

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY (HISTORY: THEORY & METHODS)

UNIT II: 20TH CENTURY FRAMEWORKS - I

[b] Variations and Marxist Influences: History from Below of the British Marxists; The Subaltern School

1. Learning Objectives

- Understand why twentieth-century historiography moved beyond political elites, institutions and great individuals toward ordinary people and social groups.
- Explain the intellectual background of Marxist historiography and the British Marxists' contribution to the study of class, social relations and popular experience.
- Define and explain the idea of "history from below" and distinguish it from a simple history of the poor.
- Identify the major British Marxist historians associated with social history, especially Maurice Dobb, Christopher Hill, Rodney Hilton, E. P. Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm.
- Understand the origins, objectives and major arguments of the Subaltern Studies project in the context of colonial India.
- Explain Ranajit Guha's concept of subalternity, the autonomy of subaltern politics, and the critique of elite/nationalist historiography.
- Assess the relationship between Marxism, postcolonial studies, cultural history and the Subaltern School.
- Develop the ability to use these approaches as research methods: identifying archives, reading sources against the grain, recovering marginalized voices and analysing power relations.

2. Meaning of "Variations and Marxist Influences"

- Twentieth-century historiography did not develop as a single school; it contained several variations within social, economic, Marxist, cultural and postcolonial approaches.
- Marxist historical writing influenced historians to examine material conditions, production, property, class relations, exploitation and conflict rather than treating political institutions as the whole of history.
- Later historians modified classical economic interpretations by paying greater attention to culture, ideology, religion, popular beliefs, gender, community and everyday experience.
- A major result was a shift in the historical question from "What did rulers and governments do?" to "How did ordinary people live, work, resist, negotiate and understand their world?"

- The Subaltern School emerged partly from dissatisfaction with both colonial histories and elite-centred nationalist histories and initially drew inspiration from Marxist and Gramscian ideas while later moving toward postcolonial and cultural approaches.

PART A: HISTORY FROM BELOW AND THE BRITISH MARXISTS

3. Historical Background of British Marxist Historiography

- British Marxist historiography developed strongly during the twentieth century, especially from the 1930s onward.
- It was influenced by Karl Marx's analysis of class, production, property relations and historical change, but British historians often produced empirically rich histories rather than mechanically applying economic formulas.
- The approach was shaped by debates over capitalism, industrialisation, class formation, popular politics, revolution and the relationship between economic change and social consciousness.
- The Communist Party Historians' Group, formed in Britain in the 1940s, became an important intellectual setting for several historians who later made major contributions to social history.
- The experience of fascism, the Second World War, the post-war labour movement and debates about socialism encouraged historians to take working people and popular political action seriously.
- British Marxist historians helped transform Marxism from an abstract theory of historical development into a detailed practice of social and cultural history.

4. What is "History from Below"?

- History from below is an approach that reconstructs the past from the experiences, actions, beliefs and perspectives of ordinary or subordinate people.
- It shifts attention from kings, ministers, generals and institutions toward workers, peasants, artisans, women, religious communities, neighbourhoods and other groups often underrepresented in conventional narratives.
- The phrase is associated particularly with the development of social history and with the work of historians such as E. P. Thompson.
- It does not mean that political leaders and institutions are ignored; rather, their actions are studied in relation to wider social forces and popular experience.
- The central methodological problem is that subordinate groups often left fewer written records in their own voices.
- Therefore, historians may have to read court records, police reports, employers' records, newspapers, petitions, autobiographies, oral testimony, songs, popular literature and material culture critically.
- A history from below asks not only what happened to ordinary people, but also what ordinary people did, wanted, believed, remembered and resisted.

