



# Historiography : Indian tradition

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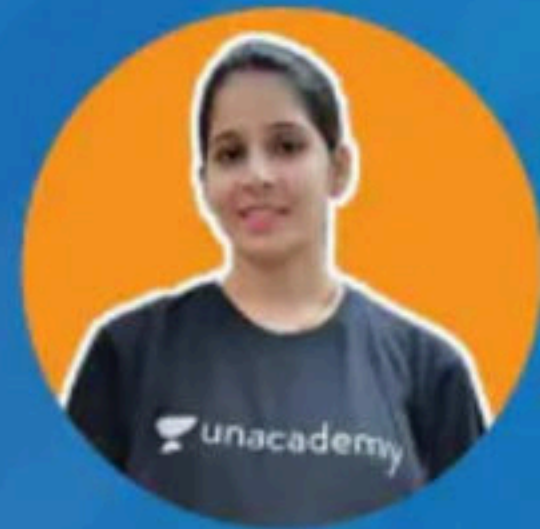


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## HISTORY & POLITICAL SCIENCE

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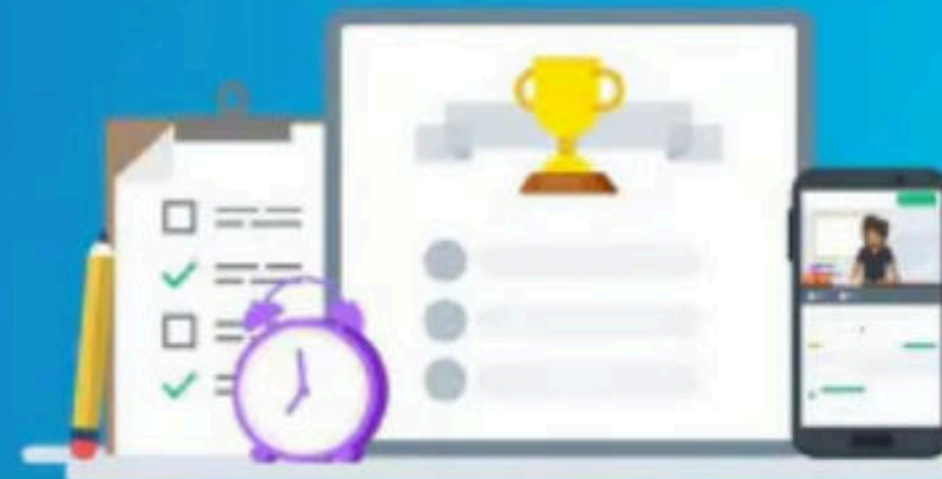
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## Chapter 2. Historiography : Indian Tradition

### 2.1 Tradition of Indian Historiography

We learnt about the western tradition of historiography in the last lesson. In this lesson we will know about the tradition of Indian historiography.

**Historiography in the Ancient Period** : In the ancient period in India memories of the great deeds of ancestors and mythological lore, also memories of social transitions were preserved with the help of oral recitals.

The inscriptions on the Harappan seals and other artefacts confirm that Indians had mastered the art of writing as early as the third millennium B.C.E. or perhaps before that. However, the Harappan script is not yet been successfully deciphered.

The earliest known written documents of historical nature found in India are in the form of inscriptions. They are dated to the 3rd century B.C.E., that is emperor Ashok Maurya's times. His edicts are inscribed on natural rocks and stone pillars.

From the 1st century C.E. inscriptions begin to occur on coins, metal images and sculptures, and also on copper plates.

They provide important historical information. We get to know about the dates of various kings, dynastic genealogies, territorial extent and administration of various empires and kingdoms and also important political events, social organisation, climate, famines, etc. of the respective times.

The ancient Indian literature including the epics Ramayana and Mahabharat, Puranas, Jain and Buddhist texts, historical accounts by Indian authors and also travelogues by foreign travellers are important sources of history.

Writing of biographies of kings and dynastic histories mark an important step in the Indian historiography. 'Harshacharit', written in the 7th century C.E. by Banabhatta is King Harsha's biography. It portrays a realistic picture of the social, economic, political, religious and cultural life during the king's times.

**Historiography in the Medieval Period**: The style of writing 'Rajtarangini', the history of Kashmir by Kalhana in the 12th century C.E. is quite close to the concept of modern historiography. Kalhana himself says that he wrote this text after critically examining various sources like inscriptions, coins, remains of ancient monuments, dynastic records and local traditions.

