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## How Important Are Dates

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History is often associated with dates, but it is much more than memorising years. It is about understanding changes over time, comparing the past with the present, and asking historical questions about how and why things have changed. For example, when did people start drinking tea or coffee? How were railways built and how did people travel before them? Such questions help us explore history beyond just dates.

Historical processes like the introduction of tea or the establishment of British rule happened over a period of time, not on a single date. Therefore, history involves understanding approximate periods and changes rather than only specific dates.

**Activity:** Look at the image titled "Brahmans offering the Shastras to Britannia" (1782). This illustration shows Indian Brahmans offering sacred texts to Britannia, symbolising British imperial power and cultural domination during colonial rule. The image reflects how Britain portrayed itself as a custodian of Indian culture to justify its rule.



*Fig. 1 – Brahmans offering the  
Shastras to Britannia, frontispiece  
to the first map produced by  
James Rennel, 1782*

Rennel was asked by Robert Clive to produce maps of Hindustan. An enthusiastic supporter of British conquest of India, Rennel saw preparation of maps as essential to the process of domination. The picture here tries to suggest that Indians willingly gave over their ancient texts to Britannia – the symbol of British power – as if asking her to become the protector of Indian culture.

History was once focused mainly on rulers, battles, and specific events with exact dates. However, modern historians study broader aspects such as livelihoods, production, urban development, and cultural changes, which often span longer periods.

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CALCUTTA  
&  
BOMBAY MADRAS  
KARACHI

CALENDAR FOR 1915.

Month	January	February	March	April	May	June
1	1	1	1	1	1	1
2	2	2	2	2	2	2
3	3	3	3	3	3	3
4	4	4	4	4	4	4
5	5	5	5	5	5	5
6	6	6	6	6	6	6
7	7	7	7	7	7	7
8	8	8	8	8	8	8
9	9	9	9	9	9	9
10	10	10	10	10	10	10
11	11	11	11	11	11	11
12	12	12	12	12	12	12
13	13	13	13	13	13	13
14	14	14	14	14	14	14
15	15	15	15	15	15	15
16	16	16	16	16	16	16
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21	21	21	21	21	21	21
22	22	22	22	22	22	22
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24	24	24	24	24	24	24
25	25	25	25	25	25	25
26	26	26	26	26	26	26
27	27	27	27	27	27	27
28	28	28	28	28	28	28
29	29	29	29	29	29	29
30	30	30	30	30	30	30
31	31	31	31	31	31	31

LIPTON'S  
TEA & COFFEE



*Fig. 2 – Advertisements help create taste*

Old advertisements help us understand how markets for new products were created and new tastes were popularised. This 1922 advertisement for Lipton tea suggests that royalty all over the world is associated with this tea. In the background you see the outer wall of an Indian palace, while in the foreground, seated on horseback is the third son of Queen Victoria of Britain, Prince Arthur, who was given the title Duke of Connaught.

This 1922 advertisement for Lipton's Coffee & Teas uses royal imagery and exotic settings to promote the product, reflecting British colonial connections and marketing strategies of the time.

## Exam Question

**Q:** Why is history not just about memorising dates?

**A:** Because history studies changes over time, processes, and events that often span long periods, not just specific dates.

## Which Dates

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The dates chosen in history depend on the focus of study. Earlier histories of British India focused on the reigns of Governor-Generals like Warren Hastings and Lord Mountbatten, marking history by their lives and policies. However, this approach excludes the experiences of different groups in society.

History is divided into chapters to give coherence, focusing on events that shape the story. Changing the focus can change which dates are important.



## *Fig. 3 – Warren Hastings became the first Governor-General in 1773*

While history books narrated the deeds of Governor-Generals, biographies glorified them as persons, and paintings projected them as powerful figures.

Warren Hastings was the first Governor-General of India in 1773. His portrait reflects his authority and the British administrative power during colonial rule.

### Exam Question

**Q:** How did the focus on Governor-Generals influence the selection of important dates in British Indian history?

**A:** Histories focused on Governor-Generals highlighted their reigns and policies, making their dates important while often ignoring other social groups and events.

### How Do We Periodise

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James Mill divided Indian history into Hindu, Muslim, and British periods, reflecting his Eurocentric view that Asian societies were less civilised. This classification is problematic because it overlooks the diversity of faiths and cultures existing simultaneously and portrays British rule as a civilising force.

Historians often use the terms ancient, medieval, and modern, borrowed from Western history, but these terms may not accurately describe Indian history, especially since British rule did not bring liberty or equality. Many prefer the term 'colonial' for this period.

**Activity:** Interview a family member about their life and divide it into periods based on significant events. Explain your reasons for this periodisation.

## Exam Question

**Q:** What are the problems with dividing Indian history into Hindu, Muslim, and British periods?

**A:** This division ignores the coexistence of multiple faiths and cultures and wrongly suggests British rule was a civilising period.

