

## The Perils of Reversing the Past

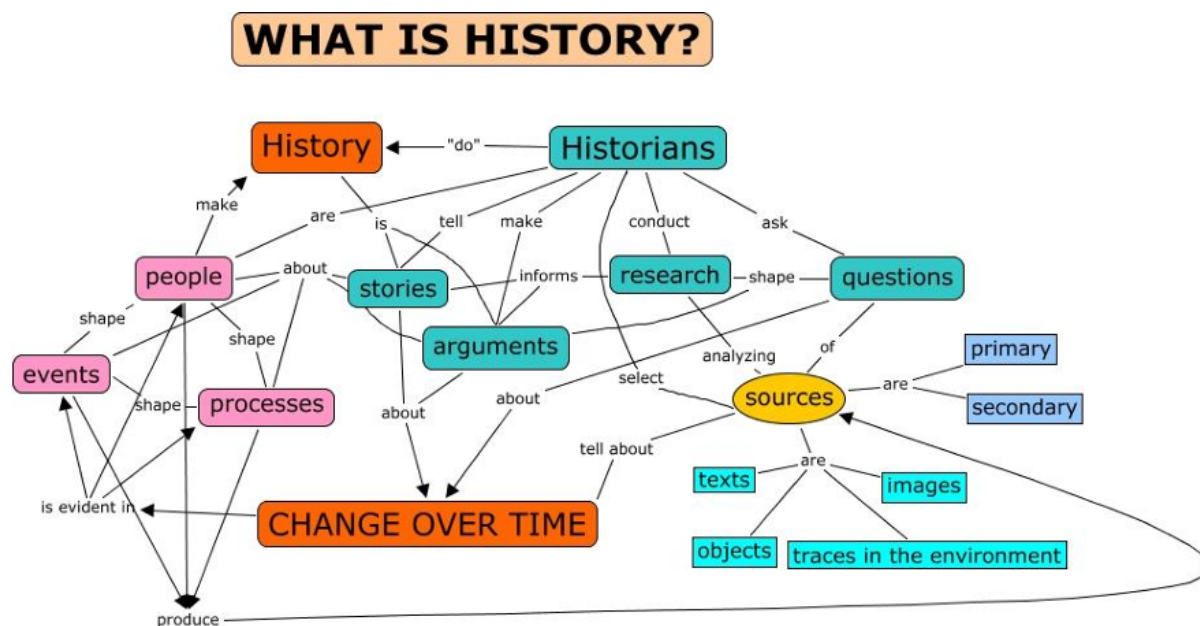
*Mains: GS I - Indian Heritage and Culture, History.*

### Why in News?

In March 2025, a wave of textbook revisions such as omitting or vilifying figures like Babur and Aurangzeb while glorifying select native rulers.

### What are the significances of studying history?

*History is the knowledge of and study of the past and it is not merely a recollection of events but a study of causes, consequences and context.*



- **Understanding the past** -It helps us understand how societies, cultures, and civilizations evolved over time.
- By learning about past events, we gain insight into how the world came to be the way it is today.
- **Learning from mistakes** - By studying mistakes made in the past—be it in governance, conflict, or societal choices—we can strive to avoid repeating them.
- **Shaping identity** - It contributes to our sense of identity, both as individuals and communities.
- By learning about our heritage, we strengthen connections to our culture and traditions.

- **Inspiring progress** - Innovations and ideas from the past often serve as inspiration for future advancements.
- For instance, scientific discoveries and inventions build upon historical knowledge.
- **Promoting critical thinking** - It encourages us to question and analyze sources of information critically, fostering a deeper understanding of cause-and-effect relationships.

## What are the impacts of revisionism of history?

*Revisionist history, especially in the political sense, seeks to reinterpret the past to justify present-day political agendas, often tied to nationalism, identity politics, or territorial claims.*

*Reinterpretation of history is a legitimate academic exercise, where new evidence or perspectives reshape our understanding of the past.*

- **Renaming or destruction of monuments** - These revision activities coincided with rising public anger demanding the renaming or even destruction of Mughal tombs.
- There were viral campaigns that called for vandalising historical monuments, driven by narratives that paint centuries of India's past in black and white.
- **Polarisation** - While some advocates that such moves correct colonial or biased portrayals, the selective rewriting of history often fuels polarisation, not clarity.
- **Disrupts social harmony** - When history becomes a battleground for ideology rather than a source of reflection, it can fracture society and foster hatred instead of understanding.
- **Divides society** - When history is weaponised in the form of revisionism, especially with an intent to restore a perceived lost glory or correct historical wrongs by reverting to a "status quo ante", it ceases to be a guide for the present and becomes a tool for division.
- **Causes conflicts** - Revisionist exercises are not only dangerous but have been the root of conflicts, wars and prolonged suffering across different parts of the world.

