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# UNIT 1 GENERALISATION

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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

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Making generalisations is an important aspect of how historians in practice carry out their task, or, to quote Marc Bloch, how historians 'practice our trade.' It is a very complex and large subject and covers almost all areas of a historian's craft. I will confine myself here to only a few of its aspects:

- i) What is a generalisation? All make it sometimes without knowing that one is doing it. What are the different levels of generalisation?
- ii) Why are generalisations inevitable? And why do some people object to them?
- iii) What is their role or use, what purpose do they serve in the historian's craft?
- iv) From where do we get generalisations or what are the sources of generalisation or how to learn to make them in a meaningful manner?
- v) How can we improve our capacity to make generalisations?

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## 1.2 WHAT IS A GENERALISATION?

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A generalisation is a linkage of disparate or unrelated facts, in time or space, with each other. It is their grouping, their rational classification. Basically, a generalisation is a connection or relationship between facts, it is an 'inference' or, as Marc Bloch puts it, 'an explanatory relationship between phenomena.' It is the result of the effort to provide an explanation and causation, motivation and effect or impact.

More widely, generalisations are the means through which historians understand their materials and try to provide their understanding of facts to others. Analysis and interpretation of events, etc., is invariably done through generalisations.

Generalisation is involved as soon as we perform the two most elementary tasks: classify 'facts' or 'data' or 'phenomena' and compare and contrast them, or seek out similarities and dissimilarities among them, and make any inference from them.

Thus we make a generalisation when we put our facts into a series one after another. For example, when we mention the caste or religion of a leader we are making a generalisation. By connecting the caste and the leader or writer we are suggesting that

his or her caste was an important part of his or her personality and, therefore, his or her political or literary work. Or even the mention of his or her age. More comprehensively, a generalisation occurs when we try to understand facts, or make connection between data, objects, events, records of the past through concepts and convey them to others through concepts.

Generalisations may be simple or complex, of low level or of high level.

**Low Level:** A Low-level generalisation is made when we label a fact or event, or classify it or periodise it. For example, labelling certain facts as economic, or certain persons as belonging to a caste, region or religion or profession, or saying that certain events occurred in a particular year or decade or century.

**Middle Level:** A middle level generalisation is made when a historian tries to find interconnections among the different elements of the subject under study; for example, when we are studying a segment of the social reality of a time, space or subject bound character. In this case – for example peasant movement in Punjab from 1929-1937 – the historian may at the most try to see the backward and forward linkages or connections but confining himself strictly to his subject matter. Themes such as class consciousness, interest groups, capitalism, colonialism, nationalism and feudalism cannot be tested in a research work except through middle level generalisations, such as relating to workers in Jamshedpur in the 1920s, growth of industrial capitalism in India in the 1930s, labour legislation in India in the 1930s.

**Wide generalisations or systematising or schematising generalisations:** These are made when historians reach out to the largest possible, significant connections or threads that tie a society together. These historians try to study all the economic, political, social, cultural and ecological linkages of a society in an entire era. The historian tries to draw a nation-wide or society-wide or even world-wide picture of these linkages even when he is dealing with a narrow theme. Quite often, even when a historian is studying a narrow theme, wide generalisations *lie at the back of his mind*. For example, quite often when a European scholar studied a specific social or religious aspect of an Asian or African society, a wider Orientalist understanding of Asia or Africa lay at the back of his mind. Similarly, quite often when a British scholar studied – or even now studies – the economic history of an Asian country for a specific period, a wider understanding of colonialism lies at the back of his mind.

The widest form of wide generalisations is the study of a social system (e.g. capitalism), or stage of society (e.g. feudalism or colonialism) or, above all, the transition from one system to another (feudalism to capitalism or colonialism to post-colonialism). Some of the historians and sociologists who have undertaken such wide generalisations are: Karl Marx, Max Weber, Marc Bloch, Fernand Braudel, Eric Hobsbawm, Immanuel Wallerstein, and in India, D.D.Kosambi, R.S.Sharma, Romila Thapar, Irfan Habib.

**Metahistory:** Metahistory is often unhistorical, since it tries to impose a principle to organise history from outside history – this principle does not emerge from the concrete study of history itself. Quite often a single cause or ‘philosophy of history’ is used to explain all historical development. Examples of this approach are: Hegel, Spengler, Toynbee or recent writers on ‘The Clash of Civilizations’.

