

DRS PHASE III

Transitions in History

Aim

Central to the different historiographical debates on the nature of state, economy and society have been discussions on historical dynamism, change and the causality of change. While discussing the concepts of evolution, development, consolidation and decline, these debates have significantly provided the theoretical constructs for periodisation of Indian history into 'ancient', 'early historical', 'early medieval', 'medieval', 'late medieval', 'early modern', 'modern', 'post-colonial' and so on. Moving beyond the mere chronological labels and seamless narratives of events over a period of time, the historical researches and the historiographical trends that inform these researches have focused on various historical processes and the notion of transition intrinsic to them.

Keeping in mind the nature of studies and historiographies, the theme of this proposal for the DSA programme is *Transitions in Indian History*. It is expected that such a theme will not only encapsulate the existing researches and analyse them, but also provide a broad framework for the future study of different areas of historical research. Further, these researches would inquire and investigate the nature of transitions and attempt to provide a theoretical template, therefore contributing significantly to the historiographical discussions.

The notion of transition in history is freighted with specialist meaning. It is not to be confused with the general notion of historical change. Not all historical change can be defined or understood as transition. Transition connotes transformative, systemic change, a move from one state of historical being to another. The discussions on transition and historical change probably date to the nineteenth and twentieth century in the works of Karl Marx and Max Weber on the social and economic organization. There were differences between their views as reflected in Marx's modes of production and the base-superstructure relationship and in Weber's ideas of economic rationality or the spirit of capitalism. These ideas influenced the course of historical scholarship in the West. Transitions in history have been usually associated with far-reaching and epoch-making changes in social formations and cultural patterns. It is in this sense that historians use the term to signify changes from slave societies to feudal ones; and then from feudalism to capitalism. Particularly, in the case of modern history, transition acquired significance mainly because changes that occurred in Europe and the West within the frame of Capital were deemed to be world historical changes, destined to play out with varying degrees of latency in the rest of the world.

Some of these ideas have also been basis of understanding transitions in Indian history. For instance, the change in social, economic and political organizations considered to occur in the movement from feudalism to capitalism was seen as a determining framework for transition. Historians like R.S.Sharma, B.D.Chattopadhyaya, and Hermann Kulke outlined the transition from ancient to early medieval society on the basis of historical processes and not on the basis of events. Some historians have argued that the concept of transition implying a change in a particular direction, for example, the succession of modes of production implies an evolutionary process in which there is a predictable direction towards which events move and hence is teleological. Post-colonial historians like Dipesh Chakravorty and Partha Chatterjee, among many others, have contested the inevitability of a transition to a modernity defined by Marxist templates. They argue for understanding the transition on the basis of indigenous categories as represented in the primary sources. Similar ideas are echoed in the recent revisionist writings on the Mughal period and the early colonial rule have focused on the transition of the Indian society from Medieval to 'Early Modern' in the sixteenth century and on the colonial transition in the late eighteenth century. While the first transition in these writings emphasizes the establishment of global networks of trade in the aftermath of exploration of trade routes and coming of Europeans, the colonial transition implicitly assumes the role of Indian actors and internal dynamics of Indian society, economy and polity in the establishment of British Colonial rule.

Given the ramifications and significance of this debate, the Department feels that the emphasis on *Transitions in History* would open new areas of historical inquiry in all manner of research interests, be they in, political, economic, social or cultural history. In certain areas, the frame of transition may be considered to explore new historical problems and raise fresh questions. For instance, Medieval Indian History has been seen by historians as consisting of three broad chronological stages: the early medieval period up to the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate, the Delhi Sultanate and Vijayanagar and the Mughal-Maratha periods up to the eighteenth century. However, the concept of 'transition' has been rarely used by any medievalists to highlight the changes from one stage to another, within the medieval period. Continuity and change from one stage to another is stressed but no major transition is seen in social formation before the imposition of the British Colonial rule in the second half of the eighteenth century.

Proposed Themes of Research:

1. The transition from tribe to caste.
2. Literary transitions and cultures, The transition from orality to print culture, Text, Transmissions and preservations of Ideologies and Traditions
3. Political, Administrative, Economic and Social Transitions
4. Regional transitions will constitute an important area of study. An attempt will be made to study how the interactions between localities, regions and the imperial polities transformed all three levels of polities.
5. Transitions of religious movements in communities and cults will be researched.
6. The transition from pre-colonial economic activities to colonial extraction
7. The transition from colonial commercialization to capitalism in Indian agriculture.
8. Mortality transition in modern India.
9. The transition from economic dirigisme to liberalization in contemporary India
10. The transition from status to contract
11. The transition from customary law to codified law books and new concepts of juridical authority.
12. The transition from cultural acceptance to critical self reflexivity.
13. The transition in gender relationships and kinship network.