
UNIT 1 WHAT IS HISTORY?*

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will learn about:

- early European historiography and its features,
- does India have history?,
- embedded and Externalised forms of history, and
- contexts which shaped the historical traditions.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In Europe, historiography became important by the twelfth century CE. The Judeo-Christian religions required the authenticating of certain traditions. This made History pivotal. By the nineteenth century, History was seen as being central to any civilisation. It was believed that any discipline, whether it be botany or physics, has to have a history, which would be the path to knowledge. So, any civilisation without history was deemed as without knowledge. A unified European identity derived from the fact that there was a continuity from the Greeks to modern Europe. One could access this identity through the study of its history. Greeks and even the Mesopotamians had historical tradition. The Chinese as early as the second century CE recorded events which were based on the cyclical form of cosmological time and drew on questions of ethics and causation. The Greco-Roman writing on the past was believed to be historical because it was based on facts and rational

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enquiry. Ancient European records took care of genealogy, causality, sequential narrative and time-reckoning. It is against this background on historical writings in the world, that the search for indigenous histories of early India under colonialism have to be grounded.

In this Unit, we will be studying the historical traditions of early India. We will be investigating whether early India had any historical consciousness and what forms it took.

1.2 CONSTRUCTIONS OF EARLY INDIAN HISTORY

In the eighteenth century, British colonialists began looking for historical literature as a distinct category in the Sanskrit tradition. They purported to have drawn a blank and thus the Indian culture and its Hindu civilisation were deemed as a-historical. Though some Indologists like William Jones were convinced that some texts might have contained the core of history, most maintained that the texts had little to show for an accurate record of the past. The only exception was Kalhana's *Rajatarangini*, which was the 12th century history of Kashmir.

The Orientalists were of the opinion that ancient India had no history primarily because according to them India lacked any historical writings. By history they meant disciplinary history. Because ancient Indians lacked a sense of history, they also were without any historical consciousness. Here it is important to distinguish between history and historical writings. The Orientalists observed that some history of India can be reconstructed based on the stories contained in the Epics, *Puranas* and the accounts of Foreigners but there is an almost complete absence of any historical writings. 'History writing and therefore historical consciousness is taken to be a sign of real history, and vice-versa. History itself is tied to historical consciousness because history that is truly history involves self-conscious actors creating what is new and without precedent, and, conversely, history writing is a sign of a history-consciousness' (Trautmann 2012). There were time and again comparisons between the systematic absence of historical records in ancient India and contemporary European historiography. They said that the Renaissance sense of the past showed clear awareness of evidence, causation and chronology together with sequential narrative. This was not the case with India.

However, some Orientalists influenced by the humanist version of Enlightenment philosophy began a search for a history of India. The initial reading was of texts on Hindu law and religion. On the other hand, in the nineteenth century, the Utilitarian thought sought to understand the new interpretations of Indian history. They supposed that the fact India did not have a history was because of the nature of Indian society. The Indian past was viewed as conforming to the theory of Oriental Despotism. James Mill's *The History of British India* (1818-1823), was the first attempt to survey the past. He divided Indian history into three periods: Hindu and Muslim civilisations and the British rule. Hindu civilisation was viewed as backward, irrational and stagnant. This view became part of Hegel's more abstract historical generalisation. According to him what India has is not History but Fore-History. In another passage Hegel is clearly speaking of ancient India: '[T]he real objective history of a nation cannot be said to have begun until it possess a written historical record. A culture which does not yet have history has made no real cultural progress [and this applied to the pretended history of India over three and a half thousand years]' (Hegel as quoted in Trautmann 2012). James

Mill rejected the Orientalists' ideas that Indian history could be sensed in the epics and other sources.

