

Introduction to History and Government

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What is History and Government?

It is the study of man and society

The Meaning of History

History is the study of man's past chronological account and record of events in reaction to the environment.

Aspects/Divisions in History

- ***Social History*** - Which deals with people's religious beliefs, cultural practices, dressing, taboos, values, eating habits and literature.
- ***Political History*** - Which dwells on the systems of government, leadership, security and maintenance of law and order.
- ***Economic History*** - Which is the means of livelihood of a people. Such as hunting and gathering, trade, crop growing, fishing and livestock keeping.

Meaning of Government

- I. The term government comes from the verb to 'govern' which means to rule or exercise authority and control over a group of people.
- II. It is also a group of people vested with the authority to make rules and to formulate and exercise policies.
- III. Government is the study of the political and administrative structure of a state.
- IV. History and Government is therefore the study of man and society.

The arms of government

- A. **The Legislature**:- referred to as the parliament. It includes the Senate and the National Assembly. This is the Law making arm of the government.
- A. **The executive**:- includes the President, the cabinet and the civil service. This is the arm that implements the Laws.
- A. **The Judiciary**:- commonly referred to as the courts. The government arm whose responsibility is to see to it that the laws made are constitutional, that they are followed and that those who break them are punished.

Forms of government

Democratic-A type of government that requires the rulers to seek public mandate through popular vote.

Democratic governments are based on the premise that elections are free and fair and that the elected officials represent the wishes and aspirations of the people.

Abraham Lincoln a famous American Statesman referred **democratic governments** as ‘governments of the people , for the people and by the people’

- ❑ **Aristocratic**-An aristocracy is a form of government in which a group of people from the highest social class, that is the royalty, in a society rule over others
- ❑ **Monarchial**-A monarchy is a form of government where democracy is practiced but aristocratic power is respected. There are two classes of monarchial governments i.e. Absolute monarch and constitutional monarch.
- ❑ **Dictatorial**-A system of government where the ruler has total power over his subjects. Dictators are the sole authority where they rule.

Characteristics of Government

- I. ***Rules:*** To govern members to ensure that life runs smoothly. The rules are also meant to control people and encourage certain kind of behaviour.
- II. ***Legitimacy:*** A government should be acceptable to the people over whom it exercises power. The organization of regular elections enhances legitimacy.
- III. ***Law enforcement:*** The government has the authority to take action against those who violate its laws.
- IV. ***Sovereignty:*** The government has the supreme authority to exercise power within its jurisdictions.
- V. ***Jurisdiction:*** This is the geographical area within which a government exercises power and enforces laws.

Sources of Information on History and Government

Sources of information on History and Government can be put into three categories

(a) Unwritten Sources

This is any source through which information is available in any other form except the written one.

These are:

(1) Oral Traditions:

This is information acquired through word of mouth as handed down from generation to generation

Forms of oral traditions include

- 1) Legends
- 2) Myths
- 3) Poems
- 4) Songs
- 5) Proverbs
- 6) Riddles
- 7) Tongue twisters
- 8) Tales or stories

Disadvantages of Oral Traditions

1. Accuracy depends on memory of informants therefore information *can be* exaggerated and omitted
2. It's biased since the data is fragmentary and one sided
3. It has the problem of the actual dates that the events occurred
4. It's expensive in terms of money and time.

Advantages of Oral Traditions

1. It is useful in societies where the art of writing is not fully developed
2. It has helped to reconstruct the history of societies

(2) Archeology

- ❖ This is the study of man's past through analysis of the remains of material culture
- ❖ In most cases the remains are found underground and have to be excavated
- ❖ The remains or artifacts include houses, tools, weapons, utensils, caves, foodstuffs and paintings
- ❖ The archeologists has to locate historical sites to begin their work.

Methods of dating fossils

- ❑ This is important in arriving at the age of fossil remains
- ❑ It helps determine when certain developments took place
- ❑ These methods include:-
 - I. Chemical dating-
 - ✓ Radio carbon dating
 - ✓ Potassium-argon dating
 - II. Stratigraphy - dating
 - III. Geological dating
 - IV. Palaeomagnetic dating
 - V. Statistical dating
 - VI. Fission-track dating

Disadvantages of Archaeology

1. It is difficult to identify a particular people by name, culture, language and political organization since they are not reflected in archeology
2. Dates suggested are not totally reliable
3. It is very expensive
4. Time consuming
5. Difficult to locate sites
6. It has to be supplemented by other sources.

Advantages of Archaeology

1. It deals with a historical period which did not have any other record
2. It complements other sources such as linguistics and palaeontology
3. It provides information of varied nature, depending on the material found on the site.

Linguistics

- ❖ This is the scientific study of languages and the way it changes in the course of time
- ❖ People who speak related languages may be assumed to have a common origin, or had been in close contact in the past
- ❖ Variation between languages can show break in contact.

Advantages of Linguistics

1. It gives information about movements of people and their relationship
2. It helps to discover links between different people which were previously unknown
3. It is useful in the dating of the migration of people.

