considerable debate among historians. In a broader sense, historiographical debates force students to confront the difficult questions of interpretation, the existence of 'truth' in history and the different ways historians use evidence. Facts and evidences are critical to historical interpretation. The conflicting emphasis on different forms of evidence can change the meaning of events. Students can understand that historiography is a guide for evaluating their own interpretation of historical events. It helps them structure their own thinking and encourages them to consider different ways of viewing the same evidence.

Some of the common topics in historiography are

1. reliability of sources used in terms of authorship, credibility of the author and the authenticity or corruption of the text,

2. Historiographical tradition or frame work. Every historian uses one or more historiographical traditions like Marxist, Annals etc.
3. moral issues, guilt assignment and praise assignment,
4. revisionism versus orthodox or conservative interpretations,
5. Historical Meta narratives. Understanding of the past is a universal human need and the telling of history has emerged independently in the civilizations around the world. The earliest chronologies date back to Mesopotamia and ancient Egypt, though no historical writers in these early civilizations were known by name

## VI. Ancient Indian Historical Sense- Assumptions

It is not merely the genealogies, biographies and chronicles of kings but also other materials of history that received the attention of the ancient Indians. There were different conceptions of history. There is a positive evidence to prove the recording of history in the time of Chandragupta Maurya. Various state officials were appointed by him to collect the details of all-important events and to put them in writing which constituted the source material of history. It is evident from the Arthashastra of Kautilya that it was the duty of the *Gopa* (an official in charge of five or ten village) to keep a record of everything concerning a village including its agricultural products and trade and commerce. He had to show social groups, class and caste, and different professionals and occupational groups. He had to register the total number of the *Kshatriya*, *Vaisyas* and *Sudras*, farmers, traders, artisans, labourers and slaves. These materials supply invaluable data for the purpose of social and economic history of the contemporary age. Kautilya also testifies to the maintenance of the archives in the Maurya court.

Hiuen-Tsang testimony of the practice of preserving historical records in India also deserves our notice. He during his stay in the country for about fifteen years (AD 629-45) noticed that its each province had its own state officials for maintaining written record of events. He has distinctly mentioned that there were separate custodians of the archives and records. The official's annals and state papers, according to him were called '*Ni-lo-pi-Cha*' or '*Ni-lo-Pi-t'u*'.

The *Sutas* were the first to keep the records of the genealogies of royal families preserved some of the Puranas. The practice of maintaining written record continued for centuries after Hiuen-Tsang. At the courts of kings, archives were maintained for preserving the records of important happenings. The archival records were used for compiling mainly the chronicles and *Vamsavalis*. The existence of the historical chronicle of Kashmir, Gujarat and Nepal support the belief that the royal archives of different states contained such chronicles.

A great nation never passes away without leaving record of its deed and achievements. Ancient India was not bereft of such record. "Each successive age has left in its literature, an impress, a photograph as it were, of its thought and civilization; and when we bring all these photographs together, we perceive at a glance the whole history of the Hindu nation and its civilization. It is also believed that some of the ancient annals and other written records were destroyed or tempered with by the Muslims in the course of their invasions of India.

The inscriptional records also reflect the historical and chronological sense of the ancient times. The inscriptions constitute valuable testimony to historical writings in ancient times. They are in fact the earliest history in rose...betraying the historical ideas of their authors. They give a lot of historical information with reliable dates. They supply genealogies of the reigning kings and recount there as well as their ancestors' lives and deeds, throw light on conditions of gifts and grants of lands, etc. Inscriptions engraved on stones, copper plates, rock, pillars, walls and coins bespeak the history of the land. The historical sense of the authors or composers of the inscriptions can in no way be doubted. The information supplied by Harisena in Allahabad pillar inscription about the conquest and campaigns of his patron, Samudragupta (AD. 335-375) and by Ravikirti in Aihole inscription (AD 634) about the achievements of Pulakesin-II, the Chalukya ruler of Badami (AD 610-43), vindicates their sense of history. Historical events were recorded in the inscriptions at the instance of the contemporary kings so as to preserve them as records for the future.