Marxist or Weberian approaches are not examples of Metahistory, for they are theories for analysing concrete history, society, politics, ideology, etc. The elements of these approaches can be tested by analysing concrete history. These approaches can be right even if Marx’s or Weber’s own statements and analysis of concrete historical events, etc., are proved wrong. On the other hand, if Spengler’s or Toynbee’s analysis of any specific event is proved wrong, his entire theory or approach falls to the ground.

### 1.3 INEVITABILITY OF GENERALISATION

Generalisations are inevitable. All make them or use them. Even when a historian thinks that he does not, he does. Generalisations are inherent in the very arrangement of words. There exists one notion that ‘the historian should gather the data of the past and arrange it in chronological sequence. Whereupon its meaning would emerge or reveal itself.’ In other words, the historian’s task is only to test the validity of data or to certify their authenticity, and not to interpret it, i.e., generalise about it. The opposite view is that sources in themselves, on their own, cannot reveal their meaning, nor can a pile of notes, however meticulously collected, ‘tell’ the historian what to write. The material has to be organised on the basis of some rational principles, i.e., some principle of selection, of importance or significance, of relevance. Even the notes taken of ‘facts’ have to have some principle of selection. Otherwise, the historian will be ‘drowned’ by facts to be noted. All this is a basic fact for three reasons:

- i) Selection is necessary since ‘facts’ are too many. Consequently, every historian selects. Question is how does he do it? Moreover, it is not even a question of selection of facts, for even that assumes that facts are lying before the historian, in a plate as it were. In reality, the historian has to search for them, and that assumes some principle of selection.
- ii) Second, gathered facts have to be arranged and grouped. Both involve explanation and causation, motivation and impact. In other words, analysis is basic to history as a discipline. In reality, except in a very limited sense, a fact becomes a fact only as a result of a generalisation.
  - a) For example, a zamindar, or a peasant, or a slave, or a capitalist looks like a fact, but is the result of a generalisation. It is only after having been analysed and explained that it can serve as a datum for the historian.
  - b) Or take census statistics. They look like facts but in reality they are already the result of generalisations by the persons who decide the headings under which statistics are to be collected by the census worker.
  - c) Or take statistical surveys of peasants. How do you determine their class or even caste? Who is a poor peasant? Who is an agricultural worker? Or, even, who is a landlord? Census till recent years produced a demand by many for classification as Brahmins and Rajputs. In U. P. there is a caste group which insists on being called Lodh Rajputs, but which also declares itself to be OBC in order to take advantage of reservations for backward castes.
  - d) The very noting of a fact or grouping hides a generalisation. To say Brahmin Tilak (or Bania Gandhi) already involved a historical generalisation. It involved the view that his being a Brahmin was important for his politics. It involved a whole theory of motivation as to why people join and lead a movement or even why and how Indians act in politics. It even leads to the theory of Brahmin domination of the Indian national movement.

It is important, in this respect, to note in which context is the caste brought in: political, social, cultural, or ritual. Kashmiri Nehru can refer to his love for Kashmir or imply that his being Kashmiri had some significance for his politics. Or take an example from Medieval India. The British referred to medieval period as period of Muslim rule, implying the generalisation that the religion of the ruler decides the nature of the rule. But they did not describe their own rule as Christian rule. On the other hand, describing the same period as feudal or medieval implies a different

generalisation. We may take another, narrower example. Emphasis in history on parliamentary speeches would imply that these were the chief determinants of politics and government policies.

Recorded facts are, in any case, already the products of the generalisation in the minds of persons who recorded them. This is also true of what and why certain statistics were gathered. Even today, the facts reported by newspapers are the result of the generalising minds of the reporters, editors and owners of newspapers.

- iii) In any case, as soon as we go beyond names or dates or mere counting, generalisations come in. Hence, without generalisations one can be a compiler (though not even that as we have explained earlier). No complex analysis or interpretation, or even narration is possible without generalisation. Nor is it possible for a historian to delve deeper than surface phenomenon in understanding events and institutions without generalisations.
- iv) But analysis and causation already involve, in turn, theories or principles of causation. To quote the philosopher Sydney Hook: 'Every fact which the historian establishes presupposes some theoretical construction.'