In the medieval India the historians in the courts of Muslim rulers were influenced by Arabic and Persian historiography. Among them Ziauddin Barani holds an important place. In 'Tarikh-i-Phiruz Shahi', a book written by him, he has stated the purpose of historiography. According to him the historian's duty is not limited only to the recording of the ruler's valour and policies of welfare but he should also write about the ruler's failings and incorrect policies. Barani further says that a historian should also take into consideration the impact of the teachings of the wise, the learned, and the saints on the cultural life of people. Thus, Barani expanded the scope of historiography. For the historians in the Mughal courts praising the emperors and exhibition of loyalty became more important. The custom of adding suitable poetic quotes and beautiful pictures was also introduced. Babur, the founder of the Mughal empire wrote an autobiography, entitled, 'Tuzuk-i-Babari'. It contains the descriptions of the battles fought by him. Babur also recorded his minute observations of various regions and cities travelled by him including the local economy, customs and the flora. Abul Fazl's 'Akbarnama' is very important from the viewpoint of critical historiography. His method of collecting authentic historical documents and their scrutiny is looked upon as devoid of bias and hence realistic.

'Bakhar' is an important type of historical documents of medieval times. It contains eulogies of the heroes and stories of historic events, battles, lives of great men.

Marathi bakhars are of various types. 'Sabhasad Bakhar' was written by Krishnaji Anant Sabhasad during the reign of Chhatrapati Rajaram Maharaj. It is an important bakhar for getting information about the rule of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj.

'Bhausahabanchi Bakhar' describes the Battle of Panipat. Another bakhar, entitled 'Panipatachi Bakhar', is also about the same event. 'Holkaranchi Kaiphayat' provides information about the Holkars and their contributions to the Maratha rule.

Bakhars can be divided into various types such as biographies of kings, dynastic history, descriptions of events, history of a sect, autobiographies, regarding grievance, based on mythologies and state administration by a king.

**Historiography in the Modern Period** : In the 20th century the Indian archaeological exploration and research started under the British rule. A number of ancient sites were excavated under the supervision of Sir Alexander Cunningham, the first Director General of the Archaeological Survey of India. He chose mainly the sites mentioned in the Buddhist texts for this purpose. Harappan Civilisation was discovered during the tenure of Sir John Marshall. Because of this discovery the antiquity of Indian history could be traced to 3rd millennium B.C.E. or even earlier.

Many British officials in India wrote about Indian history. Their writings display a strong influence of the colonial policies of the British.

Three Volumes of 'The History of British India', written by James Mill were published in 1817. This was the first book on Indian history written by a British historian. It clearly reflects an absence of objective perspective and prejudice about various aspects of the Indian culture. 'The History of India', written by Mountstuart Elphinstone, Governor of Bombay (now Mumbai) was published in 1841.

The period of Maratha Empire is very important in the Indian history. Grant Duff's name stands out among the British officers who wrote about Maratha history. He wrote the book entitled, 'A History of Mahrattas'.

This book is published in three volumes. Grant Duff's writing also shows the British inclination of condemning Indian culture and history. Similar tendency is witnessed in Colonel Todd's writings about Rajasthan's history. The two volumes written by William Wilson Hunter on Indian history show a somewhat impartial treatment of the subject.

Nilkanth Janardan Kirtane and Vishwanath Kashinath Rajwade were two Indian historians who took upon the task of exposing the limitations of Grant Duff's writings.

## 2.2 Indian Historiography : Various Ideological Frameworks

**Colonial Historiography** : The early scholars who studied and wrote Indian history were mainly British officers and Christian missionaries. Their prejudice is clearly reflected in the way some of them have ridiculed Indian culture. Their writings were used to justify the colonial British rule. The five volumes of 'Cambridge History of India', published during 1922-1937 C.E. are distinct examples of colonial historiography.

**Orientalist Historiography** : Many European scholars felt curious about civilisations and countries of the East. Some of those scholars felt admiration and respect for them. These scholars were known as 'Orientalists'.

The orientalists studied the similarities between Sanskrit and some of the European languages. They focused more on Vedic tradition and Sanskrit literature. Their studies resulted in formulating the notion of an ancient language that could be the mother of all Indo-European languages.