Meanwhile work continued on epigraphy, numismatics and archaeology and it led to the reconstruction of Indian history. However, comparisons with Europe overshadowed the new beginnings. In the 1960s, a turning point was reached when it began to dawn on Indian historians that it just might be feasible to search for history in the early period. It was recognised that Indian society was never dormant and did undergo change. This change was not uniform. This appeared to be a radically different view of the Indian past from the one held earlier. Works of D.D. Kosambi and later Marxist historians began to research historical change. There was some limited discussion on early Indian historical tradition. Historians agreed that early Indian historical tradition did exist but it was a weak tradition. It was also claimed that the ordering of the past differs from culture to culture and the Indian ordering of historiography would not be obvious to those who were familiar with the European tradition. Broadly speaking, Indian historiography's problematic nature continued for some time. V. S. Pathak's *Ancient Historians of India* was an exception to the above views which studied one specific genre – *carita* literature. He argued that not much attention has been given to texts that support the existence of a historical tradition such as *vamsavalis*, etc. Further discussion enriched the analysis even more. It came to be realised that what constitutes as historical tradition can be ascertained by distinguishing between texts intended as history and those with a broader literary interest. All texts cannot be regarded as relating to the past as history. The genres of the western tradition are different from the Indian genres recording history. History is culturally formed, the purpose of the record and the interaction of the author with the audience is crucially relevant. It is in this context that work by Romila Thapar becomes important. She has undertaken the most comprehensive study of historical traditions in ancient India. We will be presenting here some of her observations and arguments which point to the fact that ancient Indian society conceived of history in a different way, at least different from the western notions of history. 'Both variety of texts – those which reflect a consciousness of history and those which reveal forms of historical writing – were used in early times to reconstruct the past...' (Thapar 2013). In fact according to her no society is a-historical. Every society has a concept of the past and India was no exception. What is important is to realise that societies emphasise certain events more than others and how these societies maintain records is conditioned by the historical tradition.

1.3 WHAT IS HISTORICAL TRADITION?

When societies have a sense of the past, historical traditions are created. It consists of three elements:

- a) Historical consciousness of past events particularly those which are considered relevant or significant by the society.
- b) These events are arranged in a chronological fashion and reflect elements of causality.
- c) These events are recorded in a way which meets with the requirements of the society.

The historical tradition may be a record of authentic events which may or may not be actual events but necessarily reflect believed assumptions about the past.

Historical tradition has a social function. When historical traditions emerge certain pointers are considered significant.

- 1) At what point of time the society feels the need to create the historical tradition?
- 2) Who were the keepers of the tradition?
- 3) What kind of literature the tradition is embedded in-secular or religious?
- 4) What genres came into existence to record the tradition?
- 5) The composition of the historical tradition in a particular social context.
- 6) The tradition was meant for what kind of an audience?
- 7) Manipulation of the use of tradition by social groups.

‘Historical tradition, therefore, refers to those aspects of the past, recorded orally or in texts, which are consciously transmitted from generation to generation carrying the sanctity of antiquity and a believed historicity’ (Thapar 2013). The question is not whether narration about the past is authentic or not. The point is in what way historical consciousness is perceived in the texts in early Indian society. What is significant is to study how societies viewed their pasts and why it did so. The historical tradition legitimises the present. A comprehension of these aspects would help us understand the societies of that time.

1.4 TOWARDS HISTORICAL TRADITION

There are various ways in which societies represent their past. Romila Thapar differentiates between ‘the past’ – which can be realised in an abstract sense and the nature of its representation. In early periods, this kind of representation took the form of a narrative ‘that related what was believed to have happened in periods prior to the present’.

The Indian historical tradition constitutes three traditions:

- 1) Puranic tradition
- 2) Sramanic tradition, particularly Buddhist and Jaina
- 3) Bardic tradition

The Puranic and Sramanic traditions form distinct historiographies, each giving divergent interpretations. Some events are highlighted and some, suppressed. There is a mutual borrowing indicating that each is familiar with the other though it is not stated as such. The bardic tradition goes back to the early epic compositions. The bardic traditions almost runs like a substratum into later times. The bards maintained that they were formulating the genealogies of high status families which constituted as historical sources in the second millennium CE.

