

Feature Article 【專題論文】

Contemporary Challenges to Historical Studies:  
In Search of A "Humanistic History"  
in An Era of Global Crisis  
**歷史研究的當代挑戰：**  
**全球危機時代中「人文的歷史」的探索**

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Four-fold Logical Principles, Humanistic History, Connected History,  
Trauma and Suffering, Alienation, Dialogue

**關鍵詞：**全球危機、新人文精神、印度人文精神、理性、四重邏輯原則、  
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## Abstract

This paper explores the possibility of a "humanistic history" as part of a new historical thinking in an era of global crisis. It supports New Humanism emphasizing intercultural dialogue, on the one hand, and unity in difference, on the other. The key concepts in this new historical thinking are "connection" and complementarity of reason and compassion, the finest and the most humane form of emotion that brings sensitivity to reasoning. There is a need to incorporate refinement of ideas and methods in both humanism and history and to make adjustments, if necessary, in the dominant metaphysics governing modernist intellectual thinking. It is suggested that the four-fold logical system of traditional India, wider in scope than the existing one in Western rationality, may be fruitfully applied to address historical problems. The paper discusses, in the end, the nature of humanistic history with reference to three issues: a) the question of connected history, b) trauma and suffering – how emotive issues like catastrophic historical experiences could be incorporated in professional historical studies, and c) some contemporary social problems in India and the importance of dialogue to curb alienation.

## 摘要

本文探討在全球危機時代中將「人文的歷史」視為一種新歷史思維的可能性。它可做為新人文主義一面強調跨文化對話，一面強調整合差異的支柱。此新歷史思維的關鍵概念是理性與同情的「連結」與互補，情感最細微且最人性的狀態，可將感受帶向推理。有必要將精細的概念與方法納入人文精神與歷史兩方面，並且如果必要，對被具優勢的形而上學所支配的現代知識分子的思維進行調整。本文提出：傳統印度的四重邏輯系統，在範疇上遠較西方理性現存之邏輯系統寬廣，可被廣泛應用，以處理歷史問題。本文最後就三個議題討論人文歷史的本質：1. 有關相連的歷史的問題，2. 創傷與痛苦——情緒議題，如：災難的歷史經驗，可如何被併入專業歷史研究中，3. 某些印度當代社會問題，以及為抑止疏遠而進行對話的重要性。

## 1. Introduction

The contribution of historical studies to an understanding of human life in its dynamism and variety cannot be underestimated. However, there has been a growing concern among some contemporary historians that in the midst of the growth of intellectual/professional history across the world, humans – the subject matter of history – are virtually disappearing in all technical details of objective analysis. This is particularly applicable to the marginal social groups in India. Disappearing also are the sentiments about the victims of traumatic events across the world in the wake of our selective application of memory, as professional history with a commitment to celebrating linear progress has had little time and patience to pause and adequately reflect on such emotive issues. The same applies to the practices in traditional humanism. But the process of dehumanization has taken a new turn in this era of "economic" globalization, coinciding with terrorism and counter-terrorism, as well as periodic episodes of communal violence. As a result, history is facing multiple challenges from both internal and external sources. Rationalism, an effective way of viewing the world, has dominated, almost single-handedly, modern European thought and action. But scientific studies have little appreciation for the complementary relationship between reason and compassion, the finest and most humane form of emotion that brings a spontaneous sense of justice and sensitivity to reasoning. Human society experiences two forces – centrifugal and centripetal; without love and compassion that work as a force of cohesion, society and individuals face the danger of disintegration. Today's global crises might have destabilized history, but it is also the time to critically reflect on the internal weaknesses of earlier historical thinking based on a culture-specific metaphysics following an "either/or" form of logic (the law of the excluded middle).

By a radical understanding, history can be described as a hermeneutically informed dialectical discourse on the past and the present (cf. Shanks and Tilley 1987) – a process of production of the past in the present with a view to connecting two dual, but related, concepts of absence and presence. It is all about connection – not only between different available sources or sets of evidence towards a sensible interpretation or interpretation of interpretations, but also with the human agency or actors in space and time. In practice, there is a tendency to use only a selective sets of evidence – the first step towards disconnection – to prove particular points of present concern, suppressing those others that might weaken the argument of immediate objectives relating to the present.<sup>1</sup>

What is our understanding of humans in contemporary history and humanism? This understanding is based on studies of peoples whom modern historians or sociologists can comprehend – the industrialized and modernized humans round the world, and not others whom they cannot. This naturally provides a limited conception of Man<sup>2</sup> i.e. one sufficiently deviated from nature (internal and external) and dislocated, as well, from the self-created centre. If the intention is to divide people in terms of "civilized" and "uncivilized" and privileging one over the other, it would be against the spirit of humanism where human dignity is the key word. This kind of divisive humanism may not be appealing to the mankind in general. We have to evolve a wider notion of humans from alternative sources of pre- and non-modern cultures of the world. Traditional Indian culture provides a much wider notion of Man as we shall see below.

Given a close connection between history and humanism, at least in their common, but forgotten, source in trauma and suffering (see Ankersmit in the context of history<sup>3</sup>), can we talk about an integrated "humanistic history" in

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1 In this sense, historical discourses are often no different from the arguments of a counsel in modern judicial courts, where judgments are necessarily bound by binary concepts of guilty or non-guilty; the entire grey area in between that requires humane inputs are not considered to be of any significance.

2 The term "Man" has been used in this paper in a generic sense to include women as well.

3 Frank R. Ankersmit, "Trauma and Suffering: A Forgotten Source of Western Historical Consciousness,"

which the lost/ignored humans of the past and the present are restored and recommended with the histories of divergent human cultures?