Most of the ancient Indian inscriptions are dated. They give the dates of the events that took place during the reign of kings. They specify the reign periods or length of the reigns of the kings. The inscriptions of Asoka, King Kharavela of Kalinga, Rudradamana of Junagarh, the Satavahana, Samudragupta, Harsa, the Palas, Senas, Chalukyas, Rashtrakutas, Pallavs, Cholas and Hoysalas are important from both historical and chronological point of view. Fleet, an authority on Gupta inscriptions, had to accept that the ancient Hindus had an ability and capability to write history.

The coins also like inscriptions give us the dates of rulers and events. Among the non-literary sources, these two provide the most important materials for writing history of ancient India. Ancient India was not devoid of either history or historians. The hitherto existing impression created by some Indian and foreign scholars that the ancient Indians lacked in historical sense can be dispelled on the basis of the richness of historical materials embodied in different kinds of literature and the inscriptions. They have displayed enough historical sense in the genealogical lists of royal dynasties, biographical works and chronicles. Some of the Purana, Pali chronicles and commentaries, and the Jain works, Kalhana's work and the inscriptional records testify to their knowledge of both historical and chronological sense of ancient Indians.

## VII. Categories of Historical Thought

- Historical Categories. ...
- Meaning and Context. ...
- Evidence and Action. ...
- Situation and Event. ...
- Cause and Probability. ...
- Change and Narrativity. ...
- Truth and the Historical Persona. ...
- Fact as Interpretation.
- Historical Facts

## What is historical interpretation?

Historical interpretation is the process by which we describe, analyze, evaluate, and create an explanation of past events. We base our interpretation on primary [firsthand] and secondary [scholarly] historical sources. We analyze the evidence, contexts, points of view, and frames of reference. Yes, it is a complicated process, but historical thinking improves with practice. Interpretation might explore causality (what made something happen), processes (revolutions, economic depressions), conflicts (social class, race, gender), historical outcomes (effects of past events), or many more topics (creative thinking). So what are primary sources in history? We get this definition of primary sources from the Society of American Archivists.

"Material that contains firsthand accounts of events and that was created contemporaneous to those events or later recalled by an eyewitness. ... Primary sources emphasize the lack of intermediaries between the thing or events being studied and reports of those things or events based on the belief that firsthand accounts are more accurate. Examples of primary sources include letters and diaries; government, church, and business records; oral histories; photographs, motion pictures, and videos; maps and land records; and blueprints." Historical Interpretation requires synthesizing (combining) a variety of evidence, primary and secondary (critical thinking). Historical thinking involves the ability to arrive at meaningful and persuasive understandings of the past by applying all the other historical thinking skills, by drawing appropriately on ideas from different fields of inquiry or disciplines and by creatively fusing disparate, relevant (and perhaps contradictory) evidence from primary sources and secondary works. Additionally, synthesis may involve applying insights about the past to other historical contexts or circumstances, including the present. These insights (secondary sources) may come from social science theories and perspectives and/or the writings of other historians (historiography).

## UNCOVERING THE PAST

A historical fact is a fact about the past. It answers the very basic question, "What happened?" Yet beyond merely listing the events in chronological order, historians try to discover *why* events happened, what circumstances contributed to their *cause*, what subsequent *effects* they had, and how they were *interpreted*. [1] In an effort to get at what really happened, historians compare stories from a wide variety of sources, searching for common elements that corroborate a plausible account. Accounts are compared with archeological findings. Neither history nor archeology is an exact science, but technique and technology improvements over the years have enabled them both to make stronger and stronger cases for their accounts of the past.

