

Why History ? use and Abuse of History

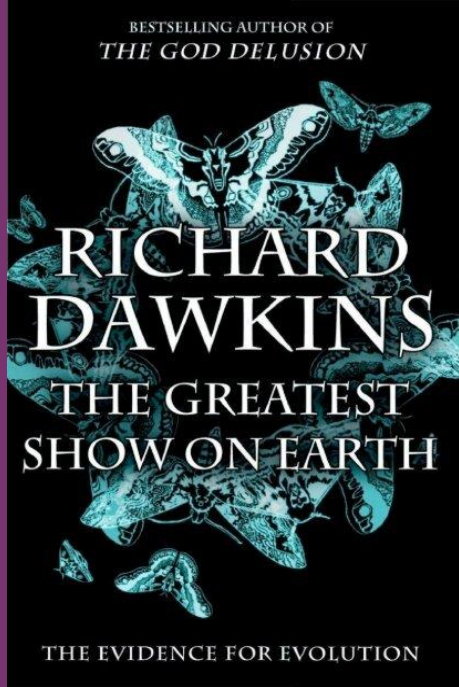
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WHAT IS HISTORY?

- **History** is the study of the human past as it is described in the written documents left by human beings.
- The past, with **all** its decisions completed, its participants dead and its **history** told, is what the general public perceives as the immutable bedrock on which we historians and archaeologists stand.
- But it is we who interpret these facts. So history is as much about present as about past.



HUMANS A SPEC IN HISTORY

Evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins has a superb analogy to highlight this fact: Stretch your arms out to represent the span of the history of life on Earth, from the origins of life to where we are today. With this scale, the whole history of our species is represented by the thickness of one fingernail clipping. All of *recorded* human history is represented by the dust from one light stroke of a nail file.

- Of all the species that have ever lived on Earth, 99.9% are now extinct. Not only have we survived, we have also seen intellectual and technological progress beyond any other form of life.

EVOLUTION

- About 13.5 Billion years ago matter, energy, time and space came into being in what is known as Big Bang. This story of the fundamental features of our Universe is called **Physics**.
- About 300,000 years after this appeared matter and energy started to coalesce into complex structures called atoms which then combined into molecules. The story of atoms, molecules and their interaction is called **Chemistry**.
- About 3.8 Billion years ago on a planet earth, certain molecules combined to form particularly large and intricate structures called organisms. The story of organism is called **Biology**.
- About 70,000 years ago organisms belonging to the species Homo sapiens started to form elaborate structures called cultures. The subsequent story of these ciultures is called **History**.

Yuval Noah Harari, 2011, Sapiens; A brief History of Human kind, Penguin, Random House. U.K.

PRE HISTORY AND PROTO HISTORY

- **Prehistory** is the period when the homo Sapiens came from Africa, West Asia and East Asia and made India their home around 65,000 years ago.
- Paleolithic Age (from early period to around 8000 B.C.)
- Mesolithic Age (around 8000 B.C. to around 4000 B.C.)
- Neolithic Age (around 4000 B.C. to around 2500 B.C.)
- For pre history there are no written records and hence we cannot be sure. Bu we can work on what kind of life they had based on other evidence. We have fossils, archaeological excavations of ancient human settlements, various objects made by human like tools, and the DNA of both ancient and present day individuals.
- Some historians use the term **Proto History** to describe the period between prehistory and History, 2500 to 600 B.C. This is a period in which a culture or civilization has not yet developed writing, but other cultures have already noted the existence of those pre-literate groups in their own writings.
- Tony Joseph, 2018, *Early Indian: The story of our ancestor and where we came from*, Juggernaut Books, New Delhi.

IS HISTORY UNIQUE TO HUMANS?

- Ever since we learned to write, we have documented how special we are.
- Aristotle marked out our differences over 2,000 years ago. We are "**rational animals**" pursuing knowledge for its own sake.
- Humans and chimpanzees diverged from our common ancestor more than six million years ago.
- We left the trees, started walking and began to live in larger groups. And then our brains got bigger. Physically we are another primate, but our bigger brains are unusual.
- We started to produce superior cultural and technological artefacts. Our stone tools became more intricate.

