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## ENTRANCE EXAMINATION, 2018

Ph.D.

## HISTORICAL STUDIES

[ Field of Study Codes : ANCH (868)/MEDH (867)/MODH (866) ]

Time Allowed : 3 hours

Maximum Marks : 100

**Note :** Questions from all Sections must be attempted. Section—I (A & B) is compulsory (carries 40 marks). Answer any **two** questions from Section—II (carries 60 marks) from the period of specialization (Ancient/Medieval/Modern).

Candidates must indicate their preferred choice of admission, e.g., Ancient, Medieval or Modern India on their answer-book's cover-sheet in bold letters.

## SECTION—I A

1. Read the passage given below carefully and answer the questions that follow in your own words in not more than 100 words each. All questions are compulsory. Do not copy from the passage :

The first thing that makes oral history different, therefore, is that it tells us less about events than about their *meaning*. This does not imply that oral history has no factual validity. Interviews often reveal unknown events or unknown aspects of known events; they always cast new light on unexplored areas of the daily life of the non-hegemonic classes.

But the unique and precious element which oral sources force upon the historian and which no other sources possess in equal measure, is the speaker's subjectivity. Oral sources tell us not just what people did but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing and what they now think they did. Oral sources may not add much to what we know, for instance, of the material cost of a strike to the workers involved, but they tell us a good deal about its psychological cost. The organization of the narrative reveals a great deal of the speaker's relationships to their history.

Subjectivity is as much the business of history as are the more visible 'facts'. What informants believe is indeed a historical fact (i.e. the fact that they believe it), as much as what really happened. When workers in Terni misplace a crucial event of their history (the killing of Luigi Trastulli) from one date and context to another, this does not cast doubts on the actual chronology, but it does force us to arrange our interpretations of an entire phase of the town's history.

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[ P.T.O. ]

Oral sources are credible but with a *different* credibility. The importance of oral testimony may lie not in its adherence to fact, but rather in its departure from it, as imagination, symbolism and desire emerge. Therefore, there are no 'false' oral sources. Of course, this does not mean that we accept the dominant prejudice which sees factual credibility as a monopoly of written documents. Very often, written documents are only the uncontrolled transmission of unidentified oral sources (as in the case of the report on Trastulli's death, which begins : 'According to verbal information taken...'). The passage from these oral *ur-sources* to the written document is often the result of processes which have no scientific credibility and are frequently heavy with class bias. In trial records, what goes on record is not the words actually spoken by the witnesses, but a summary dictated by the judge to the clerk. Yet, many historians who turn up their noses at oral sources accept these legal transcripts with no questions asked. In a lesser measure (thanks to the frequent use of shorthand) it applies to parliamentary records, minutes of meetings and conventions and interviews reported in newspapers : all sources which are legitimately and widely used in standard historical research.

A by-product of this prejudice is the insistence that oral sources are distant from events, and therefore, undergo the distortion of faulty memory. Indeed, this problem exists for many written documents, which are usually written some time after the event to which they refer, and often by nonparticipants. Oral sources might compensate chronological distance with a much closer personal involvement. While written memoirs of politicians or labour leaders are usually credited until proven to be in error, they are as distant from some aspects of the event which they relate as are many oral history interviews, and only hide their dependence on time by assuming the immutable form of a 'text'. On the other hand, oral narrators have within their culture certain aids to memory. Many stories are told over and over, or discussed with members of the community; formalized narrative, even meter may help preserve a textual version of an event. In fact, one should not forget that oral informants may also be literate. Many informants read books and newspapers, listen to the radio and TV and hear sermons and political speeches and keep diaries, letters, clippings and photograph albums. Orality and writing, for many centuries now, have not existed separately : if many written sources are based on orality, modern orality itself is saturated with writing.

But what is really important is that memory is not a passive depository of facts, but an active process of creation of meanings. Thus, the specific utility of oral sources for the historian lies, not so much in their ability to preserve the past, as in the very changes wrought by memory. These changes reveal the narrators' effort to make sense of the past and to give a form to their lives, and set the interview and the narrative in their historical context. Changes which may have subsequently taken place in the narrator's personal subjective consciousness or in their socio-economic standing, may affect, if not the actual recounting of prior events, at least the valuation and the 'colouring' of the story. Acts considered legitimate and even normal or necessary in the past may be now viewed as unacceptable and literally cast out of the tradition. In these cases, the most precious information may lie in what the informants *hide*, and in fact that they *do* hide it, rather than in what they tell.

## Questions :

- (a) What is the unique element in oral sources of history?
- (b) Why does the author insist that there are no 'false' oral sources?
- (c) What are the reasons usually given for dismissing the use of oral sources?
- (d) How does the author counter this prejudice in favour of written documents?
- (e) What are the factors which link oral sources to written sources?
- (f) What are the issues which can shape the retelling of historical events? 20

## SECTION—I B

Answer any one question

2. "Objects do not have a fixed meaning; their meanings and significance change when they move from the site of their production to other locations." Comment with examples. 20
3. What is the significance of the statistical method in historical inquiry? 20
4. How useful is the anthropological perspective in historical interpretation? 20
5. Critically analyze any one recent work on history that you consider influential, giving reasons for your assessment. 20

## SECTION—II

Answer any two questions only from the period of specialization opted for (A. Ancient or B. Medieval or C. Modern)

## A. Ancient Section :

6. What were the factors that contributed to the growth of a regional culture in the Indian Subcontinent? Elucidate with specific examples. 30
7. Would you agree with the characterization of the first millennium CE in terms of the cultural formation of the 'Sanskrit Cosmopolis'? Give reasons for your answer. 30
8. What perspectives are available from field archaeological and textual sources on the trade between the Roman Empire and the Indian Subcontinent? In the light of the evidence, do you consider that the label 'Indo-Roman trade' is apt? 30
9. Are inscriptions vehicles for representing the 'self' and the 'other'? 30

**B. Medieval Section :**

10. How appropriate is the term 'Indo-Islamic' architecture for the study of Medieval monuments? Illustrate your answer with details of at least one monument. 30
11. Why did the Vijayanagara Kings call themselves 'Sultan among Hindu chiefs'? 30
12. How did women in Medieval India step out of the 'private sphere' into the 'public sphere'? 30
13. Discuss the potentialities of capitalistic development in Mughal India. 30

**C. Modern Section :**

14. Critically assess the contribution of the subaltern studies historians to the writing of Indian history with specific reference to authors and works. 30
15. How has the conceptualization of the 'urban poor' contributed to the writing of Indian labour history? 30
16. Discuss the ideologies and strategies of various strands of militant nationalism in the period 1907-1931. 30
17. "The momentous events of 1857 and their aftermath were shaped by a shifting line between loyalty and rebellion." Comment. 30

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