Yet historical accounts are subject to frequent disagreement. Much disagreement is due to the fact that accurate history is difficult to obtain, for a variety of reasons. Much information regarding the past has been lost. Many cultures have a rich oral history, but lack written documents. Oral accounts, or "storytelling," suffer from an inherent loss of information. Each person in the chain will tend to "interpret" the story, presenting the opportunity to accidentally alter it, or worse, to slant the story to one's own tastes before passing it on. Written history before the age of copiers and computers had to be hand-copied, providing similarly easy opportunities for errors or exaggeration. Some material is simply propaganda, intentionally containing little or no truth. Even if authentic, the meaning of documents regarding the past can be highly unclear to any modern investigator, or can conflict with other sources. These factors and others result in quite a bit of uncertainty about historical accounts. This leaves room for parties to interpret history in ways that favor them, resulting in strong resistance from those on opposing sides.

## Conflicts Involving Historical Facts:

Any conflict that goes on for a long time, as intractable conflicts do, will involve historical facts. For example, the ongoing environmental conflict regarding nuclear energy draws on the history of nuclear power accidents, including those at Three Mile Island and Chernobyl. Environmental activists interpret these incidents in ways that differ from those who promote nuclear power, reflecting the general fact that conflicting parties are likely to interpret the events of the past in different ways. Yet in this case, these facts are not crucial to the current arguments over safety. More important are concerns about current potential for accidents, waste disposal, and opportunities for misuse of nuclear material.

Historical facts do play a central role in other kinds of conflicts, for example, long-running international conflicts over territory. A clear example of this is the Palestinian/Israeli conflict. Each side holds its own version of the region's history, and the respective versions are reflected in each side's rhetoric. The historical rhetoric becomes a cyclical part of the escalating conflict -- each side holds its own biases; those biases affect the way each side interprets the past; these biased interpretations are repeated and circulated as if they were a fact, thus further feeding and strengthening partisan bias on both sides. In such a conflict it becomes increasingly difficult to uncover the *authentic* history due to the continual cycle of interpretation and propaganda. In this way, historical "facts" can add significantly to a conflict's intractability.

## Constructively Addressing History

When a conflict involves a debate over a historical fact, whether the debate be over an actual event or an interpretation of the event, it may be important to decide whether the debate is resolvable and whether resolving it will improve the situation. A fact-finding endeavor may indeed uncover important historical information, and that information may play a role in building consensus. On the other hand, the information may not have any real effect, either because those facts are rejected or because someone shifts tactics to avoid utilizing those facts. Even worse, fresh information may inflame the conflict even more.

Since historical research is not an exact science, historical fact-finding suffers from the problem of uncertain information. It may not be possible to uncover what actually happened, and giving parties the hope that it is possible can lead to disappointment and a hardened position. At some point, the best option may be for each side to simply set aside arguments about the past and work toward resolving the *current* situation. Conflicts have costs -- intractable conflicts usually significant ones -- in resources and human lives. Resources and human lives lost may not be reclaimed. On the other hand, future losses are avoidable, so shifting focus from the past to the future -- at least temporarily -- can sometimes be a good strategy for both parties.

Once settlement is reached, however, it is then often useful to go back and re-address past abuses, either through war crimes tribunals (which prosecute war criminals) or truth commissions, which attempt to document what happened, while granting

amnesty rather than prosecuting the guilty. Both of these approaches enable parties to address the past, reconcile with it and with each other, and move forward into a more constructive relationship

### Another view of historical interpretation

Interpretations are in essence thoughtful efforts to represent and explain past events. Interpretations include 3 vital elements: Purposeful, **thoughtful efforts**--Interpretations are conscious reflections on the past, not simply irrational spur-of-the-moment opinions. Take time to apply logic and organization to your explanation of the past--not merely emotive or react to the evidence.

**Representations**--Interpretations are efforts to give an audience an image or description of the event/issue being focused on. We cannot recreate the past perfectly, but we can try to represent faithfully how events transpired by ground our version in the historical evidence.