HOW DO HUMANS DIFFER

- Chimps kiss, laugh, lie, have in-group politics and show goal-directed action. Ants, wolves, and dolphins all have social traits. Many primates are self-aware. Elephants cry. These are just a few examples, but the point is that many of our behaviors are actually much more advanced versions of innate “animal instincts.”
- Our ability to think about objects, principles, and ideas that are not physically present. It gives us the ability for complex language. This is supported by a lowered larynx (which allows for a wider variety of sounds than all other animals) and brain structures for complex language. Our mind acquires the ability to imagine, to reason, to choose among various motives, and to evaluate alternative plans to actions.
- Symbolic abstract thinking has a crucial role to play in allowing us as individuals—and as a species—to be imaginative and solve complex problems.
- Symbolism is the use of symbols to signify ideas and qualities by giving them symbolic meanings that are different from their literal sense. Generally, it is an object representing another to give it an entirely different meaning that is much deeper and more significant. Humans have this ability. He is a pig, an ass. Advertisers use it to the full. Diamonds are a girls best friends.

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ADVANTAGES OF HUMANS

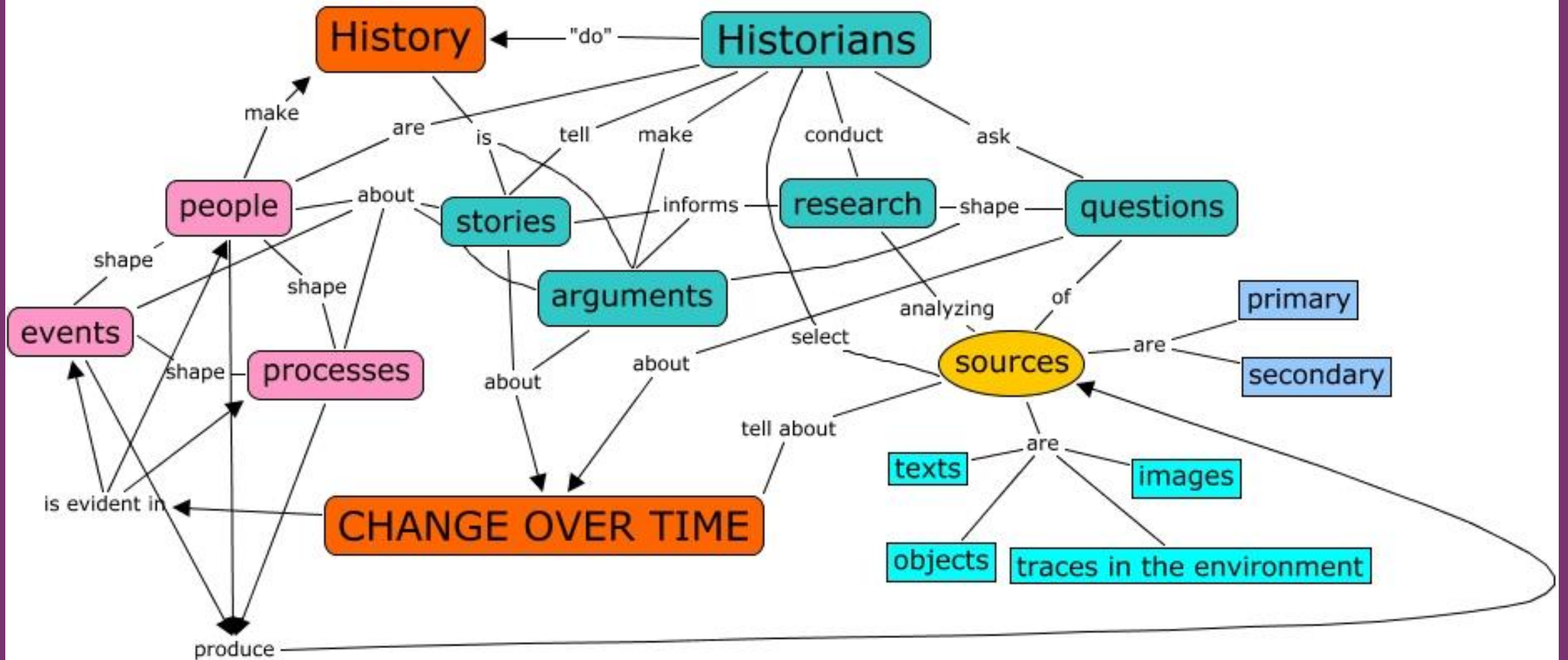
- We have our advanced language skills to thank for that
- We tell stories, we dream, we imagine things about ourselves and others and we spend a great deal of time thinking about the future and analysing the past.
- We have a fundamental urge to link our minds together. "This allows us to take advantage of others' experiences, reflections and imaginings to prudently guide our own behaviour.