Both Puranic and Sramanic historiographies contain narratives relating the past. All the narratives are underlined by a curiosity about the past and its function in the present. When a particular community’s aspirations are tied to history, a single narrative is generated which makes a particular view of the past acceptable. With historical change, alternative narratives of the same past are initiated. This may be followed by explanations regarding why some narratives were more accurate than others. Romila Thapar insists that the reconstruction of the past as history is always a representation and may not be the ‘absolute truth’. The shape and accounting of time is crucial to history. In early India, history was tied to a cyclic concept of time. This is different from the Judeo-Christian tradition which is based on the linear time, which constitutes an important factor in historical thinking.

Check Your Progress-1

1) What in your opinion was the reaction of colonialist scholars towards India having any historical sense? Give reasons for your answer.

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2) What is a historical tradition? Explain.

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1.5 PERCEPTION AND RECORDING OF PAST IN EARLY INDIA

Of late it has been recognised that various groups in society have their own versions of history. These may be fanciful, but at the same time, reflect their particular perception of the past. The intentions of the authors can either keep them discrete or amalgamate them. Much can be gleaned about the author and his society from even fabricated versions claiming to be historical. The reasons behind fabrication have to be studied. But at the same time it has to be recognised that it is a fabrication.

The study of the consciousness of the past and its function within the society is an important task for the historian. It becomes more pertinent to analyse the forms in which the Indian society has chosen to record the past. Every society has many pasts and their records are bound to vary in form. Narratives recalling the past might vary and the comparison between the variants tells us about the nature of the narrative. Romila Thapar notes that a view of the past becomes especially important at times of transition and change. These are the times when the past is either rejected or becomes a model. It could alternately be used to legitimise the changing present. Any historian who undertakes a study of historical traditions of early India have to keep the following points in mind:

- 1) Since history has been used to legitimise those in power, the majority of early historical writings are in the form of statements of the ruling class and the elite. What others had to say has to be extrapolated from these statements.
- 2) Perceptions of historical change are provided in their past within the historical tradition of particular communities. What is significant is the notion of change.
- 3) History means viewing the past from a particular perspective, from a point in time. This means that the present has also to be privileged.
- 4) Texts which relate to the past have to be situated within their contemporary context. What it means is that the relationship between the past, the text and its audience is implied.
- 5) The projection of time in a particular form is another way of making a statement. The perspective of those recording the events within a chronological framework is inescapable.

1.6 DIFFERENT KINDS OF HISTORICAL TRADITIONS

The *itihasa-purana* traditions constituted one kind of historical thinking. The working over of the tradition moves from a heroic to a courtly phase, and from clan societies to kingdoms with elements of the first being continued into the second. The bardic tradition constitutes a different kind of historical tradition incorporating historical consciousness. The relationship between the two forms was tense. The other historical traditions were represented by the Buddhist and Jaina traditions which recorded events and other persons in a different framework. The Sramanic traditions were not divorced from religious intent but they nevertheless did attempt to give centrality to history – as they viewed it. In the literature of the Jainas and the Buddhists some very influential views were expressed. Monasteries were the main institutional centres for preserving their historical traditions. They maintained chronicles of monastic and sectarian activities. Many reasons have been accounted for the different perspective of the Sramanic historical traditions. Some of these are:

- 1) Historicity of the founders of these religions.
- 2) Their breaking away from orthodoxy or orthopraxy.
- 3) The importance of eschatology.
- 4) The social background of the patrons. Most of these hailed from the agricultural and trading class.
- 5) The initial urban and literate milieu of their teachings.
- 6) The institutionalisation of their sects as orders.
- 7) The need to maintain versions of sectarian conflicts among these orders.
- 8) The interplay between the religious order and political power.

1.7 ITIHASA AND ITS MANY FACETS

In trying to understand why the past was constructed, reconstructed and represented in particular ways and whether these provide a consciousness of history, we are essentially following the arguments of the noted historian Romila Thapar who has contributed to this theme extensively through her writings.