**Past events**--Interpretations are the reflections of those of us studying the past, not of the participants in those events. We refer to the collection representations of the past done by historians as historiography. The views of participants from the past constitute our primary sources or historical evidence. Without the process of reflection removed from the event by time the creator of the view is inevitably partially influenced by the impact the person/event had on them.

Put these 3 elements together, linking them to the historical evidence surrounding your topic. The result will be a defensible, intelligible historical interpretation.

### VIII. Planning to teach interpretations

When teaching interpretations teachers need to:

Use as many different forms of interpretation as possible for example film, music and art, so that students see the different views which are held on an issue.

Use examples of interpretations which show issues about which people held really strong views.

Offer a good range of contrasting views on a topic and try to include one or two which will present an interesting or new standpoint.

Use interpretations only when the students are well grounded with background information and have some knowledge of the issues.

Use strategies which will help students to see the limitations of some interpretations and how the facts of history can be distorted or over simplified for a particular purpose.

Use criteria with students to show what makes a good answer on interpretations.

Primary examples

During the foundation stage the children can be introduced to the idea of different perspectives by examining different images of a character in a nursery rhyme. These different representations of the same character introduce the children to the idea of different ways of representing people and events in the past.

At KS1 enquiries can be focused interpretations in the form of commemoration mugs, posters, badges etc. of significant people studied, such as Florence Nightingale or Grace Darling, and raising the children's awareness of how and why these forms of commemoration were made.

Teaching young children that all history is a construct is very difficult for them to understand, as they are inclined to think that the history they read in the textbooks is full of fixed truths and facts that cannot be disputed. Developing children's understanding of this concept at KS2 focuses on helping them to understand that some interpretations might be more accurate and reliable than others, and that historians might write different versions of the same event even when using the same evidence.

The children might also be able to understand that interpretations might differ depending on which aspect historians are looking at. For example, views of the Victorians might be more positive if looking at the benefits of industrialization and empire, and more negative if looking at child labour or slavery. Children might also understand that people create different versions of the past for different audiences and therefore might give a different emphasis.

Using collections of commemorative artefacts at museums to help the children understand the purpose and audience of an interpretation and to discuss and debate why people represent the past differently.

Presenting the children with one perspective of past events and asking them to discuss and debate why the past is represented differently.

Using powerful visual interpretations such as a photograph of the evacuation of children during World War 2, can at first stimulate the children's interest about war and conflict and how it affected the lives of children and their families. Asking children to focus on the photograph itself and exploring what they see happening to the children the teacher could ask the children.

- Who they think the photographer was.
- Are there any clues in the photograph about when it was taken?
- Can they suggest who they think the photograph was taken for?
- Why did the photographer take the picture? What did he think would happen to the photograph afterwards?
- Post Primary Examples

Students at KS3 need to be encouraged to engage with interpretations so that they come to realise that their knowledge and understanding of the past depends not only on events but how the events are represented.

### IX. HISTORICAL ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The One of the most common problems in helping students to become thoughtful readers of historical narrative is the compulsion students feel to find the one right answer, the one essential fact, the one authoritative interpretation. "Am I on the right track?" "Is this what you want?" they ask. Or, worse yet, they rush to closure, reporting back as self-evident truths the facts or conclusions presented in the document or text.

These problems are deeply rooted in the conventional ways in which textbooks have presented history: a succession of facts marching straight to a settled outcome. To overcome these problems requires the use of more than a single source: of history books other than textbooks and of a rich variety of historical documents and artifacts that present alternative voices, accounts, and interpretations or perspectives on the past.

Students need to realize that historians may differ on the facts they incorporate in the development of their narratives and disagree as well on how those facts are to be interpreted. Thus, “history” is usually taken to mean what happened in the past; but written history is a dialogue among historians, not only about what happened but about why and how events unfolded. The study of history is not only remembering answers. It requires following and evaluating arguments and arriving at usable, even if tentative, conclusions based on the available evidence.