SYMBOLS



- The symbols made by *H. sapiens* are clearly more advanced. We had also been around for 100,000 years before symbolic objects appeared.
- We started with language-like symbols as a way to represent the world around us,
- Our advanced teamwork may simply reflect our long history of **working together to get food.**

WHAT IS HISTORY?



IMPORTANCE OF HISTORY

- Historians do not perform heart transplants, improve highway design, or arrest criminals. In a society that quite correctly expects education to serve useful purposes, the functions of history can seem more difficult to define than those of engineering or medicine.
- Gives us an identity as to who we are.
- Studying **history** is **important** because it allows us to understand our past, which in turn allows us to understand our present.
- It is important because history helps you understand the past to predict the future and help in creating it.
- Understanding history helps us avoid repeating the mistakes over and over again.
- History is in fact very useful, actually indispensable, but the products of historical study are less tangible, sometimes less immediate, than those that stem from some other disciplines.

FUNCTIONS OF HISTORY

- **History Helps Us Understand People and Societies.**

The past causes the present, and so the future. Any time we try to know why something happened—whether a shift in political party dominance, a major change in the teenage suicide rate, or a war in the Balkans or the Middle East—we have to look for factors that took shape earlier.

- **The Importance of History in Our Own Lives**

History well told is beautiful. Biography and military history appeal in part because of the tales they contain.

FUNCTIONS

History Contributes to Moral Understanding.

Studying the stories of individuals and situations in the past allows a student of history to test his or her own moral sense. People who have weathered adversity not just in some work of fiction, but in real, historical circumstances can provide inspiration.

History Provides Identity.

History helps one to understand the immense complexity of our world and therefore enables one to cope with the problems and possibilities of the present and future. History provides us with a sense of identity. People need to develop a sense of their collective past.

Studying History Is Essential for Good Citizenship.

History provides data about the emergence of national institutions, problems, and values—it's the only significant storehouse of such data available. It offers evidence also about how nations have interacted with other societies, providing international and comparative perspectives essential for responsible citizenship.

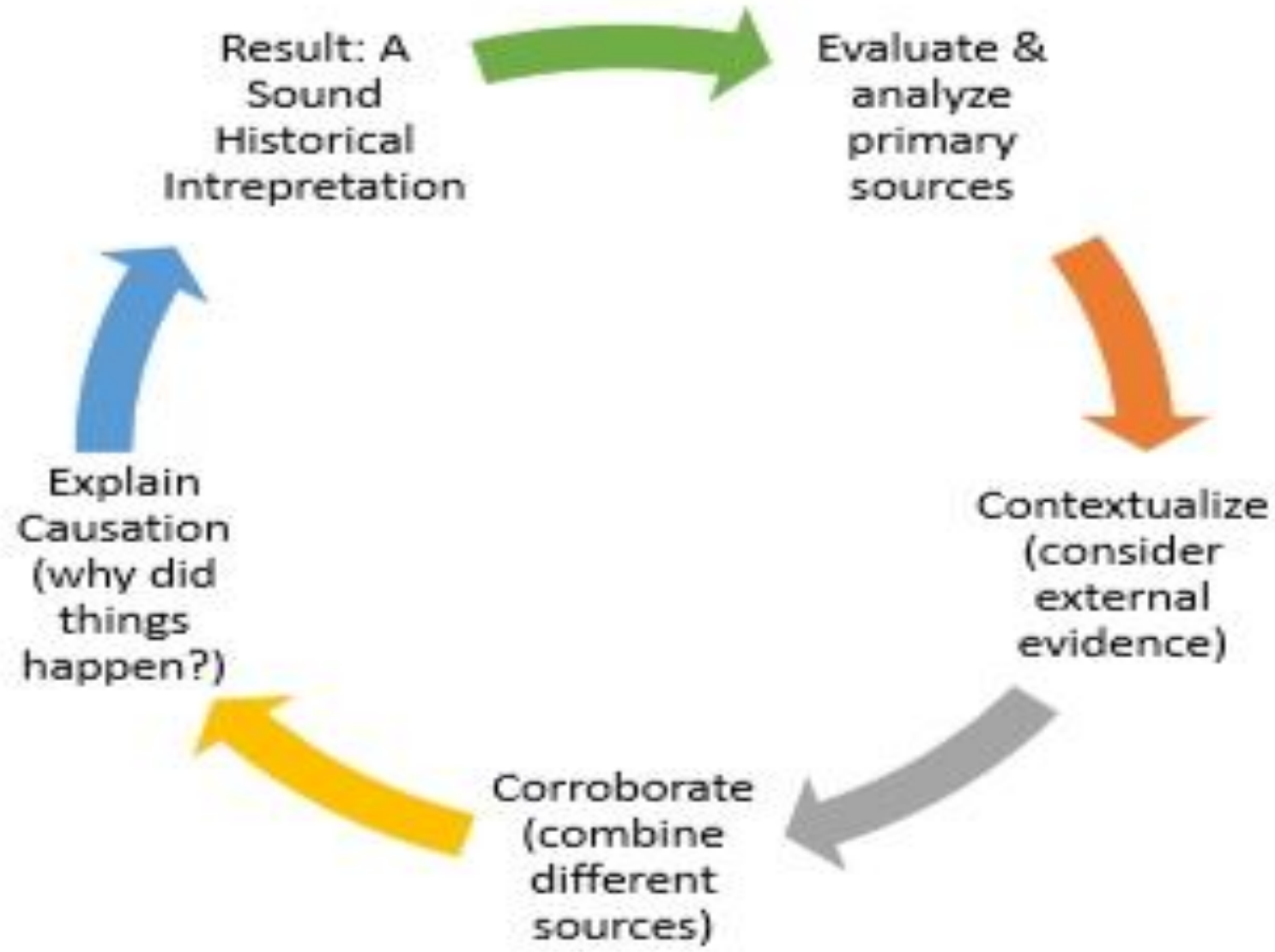
WHY IS HISTORY NEEDED?