Traditions which relate to the past are associated with two terms, *itihasa* and *purana*. *Itihasa* literally means ‘thus indeed it was’ and it is what we mean by history today. *Purana* means that which is old. It includes events and stories of ancient times. By the first millennium CE, this was used for a body of texts, the *Puranas*, which are concerned with particular deities. These constitute the major religious sectarian texts and give information about the myths and rituals associated with the deity. However they do contain some sections which can be categorised as historical records. Both the terms, *itihasa* and *purana* find mention in the *Atharvaveda* and the *Satapatha Brahmana*. In *Brahmanas* and the *Upanishads* these terms seem to refer to that which is believed to have happened in the past. *Itihasa - Purana* is referred to as the fifth *Veda*, as second-order knowledge which claims divine sanction but is not divine revelation.

The *Vedas* include *gathas* (hymns) and *narasamsis* (poems in praise of heroes) as part of *itihasa*. The Buddhist tradition also refers to *itihasa* but recognises its

association with Brahmanical sources. The ninth century *Jaina* author of *Adipurana*, Jinasena, defines *itihasa* as that which actually happened. An examination of literature which is linked to the *itihasa-purana* tradition will allow us to see how the past has been reconstructed. It has been observed that changes in the genres of texts associated with *itihasa* are linked to major historical changes ranging from the period from *c.* 1000 BCE to 1300 CE but seen as constituting substantially two periods registering difference: from *c.* 1000 BCE to *c.* 500 CE and the second from *c.* 500 CE to *c.* 1300 CE.

We begin with a category of texts which are the earliest in the Indian Subcontinent – the *Vedas* particularly the *Rigveda* and the *Brahmanas*, their hymns and narratives about heroes. Some segments are referred to as *itihasa*. The *Purana* emerges by the middle of the first millennium CE as a distinct category. However, only a part of some *Puranas* can be understood as being historical.

In the early compositions, historical consciousness is an **embedded form**. They form part of the ritual texts and have to be prised open. Though the texts are undoubtedly ritual in nature, some fragments of the historical tradition grow into the text. These embedded forms constitute the following:

- 1) Origin myths
- 2) Compositions in praise of heroes
- 3) Genealogies of ancient descent groups

Subsequently, in a later period, the genres become autonomous and historical or in other words '**externalised**'. Still later, historical traditions are articulated in ways and forms which are created with the purpose of recording history and more centrally structured around author, audience, patron and occasion.

In **Unit 2**, we have discussed the embedded forms and trace their journey up to the point they are gradually released from ritual texts. There is a gradual emergence of historical consciousness from ritual texts, and later in the *Puranas*, early inscriptions and some creative literature, they take the forms that have claim to have representation of the past. The Buddhist tradition is studied in **Unit 3**, where an attempt has been made to see how it is more centrally historical. The body of texts which have been discussed are:

- 1) Buddhist Pali Canon, encapsulating the early history of Theravada Buddhism
- 2) Chronicles of the Mahavihara monastery
- 3) Biographies of the Buddha associated with Northern Buddhism

Those texts which can be categorised as historical and are viewed as independent new historical genres are discussed subsequently in the course. These are:

- 1) Royal Biographies
- 2) Inscriptions
- 3) Chronicles

An examination of the different historical traditions reveal that there is a change from fragments of believed history to narratives focussed on a more clearly defined history.

1.7.1 Embedded History

The beginnings of the *itihasa-purana* tradition go back to *dana-stuti* hymns,

narasamsis and *akhyanas* of the *Rigveda* where these seem to have been included as part of the sacrificial ritual. These narratives were hymns in praise of generous patrons (*dana-stuti*) in the *Rigveda* and narratives (*narasamsis* and *akhyanas*). Through these narratives an attempt is made to fix a precedent for action in the present. In a later period, these forms were incorporated in the Epics – *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. However, the incorporation changes the form. The genealogies acquire greater depth in the Epics as compared to the *Vedas*. The genealogical sections of the early *Puranas* – the *vamsanucarita* – were further expanded into patterns of succession lists. It was put to writing in the early centuries CE thus ‘representing a construction of the past referring back to earlier times and based on earlier material’.