5. Major Features of History from Below

- Focus on ordinary people: Studies workers, peasants, artisans, servants, migrants, religious groups, local communities and other non-elite actors.
- Agency: Treats subordinate people as historical actors capable of making choices, negotiating power and resisting domination.
- Class and social relations: Examines relations between landlords and peasants, employers and workers, elites and dependants, and other social groups.
- Everyday life: Studies work, family, leisure, customs, popular religion, consumption, food, neighbourhoods and community life.
- Experience: Explores how large processes such as industrialisation or colonialism were experienced by people at the local level.
- Popular politics: Examines riots, demonstrations, petitions, strikes, crowd actions, local movements and informal political practices.
- Sources from below: Uses sources that can reveal non-elite experiences, while remaining alert to the fact that many were created by authorities.
- Reading against the grain: Extracts evidence about subordinate people even from records written by officials, courts or elites.

6. Marxism and the Study of Class

- Marxist historiography places social production and relations of production at the centre of historical analysis.
- A class is not simply a group with the same income; it can be understood through people's relationship to property, labour, production and power.
- Class conflict can become a major motor of historical change when groups with different interests confront one another.
- Marxist historians therefore investigate who owns land, factories or other productive resources; who works; who controls labour; and how surplus is appropriated.
- However, British Marxists frequently resisted a purely deterministic interpretation in which economic change automatically produces political consciousness.
- They increasingly examined the making of class identity through culture, political organisation, religion, custom, community and lived experience.

7. Maurice Dobb (1900–1976)

- Maurice Dobb was a prominent British Marxist economist and historian associated with the study of capitalism and economic development.
- His important work *Studies in the Development of Capitalism* (1946) examined the historical development of capitalism through changing social and economic relations.

- Dobb challenged explanations that treated capitalism primarily as the result of expanding trade or commerce; he emphasised transformations in class relations and production.
- His work contributed to the transition from a purely political history of capitalism toward a social and economic history of production and class.
- Methodologically, Dobb encouraged historians to examine property relations, labour, surplus extraction and the interaction of economic structures with social conflict.
- His work also stimulated major debates among Marxist historians about the transition from feudalism to capitalism.

8. Christopher Hill (1912–2003)

- Christopher Hill was one of the leading historians of seventeenth-century England and a major figure in British Marxist historiography.
- His research focused on the English Revolution, religion, radicalism, popular movements and the social forces behind political change.
- Hill's major works include *The English Revolution 1640*, *The World Turned Upside Down* and *The Century of Revolution*.
- He treated the English Revolution as more than a constitutional conflict between political elites; he explored the social and ideological energies released during the revolutionary crisis.
- Hill studied radical groups such as the Levellers and Diggers and examined how religious language could express social and political aspirations.
- His work demonstrated how religion, ideas and politics could be connected with social and class relations.
- His history from below approach made marginal and radical groups visible within a period traditionally narrated through kings, Parliament and elite political actors.

9. Rodney Hilton (1916–2002)

- Rodney Hilton was an important Marxist medieval historian who studied peasants, feudalism and the transition toward capitalism.
- His work challenged histories of medieval England that concentrated mainly on monarchs, nobles and institutions.
- Hilton emphasised the economic and social position of peasants and the tensions built into feudal relations.
- *The English Peasantry in the Later Middle Ages* examined peasant society, agrarian relations and conflict.
- Hilton's interpretation of peasant revolts showed that popular resistance could be rooted in material interests and social relationships rather than being mere disorder.

- His work helped establish the peasantry as a central subject of serious historical inquiry.

10. E. P. Thompson (1924–1993)

- E. P. Thompson is one of the most influential historians of history from below and social history.
- His best-known work, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), examined how working-class identity developed in England between roughly 1780 and 1832.
- Thompson famously treated class as a historical relationship rather than simply as a fixed structural category.
- For Thompson, class is “made” through shared experiences, conflicts, organisation, culture and consciousness.
- He gave major importance to working people’s own traditions, political associations, religious beliefs, customs and moral expectations.
- He rejected the idea that workers were merely passive products of industrial capitalism.
- His concept of the “moral economy” explained how popular groups could judge economic practices according to inherited ideas of fairness and legitimate behaviour.
- His study of eighteenth-century crowd actions demonstrated that food riots could contain rational social expectations rather than being simple expressions of hunger or irrational violence.
- Thompson’s approach combined Marxist class analysis with human agency, culture, political experience and moral values.
- He strongly influenced social history, labour history, cultural history and later studies of popular politics.