In 1784, Sir William Jones founded Asiatic society in Kolkata. It opened the doors for research in ancient Indian literature and history.

Among the Orientalist scholars, Friedrich Max Muller deserves a special mention. In his opinion, Sanskrit was the most ancient language of the Indo-European languages. He was deeply interested in Sanskrit literature. He first translated the Sanskrit text of 'Hitopadesh'. He was the editor of 50 volumes of 'The Sacred Books of the East'. He also compiled 'Rigveda', which has been published in six volumes. He translated Rigveda in German.

Lately, Edward Said, a scholar who has re-evaluated the orientalist writings, has thrown light on imperialist interests of orientalist scholars.

**Nationalistic Historiography** : The writings of Indian historians who were trained in the British educational system show an inclination to restore the pride in the ancient glory of India and the self-esteem of the Indian readers. Their writings are known as 'Nationalistic Historiography'. Nationalistic writings in Maharashtra were inspired by Vishnushastri Chiplunkar. He criticised the prejudiced history of ancient India written by British officers. The nationalistic historians tried to seek the golden era of Indian history. They are at times blamed for ignoring the critical analysis of the historical truth. Mahadev Govind Ranade, Ramkrishna Gopal Bhandarkar, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, Rajendra Lal Mishra, Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, Kashi Prasad Jayswal, Radha Kumud Mukherjee, Bhagawan Lal Indraji, Vasudev Vishnu Mirashi and Anant Sadashiv Altekar are the names of some renowned scholars among the nationalistic historians.

Rajwade is well-known for his writings in Marathi on varied subjects like history, linguistics, etymology, grammar, etc. He was of the firm opinion that we should write our own history. He compiled and edited 22 volumes of 'Marathyanchnya Itihasachi Sadhane'. He wrote very scholarly prefaces to each of the 22 volumes. He stated, 'History is the all-inclusive image of the past societies. It does not include only the stories of political images, conspiracies and wars for seizing power.' He insisted that history should be written only using the authentic documentary source.

The nationalistic historiography helped in the triggering of the independence movement of the Indian people against the British. In this aspect the book, 'The Indian War of Independence, 1857', written by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar is of great importance.

The nationalistic historiography provided a momentum to the writing of regional histories too. As a result the attention of historians was drawn to the geographic conditions and history of south Indian regions.

**Historiography in the Post- Independence Era** : Now along with writing the dynastic histories, the cultural, social, economic histories were also being written. Scholars of the post-independence era began to feel the need of writing histories of various communities, science, economic systems, political ideologies, cultural aspects, etc. The historiography of this era has been influenced mainly by three ideological schools: (1) Marxist History (2) Subaltern History (3) Feminist Histor

**Marxist History** : The concern for the means of production, modes of production and the industrial relations were at the centre in the writings of Marxist historians. Accordingly, to analyse the impact of every social event of significance has remained the basic theme of Marxist historiography. Marxist historians in India studied the transitions within the caste system. Among the notable Indian historians who adopted Marxist ideological framework, scholars like Damodar Dharmanand Kosambi, Comrade Shripad Amrut Dange, Ram Sharan Sharma, Comrade Sharad Patil have contributed notably. Comrade Dange was one of the founder members of the Indian Communist Party. 'Primitive Communism to Slavery', the book written by him represents Marxist historiography.

**Subaltern History** : The seeds of subaltern history are found in the Marxist historiography. The role of the Italian historian Antonio Gramsci is very important in developing the idea that history should be written starting from the bottommost ranks of people in the society. In fact, subaltern means the 'bottommost ranks'. Folklore has been considered as a very important source of writing subaltern histories. Ranjit Guha, an Indian historian played a major role in establishing subaltern history as an important academic school of historiography. However, we may point out that much before the onset of subaltern ideology similar thoughts were expressed by Mahatma Jyotirao Phule and Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar.

Mahatma Phule unfolded the history of the 'shudratishudra' communities in his book, 'Gulamgiri'. He drew attention to the exploitation of women, shudras and atishudras done under the name of religion. The terms 'shudra' and 'atishudra' indicates the bottommost ranks in the caste system.