The construction of genealogical forms evolved out of the embedded forms and were used in the more evidently historical texts such as *caritas* (biographies) and *vamsavalis* (chronicles) in the period after the seventh century CE.

1.7.2 Externalised Historical Forms

Biographies of rulers or authoritative persons; chronicles and inscriptions constitute texts which are different from earlier ones. Not only inscriptions give information on chronology, dynastic history and economic change but also are a literal embodiment of historical consciousness. Many free standing inscriptions and architectural fragments were reused from earliest times. The questions that arise are pertinent: Why were some objects selected? What meanings do they convey? According to Romila Thapar, ‘Re-use is both an act of inheriting the past and translating it’ (Thapar 2013: 61).

The Buddhist monastic chronicles of Sri Lanka such as *Dipavamsa* and the *Mahavamsa* of the mid-first millennium CE tell us about the early history of Buddhism, interconnecting the history of India with the coming of the Buddhism to Sri Lanka. In this, Ashoka is seen as playing a major role. In the Mahayana of Northern Buddhism, the *Avadana* texts and the biographies of rulers and teachers, give evidence of a more clear representation of Indian history. Of these *Asokavadana* informs us about the activities of Mauryan king Ashoka and but from a more Northern Buddhist perspective.

Historical writing – no longer embedded in ritual texts – made its appearance in the post-Gupta period. It constitutes three forms: *caritas*, *prasasties* and *vamsavalis*. *Caritas* were written as *Kavyas*, and were historical biographies. They incorporated historical views. Banabhatta’s *Harshacarita* is the most successful. It captures the historical ethos of the seventh century CE. Sandhyakaranandin’s *Ramacarita* is slightly later in date and provides a perspective on the rebellion by the landowning intermediaries.

In the period after the seventh century CE, we have inscriptions which can be read additionally as dynastic annals. They list the dynasty chronologically and provide information on events. The *prasasti* section of the inscriptions carry historical information about the dynasty. It is essentially a eulogistic description of the kings and their achievements.

The *vamsavalis* constitute a historical tradition where the historical events are central. Kalhana’s *Rajatarangini* is the most illustrious example of this kind.

1.8 SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CONTEXT OF HISTORICAL TRADITIONS

Historical traditions are shaped by the requirements of their contexts. In the institutionalisation of power and resources, many processes of change through time affected the manner in which the changes were legitimised. The historical traditions can be comprehended by understanding the changes that have occurred in the historical contexts. In our effort to understand the historical contexts and the changes that have occurred it is important to understand the background.

There is evidence for two kinds of organisation of societies in early India. Clan societies emerged in the early period to be followed by kingdoms. Sometimes both coexisted also. Let us first try to understand these two organisations – clan society and kingdoms. Identity in a clan society is derived from the clan. A clan is a corporate group of unilineal kin defined by an actual or fictive genealogy. Persons within the same lineage trace their identity to the same ancestor. Kinship was central to social ties and controlled a variety of functions within the society. Fictive or actual genealogies were important and these were carried over in records of royal descent.

Genealogies constituted records of both present and past identity. Genealogies along with clan myths are found to keep track of processes in the clan societies – fission and fusion. When a large clan breaks up into smaller clans, some of which might migrate to new lands, it is called fission. Fusion is when a few clans come together to form a large lineage group. Romila Thapar maintains that, ‘Lineages were ordered hierarchically, and this ordering, if so required, could be recorded or reformulated in genealogical or other forms even at a stage subsequent to that ordering. Because of this hierarchy, some lineages were better placed than others for access to resources’ (Thapar 2013: 67). Lineage based societies generally recorded their past heroes and events. The early agro-pastoral societies in India considered cattle as a valuable asset. However some agriculture did form part of their subsistence strategy. The produce was offered ritually to ruling families. Wealth was in the form of prestations, offerings and gifts to the chief. A major portion of the produce was consumed in the ritual and given to those performing the ritual. The priests legitimised the status of the chief and in return received material gifts from the chief. When the importance of the clans increased with time, a distinct class of ritual specialists arose. Among these some were engaged with the memorisation of traditions about the past and narrated these on special occasions. This may have been the bards or the poets.