A growing tendency in professional history of the West is to go for oversimplification by restricting the time-scale to modern periods alone. But if we extend the historical time-scale from modern to pre-modern times, well into the Bronze Age or still further into prehistory, which is arguably not an undesirable consideration and still in practice in most universities of India, history becomes (like archaeology) the fourth order hermeneutical inquiry, and hence most challenging branch of study.<sup>4</sup>

Humanistic history – a history of connectedness – is an idea, a possible solution as well, to the problem of current global crisis. This may also be considered as one of the many new forms of historical thinking that are currently shaping up in the minds of historians. In this paper, I shall discuss humanistic history with reference to three issues, viz.: a) the question of connected history, b) trauma and suffering – how emotive issues like catastrophic historical experiences could be incorporated in professional historical studies, and c) some contemporary social problems in India and the importance of dialogue to curb alienation.

However, before coming to this main point of humanistic history (Section 5), I would like to proceed with a discussion on the salient points of Humanism and historical thinking in Europe (Section 2), perspectives on Indian humanistic thoughts (Section 3), and modern Indian historical practices (Section 4).

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in Jörn Rüsen (ed.), *Western Historical Thinking: An Intercultural Debate* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002), pp. 72-84.

4 See Michael Shanks and Christopher Tilley, *Re-Constructing Archaeology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) for details.

## 2. Humanism and Historical Thinking in Europe

Traditional European Humanism, a movement of the eighteenth century, has had its traces during the Italian Renaissance. It was developed in the context of Europe and had a great success in the overall improvement of a decaying society torn apart by political and religious forces during the Dark Age and in later centuries. The recognition in subsequent centuries of the creative potential of humans and their important faculty of reason during seventeenth and eighteenth centuries led to the development of science and technology that not only highlighted a "progressive" world-view but also an economic and political triumph, from whence emerged a new European identity.

Because of Humanism's ethnocentric approach, a need was felt in recent times to expand its scope to incorporate humanistic ideas from several non-Western traditions in a New Intercultural Humanism, envisaged by Jörn Rüsen.<sup>5</sup> It was consistent with a similar line of thinking in approaching history from interdisciplinary orientation and intercultural perspective.<sup>6</sup> This "New Humanism" highlights two inter-related ideas of great significance – a) unity in difference and b) rejection of the "clash of civilizations" thesis of Samuel Huntington.<sup>7</sup> This approach of interculturality has the potential to link humanism to history. It is essential now for humanists and historians to join hands in discovering the obstacles to the unity of peoples/cultures round the world and come forward with possible solutions by invoking, if necessary, (a) a paradigm shift and/or metaphysical

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5 See Jörn Rüsen, "Introduction. Humanism in the era of globalization: Ideas on a new cultural orientation," in J. Rüsen and H. Laass (eds.), *Humanism in Intercultural Perspective: Experiences and Expectations* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2009), pp. 11-19.

6 See Jörn Rüsen, "Preface to the Series," in Idem. (ed.), *Western Historical Thinking: An Intercultural Debate* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002), pp. vii-xiii; "Introduction: Historical Thinking as Intercultural Discourse," in Idem. (ed.), *Western Historical Thinking: An Intercultural Debate* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002), pp. 1-11.

7 See Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India (P) Ltd., 1996; Originally published the same year by Simon & Schuster).

restructuring (see below), and (b) an intercultural perspective that would provide new qualitative ideas such as the revolutionary change in Physics in 1920s.<sup>8</sup>

Now we can outline some salient points on historical thinking in Europe. An interest in history, shaped by the political and social conditions, is dependent upon our position in time.<sup>9</sup> With every new epoch associated with extraordinary events, there is a tendency to look into the past in a different way, i.e. to make a fresh beginning in historical thinking.

The latest example of such turning points in history is a series of rapid changes in global political and cultural situations in the past two decades – the dismantling of the *Iron Curtain* (1989) and the rise of postmodernism and multiculturalism with the implication that history as we know it "has been declared to be dead, outdated, overcome, and at its end."<sup>10</sup> But what is interesting is that "ever since 'history' has been declared to be at its end, 'historical matters' seem to have come back with a vengeance."<sup>11</sup> Another

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8 A real paradigm shift emerged in physics in 1920s when the entire physicist community of Europe was puzzled on the nature of light – whether wave or particle. In a moment of crisis it was Neils Bohr who had a chance encounter with *I-Ching* – an ancient Chinese text, suggesting complementarity between apparently opposites like *Yin* and *Yang*. That helped him formulating his famous Copenhagen Interpretation of Quantum Theory to explain the dual nature of light. In other words, it was because of this qualitative idea from an Eastern culture that a real paradigm shift emerged in Western sciences. But the new insights acquired in Quantum/Modern Physics are substantially and qualitatively different from the classical sciences, based on exclusively positivist methods, most social scientists have been dealing with. It may be mentioned in passing that a previous paradigm shift in Western scientific thought was brought about by Darwinian Theory of evolution, highlighting genetic "connectedness" of organisms, which was long anticipated in Indian Puranic literature, especially in the famous narrative on Lord Vishnu's "Ten Incarnations".

9 See E. H. Carr, *What is History?* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1964; First published in 1961 by Macmillan), and Jörn Rüsen, "Trauma and Mourning in Historical Thinking," *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in History and Archaeology*, 1, 1 (2004), pp. 31-43.

This emphasis on the spirit of time for historical consciousness finds further elaboration by Rakitov as follows: "Turning points in the life of peoples, radical changes in modes of production, wars and revolutions, transitions from economic upswings to depression or decline, religious movements, etc., have always generated heightened interest in history" (See Anatoly Rakitov, *Historical Knowledge: A Systems-Epistemological Approach* [Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1982], 2: 27).

10 See Jörn Rüsen, "Preface to the Series," p. vii; cf. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Avon Books, Inc., 1992).

11 Ibid.

development was the recognition of intrinsic "connection" between historical theory and historical memory. According to Rösen,

As long as we fail to acknowledge this interesting connection between the most sophisticated historical theory and the procedures of historical memory most deeply imbedded in the culture and the everyday life of people, we remain caught in an ideology of linear progress, which considers cultural forms of memory simply as interesting objects of study instead of recognizing them as examples of "how to make sense of history."<sup>12</sup>

This point on making sense of history is important also for a critical review of historical studies in India, especially on traumatic experiences following partition of the nation in 1947, as will be discussed below (Section 5.2).