The role of the people belonging to Dalit castes is very significant in the shaping of various cultural and political aspects of India. However, their role was not duly acknowledged in the colonial and nationalistic historiography. Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar focusing on this fact, consistently wrote about it. Two of his books, 'Who Were the Shudras' and 'The Untouchables' may be cited as examples of history of subaltern type.

## TEXTUAL QUESTIONS WITH COMPLETE SOLUTION.

1. Complete the sentences by choosing the correct option.

(1) ..... was the first Director General of the Archaeological Survey of India.

- (a) Alexander Cunningham
- (b) William Jones
- (c) John Marshall
- (d) Friedrich Max Muller

(2) ..... translated the Sanskrit text of 'Hitopadesh'.

- (a) James Mill
- (b) Friedrich max Muller
- (c) Mountstuart Elphinstone
- (d) Sir John Marshall

**(B) Identify the wrong pair in the following, correct it and rewrite.**

- (1) 'Who were the Shudras' - Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar
- (2) 'Stri-Purush Tulana' - Feminist writing
- (3) 'The Indian War of Independence 1857' - Marxist History
- (4) Grant Duff - Colonial History.

**Answer:**

**The incorrect pair is:**

The Indian War of Independence, 1857 - Marxist History

**The Appropriate Pair is:**

The Indian War of Independence, 1857 - Nationalistic Historiography.

**2. Explain the following with its reason.**

**(1) Writing of the regional history received a momentum.**

**Answer:**

i. The writings of Indian historians who were trained in the British educational system show an inclination to restore the pride in the ancient glory of India and the self-esteem of the Indian readers.

ii. The nationalistic historiography helped in the triggering of the independence movement of the Indian people against the British.

iii. In this aspect the book, 'The Indian War of Independence, 1857', written by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar is of great importance.

iv. Also Vishnushastri Chiplunkar, who criticised the prejudiced history of ancient India written by British Officers, inspired the nationalistic writings in Maharashtra.

v. Thus, nationalistic historiography provided a momentum to the writing of regional histories, which drew the attention of historians

v. Thus, nationalistic historiography provided a momentum to the writing of regional histories, which drew the attention of historians to the geographic conditions and history of south Indian regions.

## **(2) Bakhar is an important type of historical documents.**

### **Answer:**

i. 'Bakhar' is an important type of historical documents of medieval times. It contains eulogies of the heroes and stories of historic events, battles, lives of great men.

ii. Marathi bakhars are of various types. 'Sabhasad Bakhar' was written by Krishnaji Anant Sabhasad during the reign of Chhatrapati Rajaram Maharaj. It is an important bakhar for getting information about the rule of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj.

iii. 'Bhaushebanchi Bakhar' as well as 'Panipatachi Bakhar' describes the Battle of Panipat.

iv. 'Holkaranchi Kaiphayat' provides information about the Holkars and their contributions to the Maratha rule.

v. Bakhars can be divided into various types such as biographies of kings, dynastic history, descriptions of events, history of a sect, autobiographies, regarding grievance, based on mythologies and state administration by a king.

**3. Answer the following in 25-30 words.**

**Which things are included in the descriptions by Emperor Babur in his autobiography ?**

**Answer:**

i. Babur, the founder of the Mughal empire wrote an autobiography, entitled, 'Tuzuk-i-Babari'.

ii. It contains the descriptions of the battles fought by him.

iii. Babur also recorded his minute observations of various regions and cities travelled by him including the local economy, customs and the flora.

**What is the contribution of Svatantryaveer Savarkar to nationalistic historiography?**

**Answer:**

- i. The writings of Indian historians who were trained in the British educational system show an inclination to restore the pride in the ancient glory of India and the self-esteem of the Indian readers.
- ii. The nationalistic historiography helped in the triggering of the independence movement of the Indian people against the British.
- iii. In this aspect the book, 'The Indian War of Independence, 1857', written by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar is of great importance.

#### **4. Write detailed answers to the following questions :**

##### **(1) What is Marxist History?**

##### **Answer:**

- i. The concern for the means of production, modes of production and the industrial relations were at the centre in the writings of Marxist historians.
- ii. Accordingly, to analyse the impact of every social event of significance has remained the basic theme of Marxist historiography.
- iii. Marxist historians in India studied the transitions within the caste system.
- iv. Among the notable Indian historians who adopted Marxist ideological framework, scholars like Damodar Dharmanand Kosambi, Comrade Shripad Amrut Dange, Ram Sharan Sharma, Comrade Sharad Patil have contributed notably.
- v. Comrade Dange was one of the founder members of the Indian Communist Party. 'Primitive Communism to Slavery', the book written by him represents Marxist historiography.