The chief had power, and was lauded as a hero by the priest. It was in this context that the hero-lauds and ballads assume importance. These poems were brief in length and aimed at increasing the importance of the chief. The poems were recited in clan gatherings and reiterated its identity. The hero-lauds were important both to the chief and to the clan.

The clan societies had many variants. Among these, the *gana-sanghas/gana-rajyas* – clans or assemblies of clans – were the oligarchies and chiefships of the early north Indian society. These kind of societies were more complex than those found in the *Vedas* and the *Mahabharata*. The Pali Buddhist Canon describes these societies in detail and the Buddha belonged to one such *gana-sangha* – the Sakyas. Gradually some were changing into kingships and the associated tension over forms of control, authority and power is depicted in the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*.

By the mid-first millennium BCE, kingship had emerged in the middle Ganga Plain. The chief through accumulation of wealth, which by this time was not gifted or spent in sacrifices, became powerful. Spread of agriculture and iron technology led to emergence of surplus and the beginnings of urbanisation. Caste came to regulate hierarchy in society and the sudras and untouchables became the labouring class. The social organisation became more complex and required governance by a central figure. Kingship emerged and slowly became the norm. The King now came to symbolise the state. With the emergence of kingship, the clan society was marginalised. Kingdoms when they emerged were antagonistic to *gana-sanghas*. In the fifth century BCE, in eastern India, Vrijjis – the confederacy of *gana-sangha* clans – got embroiled in a conflict with the powerful kingdom of Magadha. The hostility is also mentioned in the *Arthashastra*.

As different from clan societies, the kingdoms drew resources from regular taxes and the common ownership of land was not the norm any longer. As change accelerated further, by the Gupta period we see the emergence of intermediaries pointing to a quantitative and qualitative change in the complexities of state authority and governance. Land was granted to brahmanas in the post-Gupta times who were rewarded for having legitimised the power of the king. Soon not only brahmanas, but also religious institutions and administrators were given grants of land. The result was the emergence of a class of intermediaries between the cultivator and the king. They were now receiving what had earlier been revenue to the king. The more powerful of the intermediaries saw themselves as potential kings and competed with each other for the throne. 'In the establishing of these relationships and claims, there was much recourse to earlier historical traditions for purposes of legitimising rule' (Thapar 2013: 73).

The relatively egalitarian society of the clans was now transformed into a stratified complex society. Now competition for political authority was relatively open. Mythic origins and lineage links helped in legitimation. Control over narratives about the past became useful. The historical traditions record the changes through which the kingdoms were expanding in the post-Gupta period. New territories were being conquered and annexed. Clan societies were being converted to caste societies and incorporated into kingdom. Various types of societies like those which had been earlier hunter-gatherers, forest-dwellers, pastoralists, shifting cultivators and peasant groups now were assimilated in the caste society. The historical tradition records even those changes where the kingdoms and societies (which were to be incorporated through the appropriation of resources and conversion to caste) were facing each other in confrontations even though the evidence in the texts is not so apparent.

In these processes ideology played an important role. Usually coercion was carried out through a hegemonic ideology, generally of a religious sect. This is evident in some constructions and representations of the past aimed at providing legitimacy to an authority which was either already established or was going to be so. Constructions of the past was a gradual process. The transformations of clan-based societies into kingdoms continued well into the later part of the second millennium CE. By this time the kingdoms had become the norm and the clan societies came to exist in the more remote areas.