- The past has value to our society. It helps to show how we've gotten to where we are now, and understand why our country is progressing or not progressing.
- Our view of history shapes the way we view the present, and therefore it could be easier for new generations to preserve history and pass it on into the future generations to know what has really happened in the past.
- We should be aware of our respective culture to know the history of our own country.
- To evaluate the happenings of the past for the present generation not to commit the same mistakes of the past.

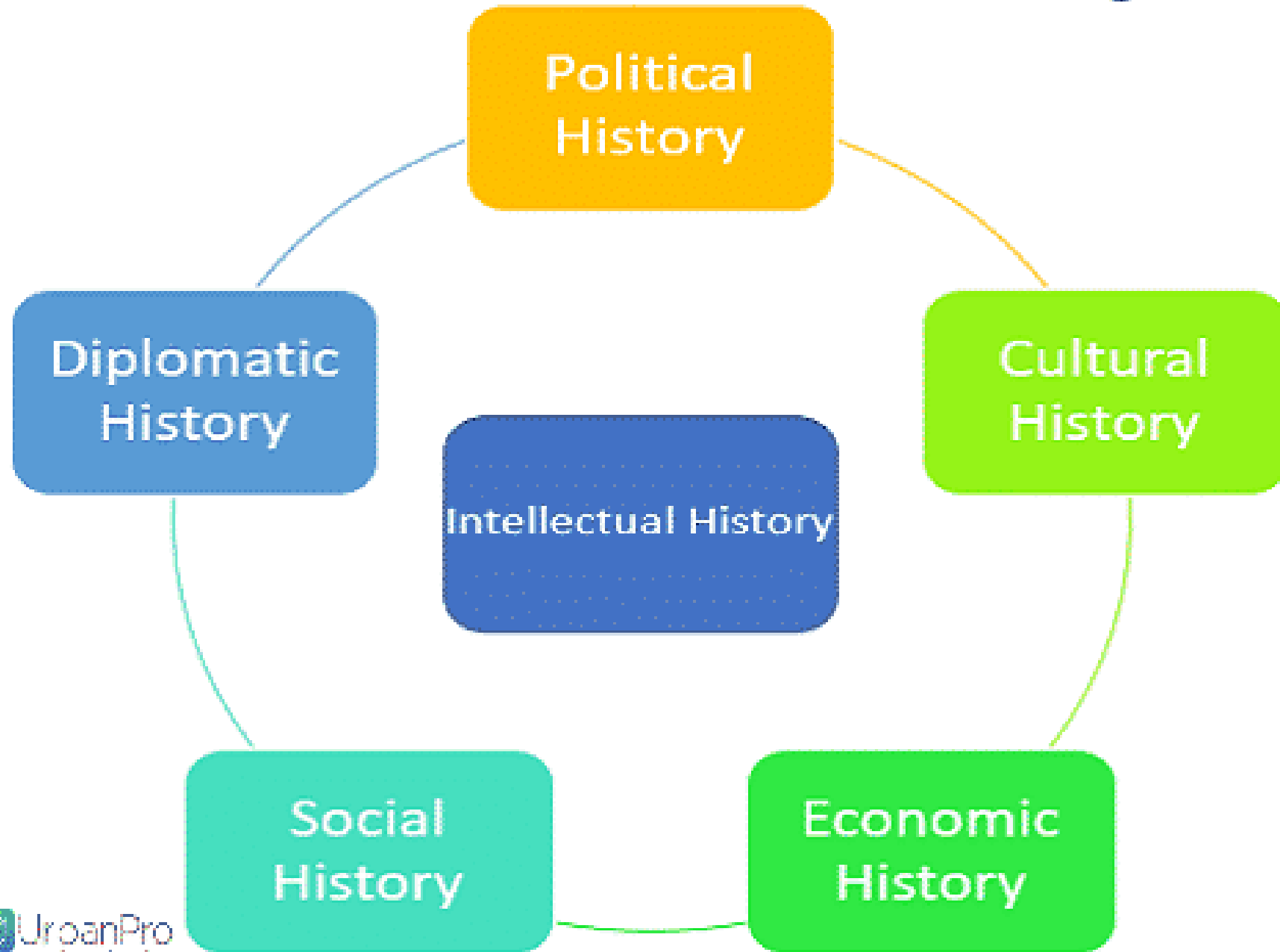
CONNECTS TO THE WORLD

- History also helps us to understand many of the issues that affect the world today
- By broadening your knowledge of current affairs, you are developing yourself personally and preparing yourself more fully for adult and working life
- Can you think of any issues that affect the world that have their roots in history?

Keys to Historical Thinking



6 Different Types of History



KINDS OF HISTORY

- **Political History:** Political History is the narration of the evolution of the political related matters of the past.
- **Diplomatic History:** That branch of history that focuses on the study of international relations between nations (between states).
- **Cultural History:** That branch of history that deals with the traditions and cultural interpretation of the past.
- **Social History:** The history which focuses on the study of various societal norms like ways of living, standard, customs, disciplines, status and so on of the people, alongside the demography. **Women's History** is an important branch
- **Economic History:** Studies economies as well as economical phenomena of the past.
- **Intellectual History:** The history which aims to understand the ideas (ideology and philosophy) by understanding the political, cultural, intellectual, and social context of the past.

THE THREE EPISTEMOLOGICAL WEAKNESSES OF HISTORY



- **1 - The historian's sources - the raw material.** The first thing that makes historical knowledge difficult to acquire is the inadequacy of the raw materials that the historian is forced to work with. Unlike a social scientist who can directly observe participants in a controlled experimental context, our inability to travel through time means that the historian relies on indirect and uncontrollable evidence that the past has left behind.

THE THREE EPISTEMOLOGICAL WEAKNESSES OF HISTORY

- **2 -The historian's method - interpreting the evidence.** History constructs plausible meanings from the evidence that the past has left behind. What this means in reality is two levels of interpretation. In the **first level of interpretation**, historians depend entirely on the people who have interpreted the events they have lived through and who have left us a record to consider. The **second level of interpretation** is of course the interpretation of the past evidence by the historians themselves.
- **3 -The historian's product - writing the text.** The final epistemological weakness of history stems from the simple inability to be able to compare like with like. History cannot be compared with the past and cannot be verified against the past, because the past and history are different things. The historical text, the narrative account can never correspond to the past as it was, because unlike history the past was not a text, it was a series of events, experiences, situations etc.

USE OF HISTORY

1. History is essential to individuals and society
2. History helps us understand people and societies
3. History is the story of human life on Earth
4. History contributes to moral understanding
5. History provides Identity
6. It is a master discipline, 'in which', as E. P. Thompson put it, 'all other human disciplines meet', 'the Queen of humanities'.