This has another positive consequence for historians. Even when no new facts are unearthed, two or more historians can work on the same theme or subject. They can work on the same material through fresh generalisation. This is particularly important for historians of the Ancient and Medieval periods. Even in the absence of new sources and material, fresh approaches and generalisations can produce fresh research.

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## 1.4 OBJECTIONS TO GENERALISATION

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Some people object to generalisations and raise three types of objections:

- i) The first objection is based on the notion that facts are to be differentiated from generalisations and that generalisations should flow out from facts. We have already answered this objection and pointed out that facts are often made facts through generalisations.
- ii) It is said that every event is unique and possesses an individuality of its own. According to this view, society is atomistic and follows no uniformity. But, the fact is that even uniqueness demands comparison. We cannot grasp the unique unless it is compared with some thing we know. Otherwise the unique is unknowable, even unthinkable. In any case, a historian is concerned with the relation between the unique and the general. For example, Indian national revolution is unique but its uniqueness can be grasped only by comparing it with other known revolutions.
- iii) Often the critics really target those generalisations which are a priori in character and are superimposed on historical reality. These critics are not wrong. Many put forward a generalisation as an assertion and consider it proved when it has to be proved. Similarly, many generalisations are inadequately tested. Many are based on oversimplification of data and relationships and causation. Some generalisations are plainly stupid. For example, the answer to the question: why study Africa? Because it is there. Or that some other countries are undergoing military coups, therefore another country has also to. (By the way, this is different from suggesting that events in one country may have exercised influence on another). Or that because imperialism produced a comprador capitalist class, therefore every colonial country's capitalist class had to be comprador. Or that since other nationalist revolutions took to violence, therefore Indian national revolution also had to be violent. Or that since globalisation led to underdevelopment in some countries, it

must lead to the same in all countries. All these objections apply to the unscientific and illogical character of some generalisations or are critiques of the manner in which they are arrived at.

In fact, the real problem is different and may be delineated as follows:

- a) Generalisations should be made explicit so they can be openly debated.
- b) The main problem is the level of a generalisation and of kind it is.
- c) The degree of validity or tentativeness or 'truth' of a generalisation and what kind of proof is used to validate it.
- d) One should study how to make generalisations and learn how to improve one's capacity to make interconnections which are better or more authentic and useful ones (i.e. with greater validity and coverage). In other words, when we say that a particular historian is a good historian, one means that he makes better connection and generalisations apart from having technical skill and integrity as a historian.

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## 1.5 ROLE OF GENERALISATIONS

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Apart from the function they perform that we have discussed earlier, generalisations have certain added *advantages* for the students of history:

- i) They serve as the organising principles for his/her data thus resolving a basic problem for the historian with a mass of untidy facts in his notes not knowing how to put them in some type of order.
- ii) They improve a historian's perception or 'broaden his gaze'; they increase his ability to grasp an ever-increasing area of reality and make more and more complex interconnections.
- iii) They enable the historian to draw inferences and establish chains of causation and consequence or effect. In other words, they enable him to analyse, interpret and explain his date.

The five W's of a historian's craft are who or what, when, where, how and why. Direct facts (i.e., low level generalisations) can at the most enable us to answer who (or what), when and where questions but not how and why questions. The latter require wider generalisations.

- iv) More specifically, generalisations lead the historian to look for new facts and sources. Quite often new sources can be properly grasped only through new generalisations. But very often the process is the other way around. In general, the search for new materials is motivated by new generalisations.
- v) Generalisations also enable the historian to establish new connections between old, known facts. When we say that a historian has thrown new light on old facts, it invariably means that the historian has used new generalisations to understand the known facts.
- vi) Generalisations help the historian to avoid 'empiricism' or 'literalism'— that is taking the sources at their face value or literal meaning. Instead, he is led to establish their significance and relevance in his narrative. Take, for example, D. N. Naoroji's statements on (British) foreign rule and the use of foreign capital over his lifetime. Without the use of generalisations, the tendency would be to take his statements at face value and quote them one after other in a chronological order.

Or, the historian can generalise regarding Naoroji's approach and then see how all of his statements 'fit in' the generalisation. Maybe the generalisation has to be

made more complex; may be one has to make separate generalisations for different stages or phases in his thinking. Or may be, the generalisation has to be made that there are differences in his theory and practice. Or may be one has to say that there is general and continuous unsystematic and irregular thinking by him. Then one can make the generalisation that Naoroji was confused and incoherent. The latter would, in any case, be the impression of the reader if 'literalism' was followed. On the other hand, generalisation would enable the historian to look at different options in interpretation; his discussion would be put on a sounder footing.