To engage in *historical analysis and interpretation* students must draw upon their skills of *historical comprehension*. In fact, there is no sharp line separating the two categories. Certain of the skills involved in comprehension overlap the skills involved in analysis and are essential to it. For example, identifying the author or source of a historical document or narrative and assessing its credibility (comprehension) is prerequisite to comparing competing historical narratives (analysis). Analysis builds upon the skills of comprehension; it obliges the student to assess the evidence on which the historian has drawn and determine the soundness of interpretations created from that evidence. It goes without saying that in acquiring these analytical skills students must develop the ability to differentiate between expressions of opinion, no matter how passionately delivered, and informed hypotheses grounded in historical evidence.

Well-written historical narrative has the power to promote students’ analysis of historical causality—of how change occurs in society, of how human intentions matter, and how ends are influenced by the means of carrying them out, in what has been called the tangle of process and outcomes. Few challenges can be more fascinating to students than unraveling the often-dramatic complications of cause. And nothing is more dangerous than a simple, monocausal explanation of past experiences and present problems.

Finally, well-written historical narratives can also alert students to the traps of *lineality and inevitability*. Students must understand the relevance of the past to their own times, but they need also to avoid the trap of lineality, of drawing straight lines between past and present, as though earlier movements were being propelled teleologically toward some rendezvous with destiny in the late 20th century.

A related trap is that of thinking that events have unfolded inevitably—that the way things are is the way they had to be, and thus that individuals lack free will and the capacity for making choices. Unless students can conceive that history could have turned out differently, they may unconsciously accept the notion that the future is also inevitable or predetermined, and that human agency and individual action count for nothing. No attitude is more likely to feed civic apathy, cynicism, and resignation—precisely what we hope the study of history will fend off. Whether in dealing with the main narrative or with a topic in depth, we must always try, in one historian’s words, to “restore to the past the options it once had.”

## 1. HISTORICAL THINKING

### The student engages in historical analysis and interpretation:

Therefore, the student is able to:

**Compare and contrast differing sets of ideas**, values, personalities, behaviors, and institutions by identifying likenesses and differences.

**Consider multiple perspectives** of various peoples in the past by demonstrating their differing motives, beliefs, interests, hopes, and fears.

**Analyze cause-and-effect relationships** bearing in mind **multiple causation** including

- (a) **the importance of the individual** in history;
- (b) **the influence of ideas**, human interests, and beliefs; and
- (c) the role of chance, the accidental and the irrational.

**Draw comparisons across eras and regions in order to define enduring issues** as well as large-scale or long-term developments that transcend regional and temporal boundaries.

**Distinguish between unsupported expressions of opinion and informed hypotheses grounded in historical evidence.**

**Compare competing historical narratives.**

**Challenge arguments of historical inevitability** by formulating examples of historical contingency, of how different choices could have led to different consequences.

**Hold interpretations of history as tentative**, subject to changes as new information is uncovered, new voices heard, and new interpretations broached.

**Evaluate major debates among historians** concerning alternative interpretations of the past.

**Hypothesize the influence of the past**, including both the limitations and opportunities made possible by past decisions.

## 2. HISTORICAL ISSUES

Issue-centered analysis and decision-making activities place students squarely at the center of historical dilemmas and problems faced at critical moments in the past and the near-present. Entering into such moments, confronting the issues or problems of the time, analyzing the alternatives available to those on the scene, evaluating the consequences that might have followed those options for action that were not chosen, and comparing with the consequences of those that were adopted, are activities that foster students’ deep, personal involvement in these events.

If well chosen, these activities also promote capacities vital to a democratic citizenry: the capacity to identify and define public policy issues and ethical dilemmas; analyze the range of interests and values held by the many persons caught up in the situation and affected by its outcome; locate and organize the data required to assess the consequences of alternative approaches to resolving the dilemma; assess the ethical implications as well as the comparative costs and benefits of each approach; and evaluate a particular course of action in light of all of the above and, in the case of historical issues-analysis, in light also of its long-term consequences revealed in the historical record.