UNDERSTANDING CHANGE

- History is unique in that it investigates how human life has changed over time
- Today the scientists, the administrators, technocrats, intellectuals, musicians, painters, artists, all are products of history.
- We will develop an understanding of change through the perspectives of political, social, cultural, economic, religious and scientific history

FOR CAREER

- Independent thinkers
- Open-minded and objective
- Disciplined
- Good communicators
- Able to analyse issues and problems
- Able to put together logical arguments

SKILLS

- Historians are regarded as having had an education that trains their minds to assemble, organise and present facts and opinions and this is a very useful quality in many walks of life and careers .
- History is an excellent preparation for very many other jobs.
- One can get the ability to understand and solve issues of society through history.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

- The study of history is not just about interpreting the past but also presenting your thoughts
- History helps you to write in an organised, coherent, logical way, supporting your views with evidence
- This will help you in your other subjects, as well as in life and work later

RESEARCH SKILLS

- A study of the past will introduce us to many different types of evidence, such as:
 - Paintings, Sculptures, Photographs.
 - Maps
 - Oral literature and textual traditions.
 - Political cartoons
 - Diary entries, Memoirs
 - Official records

RESEARCH SKILLS

- As a historian , exploring these types of evidence enhances the research skills
- A person can become skilled at locating historical data from different sources, evaluating it and recording and presenting their findings
- One will also realise the importance of looking at issues from more than one point of view

ANALYTICAL SKILLS

- You will also develop your ability to think critically, to evaluate the usefulness of sources, to detect bias or propaganda
- These skills are very useful in many careers and in everyday life



ABUSE OF HISTORY



- The historian [Carl Becker](#) wrote, “History is what the present chooses to remember about the past.” And as a nation founded on the pillars of genocide, slavery, patriarchy, violent repression of popular movements, savage war crimes committed to expand the empire, and capitalist exploitation, we choose to remember very little.
- [James Baldwin](#) never tired of pointing out, is very dangerous. It feeds self-delusion. It severs us from recognition of our propensity for violence. It shuts down the voices of the oppressed. “History does not merely refer to the past ... history is literally present in all we do,” Baldwin wrote.