Another turning point may be the event of 2001 – the 9/11 attack on the twin towers in Manhattan area of New York – and the emerging intellectual responses which seemed to resonate Samuel Huntington's theory on clash of civilization. These factors would have to be considered with the rising tide of terrorist activities along with huge investment made by Western economies to combat this threat. Upon these crises is the global economic meltdown that got worsened since August 2011.

In response to all these rapid developments over the past two decades, a new historicism is bound to emerge, sooner than later, in an interdisciplinary and intercultural spirit where sharing of ideas and cooperation across the world would be necessary through constructive dialogues and exchange of creative ideas. One can hope that the scope of this forthcoming history will be global rather than regional. Whatever new approaches may emerge in historical studies, I would

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12 Jörn Rösen, "Preface to the Series," p. viii.



like to suggest and elaborate below that there is a need to develop humanistic history with refinement of ideas and methods in both humanism and history; both these streams need to "connect" with each other as what Rösen calls a connection between historical theory and historical memory in order to make a better sense of history.

### 3. Humanistic Thoughts in India

#### 3.1 Understanding India

From a Biblical prescription, Indian cultural tradition(s) cannot be understood as anything other than a Pagan one – like that of the ancient Greeks and the Imperial Romans before Constantine the Great (early 4<sup>th</sup> century AD). But then India is not alone; the core values of some other contemporary civilizations, such as Chinese, Japanese, African, and Latin/Central American, are also derived from diverse Pagan traditions. A bulk of Indian population has had a historical connection (in body, mind and linguistic structure) with its Indo-European kin, but there were historical circumstances in Rome and beyond since 4<sup>th</sup> century that profoundly changed the European mindset from Paganism to non-Paganism. Yet, some essential similarity between European and Indian ways of thinking still exists. Despite attempts at modernization, Westernization and secularization around nineteenth century, India did not drastically deviate from that original Pagan world-view persisting ever since prehistoric times. It is on this point that India stands out as different and mystical in the eyes of modern rationalists.

#### 3.2 Indian Humanism: A Brief Outline

Despite the existence of humanitarian concerns in the long course of Indian history, humanism in the sense of Western movement, by and large, did not

emerge in India until as late as 20<sup>th</sup> century. Contacts with the Colonial powers did result in modernization and socio-cultural reforms. Social reforms occurred through various enlightened thinkers and humanists of the land since 19<sup>th</sup> century such as Raja Rammohan Roy (1772-1833), often described as the father of Indian Renaissance.

Indian thinkers did develop, even in pre-modern times, unique forms of humanism, some within the overall orthodox tradition, while others were focused on ethical virtues, independent of theistic ideologies, such as Buddhism, Jainism or even extreme materialist systems of thought such as the Carvaka and the Lokayata philosophies.<sup>13</sup> These forms of humanism often involved social and political protests and reforms<sup>14</sup> perhaps not in such a drastic, dramatic ways as to leave tangible evidence for historians to see any reflection of modernity. It was, perhaps, modernity in a different garb. These traditional philosophico-religious ideas along with those developed in later times – Islamic, Sikh and modern scientific – paved the way for complex, diversified approaches towards understanding humanism and history of the land. Indian humanism has a plural rather than singular dimension.

The most direct impact of traditional (secular) humanism on Indian intellectuals could be noticed in M. N. Roy (1887-1954), a political thinker and philosopher. His humanism, which is based on classical sciences and materialistic philosophy, transcended regional biases and therefore in contradistinction to what was fashionable within European humanist tradition of his times.<sup>15</sup> He was a liberal Marxist and seems to have been impressed also by the early writings of Marx which remains a reliable source of Marxist humanism. Although Marxism

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13 See U. C. Chattopadhyaya, "Indischer Humanismus," in Jörn Rüsen und Henner Laass (eds.), *Interkultureller Humanismus. Menschlichkeit in der Vielfalt der Kulturen* (Schwalbach/Taunus: Wochenschau, 2009), pp. 115–144, for a general outline.

14 See S. C. Malik, *Dissent, Protest and Reform in Indian Civilization* (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1977), and *Indian Movements: Some Aspects of Dissent, Protest and Reform* (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1978); Romila Thapar, *Early India: From the Origins to AD 1300* (London: Allen Lane, 2002).

15 See M. N. Roy, *New Humanism: A Manifesto* (Delhi: Ajanta Publications. Reprint, 1981).

has had a profound impact on contemporary historical studies, humanism (Marxist or otherwise) has never been a theme of foremost research in any of the major historiographical schools – Empiricist, Nationalistic and Marxist. Roy was not a professional historian, but certainly one who created history. So, it was mostly non-historians, especially sociologists and philosophers, who addressed the problem of humanism or humanitarian issues in various ways.<sup>16</sup>

Historians or non-historians, with the recent emphasis on interdisciplinary and intercultural approaches in the New Humanism project initiated by Jörn Rüsen, witnessed some positive responses from competent Indian scholars like Romila Thapar, Surendra Munshi, and Dipesh Chakrabarty.<sup>17</sup> Thapar, while rejecting the eighteenth century humanism, does provide some critical, thought-provoking ideas for consideration in the New Humanism project.<sup>18</sup> She is clearly uncomfortable with binary concepts like civilized vs. non-civilized, progressive vs. primitive, which remain a long-lasting aspect of Western metaphysics and have become a target of Derrida's deconstructionist attack.<sup>19</sup> It is not just globalization that is problematic, the concept of civilization too is paradoxical; it has had a highly divisive role in social history as resonant in Huntington's thesis.