11. Eric Hobsbawm (1917–2012)

- Eric Hobsbawm was a major British Marxist historian whose work covered labour history, nationalism, capitalism, industrialisation and social protest.
- His important works include *Labouring Men*, *Primitive Rebels*, *The Age of Revolution*, *The Age of Capital*, *The Age of Empire* and *Age of Extremes*.
- Hobsbawm examined how industrial capitalism transformed social structures, work, politics and class relations.
- He studied labour movements and forms of popular resistance that did not always fit conventional political organisations.
- His concept of “primitive rebels” explored forms of social protest in which people expressed resistance through traditional or pre-modern organisational forms.
- His work demonstrated the value of connecting local and popular movements with large historical transformations.

- Unlike a narrowly local history, Hobsbawm frequently linked social history with global and comparative processes.

12. Other Important British Marxist Contributions

- George Rudé studied crowds, popular protest and revolutionary movements, helping to recover the social composition and political ideas of ordinary participants.
- Victor Kiernan contributed to the history of imperialism, international relations and social change from a Marxist perspective.
- Raphael Samuel later became an important advocate of popular history, oral history, memory and community-based historical practice.
- The wider tradition of British social history encouraged historians to combine economic structures with culture, politics, experience and agency.

13. “Class” and “Class Consciousness” in British Marxist History

- Class is treated as historically changing rather than as an unchanging social label.
- Class formation involves shared experiences of work, exploitation, conflict and collective organisation.
- Class consciousness refers to the awareness of common interests and social position, although it may take different forms and may be incomplete or contradictory.
- Workers can possess class identities without belonging to a single political party or adopting a formal socialist ideology.
- Religion, locality, ethnicity, craft identity and family can coexist with class identity.
- The historian must therefore avoid reducing every popular action to a simple expression of class interest.

14. The “Moral Economy” Approach

- The moral economy approach is especially associated with E. P. Thompson’s analysis of popular economic behaviour.
- It argues that people may resist market practices when they believe those practices violate established norms of fairness and community obligation.
- For example, popular food protests could arise when merchants were accused of hoarding, profiteering or violating customary expectations.
- Such actions were not necessarily irrational; they could represent a community’s defence of accepted moral rules.
- The approach encourages historians to study the cultural meanings attached to economic transactions.
- It also illustrates how economic history and cultural history can be integrated.

15. Methodology of History from Below

- Start with a question about a social group, local community, occupation, movement or everyday practice rather than only a political institution.
- Identify both direct and indirect evidence of subordinate groups.
- Read official records critically because the language of police, courts, landlords or employers may construct popular people as criminals, disorderly or irrational.
- Compare different source types: administrative records, newspapers, petitions, letters, diaries, memoirs, autobiographies, oral testimony, songs, literature and material evidence.
- Use local and micro-level evidence to test broad historical explanations.
- Reconstruct agency: ask what choices people made, what alternatives they considered and how they negotiated power.
- Avoid romanticising the poor or treating all popular action as inherently progressive.
- Locate individual experiences within larger structures such as capitalism, state formation, industrialisation, empire and class relations.

16. Strengths of History from Below

- Broadens the subject matter of history beyond elites and institutions.
- Restores agency to workers, peasants and other subordinate groups.
- Provides a richer understanding of everyday life and popular political culture.
- Connects large structural transformations with lived experience.
- Encourages critical and creative use of archives.
- Makes history more socially inclusive.
- Helps explain why major political or economic changes were experienced differently by different social groups.