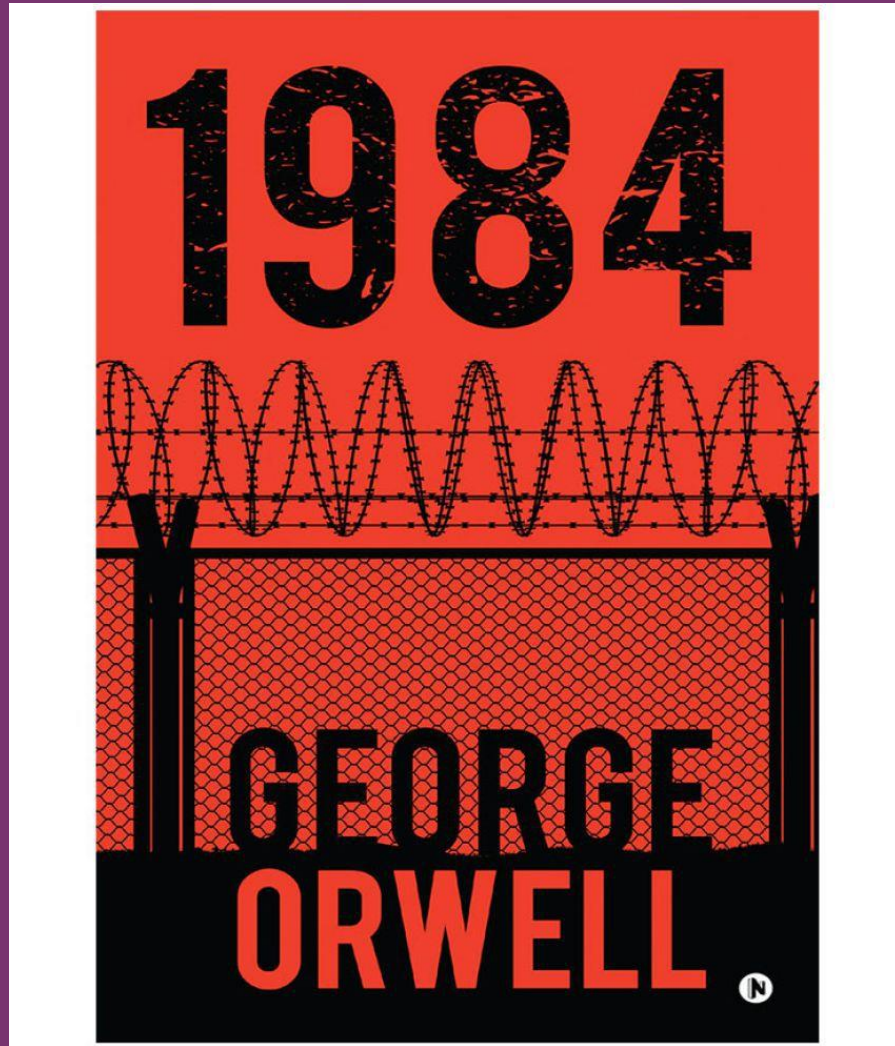
REWRITING OF HISTORY

- The rewriting of history is a project that has been undertaken by authoritarian regimes globally during the 20th and 21st centuries.
- In Nazi Germany, from 1934 onwards, many historians went into exile.
- Similarly, in the 1950s, many notable historians left Argentina during Juan Perón's tyrannical regime.
- There was censorship of historians in Pakistan after the Bangladesh war of 1971.

GEORGE ORWELL

This is a dystopian novel published in 1949. It describes a nightmare vision of future society – The polar opposite to a perfect world. George Orwell creates this image through a number of different methods and techniques.

George Orwell imagined a future world where a government at war could switch allegiances with the country's enemies and allies and a docile public would accept the revised version of history unquestioningly. Orwell, a keen observer of the modern world, recognized that history itself could be manufactured and manipulated in the service of broader purposes.



INDIAN HISTORY

- The development of history as an institutionalized discipline had its roots deep in the soil of colonial politics. The rise of British colonialism — for textualizing the past and standardizing an origin narrative.
- Britishers divided Indian History into Hindu, Muslim and British India. They came with the White man's Burden to civilise our society.
- We were backward civilisation where community was very important and we were spiritual .Our epics became myths and Sanskrit devalued.
- A colonial interpretation of Indian history played a critical role in creating and promoting divisions in Indian society and in legitimizing colonial rule
- Gradually, during the early decades of the 20th century, when the anti-colonial resistance was at its zenith, it emerged as one of the primary spaces for constructing a national identity. Hence it set an example for political ideologues to seek their validation from history.

DEVELOPMENT OF COLONIALISM

- With the emergence, in the late 19th century, of the Third, Finance Capital Stage of colonialism, and the deepening and spread of the industrialization process to several countries in the world, mainly the West, there occurred a fierce scramble for acquiring new colonies and establishing firm control over existing ones.
- This was necessary not only to secure exclusively for each metropolitan country markets and sources of raw material but also to protect the large investments that were being made in the colonies.