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16 See D. D. Bandiste, *Humanist Thought in Contemporary India* (Delhi: B. R. Publishing Corporation, 1999); John H. Crook, *World Crisis and Buddhist Humanism. End Games: Collaps or Renewal of Civilisation* (New Delhi: New Age Books, 2009; First Indian edition); N. K. Devaraja, *Humanism in Indian Thought* (New Delhi: Indus Publishing Co., 1988); D. R. Jatava, *The Dimensions of Humanism* (Agra: Phoenix Publishing House, 1970); P. K. Mohapatra, (ed.), *Facets of Humanism* (New Delhi: Decent Books, 1999); Radhakamal Mukerjee, *The Way of Humanism: East and West* (Bombay: Academic Books, 1968); D. P. Mukerji, *Redefining Humanism: Selected Essays of D. P. Mukerji*, edited by Srobona Munshi (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2009); D. M. Praharaj, *Humanism in Contemporary Indian Perspective* (Meerut: Anu Books, 1995); M. N. Roy, *New Humanism: A Manifesto* (Delhi: Ajanta Publications. Reprint, 1981); K. G. Saiyidain, *The Humanist Tradition in Indian Educational Thought* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1966); Jaideep Singh, *The Humanistic View of Man* (New Delhi: Indian Institute of Public Administration, 1979); Bhikkhu Duc Truong, *Humanism in the Nikaya Literature* (Delhi: Eastern Book Linkers, 2005); V. P. Varma, *Philosophical Humanism and Contemporary India* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1979).

17 See *Humanism in Intercultural Perspective*, edited by Rüsen and Laass.

18 See Romila Thapar, "Humanism in the Era of Globalization: Some Thoughts," in J. Rüsen and H. Laass (eds.), *Humanism in Intercultural Perspective: Experiences and Expectations* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2009), pp. 37-45.

19 Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, translated by Alan Bass (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978).

The problem with this controversial category, as I understand, gets compounded if that is privileged over non-civilization.<sup>20</sup> Thapar raises for us a vital point regarding the incorporation of the marginal cultures or cultures of the Other in a future kind of Humanism:

If the search for the presence of Humanism is sought in marginal cultures, in the cultures of the Other, and in the ideals held by subordinate groups, we may find many facets of Humanism without their being called so. Such groups are by their very nature interested in the ideals and values of Humanism and it is to these groups that we should also turn our attention. Studies of the ideologies of such groups in the context of Humanism and their articulation may take Humanism further as a perception of, and a prescription for, the globalizing world of today.<sup>21</sup>

Munshi for his part provides a lucid picture of Indian humanism while focusing on the likes of Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, S. Radhakrishnan.<sup>22</sup> After a thorough evaluation of Indian and Western ideas, he suggests the following universal definition of humanism for further reflection:

Humanism at its core is the belief in the possibility of all human beings realizing their innate nobility, irrespective of gender, race, class, religion, caste, or any other distinction among them.<sup>23</sup>

Another prominent Indian collaborator of this New Humanism Project, Sanjay Seth comments that the renewed and differently conceived humanism

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20 Cf. Gayatri C. Spivak, "Culture," *Journal of the Interdisciplinary Crossroads*, 1, 1 (April, 2004), pp. 9-11.

21 Romila Thapar, "Humanism in the Era of Globalization: Some Thoughts," p. 45.

22 See Surendra Munshi, "Humanism in Indian Thought," in J. Rüsen and H. Laass (eds.), *Humanism in Intercultural Perspective: Experiences and Expectations* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2009), pp. 57-64.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 64.

"will not be the search for a singular Reason, but the process of intercultural dialogue, by those working with and from what are acknowledged to be different traditions of reasoning, all worthy of respect."<sup>24</sup>

The purpose here is not to provide a comprehensive account of the vast literature on Indian humanism (some prominent references are given above). However, it is thought desirable to outline some salient, positive points of Indian cultural traditions that shaped humanistic thoughts:

1) Enormous range of diversity at social, ethnic, intellectual, and cultural levels; acceptance of new ideas without generally giving up the old ones. The second point finds a similarity with that in traditional China.<sup>25</sup>

2) Cultural evolution of communities since prehistoric times, based on the cosmo-social principle of periodicity<sup>26</sup> group diversification (branching off from parent groups) and re-gathering<sup>27</sup> generally in harvesting seasons, as well as inter-group complementarity in terms of exchange system.

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24 Sanjay Seth, "Humanism and dialogue," Working Paper No. 15 of the Project: "Humanism in the Era of Globalization – An Intercultural Dialogue on Culture, Humanity and Values" (Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities, Essen, in cooperation with the Universities of the Ruhr-area [Bochum, Dortmund, Duisburg-Essen] and national and international partners. Project Supervisor: Jörn Rüsen), p. 7.

25 P. T. Raju, *Introduction to Comparative Philosophy* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1992), p. 161.

26 This model is derived from the cyclic conception of time found in ancient Indian tradition (see H. W. Wallis, *The Cosmology of the Rigveda, An Essay* [London: Williams and Norgate, 1887]), characteristic of Pagan tradition with roots in prehistory. It is about periodic processes of events, phenomena – beginning, development and end, for example – which are followed by regeneration of the entire cyclic process in a different form. It also incorporates linear processes, but within the cyclic process. Being developed by the author for a future publication, this model is one of hope and optimism, i.e. present setbacks or failures are only temporary.

27 The latter signifies relocation of the dislocated, thus ensuring social stability and well-being. This periodicity of events, especially reunion, later got manifested in some festivals like Holi, Pongal, Diwali, Durga Puja/Dussehra etc. in which religion, society, culture (music, dance, plays), politics, economy, social negotiations all combine together to provide essential mental food till next such event. This interconnectedness is a characteristic feature of a wider Pagan tradition, as Marshall Sahlins (*Stone Age Economics* [London: Tavistock, 1974]) too observes that such modern categories are intertwined among small-scale peasant communities of Papua New Guinea.

3) A much wider concept of man (than that in modern West), derived from *Purusha* – the Primordial Man, as mentioned in a late portion of the *Rgveda Samhita* dated around first millennium BCE.<sup>28</sup> The creation of humans as well as the world was a result of sacrifice of the *Purusha*. In Upanishadic and Vedantic philosophies, *Brahman* (or *Atman*) is the Ultimate Reality and there is a complete unity of *Brahman* with organisms (*Jiva*), including their most evolved form, the human.

4) A form of cosmology in which time is generally perceived as cyclic or periodic in nature,<sup>29</sup> yet, being aware that a linear conception of time also exists within a cyclic process. The former conception has nurtured a quality of reconciliation and brought hope and optimism in life, and death is not considered an abrupt end of everything (see note 26).