## Religious and political conflicts of revisioning history

### Crusades

- **Crusades** - They were a series of religious wars initiated, supported, and sometimes directed by the Christian Latin Church in the medieval period.
- They were sparked by the belief in the sanctity of Christian control over Jerusalem.
- **First Crusade (1096-1099)** - It launched to reclaim the Holy Land from Muslim rule, despite the region's diverse religious history.
- **Impact of crusades** - Centuries of bloodshed, occupation, and retaliatory campaigns, none of which restored any meaningful peace but, instead, deepened divisions between civilisations.

## European Wars of Religion in the 16th and 17th centuries

- **The Protestant Reformation** - It began in 1517, challenging the authority of the Catholic Church and led to the emergence of new Christian denominations.
- These divisions fueled religious tensions and conflicts across Europe such as - Schmalkaldic War, French Wars of Religion, and Thirty Years' War.
- **Schmalkaldic War (1546-1547)** - This war in the Holy Roman Empire was a major conflict between the Protestant Schmalkaldic League and the Catholic Holy Roman Emperor.
- **French Wars of Religion (1562-1598)** - These were a series of civil wars in France between Catholics and Protestant Huguenots, lasting for 36 years.
- **Thirty Years' War (1618-1648)** - This devastating war, fought primarily in Central Europe, involved religious and political conflicts within the Holy Roman Empire and drew in other European powers.
- **Implications** - These wars demonstrate the dangers of historical grievances being revived under the banner of religious or political legitimacy.
- The danger was not in recognising the grievances of the past but in weaponising them to reshape the present based on historical constructs.
- Rather than moving forward with mutual tolerance and understanding, European States plunged backward into a cycle of vengeance, each side justifying their acts through selective memories of the past.

## Nazism

- **Dangerous revisionism of Nazi Germany** - Adolf Hitler's ideology rested heavily on the notion of reclaiming the glory of the German Reich and correcting the "humiliation" of the Treaty of Versailles.
- **Manipulation of history** - His rhetoric about the Aryan past, the "stab in the back" theory, and a need for Lebensraum (living space) were all rooted in a highly manipulated version of history.
- **Impact** - The attempt to reverse the outcome of the First World War by restoring German supremacy led to the Second World War and the Holocaust — a catastrophic result of trying to reengineer history through conquest and genocide.

## Partition of India in 1947

- **Competing historical narratives** - Hindu and Muslim nationalists invoked centuries of grievances under previous rulers.
- **Impact** - What should have been a peaceful transition into two sovereign States turned into one of the worst episodes of communal violence in history, killing over a million and displacing more than 10 million.
- The violence was not about the future; it was about reclaiming identities and rights rooted in selective versions of the past.

- **Creating chaos** - Much of the chaos in today's world arises not because we forget history but because we seek to relive or reverse it.

## Israel-Palestine

- **Clash of History and Geopolitics** - In the contemporary world, Israel-Palestine remains a deeply complex and tragic case of historical grievances clashing with present-day geopolitics.
- **Historical claims** - Both Israelis and Palestinians stake claims based on history — often diverging, irreconcilable, and deeply emotional.
- **Impact** - Efforts to reverse history, whether through settlements, territorial claims, or denial of nationhood, have prolonged a conflict that cannot be resolved by appealing solely to the past.

### Russia's invasion of Ukraine

- **Historical unity claim** - In Eastern Europe, Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 was partly justified by revisionist arguments about the historical unity of the Russian and Ukrainian people and the invalidity of Ukraine's post-Soviet independence.
- This attempt to undo post-Cold War borders in the name of historical continuity has led to massive human suffering, economic crises, and a destabilisation of the entire region.

- **Ignorance of Present times** - The obsession with returning to a perceived golden past blinds nations and people to the opportunities of the present and the possibilities of the future.

### What lies ahead?

- The discipline of history demands a careful and nuanced discernment of the past.
- While historical wrongs must be remembered to avoid their repetition, they must not be interpreted as mandates to reclaim past statuses or boundaries.
- As philosopher George Santayana aptly put it: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."
- But equally dangerous are those who remember the past only to relive it, seeking justice through reversal, not reconciliation.
- The greatest service we can do to history is not to rewrite it, but to learn from it — with humility, not hubris.

### Reference

[The Hindu | History as battlefield](#)