17. Limitations and Criticisms

- Sources produced by ordinary people are often scarce, fragmentary or mediated through elite institutions.
- There is a danger of treating “the people” as a homogeneous group.
- Overemphasis on local experience can sometimes weaken attention to wider structures.
- Some versions of social history may understate gender, caste, race, ethnicity or religion if class is treated as the dominant category.
- The historian can unintentionally speak for people whose own voices remain difficult to recover.
- Popular action should not automatically be interpreted as revolutionary or emancipatory.

PART B: THE SUBALTERN SCHOOL

18. Meaning of “Subaltern”

- The term “subaltern” originally refers broadly to people or groups occupying subordinate positions within a social, political or economic order.
- The concept was strongly influenced by Antonio Gramsci, who used “subaltern” to discuss subordinate social groups whose political agency and representation were constrained by dominant power.
- In Indian historiography, the term was adapted to investigate groups excluded or marginalised by colonial and elite nationalist narratives.
- Subalternity is not identical to poverty: a group may be politically, socially or culturally subordinated even when it is not the poorest group.
- The concept directs attention to power, exclusion, representation and the ability to make history.

19. Emergence of the Subaltern Studies Project

- The Subaltern Studies project began in the early 1980s under the leadership of Ranajit Guha and a group of historians working mainly on South Asian history.
- The first volume, *Subaltern Studies I: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, appeared in 1982.
- The project arose from dissatisfaction with dominant interpretations of Indian nationalism and colonial history.
- Its early contributors argued that both colonialist and elite nationalist histories often privileged rulers, administrators, educated elites and organised political leadership.
- The project sought to recover the autonomous role of peasants, tribal communities, workers and other subordinate groups in historical processes.
- Over time, Subaltern Studies evolved from a strongly Marxist/Gramscian social history toward engagements with poststructuralism, postcolonial theory, discourse, identity and representation.

20. Ranajit Guha (1923–2023): Central Figure

- Ranajit Guha was the principal intellectual force behind the early Subaltern Studies project.
- His major work *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (1983) analysed patterns of peasant rebellion under colonial rule.
- Guha criticised elite-centred nationalist historiography for presenting the history of Indian nationalism mainly through educated, urban and political elites.
- He argued that subaltern politics possessed a degree of autonomy and could not simply be treated as an extension of elite politics.

- He paid close attention to peasant insurgency, collective action, rumours, symbols, authority and the political meanings of rebellion.
- His approach asked historians to identify the political consciousness embedded in actions that elite sources might dismiss as spontaneous, criminal or irrational.

21. Critique of Colonialist Historiography

- Colonial histories often represented Indian society through categories created by colonial administrators.
- Colonial narratives could portray peasants and tribal communities as irrational, violent, primitive or incapable of modern political action.
- The Subaltern approach challenges these representations by examining the social logic and political meanings of popular action.
- Official records are not rejected; instead, they are read critically as documents produced within relations of power.
- The historian asks what an official record reveals unintentionally about the people it attempts to control or describe.

22. Critique of Elite Nationalist Historiography

- Guha argued that nationalist historiography often produced a history in which elite leaders appeared as the principal makers of Indian nationalism.
- The activities of peasants, workers, tribal communities and local activists could become secondary or merely supportive.
- The Subaltern School therefore questioned the assumption that popular participation was simply mobilised or directed by elite nationalism.
- It sought to reconstruct the independent political actions and consciousness of subordinate groups.
- This critique did not mean that elite leadership was historically unimportant; it meant that the political history of India could not be adequately explained through elite initiatives alone.

23. The Idea of Autonomy of Subaltern Politics

- One of Guha's most important arguments was that subaltern politics could possess its own logic, aims, symbols and forms of organisation.
- Peasant insurgency was not always a derivative response to elite politics.
- Popular movements could draw on local memories, religious ideas, community norms, kinship, customary rights and experiences of oppression.
- Subaltern political action could intersect with elite movements while retaining distinct motivations.
- This concept of autonomy is one of the key methodological contributions of the Subaltern School.

24. Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India

- The Subaltern School treated peasant rebellion as a significant form of political action rather than simply as law-and-order disturbance.
- Common forms of resistance included attacks on landlords or officials, refusal to pay revenue, destruction of records, collective occupation, boycotts and symbolic acts.
- Historians examine who participated, who led, what targets were selected and what social relationships shaped the movement.
- Symbols, rumours, religious idioms and collective rituals can provide evidence of political consciousness.
- The aim is to reconstruct the insurgents' social and political world rather than simply reproduce the official explanation of rebellion.

25. "Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency" – Major Analytical Elements

- The study examines recurring forms or "elementary aspects" of insurgent behaviour.
- Insurgency may involve the deliberate identification of enemies and targets.
- Popular action may distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate authority.
- The destruction of documents can express opposition to the systems of revenue, debt and property that those documents represent.
- Collective action can reveal a sense of community and shared political purpose.
- Rumour and communication networks can mobilise people and spread political information.
- Religious or symbolic language may provide a culturally meaningful framework for resistance.
- Violence in insurgency must be interpreted historically and socially rather than merely condemned as criminality.

26. Subalternity and Representation

- A central difficulty is that subaltern groups are frequently represented through the records of dominant institutions.
- The archive is therefore not neutral; it reflects the conditions under which documents were produced and preserved.
- The historian must distinguish between the historical actor and the official description of that actor.
- Questions of voice and representation became increasingly important as Subaltern Studies engaged with poststructuralist and postcolonial theory.
- The project gradually moved from the recovery of subaltern agency toward questioning whether the subaltern can ever be represented without mediation.

27. Important Scholars Associated with Subaltern Studies

- Ranajit Guha: Founder and principal early theorist; peasant insurgency, elite historiography, autonomy of subaltern politics.
- Shahid Amin: Studied local memory, popular politics and the complex relationship between nationalist narratives and local experience, notably in *Event, Metaphor, Memory*.
- David Hardiman: Worked on peasant movements, tribal communities, religion and popular resistance in western India.
- Gyanendra Pandey: Studied communalism, violence, nationalism and the limits of conventional historical categories.
- Gautam Bhadra: Contributed to studies of popular groups and subaltern social worlds.
- Dipesh Chakrabarty: Developed influential critiques of Eurocentric historical categories and examined labour, modernity and historical difference.
- Partha Chatterjee: Analysed nationalism, colonial modernity and the relationship between political society and elite/non-elite groups.

28. Shahid Amin and Local History

- Shahid Amin demonstrated how national political narratives could differ sharply from local memories and experiences.
- His work on the Chauri Chaura episode showed that local actors could assign meanings to political events that differed from those found in national histories.
- This approach highlights the importance of locality, memory, oral testimony and community narratives.
- It also warns historians against assuming that national political categories had exactly the same meaning at the local level.

29. David Hardiman and Popular Movements

- David Hardiman's work on peasants and tribal communities examined the interaction of economy, religion, local society and political mobilisation.
- His studies demonstrate that peasant politics cannot always be reduced to class conflict in a narrow economic sense.
- Religion, community identity, customary rights and local leadership can shape popular mobilisation.
- His work illustrates the broadening of Subaltern Studies from class-centred analysis toward more complex social and cultural histories.

30. Dipesh Chakrabarty and the Critique of Eurocentrism

- Dipesh Chakrabarty questioned the assumption that European historical experience provides a universal model of modernity.

- Provincializing Europe argues for recognising the plurality and unevenness of historical experiences.
- His work is important for understanding how concepts such as modernity, citizenship, class and political consciousness may acquire different meanings in different historical contexts.
- This represents a significant movement from early Subaltern Studies' Marxist concerns toward postcolonial critique.