- V.I. Lenin had aptly summed up the situation in one line, characterizing the shift in attitude from the second to the third stage because of the introduction of the new element of foreign capital investments: ‘the creditor is more firmly attached to the debtor, than the seller is to the buyer’.
- The ideology of training the colonial people for self-governance was replaced with the colonial people being *permanently* unfit for self rule. Talk of leaving was now abandoned, as Sir Richard Temple, Governor of Bombay wrote in 1880; England ‘must keep India...because a vast amount of British capital has been sunk in the country, on the assurance of British rule being *humanly speaking, perpetual.*’

LEGITIMISING COLONIAL RULE

- The legitimation for *permanent* colonial rule came not only from the notion of Indians being unfit to govern themselves because of their supposedly flawed history, geography, culture, religious practices, climate, family structure, social institutions, demographic constitution, etc.,
- There was an increasingly key notion that colonial rule was necessary to keep peace among a people deeply divided on the basis of religion and caste.
- Self government based on a *democratic* elective principle, (as demanded by the Indian National Movement) could not be granted as then the religious majority, the Hindus, would oppress the religious minorities, the Muslims and others.
- Since this legitimation for continuance of colonial rule was based on the notion of a divided people, the colonial state made every conceivable effort to create, consolidate and provoke this divide.
- For various historical reasons, the British found the religious divide as the most effective one though many other divisions based on language, caste, occupation, etc., were also promoted assiduously. Indian history was now seen as one where the Indian people were *always deeply divided* on the basis of 'primordial identities' of religion and caste and these identities were seen as subsuming all other identities or interests, economic, political, social or cultural.
- The religious communal ideology and a *communal interpretation of history* was thus born and propagated widely. As India has learnt to its grave cost, the longest lasting legacy of colonialism has not been the economic or political destruction but that, wherever it has gone globally, beginning with Ireland, the first colony, it has left behind a *divided people*.