## **(2) What is the contribution of Itihasacharya V.K. Rajwade to historiography?**

### **Answer:**

- i. Rajwade is well-known for his writings in Marathi on varied subjects like history, linguistics, etymology, grammar, etc.
- ii. He was of the firm opinion that we should write our own history. He founded 'Bharat Itihas Samshodhak Mandal' in Pune, on 7th July 1910 to facilitate historical research.
- iii. He compiled and edited 22 volumes of 'Marathyanchya Itihasachi Sadhane'. He wrote very scholarly prefaces to each of the 22 volumes.
- iv. He stated, 'History is the all-inclusive image of the past societies. It does not include only the stories of political images, conspiracies and wars for seizing power.'
- v. He insisted that history should be written only using the authentic documentary source.
- vi.. According to him, an event qualifies to be an historical event if it presents a balanced combination of the three factors, Time, Space and Personalities.

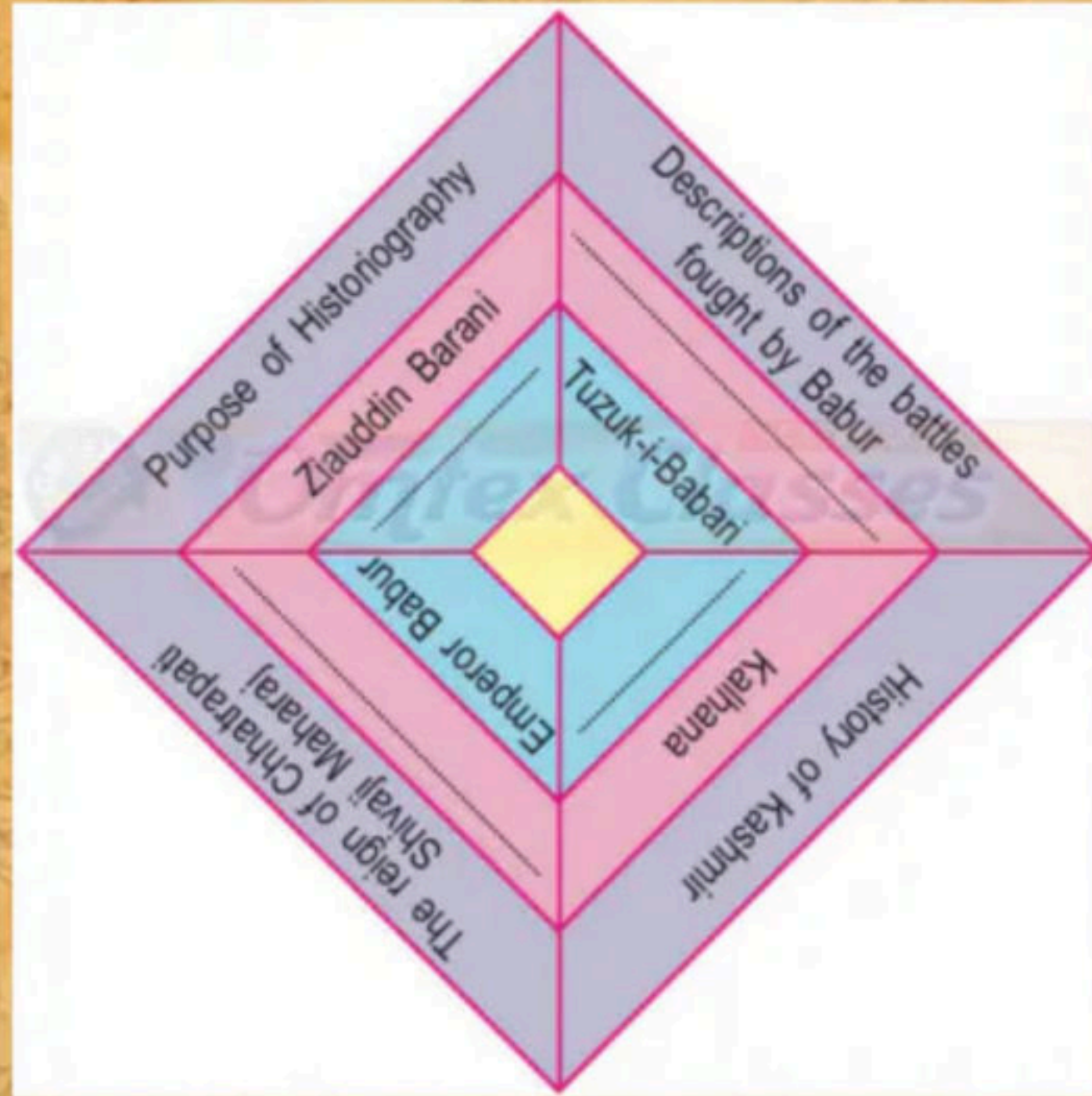
**5. (a) Complete the following chart.**