31. Subaltern Studies and Gramsci

- Antonio Gramsci's concept of subaltern groups provided an important intellectual influence on the project.
- Gramsci's ideas about hegemony, civil society, intellectual leadership and subordinate groups helped historians think about power beyond direct coercion.
- The concept of hegemony highlights how domination can involve consent, cultural leadership and the organisation of common sense.
- Subaltern Studies adapted these ideas to colonial India, though its later scholarship developed beyond a strictly Gramscian framework.

32. Subaltern Studies and Marxism

- Early Subaltern Studies was deeply influenced by Marxism, particularly class analysis and Gramscian ideas.
- Its historians were interested in peasants, landlords, colonial exploitation, class relations and forms of resistance.
- However, the project criticised versions of Marxist history that reduced popular politics to economic structures or treated class consciousness as developing in a predetermined way.
- The emphasis on autonomy, culture, religion, symbols, memory and discourse widened the analytical field.
- Later Subaltern Studies increasingly interacted with poststructuralism and postcolonial theory, making the relationship with classical Marxism more complex.

33. Subaltern School vs. Conventional Elite History

- Conventional elite history: focuses on rulers, administrators, educated leaders and formal institutions.
- Subaltern approach: asks how subordinate groups acted within and sometimes against these structures.
- Conventional history may treat rebellion primarily as disorder; subaltern history treats it as a possible form of political communication and collective action.
- Conventional history may use official records at face value; subaltern historians read them as products of power.

- Conventional nationalism may present a unified national subject; subaltern analysis highlights differences, conflicts and uneven participation within nationalism.

34. Subaltern Studies as a Research Method

- Select a historical problem involving a subordinate or marginalised group.
- Identify how colonial, state, landlord, employer or nationalist sources represented that group.
- Ask what those representations leave out.
- Search for petitions, court cases, local newspapers, oral histories, folk traditions, songs, rumours, letters, autobiographies, local records and material evidence.
- Compare official narratives with local memories and independent evidence.
- Analyse the language of power: labels such as “criminal”, “primitive”, “riotous”, “backward” or “communal” should be treated as historical constructions requiring explanation.
- Recover agency without assuming that subaltern actors were completely independent of elites or larger political movements.
- Pay attention to internal differences of gender, caste, class, religion, tribe, region and generation within the broad category of “subaltern”.

35. Major Concepts to Remember

- History from below: History centred on ordinary/subordinate people and their experiences and actions.
- Agency: Capacity of historical actors to make choices and act, even within structures of constraint.
- Class formation: Historical process through which shared material conditions and experiences contribute to collective identities and action.
- Moral economy: Popular expectations about fairness, legitimate prices, customary rights and community obligations.
- Subaltern: Socially/politically subordinate groups whose voices and agency are often marginalised in dominant narratives.
- Elite historiography: History that gives disproportionate importance to ruling, educated or politically dominant groups.
- Autonomy of subaltern politics: Idea that subordinate political action can have its own aims, logic, symbols and organisation.
- Reading against the grain: Critical reading of dominant/official sources to uncover suppressed or unintended evidence about subordinate people.
- Hegemony: Domination involving cultural leadership, consent and the shaping of common sense, especially associated with Gramsci.

- Eurocentrism: Treating European historical experience as the universal model for interpreting other societies.
- Representation: The process through which historical actors are described, classified and made visible or invisible in sources and narratives.

36. Comparison: British Marxists and Subaltern School

Aspect	British Marxists / History from Below	Subaltern School
Primary context	Britain and European social history	Colonial and postcolonial South Asian history
Main concern	Class, capitalism, labour, peasants, popular politics and social experience	Subaltern groups, colonial power, nationalism, popular politics and representation
Key influences	Marx, Marxist social history, labour history	Marx, Gramsci, Marxist historiography; later postcolonial/poststructuralist theory
Major actors	Workers, peasants, artisans, crowds and popular movements	Peasants, tribal groups, workers and other subordinated communities
Important contribution	History from below and social history	Critique of elite historiography and recovery/problematisation of subaltern agency
Method	Class analysis + empirical social history + lived experience	Reading official archives critically + local histories + discourse/representation + popular agency
Major development	From economic/class history toward culture and experience	From Marxist/Gramscian social history toward postcolonial and cultural theory

37. Similarities between the Two Approaches

- Both challenge histories dominated by political elites.
- Both take ordinary or subordinate people seriously as historical actors.
- Both emphasise social relations and power rather than isolated political events.
- Both use sources critically and seek evidence of popular action.
- Both reject the assumption that people at the bottom of society are merely passive recipients of historical change.