PROBLEMS OF SOUTH ASIA

- It is no surprise that many of the problems that South Asian countries face today have a lot in common. This is because, on the one hand most of these countries were colonies of the British and, on the other, there is a lot of overlap in their religious and cultural norms. Some of them have been artificially divided in the name of religion but share much in common.
- The focus of most of these is the abuse of history by religious nationalist movements, and some of them delve into the shared commonalities of the region - conflict and governance, history and politics, culture and philosophy, and so on.

A POWERFUL TOOL

- History becomes a powerful tool and there are attempts at rewriting our history.
- Hindu nationalism attempts to fortify its ideology and create a long-lasting influence, it is only natural that it would turn towards history.
- This right-wing revisionism balances itself on binaries, such as fact *versus* myth and also Hindus *versus* Muslims.
- Identity blocks of 'Hindus' and 'Muslims' are not cultural givens or historical monoliths, but results of political process with innumerable divisions and fragments that can only become the dominant sentiments as a result of a specific political process.
- Leads to false consciousness- communalism where religion and not class and culture is the dividing force. In reality a Kerala Muslim has more in common with a Kerala Hindu than a Kashmiri Muslim but Communalism creates a bond that all Muslims irrespective of class, region or language are one.

At this juncture, since the identity of being a 'Hindu' has gained primacy in the public sphere, it is being consolidated through this attempt to trace Hindu origins by rewriting 'history'. Not only does this polarization add fuel to the fire of co The grand narrative, which is taught in schools as history, is a mouthpiece of the State. This rewriting project will affect future generations of learners immensely. Rather than being taught how to think, they will be absorbed into a system The association of history with the idea of a singular truth has long been criticized by generations of historians. And yet, it remains the bridge over the gulf which separated history and politics in India. However, in these dark times, the pro

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HISTORY REWRITING PROJECT

- Therefore, 70 years after Independence, as Hindu nationalism attempts to fortify its ideology and create a long-lasting influence, it is only natural that it would turn towards history and archaeology.
- Archaeological representations need to be used carefully in the creation of histories. Artefacts do not provide normative conclusive 'truths' as it is often claimed in these projects of rewriting. Hence it becomes problematic to cite archaeological sources as proof of mythological narratives.
- This right-wing revisionism balances itself on binaries, such as fact *versus* myth and also Hindus *versus* Muslims. In India, religious sentiments and values could not be divorced from political processes. Identity blocks of 'Hindus' and 'Muslims' are not cultural givens or historical monoliths, but results of political process with innumerable divisions and fragments that can only become the dominant sentiments as a result of a specific political process.

POLARISATION

- At this juncture, since the identity of being a 'Hindu' has gained primacy in the public sphere, it is being consolidated through this attempt to trace Hindu origins by rewriting 'history'. Not only does this polarization add fuel to the fire of communal tension within South Asian politics at large but it also marginalizes other groups within the broader Indian demographic, such as Dalits and other lower-caste groups, religious minorities like Parsis and Jews, and even women.
- This Hindu history will reify history by underplaying the role of women and other gender groups. By reiterating patriarchal stereotypes of women, the right-wing government will facilitate its politics of invented traditionalism. It will also obliterate the voices of women and other marginalized gender groups even from the archives.

HISTORY AND SINGULAR TRUTH

- The grand narrative, which is taught in schools as history, is a mouthpiece of the State. This rewriting project will affect future generations of learners immensely. Rather than being taught how to think, they will be absorbed into a system of being told what to think. The pedagogical routes for unlearning will gradually become endangered.
- The association of history with the idea of a singular truth has long been criticized by generations of historians. And yet, it remains the bridge over the gulf which separated history and politics in India. However, in these dark times, the promise of a better tomorrow lies within history. Since it always repeats itself, we can only hope that it dethrones the authoritarianism that lurks beneath the facade of democracy, ushering in a new era characterized by greater compassion, understanding and, above all, humanity.

CONCLUSIONS

- Choosing history allows you to acquire a combination of skills and insights that will
- broaden your understanding of the world
- develop you as a person
- prepare you for a future career
- enable you to participate fully in society.
- It is a powerful tool that can also lead to abuse.

History
people helps understanding
past looking develop
historical skills
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