James Mill	'The History of British India'
James Grant Duff	
	'The History of India'
S.A. Dange	
	'Who were the Shudras'

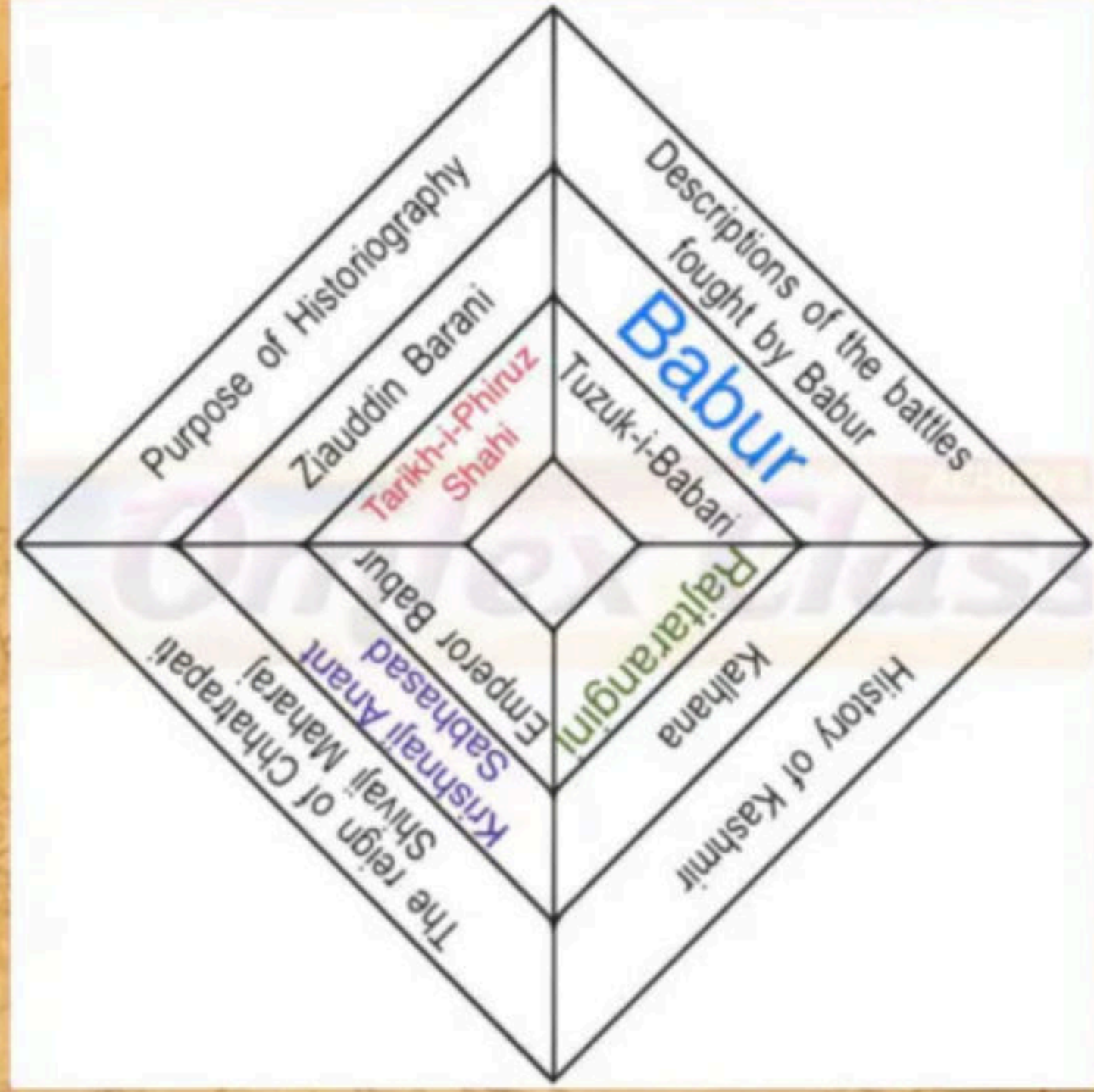
**Answer:**

James Mill	'The History of British India'
James Grant Duff	'A History of Mahrattas'
Mountstuart Elphinstone	'The History of India'
S.A. Dange	'Primitive Communism to Slavery'
Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar	'Who were the Shudras'

5. (b) Complete the following concept chart.



**Answer:**



## 6. Explain the following concepts.

### (1) Orientalist historiography.

#### Answer:

- i. Many European scholars felt curious about civilisations and countries of the East. Some of those scholars felt admiration and respect for them. These scholars were known as 'Orientalists'.
- ii. The orientalists studied the similarities between Sanskrit and some of the European languages. They focused more on Vedic tradition and Sanskrit literature.
- iii. Their studies resulted into formulating the notion of an ancient language that could be the mother of all Indo-European languages.
- iv. In 1784, Sir William Jones founded Asiatic society in Kolkata. It opened the doors for research in ancient Indian literature and history.
- v. Among the Orientalist scholars, Friedrich Max Muller deserves a special mention. In his opinion, Sanskrit was the most ancient language of the Indo- European languages.

vi. He was deeply interested in Sanskrit literature. He first translated the Sanskrit text of 'Hitopadesh'. He was the editor of 50 volumes of 'The Sacred Books of the East'. He also compiled 'Rigveda', which has been published in six volumes. He translated Rigveda in German.

vii. Lately, Edward Said, a scholar who has re-evaluated the orientalist writings, has thrown light on imperialist interests of orientalist scholars.

## **(2) Nationalistic historiography.**

### **Answer:**

i. The writings of Indian historians who were trained in the British educational system show an inclination to restore the pride in the ancient glory of India and the self-esteem of the Indian readers. Their writings are known as 'Nationalistic Historiography'.

iii. The nationalistic historians tried to seek the golden era of Indian history. They are at times blamed for ignoring the critical analysis of the historical truth.