5) A rare combination of reason with compassion as in Buddhism, Jainism, but also in Hinduism. Love finds fullest manifestation in the Bhakti thought and Sufism. Humanistic ideas are highly evolved in Buddhism – see Crook (2009), Jatava (1998) and Truong (2005) for details.<sup>30</sup>

6) An intellectual tradition reflected in the rise of Orthodox and Heterodox philosophical systems based on reason, but also on revelation. Interestingly several schools of Indian philosophy had their parallels in ancient Greece.<sup>31</sup> Philosophy in India was not only a rational inquiry, but also a life process towards attaining wisdom and self-perfection, i.e. practice in life and therapy. It

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28 See note, below Table 1

29 See H. W. Wallis, *The Cosmology of the Rigveda, An Essay*.

30 John H. Crook, *World Crisis and Buddhist Humanism. End Games: Collaps or Renewal of Civilisation* (New Delhi: New Age Books, 2009; First Indian edition); D. R. Jatava, *The Humanism of Buddha* (Jaipur: Ina Shree Publishers, 1998); Bhikkhu Duc Truong, *Humanism in the Nikaya Literature* (Delhi: Eastern Book Linkers, 2005).

31 There is no publication dated 2008 on the work-cited list. Thomas McEvelley, *The Shape of Ancient Thought: Comparative Studies in Greek and Indian Philosophies* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2008).

was an act of understanding of Man – his outer and inner worlds; his infinite potential, through different faculties.

7) In India the problem of dealing with conceptual dualities takes on two different forms, viz.: a) as opposites and contradictory just like modern West; b) viewed in their relatedness. For example, materiality and spirituality are essentially interrelated, but they are viewed as opposites in many circles, particularly since colonial impact.<sup>32</sup>

8) A love for freedom both at social and political levels that was facilitated by a strong narrative tradition<sup>33</sup> as well as the four-fold logical structure corresponding to different modes of existence.<sup>34</sup> India's freedom struggle against the British rule may be taken as part of a truly humanistic movement.

9) Human's close association with nature (now at stake), as one also finds in ancient China and Japan.<sup>35</sup>

### The Logical Worlds of India in A Comparative Perspective

"Western thought," according to A. L. Basham, "[...] has been largely governed by the logical rule known as the law of the excluded middle – 'either *a* or *not-a*.'"<sup>36</sup> Socrates must be a mortal or not-mortal – there is no other

32 According to traditional Indian perspective, dualities are perceived not only in their connectedness, but also in terms of mutual attraction and appreciation (Rabindranath Tagore, *The Religion of Man* [London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1931]; see also Niharranjan Ray, *Idea and Image in Indian Art* [New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Pvt. Ltd., 1973], pp. 4-5). Again, a sensible reconciliation of the conventional dichotomy between the existence and non-existence of God can be found out in Tagore's statement that religions are "never about a God of cosmic force, but rather about the God of human personality" (quoted in Surendra Munshi, "Humanism in Indian Thought," in J. Rüsen and H. Laass [eds.], *Humanism in Intercultural Perspective: Experiences and Expectations* [Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2009], p. 59). This idea of the Divinity of Man with infinite potential can be seen in the thoughts of Vivekananda (Ibid.).

33 Epics like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* and the Puranic literature.

34 From bondage to freedom (see below).

35 P. T. Raju, *Introduction to Comparative Philosophy*, pp. 101-167.

36 See A. L. Basham, "Jain Philosophy and Political Thought," in de Bary et al. (eds.), *Sources of Indian Tradition* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1972; First edition, 1958), p. 73.

possibility. The role of reason is only to choose the better option, but what is preferable for one individual or context, may be different for the other. "In India, on the other hand," Basham continues, "this law of thought has never been so strongly emphasized as in Europe, and the Jains allow not two possibilities of predication, but seven. These are known as "the Seven-fold Division" (*saptabhangi*) or "the Doctrine of Maybe" (*syadvada*) [...]" (Ibid.)

In *Arthashastra*, a treatise mainly on statecraft composed between 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE to 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE, one finds four possibilities of predication – or a four-fold logical system – 1) *niyoga* (restriction, command, no option),<sup>37</sup> 2) *vikalpa* (option between two possibilities in the either/or sense), 3) *samuccaya* (combination – and/both logic) and 4) *guhya* (total understanding through revocation in neither/nor sense).<sup>38</sup> The option in *vikalpa* promotes exclusivity and is not totally free from a sense of restriction. In contrast, *samuccaya* is inclusive and *guhya*, transcendental in character. With their distinctive reasons, the systems essentially reflect four states of existence, which ranges within a polarization of bondage to freedom. Taken together, they constitute a sufficiently wide range of logical principles. The last two are typical of the Indian system which are no longer to be found in modern Western modes of thinking. This accounts for the reasons why philosophical dialogue was not possible between India and the modern West, except in the context of second logical principle (*vikalpa*) that was common to both.<sup>39</sup> It may be mentioned, however, that the third logical principle (*samuccaya*) has been systematically elaborated in ancient Chinese texts like *I-Ching* which would inspire Neils Bohr to formulate the dual properties of light in his famous Copenhagen Interpretation.<sup>40</sup>

37 But the term *niyoga* should not always be taken in a negative sense. Some times, imposition of ideas (or commands) has an altruistic dimension, particularly in situations of help to patients refusing to take medicine or to children failing to anticipate dangers.

38 *Arthashastra*, 15.1, pp. 63-70, see R. P. Kangle, *The Kautilya Arthashastra* (Bombay: University of Bombay, 1972, Second edition), pp. 515-516.

39 Cf. Donald K. Miller, *The Reason for Metaphor* (New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 1992).

40 See footnote 8.



## 4. Modern Indian Historical Thinking

Although the dominant understanding of time in traditional India has been cyclical in nature, linear concepts also existed, as proven by several pieces of historical writings produced since the ancient period.<sup>41</sup> Professional history and archaeology were introduced generally by the British in modern times. A systematic study of texts and monuments established a long-term history of the subcontinent. Table 1 presents significant phases of development in Indian history over a period of five thousand years.