- Both contributed to the expansion of historiography from political history toward social and cultural history.

38. Major Differences

- British Marxist history from below is more directly rooted in the history of class, capitalism, labour and European social relations.
- Subaltern Studies began with colonial India and a critique of both colonialist and elite nationalist historiographies.
- Early British Marxists generally sought to explain social transformation through class and material relations while retaining attention to culture and agency.
- Subaltern Studies increasingly questioned universal historical categories and became more concerned with discourse, representation, identity and the limits of historical recovery.
- The category “subaltern” cannot simply be equated with “working class”; it includes a wider range of politically and socially subordinate groups.

39. Criticisms of the Subaltern School

- The category of “subaltern” can become so broad that its analytical precision is weakened.
- Recovering autonomous subaltern consciousness is difficult because much evidence comes from elite or state-produced archives.
- Some critics argue that early Subaltern Studies could romanticise the autonomy of popular politics.
- The emphasis on subaltern agency may sometimes understate the power of state institutions, capitalist structures or elite political organisations.
- Later poststructuralist approaches raised difficult questions about whether historians can fully recover the voice of people who left little written evidence.
- Some scholars argue that gender, caste and internal inequalities within subaltern groups require greater attention.
- The shift from material/class analysis toward discourse and representation has been criticised by some Marxist scholars as weakening structural analysis.

40. Research Application: How a Student Can Use These Approaches

- Topic: A peasant movement — use history from below to reconstruct participants, grievances, organisation and lived experience; use subaltern analysis to examine how officials and nationalist leaders represented the movement.
- Topic: A labour strike — analyse wages and working conditions through Marxist social history, but also study workers’ culture, identity, leadership and local community.

- Topic: A tribal/indigenous movement — examine land, forest and revenue relations while also investigating customary authority, religion, memory and community identity.
- Topic: A food riot — apply the moral economy approach to investigate popular ideas of fairness and legitimate pricing.
- Topic: A nationalist movement in a village — compare national political narratives with local memories and actions.
- Topic: A colonial police record — read it against the grain: ask what the record unintentionally reveals about the people being policed.
- Topic: Oral history — compare memory with written records; treat memory not merely as factual evidence but also as evidence of how communities interpret their past.

41. Suggested Source Types for Research

- Government proceedings and administrative reports.
- Police and intelligence records, read critically.
- Court proceedings and legal records.
- Revenue and land records.
- Newspapers and periodicals.
- Petitions, letters and autobiographies.
- Trade union and workers' organisation records.
- Village and local institutional records.
- Oral histories and interviews.
- Folk songs, legends, ballads and popular literature.
- Photographs, posters, pamphlets and visual materials.
- Material culture, monuments and archaeological evidence where relevant.

42. Quick Revision: Thinkers and Contributions

- Maurice Dobb → development of capitalism; class and production relations; transition debate.
- Rodney Hilton → medieval peasants; feudal social relations; peasant resistance.
- Christopher Hill → English Revolution; radical groups; religion and social change.
- E. P. Thompson → history from below; making of the working class; agency; moral economy.
- Eric Hobsbawm → labour history; popular protest; capitalism; comparative and global social history.
- Ranajit Guha → Subaltern Studies; peasant insurgency; critique of elite historiography; autonomy of subaltern politics.