Disadvantages of Linguistics

1. It takes time to learn a particular language
2. When translating the historian might omit some words and therefore loose vital information
3. Different languages may have similar words with different meanings.

Anthropology

Anthropology is the study of social and cultural institutions of man, that is: his origins, developments, customs, kinship ties, marriage affiliations, religious practices and economic activities.

Advantages of Anthropology

- ❖ It helps determine cultural past of the people
- ❖ It gives a deeper understanding of a particular aspect of a people's culture
- ❖ Shows cultural interaction of different people in the past.

Disadvantages of Anthropology

1. It is time consuming
2. It is very expensive
3. It is not reliable on its own; it must be complimented by other sources.

Ethnology

which is a branch of anthropology helps historians to identify a people with a culture and political organization of the particular race or community.

Paleontology

- ❖ This is the study of the evolution and structure of extinct plants and animals through scientific examination of fossil remains
- ❖ They provide details on the physical characteristics of the earlier forms of humanity.

Geology

- ❖ This is the scientific study of origins, structure and composition of the soils, rocks and other materials which make up the earth's crust and the changes they have undergone over the years
- ❖ Geologists discover fossils in their study of rocks. This helps the historian to calculate the approximate age when such material was formed, its nature and uses
- ❖ Geology gives additional information about pre-historic remains.

Genetics

- ❖ This is the study of ways in which characteristics are passed from parents to offspring, from one generation to the next
- ❖ It helps historians to trace the origin of domestication of crops and animals and their spread to different areas
- ❖ It also explains how and when certain strains of plants and animals came into existence.

(b) Written Sources

- This is the recorded information .
- It is the principal source of history

Forms of written sources

Inscriptions - these are the earliest forms of written sources of history they constitute words engraved on statues walls of tombs and coins

- ❖ ***Lists*** - Include lists of leaders, towns, and items of trade or weapons associated with a community
- ❖ ***Diaries and Journals*** - these are records of daily events of important personalities like president, king or queen. It gives cues on important events during the time the person reigned
- ❖ ***History books*** - which may be biographies and autobiographies
- ❖ ***Print media*** which includes books, newspapers and magazines

Advantages of written sources

- a) They are widely read, since most people are literate
- b) They are more accurate than oral sources
- c) Methods used in writing are comparatively cheaper than those used in archaeology
- d) They can be easily translated to many languages
- e) They help in giving a chronological framework absent from oral traditions.

Disadvantages

1. They are acquired through research
2. Interpretations of written materials may vary
3. They may contain a writer's biases and therefore distort history
4. Information may become obsolete and inaccurate because life is dynamic hence it is essential to update written records
5. It is not useful in non-literate communities.

(c) Electronic Sources

There are four forms of electronic sources

- a) ***Micro-films:*** These are extremely small photographs of documents and printed matter stored in a film.
- b) ***Radio:*** It captures words and emotions of an event as it was.
- c) ***Audio-visual sources:*** These include televisions, films and videos. They give facts that are recorded live.
- d) ***Databanks and databases:*** These are large stores of organized information that can accessed in a number of ways by the user and very fast e.g. computer

Disadvantages

- a. They may contain biased information
- b. The information is in most cases exaggerated
- c. Sometimes electronic sources are inaccurate, as it is censored and may leave out vital information
- d. Electronic sources are expensive and may not be readily available for many people in Kenya.

Advantages

- a) Electronic sources are faster, as the information reaches the audience live
- b) They can be accessed when needed
- c) It has shortened distances (global villages)
- d) They are easily stored.

Importance of Studying History

- 1) It helps us to understand and appreciate our culture and respect other peoples values and cultures
- 2) By studying the past, we get to know what might happen in future
- 3) It helps to gain a wide range of educational skills
- 4) Appreciate the achievements and learn from the failures of mankind in the past.
- 5) Gives time and space of events
- 6) Develops a critical mind as we try to explain historical events
- 7) Utilizes historical record of events such as families, clashes and civil wars to prepare people to cope with, and avoid a repeat of such tragedies.

- 8) It instills in us a sense of patriotism and national pride
- 9) It fosters empathy
- 10) Comprehends the social, economic, and political developments our society
- 11) It helps us to be more knowledgeable as it documents information of varied nature
- 12) Prepares community for life
- 13) Provides intellectual fulfillment and interest to the learner
- 14) It is a career subject for those with professional commitment

Importance of studying government

1. It makes us know how laws are made and implemented
2. We also learn how development programmes are formulated and implemented
3. It helps us to know how the government raises and spends revenue
4. It helps us know our roles as citizens and the roles of leaders who govern us
5. We learn how power are vested in different organs of the government

6. Through the study of government we understand and appreciate the need for a government
7. It helps us appreciate the constitution and the process of making and reviewing laws and statutes
8. It helps us understand our rights, responsibilities as well as the limitation within which we must operate for the well being of every member of the society.
9. It influences career choice