Trends in modern Indian historical thinking may be understood in the context of four major historiographical schools – the Empiricist, Nationalist, Marxist and Subaltern. As fresh historical thinking is generally a product of epochal moments arising out of new political, economic or cultural upheavals, the main crisis point perceived by the nationalist historians was, perhaps, a distorted account of Indian history and culture, produced by the colonial writers; a narrative that would be countered by glorification of the past. Nevertheless, the communal tone in the earlier Empiricist school did not bother the nationalists too much. The often lack of objectivity among many nationalist historians paved the way for fresh historical thinking of D. D. Kosambi and his followers who then offered an alternative kind of history taken from a pre-existing model of Marxism. They did well in implementing those ideas with caution, even challenging some of the objectionable tenets of Marxism and made an objective study of historical sources. The Subaltern school initiated by Ranajit Guha was based on the observation that in a land of great social and cultural diversity the voice of the people on the fringes were not heard.<sup>42</sup> So the purpose was to present their version of history – the sad experiences of their oppression by both colonial powers and indigenous elites. But as Dipesh Chakrabarty observes, modernity is

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41 A. K. Warder, *An Introduction to Indian Historiography* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1972); Romila Thapar, *Early India: From the Origins to AD 1300* (London: Allen Lane, 2002).

42 See Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Study – 1: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982).

so deeply ingrained in post-Independence India in political, social and academic circles that it is almost impossible to write professional history without the prescriptions rooted in Western thought structure.<sup>43</sup>

Another observation is that Indian history is generally practiced in isolation, although there are notable exceptions. Since political and social situations within the Indian context do not move as rapidly as in the West, there is little scope for fresh dawning of alternative historical consciousness. But since India is not unaffected by the present global crisis, it is time to develop new ways of historical thinking. This new way of thinking would not just accommodate the existing logical structure; it would include the indigenous wider four-fold logical structure developed in ancient India. Such an initiative should be carried out in intercultural perspective.

## 5. Back to Humanistic History

Following a Cosmo-Social Periodicity Model<sup>44</sup> – promising re-appearance of what seemed to have been lost – humane values, intercultural reconnection, peace and harmony, one would notice for example, an element of optimism for a humanistic history to appear in response to new ways of historical thinking. This is possible through the ongoing emphasis on interdisciplinarity and interculturality in historical and new Humanistic studies. In this section, I have incorporated four themes reflecting on how disconnections and ruptures in history and historical writings might be rejoined, how wounds might be healed. When politicians and economists struggle to improve the existing situations of crisis, the responsibility falls squarely on the shoulders of historians to suggest new ways of tackling

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43 See Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001; First published in 2000 by Princeton University Press).

44 See footnote 27.

present problems – to rediscover the absence, analyze on how things went wrong, and finally devise strategies/mechanisms towards new solutions to the problems.

### 5.1 The Idea of Connected History

The word connection has a meaning in relation to its opposite, disconnection. The purpose here, however, is not to perpetuate any dichotomy between them – far less to give preference to one over the other – but to seek a "dynamic relatedness" between them in a wider cosmo-social context where all such opposites – chaos-pattern, disorder-order, absence-presence, etc. – are ever recurring and inter-changeable features.

It may be observed that three types of cultural connections can be traced historically: a) based on complementarity, as in pre-modern times, where autonomous to semi-autonomous political units were bound together in a wider economic and cultural networks; b) one where the meaning of connection shifts to integration – a forceful or persuasive one that one finds in colonial times – the purpose was to homogenize and tame diverse cultures of the world through a single ideology of modernity; c) the recent phase of globalization in which a large part of the world is connected in a different way – economically – only to facilitate free international trade of multinational companies. The earlier autonomy of nation states and their indigenous economies are now at stake. The last two types show conditioned connection, different from that in the first one. I shall briefly discuss two examples of the first type from pre-Modern times.

The first is the spontaneous connectivity of cultures across southern Europe through to Asia, during what Karl Jasper described as the Axial Age (800-200 BCE).<sup>45</sup> States like Greece, Rome, Egypt, Persia, India and China were linked culturally through trade networks. It was also the period when some of the greatest ideas in philosophy and rare insights on humanity were generated by

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45 See Karl Jasper, *Existentialism and Humanism* (New York: Mare, 1952).

figures like Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Moses, Zarathustra, Seers of the Upanishads, the Buddha, Mahavira, Lao-tsu and Confucius. Their visions and logical discourses were developed and transmitted through trade networks and well-established centres for academic discourse and exchange of ideas in Greece, Ionia, Alexandria and Taxila (northwestern India), among other places. Cultural globalization initiated by Cyrus of Persia, followed by Alexander, for example, played crucial roles in the transmission of knowledge and thoughts across a very wide areas linked up through trade network.

A second example from the pre-modern times is the wide network of cultures and empires which flourished in a connected manner during early Modern period from the river Tagus in Spain to Ganga in India.<sup>46</sup> Subrahmanyam describes the situation through four related questions of empire, trade, travel, and acculturation. While earlier approaches have viewed different empires inside and outside India as isolated units in mutual hostility, Subrahmanyam gives evidence to suggest their interrelatedness. Different resources from regions as far apart as Brazil and Japan reached different empires. Using insights of Velcheru Narayana Rao, a poet and literary analyst, Subrahmanyam writes that the period of Indian history between 1300 and 1800 "is one which we can only think through in terms of the idea of a crossroads, where not only did regions and regional cultures within South Asia influence one another, but things came and went from far afar from more distant lands, whether Europe, Central Asia, Iran, and the Ottoman empire, or south-east Asia and East Africa."<sup>47</sup> He provides a concrete example of the state of Vijayanagara in southern India between the mid-fourteenth and the mid-seventeenth century. Some fifty years ago, scholars like K. A. Nilakantha Sastri portrayed this state as "a centre of pristine, ancient, and militant Hindu

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46 See Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Connected histories: Notes towards a reconfiguration of early modern Eurasia," *Modern Asian Studies*, 31, 3 (Jul., 1997), pp. 735-762; *Explorations in Connected History: From the Tagus to the Ganges* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005).