1.9 SOME REFLECTIONS

Historical consciousness is expressed in the way societies perceive and wish to present their pasts. It is an underlying feature of all societies. Initially the historical traditions may assume embedded forms as was clear from the hero-lauds in the

Rigveda. Here the patterns of the past are embedded into ritual texts. In contrast to this, in the Buddhist and Jaina historiographies, events connected with monastic Elders and the history of the *Sangha* become important. These are correlated with the history of rulers and powerful patrons making history a powerful statement of a different kind of tradition. The post-Gupta texts that pertain to historical writing, such as inscriptions, the *carita* literature and the chronicles follow the same pattern.

The ways in which the authors were commenting on what they believed to be the past, are highlighted in the texts. The past and its interface with the period when the texts were composed is also a facet worthy of study. Romila Thapar maintains that in the embedded tradition the narrative was updated through interpolations more than once. When distinctive historical writings emerged, there was no longer a need to update and change the text. The texts were now no longer associated with the sacred and other texts could be written as per requirement to confirm or contradict the earlier ones.

One must realise that there can be more than one historical tradition where the search is for a record of identities. A society’s perception of the past may have multiple forms which change from time to time. Historical consciousness in any society is meaningful and has relevance for an understanding of social culture. Past events which are relevant to the society are the ones which it is consciously aware of. It takes the form which meets the requirements of that society. ‘The form is based on its intellectual and social assumptions – these include the social purpose of the record and the ideological concerns of the society with reference to its understanding of the past’ (Thapar 2013: 84). This is, in a broad sense, the way this Unit has been structured.

Check Your Progress-2

1) What are embedded and externalised forms of history? Explain with the help of examples.

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2) What was the social, political and economic context of the historical traditions? In what way they have been shaped by these contexts?

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1.10 SUMMARY

In this Unit, we have studied the forms which historical consciousness in early India took. The central concern was to investigate how the early authors saw the past before them. Historical consciousness and its articulation in varied Indian texts in the period from *c.* 1000 BCE to *c.* 1300 CE is the subject matter of this Unit.

The three main historical traditions in early India were: the *itihasa-purana* tradition, attributed to brahmana authors writing about those who ruled. A different perspective comes from the bardic compositions. Their compositions are believed to have been overwritten by the brahmana authors, making their retrieval difficult.

The third tradition was the Sramanic tradition in which the rulers were tied into the history of the teaching of the Buddhist and Jaina *Sanghas*. In this Unit, we traced historical consciousness and its formulation as representations of the past through various genres.

1.11 KEYWORDS

<i>Sangha</i>	Buddhist monastic order, traditionally composed of four groups: monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen. The <i>Sangha</i> is a part – together with the Buddha and the <i>Dharma</i> (teaching) – of the Threefold Refuge, a basic creed of Buddhism
<i>Carita</i>	Biographical literature
<i>Vamsavalis</i>	A genre which is a chronicle of a state, region or kingdom
Embedded Historical Forms	Those forms like the <i>dana-stutis</i> , <i>gathas</i> and the <i>narasamsis</i> which were woven into the literature of the early Indian society
Externalised Historical Forms	Examples include <i>carita</i> literature and <i>vamsavalis</i> which were more independent of the texts in which they are placed

1.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress-1

- 1) See Section 1.2
- 2) See Section 1.3

Check Your Progress-2

- 1) See Section 1.7 and its Sub-sections
- 2) See Section 1.8

1.13 SUGGESTED READINGS

Trautmann, Thomas R., (2012) ‘Does India Have History? Does History Have India?’ *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 54, No. 1, pp. 174-205.

Thapar, Romila, (2013) *The Past Before Us: Historical Traditions of Early North India* (New Delhi, Ashoka University: Permanent Black).

1.14 INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEO RECOMMENDATIONS

Conversations with India’s Ancient Past

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wsu1Jc3y_sM

India’s Past and Present: How History Informs Contemporary Narrative

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J8HhLJzpx3Y>

The Past Before Us: Historical Traditions of Early North India

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V3rR_x24S64