Because important historical issues are frequently value-laden, they also open opportunities to consider the moral convictions contributing to social actions taken. For example, what moral and political dilemmas did Lincoln face when, in his Emancipation Proclamation, he decided to free only those slaves behind the Confederate lines? Teachers should not use historical events to hammer home their own favorite moral lesson. The point to be made is that teachers should not use

critical events to hammer home a particular “moral lesson” or ethical teaching. Not only will many students reject that approach; it fails also to take into account the processes through which students acquire the complex skills of principled thinking and moral reasoning.

When students are invited to judge morally the conduct of historical actors, they should be encouraged to clarify the values that inform the judgment. In some instances, this will be an easy task. Students judging the Holocaust or slavery as evils will probably be able to articulate the foundation for their judgment. In other cases, a student’s effort to reach a moral judgment may produce a healthy student exercise in clarifying values, and may, in some instances, lead him or her to recognize the historically conditioned nature of a particular moral value he or she may be invoking.

Particularly challenging are the many social issues throughout United States history on which multiple interests and different values have come to bear. Issues of civil rights or equal education opportunity, of the right to choice vs. the right to life, and of criminal justice have all brought such conflicts to the fore. When these conflicts have not been resolved within the social and political institutions of the nation, they have regularly found their way into the judicial system, often going to the Supreme Court for resolution.

As the history course approaches the present era, such inquiries assume special relevance, confronting students with issues that resonate in today’s headlines and invite their participation in lively debates, simulations, and socratic seminars—settings in which they can confront alternative policy recommendations, judge their ethical implications, challenge one another’s assessments, and acquire further skills in the public presentation and defense of positions. In these analyses, teachers have the special responsibility of helping students differentiate between

(1) relevant historical antecedents and

(2) those that are clearly inappropriate and irrelevant. Students need to learn how to use their knowledge of history (or the past) to bring sound historical analysis to the service of informed decision making.

### 3. The student engages in historical issues-analysis and decision-making:

*Therefore, the student is able to*

**Identify issues and problems in the past** and analyze the interests, values, perspectives, and points of view of those involved in the situation.

**Marshal evidence of antecedent circumstances** and current factors contributing to contemporary problems and alternative courses of action.

**Identify relevant historical antecedents** and differentiate from those that are inappropriate and irrelevant to contemporary issues.

**Evaluate alternative courses of action**, keeping in mind the information available at the time, in terms of ethical considerations, the interests of those affected by the decision, and the long- and short-term consequences of each.

**Formulate a position or course of action on an issue** by identifying the nature of the problem, analyzing the underlying factors contributing to the problem, and choosing a plausible solution from a choice of carefully evaluated options.

**Evaluate the implementation of a decision** by analyzing the interests it served; estimating the position, power, and priority of each player involved; assessing the ethical dimensions of the decision; and evaluating its costs and benefits from a variety of perspectives.

## X. HISTORICAL RESEARCH CAPABILITIES

Perhaps no aspect of historical thinking is as exciting to students or as productive of their growth in historical thinking as “doing history.” Such inquiries can arise at critical turning points in the historical narrative presented in the text. They might be generated by encounters with historical documents, eyewitness accounts, letters, diaries, artifacts, photos, a visit to a historic site, a record of oral history, or other evidence of the past. Worthy inquiries are especially likely to develop if the documents students encounter are rich with the voices of people caught up in the event and sufficiently diverse to bring alive to students the interests, beliefs, and concerns of people with differing backgrounds and opposing viewpoints on the event.

Historical inquiry proceeds with the formulation of a problem or set of questions worth pursuing. In the most direct approach, students might be encouraged to analyze a document, record, or site itself. Who produced it, when, how, and why? What is the evidence of its authenticity, authority, and credibility? What does it tell them of the point of view, background, and interests of its author or creator? What else must they discover in order to construct a useful story, explanation, or narrative of the event of which this document or artifact is a part? What interpretation can they derive from their data, and what argument can they support in the historical narrative they create from the data? In this process students’ contextual knowledge of the historical period in which the document or artifact was created becomes critically important. Only a few records of the event will be available to students. Filling in the gaps, evaluating the records they have available, and imaginatively constructing a sound historical argument or narrative requires a larger context of meaning.