47 Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Explorations in Connected History: From the Tagus to the Ganges*, pp. 14-15. See also V. N. Rao, D. Shulman and S. Subrahmanyam, *Textures of Time: Writing History in South India 1600-1800* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001).

political culture, resisting both physical incorporation and cultural influence from Delhi as well as the Sultanates from the Deccan."<sup>48</sup> Today, scholars would point to "the openness to external influence, whether from Hurmuz and the Persian Gulf, or from northern India and the Deccan, which one can see expressed in terms of architecture, irrigation systems, military and fiscal organization, and even in part the titulature of these kings."<sup>49</sup> On this conjecture, Subrahmanyam is able to successfully question the historically "invented" and "fossilized" myth of a "Hindu" Vijayanagara resisting "Muslim" opponents.

## 5.2 Emotive Issues in History

It has been a difficult proposition for historians on how to reconcile the rational and emotional aspect of human nature. In other words, how would a work of historiography, based on reason and of linear progress of mankind, address issues as "trivial" as emotional? Tragic historical experiences such as the Holocaust have been studied in depth by historians. The 1947 Partition of the British Indian subcontinent into New India and Pakistan was an equally tragic historical experience that has generated a lot of study and interest by many notable historians and scholars. It is at this point that we encounter a dilemma for the historian as noted by Gyan Pandey:

[...] even when history is written as a history of struggle, it tends to exclude the dimensions of force, uncertainty, domination and disdain, loss and confusion, by *normalising* the struggle, evacuating it of its messiness and making it part of a narrative of assured advance towards specified (or specifiable) resolutions. I wish to ask how one might write a history of an event involving genocidal violence, following all the rules

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48 Ibid., p. 12.

49 Ibid.

and procedures of disciplinary, "objective" history, and yet convey something of the impossibility of the enterprise. (emphasis added)<sup>50</sup>

The characterization of such traumatic experiences means that historians mostly "destroy any possible sense criteria and sense making strategies of historical thinking [...] They detraumatise them."<sup>51</sup> According to Rösen, it is necessary to develop ways of historical thinking that would retain the traumatic nature of historical experiences. He proposes an alternative strategy of re-traumatizing such experiences. Mourning, as a mode of historical thinking, can be addressed as one mode of historical thinking which has not yet been properly established in the discourse of collective memory and historical culture. Due to its emotional and personal touch, mourning in a sensitive manner is an effective method that can be addressed as a cultural strategy of collective commemoration and historical culture as well.<sup>52</sup>

The problem here is how to connect two apparently different characteristics of human nature – catastrophic experiences and their rational expression for historical elaboration. Given the sensitive nature of the problem, it requires a really challenging task for historians to contemplate and evolve method(s), on compassionate grounds, on how to deal with a situation in which the usual commitment to constructing a narrative of linear progress has to be postponed in favour of creative ideas and actions where the traumatic, frozen moment can take on another dimension of meaningful action. Such periodic actions, perhaps on an annual basis, would at least ensure the relations of the victims and the entire mankind that the world is with them in all moments of pain and suffering. What is lost is a collective loss. This will certainly revoke faith in human relations and

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50 Gyan Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2003; Indian edition published by Foundation Books), pp. 4-5.

51 See Jörn Rösen, "Trauma and Mourning in Historical Thinking," *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in History and Archaeology*, 1, 1 (2004), pp. 10-21.

52 Ibid.

institutions, which is a vital component of humanism, history and specifically of what I proposed for future development – the humanistic history.

### 5.3 Some Contemporary Social Problems in India: Dealienation through Dialogue

No discussion on Indian humanism is complete without considering the existing social practices. The fourfold division of society initially into classes (as in early Vedic times) got transformed into castes before the times of the Buddha (6<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE). The four conventional castes are the *Brahmins* – the priestly or learned class, the *Kshatriyas* – the kingly and warring class, the *Vaisyas* – the commoner/traders/peasants and the *Sudras*, whose duties were to serve other classes, but also to specialize in arts and crafts. The Buddha condemned the evils of the caste systems. But since early centuries of the Christian era, a new caste emerged, which is now known as the untouchables. Sonkar traced the history of untouchability in the first twelve centuries CE. The position of the untouchables weakened during the second half of this period of study, a time phase when Brahmins, their main rivals, tried to consolidate their own social position and status. The origins of untouchability is a complex problem, no single theory can explain it.<sup>53</sup>

A new term, *Dalit*, is in circulation nowadays to describe the weakest sections of Indian society (including the untouchables). The Constitution of India largely framed by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar is sensitive to their rights and the ongoing Dalit Movements towards acquiring new political power is a very positive development.

But there is another section of the society called the *Adivasis* (inhabiting the forested lands), who are facing problems of a different kind. While the problem

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53 See C. L. Sonkar, *Bharata Mein Asprishyata: Eka Aitihasika Adhyayana* – in Hindi (*Untouchability in India: A Historical Study*) (Allahabad: Kitab Mahal, 2010).

of the *Dalits* is one of dislocation from their pristine roots and alienation, at the same time, from the mainstream modernized world, the *Adivasis* have been fighting to preserve their autonomy and pursuit of the Zen way to affluence. The *Adivasis* wish to remain firmly located in their lands of origin and prefer alienation to what they call a corrupt mainstream culture. Recent developmental programmes in the wake of globalization virtually destabilized them from their roots. Thanks to the special provisions made in the Constitution for their rights and positive intervention of the judiciary, there is a new hope for their welfare.

Finally, there is another example of inhumanity involving instances of suicide of farmers in ever increasing numbers due to an insensitive attitude of the democratically elected governments. Rather than supporting the indebted farmers, the state has a better reason to protect the interest of market economy.