## What Is Colonisation

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Colonisation is the process by which one country subjugates another, bringing political, economic, social, and cultural changes. British colonisation in India involved conquering local rulers, controlling the economy, collecting revenue, and influencing customs and values. Different groups experienced these changes differently, which is why history is studied in the plural.

## Exam Question

**Q:** What does colonisation involve?

**A:** It involves political control, economic exploitation, social changes, and cultural influence by a foreign power over a country.

## How Do We Know

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Historians use various sources to study the last 250 years of Indian history. Official British administrative records are important, as the British maintained detailed written documents, preserved in archives and museums.

These records include memos, reports, letters, and printed proceedings, often beautifully written or printed after the spread of printing technology.



*Fig. 4 – The National Archives of India came up in the 1920s*

When New Delhi was built, the National Museum and the National Archives were both located close to the Viceregal Palace. This location reflects the importance these institutions had in British imagination.

The National Archives of India, established in the 1920s near the Viceroy's Palace, preserve these important documents, reflecting the British emphasis on record-keeping for administration.

Reports such as those during the 1946 Royal Indian Navy mutiny provide detailed accounts of events from official perspectives.

## Exam Question

**Q:** Why are official British records important for historians?

**A:** They provide detailed, preserved information about administration, policies, and events during British rule.

## Surveys and Census

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The British conducted detailed surveys and censuses to understand and administer India effectively. These included revenue surveys, botanical, zoological, archaeological, anthropological, and forest surveys.

Censuses were conducted every ten years from the late 19th century, recording population data including caste, religion, and occupation.

Prepzy



*Fig. 5 – A  
custard-apple  
plant, 1770s*

Botanical gardens and natural history museums established by the British collected plant specimens and information about their uses. Local artists were asked to draw pictures of these specimens

Historians are now looking at the way such information was gathered and what this information reveals about the nature of colonialism.

Botanical drawings like this custard-apple plant from the 1770s were part of scientific efforts to document flora, often involving local experts and reflecting colonial interests in natural history.

### Exam Question

**Q:** What was the purpose of British surveys and censuses in India?

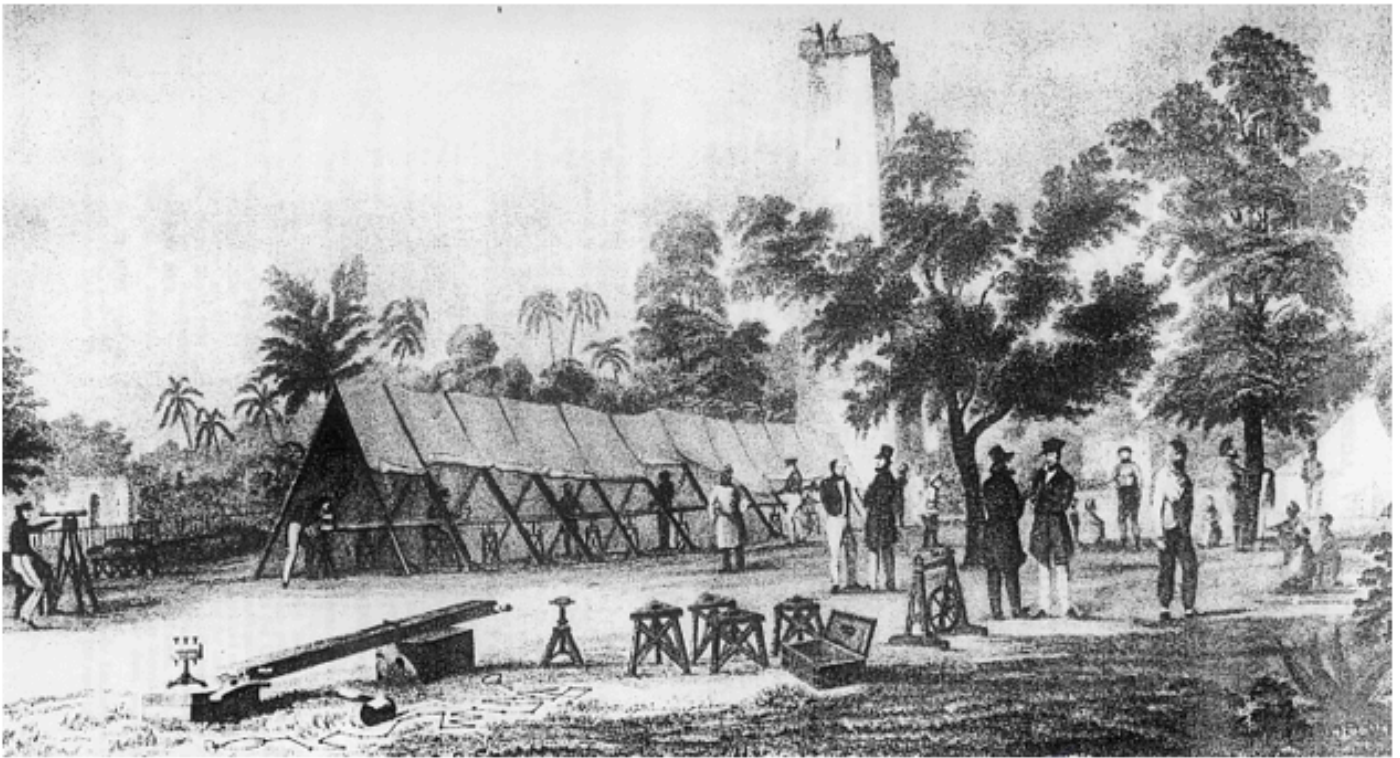
**A:** To gather detailed information about land, population, and natural resources for effective administration and control.