For these purposes, students’ ongoing narrative study of history provides important support, revealing the larger context. But just as the ongoing narrative study, supported by but not limited to the textbook, provides a meaningful context in which students’ inquiries can develop, it is these inquiries themselves that imbue the era with deeper meaning. Hence the importance of providing students documents or other records beyond materials included in the textbook that will allow students to challenge textbook interpretations, to raise new questions about the event, to investigate the perspectives of those whose voices do not appear in the textbook accounts, or to plumb an issue that the textbook largely or in part bypassed.

Under these conditions, students will view their inquiries as creative contributions. They will better understand that written history is a human construction, that many judgments about the past are tentative and arguable, and that historians regard their work as critical inquiry, pursued as ongoing explorations and debates with other historians. On the other hand, careful research can resolve cloudy issues from the past and can overturn previous arguments and theses. By their active engagement in historical inquiry, students will learn for themselves why historians are continuously reinterpreting the past, and why new interpretations emerge not only from uncovering new evidence but from rethinking old evidence in the light of new ideas springing up in our own times. Students then can also see why the good historian, like the good teacher, is interested not in manipulation or

indoctrination but in acting as an honest messenger from the past—not interested in possessing student’s minds but in presenting them with the power to possess their own.

#### The student conducts historical research:

Therefore, the student is able to

**Formulate historical questions** from encounters with historical documents, eyewitness accounts, letters, diaries, artifacts, photos, historical sites, art, architecture, and other records from the past.

**Obtain historical data** from a variety of sources, including: library and museum collections, historic sites, historical photos, journals, diaries, eyewitness accounts, newspapers, and the like; documentary films, oral testimony from living witnesses, censuses, tax records, city directories, statistical compilations, and economic indicators.

**Interrogate historical data** by uncovering the social, political, and economic context in which it was created; testing the data source for its credibility, authority, authenticity, internal consistency and completeness; and detecting and evaluating bias, distortion, and propaganda by omission, suppression, or invention of facts.

**Identify the gaps in the available records and marshal contextual knowledge and perspectives of the time and place** in order to elaborate imaginatively upon the evidence, fill in the gaps deductively, and construct a sound historical interpretation.

**Employ quantitative analysis** in order to explore such topics as changes in family size and composition, migration patterns, wealth distribution, and changes in the economy.

**Support interpretations with historical evidence** in order to construct closely reasoned arguments rather than facile opinions.

## XI. CONCLUSION

T.R.Adams defines, colonialism in his book ‘Modern colonialism: Institutions and Policies’ as the political control of an under developed people whose social and economic life is directed by the dominant power. The word colonialism, alleged policy of exploitation on backward or weak people by a large power. There will be the political sovereignty, it can be achieved by force, by political collaboration, by economic, social or cultural dependence In India the *Subaltern Studies* began in the early 1980s as a critique of the existing historiography which was accused by its initiators for ignoring the voice of the people. The writers associated with the project promised to offer a completely new kind of history in the field of Indian studies. Judging from the reactions from the scholars and students in the early years, it seemed to have fulfilled this promise to some extent. It soon received international recognition. In the early years, encompassing six volumes, edited by Ranajit Guha, the *Subaltern Studies* made efforts to explore the consciousness and actions of the oppressed groups in the Indian society. However, there was another trend discernible in some of the essays published in it. This trend was influenced by the increasingly important postmodernist and postcolonialist writings in the Western academic circles.writers associated with the *Subaltern Studies*. This trend was marked by a shift from the earlier emphasis on the subaltern themes. Sometimes the scepticism became so extreme that it questioned the need for the writing of history itself.

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