But who will think about these problems? I think historians are most competent to take the responsibility of re-humanizing such discriminating and dehumanizing practices. The peoples in the margins need to be heard and assured of their legitimate rights in keeping with the finest ideals of New Humanism. All the sections of Indian society need to be connected, not in the sense of a forced integration into the mainstream culture, which in itself is not an ideal model for every group to follow. The purpose is to devise constructive dialogues and ways on how different cultures could contribute to the improvement of the overall social system based on humanistic values. The so-called mainstream cultures have a lot to learn from those pushed to the margins.

## 6. Concluding Remarks

This paper began with a proposal for a humanistic history – a fresh historical thinking in the wake of current epochal crises with disturbing trends in global political and economic fields. The emphasis has been on connection, an essential



feature of life that is at stake even in contemporary professional studies with its so-called claims on interdisciplinarity. It was also suggested that humanism as well as new historicism can benefit from a consideration of historical time-depths and experiences of non- and pre-Modern peoples with their wider range of logical thinking. While conventional humanism was inflexible, the New Humanism Project of Jörn Rüsen, inviting intercultural perspectives to analyze common grounds and differences, brings hope for the connection not only between cultures, but also between New Humanism and new historicism that needs to be worked out in detail. Perhaps all cultures have their peculiarities and edges, so for a healthy intercultural dialogue, common grounds have to be evolved by refining culture-specific peculiarities into fresh modes of thinking. It will be wonderful if good ideas from all cultures are appreciated and incorporated for evolving common grounds, so as to counter the negative developments in contemporary world affairs. One such idea was the *samuccaya* logic of inclusiveness that developed in both ancient India and China, which also brought a paradigm shift in Modern Physics in the West.<sup>54</sup>

With a view to substantiating the proposal for a new humanistic history, the paper supports Sanjay Subrahmanyam's appeal for connected histories. Two clear examples came from pre-modern times – one from the Axial Age, the other from medieval/early Modern period.

It was further suggested that since humans are both rational and emotional beings,<sup>55</sup> history should not be insensitive to the latter aspect of human life. Reason and compassion have to be understood as a complementarity and not as conflicting opposites. As regards several traumatic historical experiences emerging out of wars or political developments such as the partition of British India in 1947, professional history generally showed preference for celebrating progress

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<sup>54</sup> See footnote 8.

<sup>55</sup> There are no title written by Williams in the work cited list. Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 254-255.

and changes in a linear temporal scale, rather than pausing and reflecting adequately on human suffering. This is partly because trauma and suffering that constituted one of the important sources of historical consciousness are now forgotten.<sup>56</sup> In order to get released from the trap of linear progress, historians have to pay attention to punctuations as well. It is in this connection that Rüsen's appeal for a connection between historical theory and historical memory is of vital importance. A new historicism sensitive to this subtle dimension of human life might suffice. Rüsen has proposed a method of re-traumatizing catastrophic historical experiences instead of de-traumatization, which has been the conventional practice. According to him, it makes a lot of sense to address mourning as a cultural practice or strategy of collective commemoration and historical culture as well. Compassionate reflections and collective healing actions constitute a fruitful solution to the problem of reconciliation between two near impossible characteristics – emotive issues arising out of extreme forms of suffering and their rational expression in history. Periodic acts of mourning, perhaps on an annual basis, would at least ensure the relations of the victims and to the entire mankind that the world is with them in all moments of pain and suffering. This will certainly revoke faith in human relations and institutions, which is a vital component of humanism, history and specifically, my proposal for future development – the humanistic history.

In the end, some inhumanistic trends in India based on social discrimination leading to an ever-growing problem of alienation were discussed. Constructive dialogues among various sections of society in an intercultural and compassionate spirit are essential to prevent the disintegration of the social and moral fabric, otherwise founded on the novel spirit of inter-group complementarity and cooperation. This idea of a dialogue and need for human connections have to be extended at

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56 See Frank R. Ankersmit, "Trauma and Suffering: A Forgotten Source of Western Historical Consciousness," in Jörn Rüsen (ed.), *Western Historical Thinking: An Intercultural Debate* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002), pp. 72-84.

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the global level as is echoed in a recent peace proposal at the United Nations by Daisaku Ikeda, President of the Soka Gakkai International.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> See Sumita Mehta, "We need to talk" (under the column, "The Speaking Tree"), *Times of India*, Allahabad edition (September 8, 2011), p. 10.

## Appendix

Table 1. Major Epochs of Indian History<sup>58</sup>

First epoch	3000–1750 B.C.	Pre-Vedic/Harappan Scenario; First Urban Revolution and its subsequent decline
Second epoch*	1750–500 B.C.	The Vedic World
	1750–1200 B.C.	Early Vedic Period
	from 1200 B.C.	Middle Vedic Period
	from 850 B.C.	Late Vedic Period
Third epoch	500–200 B.C.	Ascetic Reformism (Rise of Buddhism and Jainism); Second Urbanisation
Fourth epoch	200 B.C.–1100 A.D.	Classical Hinduism
	from 200 B.C.	Pre-Classical Hinduism
	from 400 A.D.	Golden Period or Classical Hinduism?
	from 650 A.D.	Late Age – Development of Bhakti ways of life along with Sufism
Fifth epoch	1100–1850 A.D.	Sects of Hinduism, Islamic-Hindu Syncretism
Sixth epoch	From 1850 A.D.	Modern/Colonial period; Social and Religious Reforms; Modern Hinduism
Seventh epoch	From 1947 A.D.	Post-colonial period – Nehruvian modernity followed by the process of Globalisation

\* According to another convention, historians have divided the entire Vedic period into two phases: a) Early Vedic (>1500-1000 B.C.) when most portions of the four *Samhitas* (Books dealing with the *mantras* or hymns), viz. *Rgveda*, *Yajurveda*, *Samveda* and *Atharvaveda* were composed, and b) the Later Vedic (c. 1000-500 B.C.) when late portions of some *Samhitas* other forms of Vedic literature (*Brahmanas*, *Aranyakas*, and *Upanishads*) were composed.♦

58 This table was modified after Axel Michaels, *Hinduism: Past and Present*, translated by Barbara Harshav (Hyderabad: Orient Longman Private Limited, 2006), p. 32.

♦ Responsible editor: Yung-hsiang Yuan (袁永祥).

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