- Shahid Amin → locality, memory and the gap between national narratives and local experience.
- David Hardiman → peasants, tribal communities, religion and popular movements.
- Dipesh Chakrabarty → critique of Eurocentrism; historical difference; provincializing Europe.

43. Important Short-Answer Questions

- What is meant by “history from below”?
- Who were the British Marxist historians?
- What is the significance of E. P. Thompson’s *The Making of the English Working Class*?
- What is the “moral economy”?
- Explain the concept of class formation.
- Who was Ranajit Guha?
- What is meant by “subaltern”?
- When did the Subaltern Studies project begin?
- What is meant by the autonomy of subaltern politics?
- What is meant by reading sources “against the grain”?
- What was the contribution of Shahid Amin?
- How did Dipesh Chakrabarty criticise Eurocentrism?

44. Important 10-Mark / Long-Answer Questions

- Discuss the meaning, objectives and significance of “history from below” in twentieth-century historiography.
- Examine the major contributions of the British Marxist historians to social history.
- Discuss E. P. Thompson’s contribution to the study of class, agency and popular politics.
- Explain the concept of “moral economy” and assess its significance in the study of popular protest.
- Discuss the origins and major objectives of the Subaltern Studies project.
- Critically examine Ranajit Guha’s critique of elite historiography.
- Explain the concept of the autonomy of subaltern politics with reference to peasant insurgency in colonial India.
- Discuss the relationship between Marxism and the Subaltern School.
- Compare history from below of the British Marxists with the Subaltern School.
- Critically evaluate the strengths and limitations of the Subaltern approach to Indian history.

45. Model Framework for a 10-Mark Answer

- Introduction → define the approach and place it within twentieth-century historiographical developments.
- Background → explain the limitations of elite/political history and the influence of Marxism or Gramsci where relevant.
- Core concepts → explain class, agency, history from below, subalternity, autonomy, moral economy or representation as applicable.
- Historians → mention 3–5 relevant scholars and their major contributions.
- Examples → provide one or two concrete historical illustrations.
- Methodology → explain how the approach changes source selection and interpretation.
- Criticism → identify at least two limitations or debates.
- Conclusion → assess the approach's contribution to making historical writing more socially inclusive and analytically complex.

46. Key Takeaways

- The twentieth century witnessed a major expansion of historical subject matter from elites and institutions toward society and ordinary people.
- British Marxist historians made class, labour, peasants, popular politics and lived experience central to social history.
- History from below emphasises agency: ordinary people are not merely victims or objects of history.
- E. P. Thompson is especially important for the concepts of class formation, experience, agency and moral economy.
- The Subaltern Studies project emerged in the early 1980s to challenge colonial and elite nationalist narratives of Indian history.
- Ranajit Guha argued that subaltern politics could possess relative autonomy and should not be reduced to elite initiatives.
- Subaltern Studies used Marxist and Gramscian influences but later engaged strongly with postcolonial and poststructuralist theory.
- Both approaches transformed historical methodology by asking historians to search for voices, actions and experiences that conventional archives and narratives often marginalised.
- Neither approach should be treated as a single rigid formula; both contain internal debates and significant changes over time.

47. Selected Readings for Students

- Maurice Dobb, *Studies in the Development of Capitalism* (1946).
- Rodney Hilton, *The English Peasantry in the Later Middle Ages*.

- Christopher Hill, *The English Revolution 1640; The World Turned Upside Down*.
- E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963).
- E. P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century."
- Eric Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men; Primitive Rebels; The Age of Revolution*.
- Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies I: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (1982).
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48. Concluding Note for Classroom Discussion

- The central methodological lesson of these approaches is that the archive does not automatically provide a complete history.
- Historians must ask whose voices are preserved, whose voices are absent, who produced the records, and what relations of power shaped their production.
- History from below and Subaltern Studies therefore encourage a more critical, inclusive and reflexive practice of historical research.
- For a History Major student, the most important skill is not merely memorising the names of historians, but learning how these approaches change the questions asked, the sources selected and the interpretations produced.