### Limitations of Official Records

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Official records reflect the views and interests of British officials and do not always reveal the experiences and feelings of ordinary people like tribals, peasants, and workers.

Other sources such as diaries, travellers' accounts, autobiographies, newspapers, and popular booklets provide additional perspectives but are often limited to literate groups.



*Fig. 6 – Mapping and survey operations in progress in Bengal, a drawing by James Prinsep, 1832*  
Note how all the instruments that were used in surveys are placed in the foreground to emphasise the scientific nature of the project.

This drawing from 1832 shows surveying operations in Bengal, highlighting the scientific and organised nature of British mapping efforts.

## Exam Question

**Q:** Why do official records not fully explain the experiences of all people in colonial India?

**A:** Because they mainly reflect the views of officials and literate groups, excluding many ordinary people's perspectives.

## Historical Reporting and Perspectives

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British accounts of events like the 1857 Rebellion often portrayed Indian rebels negatively to justify colonial actions. Understanding these perspectives is important to critically study history.



*Fig. 7 – The rebels of 1857*

Images need to be carefully studied for they project the viewpoint of those who create them. This image can be found in several illustrated books produced by the British after the 1857 rebellion. The caption at the bottom says: “Mutinous sepoy share the loot”. In British representations, the rebels appear as greedy, vicious and brutal. You will read about the rebellion in Chapter 5.

The 1857 Rebellion was a complex uprising involving soldiers and civilians against British rule, often called the First War of Indian Independence.

## Exam Question

**Q:** How did British reports portray the 1857 Rebellion?

**A:** They depicted the rebels as mutinous and violent to justify British suppression.

# Newspapers and Public Opinion

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Newspapers provided accounts of social movements and events, such as the 1946 police strike in Delhi protesting low salaries and poor food quality.

These reports offer insights into the conditions and sentiments of various groups during colonial times.

## Exam Question

**Q:** What role did newspapers play during British rule in India?

**A:** They reported on social issues and movements, influencing public opinion and recording contemporary events.

## Solved Examples

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**Example 1:** Explain why history is not just about memorising dates.

**Answer:** History studies changes over time, processes, and events that often span long periods. Focusing only on dates ignores the broader social, economic, and cultural changes that define historical periods.

**Example 2:** Describe the significance of official British records for historians.

**Answer:** These records provide detailed information about administration, policies, and events during British rule, helping historians understand governance and historical developments.

## Practice Set

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Easy

- What is the importance of periodisation in history?
- Who was Warren Hastings?

## Moderate

- Explain the limitations of official British records in understanding Indian history.
- Describe the role of surveys and censuses conducted by the British in India.

## Challenging

- Critically analyse James Mill's periodisation of Indian history and its implications.
- Discuss how colonial imagery, such as the "Brahmans offering the Shastras to Britannia," was used to justify British rule.

## Answer Key

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- **Importance of periodisation:** It helps organise history into coherent chapters reflecting significant changes and characteristics of different times.
- **Warren Hastings:** The first Governor-General of India appointed in 1773, representing British administrative authority.
- **Limitations of official records:** They reflect official views and exclude experiences of many ordinary people.
- **Role of surveys and censuses:** To collect detailed data for effective administration and control.
- **Critique of James Mill's periodisation:** It is Eurocentric, oversimplifies Indian history, and portrays British rule as civilising.
- **Colonial imagery justification:** Such images symbolised British power and cultural dominance to legitimize colonial rule.

## Quick Reference

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- **History:** Study of changes over time, not just dates.

- **Periodisation:** Dividing history into meaningful periods.
- **Colonisation:** Political, economic, social, and cultural domination by a foreign power.
- **Official Records:** Documents produced by British administration.
- **Surveys and Census:** Tools for gathering data about land and population.
- **Limitations:** Official records do not capture all perspectives.

## Glossary

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### Periodisation

The process of dividing history into distinct periods for study.

### Governor-General

The chief British official in India during colonial rule.

### Colonisation

The process of one country controlling and exploiting another.

### Archives

Places where historical documents are preserved.

### Survey

A detailed examination and mapping of land or resources.

### Census

An official count and description of a population.

### Sepoy

An Indian soldier serving under British command.