iv. The nationalistic historiography helped in the triggering of the independence movement of the Indian people against the British.

v. Mahadev Govind Ranade, Ramkrishna Gopal Bhandarkar, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, Rajendra Lal Mishra, Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, Kashi Prasad Jayswal, Radha Kumud Mukherjee, Bhagawan Lal Indraji, Vasudev Vishnu Mirashi and Anant Sadashiv Altekar are the names of some renowned scholars among the nationalistic historians.

vi. The nationalistic historiography provided a momentum to the writing of regional histories too. As a result the attention of historians was drawn to the geographic conditions and history of south Indian regions.

### **(3) Subaltern history.**

#### **Answer:**

i. The seeds of subaltern history are found in the Marxist historiography.

ii. The role of the Italian historian Antonio Gramsci is very important in developing the idea that history should be written starting from the bottommost ranks of people in the society. In fact, subaltern means the 'bottommost ranks'.

iii. Folklore has been considered as a very important source of writing subaltern histories.

iv. Ranjit Guha, an Indian historian played a major role in establishing subaltern history as an important academic school of historiography.

v. However, we may point out that much before the onset of subaltern ideology similar thoughts were expressed by Mahatma Jyotirao Phule and Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar.

vi. Mahatma Phule unfolded the history of the 'shudratishudra' communities in his book, 'Gulamgiri'. He drew attention to the exploitation of women, shudras and atishudras done under the name of religion. The terms 'shudra' and 'atishudra' indicates the bottommost ranks in the caste system.

vii. The role of the people belonging to Dalit castes is very significant in the shaping of various cultural and political aspects of India. However, their role was not duly acknowledged in the colonial and nationalistic historiography.

viii. Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar focusing on this fact, consistently wrote about it. Two of his books, 'Who Were the Shudras' and 'The Untouchables' may be cited as examples of history of subaltern type.