In Naoroji's case we may say that he was an admirer of British rule during the initial period (till early 1870s) and then became critical of British rule and began to consider it an impediment to economic growth and a cause of India's poverty. Similarly, we may point out that he initially favoured the use of foreign capital and later, after 1873, started opposing its entry. We may also analyse the reason for his change of views.

Here, we can see the advantages of the use of generalisations, for the mere recitation of Naoroji's opinions would not enable us to understand him or to analyse his economic thinking, it would only amount to compiling or summarising his views.

- vii) Generalisations enable a historian to constantly test what he is saying.
- a) At the theoretical plane: As soon as one consciously classifies or categorises or interrelates persons or events, that is, makes generalisations, one can oneself examine what their meaning or relevance is.
  - b) As soon as one has made a generalisation, one starts looking for facts which may contradict it, or looking for 'the other side'. Without a generalisation one does not look for facts which might contradict one's views; in fact, one may miss contrary facts even when they stare one in the face. This looking for contrary facts is basic to the historical discipline, though it is often ignored.  
To go back to Dadabhai Naoroji's example, as soon as I have generalised about his critique of British rule, I have to ask the question: how does he reconcile this critique with his praise for British rule. Or does he not make an attempt to do so? If I am merely compiling his statements, I need not look for the contradiction or its explanation. Similarly, if I generalise about his attitude to foreign capital, I start looking for contrary instances. If I am compiling, I need not. Another instance would be Gandhi's statements on the relation between religion and politics. As soon as I generalise, I start looking for any opposite statements as also other statements which throw light on his statements.
  - c) In fact, quite often, others have already generalised on an issue or subject, the historian researching afresh on the issue can make an advance, in the main or often, only by testing the earlier generalisations with existing or fresh evidence and thus, constantly, revise or negate or confirm them. The historian's task is made easier if he makes his generalisations explicit along with the generalisations he is testing.

To sum up: Generalisations guide us, they enable us to doubt facts as they appear or as they have been described by contemporaries or later writers; they suggest new possible understanding of old facts; they bring out fresh points and views for confirmation, refutation, further development, further qualification of existing views.

Generalisations help define a student of history's theme whether in the case of an essay, a tutorial, a research paper or a book. They enable him to take notes – whether from a book, an article, or a primary source. In fact, a student of history's essay or thesis has

to be a series of generalisations to be tested, whether he puts them as statements or questions. Generalisations also enable him to find out which of his notes are significant and relevant to the theme or subject matter of his research.

Generalisations also enable a researcher to react to what he is reading. He can do so only if he is generalising while he is reading. Generalisations lead to debates among historians, otherwise the only reaction to each other's work among them would be to point out factual mistakes. Generalisations lead historians to pose issues for discussion and debate and to start processes of fruitful discussion among them. Some would agree with the generalisations presented in another historian's work and find new guides for research and thinking in them. Others would disagree and try to find new and different explanations for the phenomenon under discussion and would look for different evidence for their point of view. Generalisations thus promote search for fresh supporting or countervailing evidence regarding them. We may discuss the case of a paper presented in a seminar. If it has no generalisations, it provides no ground for discussion. Participants can at the most refute or add to the facts presented in the paper. The absence of generalisations also explains the boring character of some of Indian historical writings. The reader does not have anything to react to them.

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## 1.6 SOURCES OF GENERALISATION

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It should be realised in the very beginning that no general rule or standard procedure exists for deriving generalisations. However, several sources for the purpose do exist.

- i) A major source is the previous writings on any subject which often contain different generalisations.
- ii) Another major source consists of other social sciences, for example generalisations regarding individual behaviour and motivations, mass behaviour or behaviour of crowds, role of tradition, role of family, caste outlook and behaviour; economic theory and history; functioning of political systems; social anthropology (especially important for ancient and medieval history); linguistics; and so on. These sources of generalisation are especially important in view of this changed nature of historical discipline in India in the last 50 years or so. History is no longer seen merely in terms of wars and diplomacy or from the point of view of the upper classes or ruling groups or males. It now pertains more to study of society, economy, wider political movements, culture, daily life, suppressed, dominated and marginal groups, such as women, lower castes and tribal groups, ecology, medicine, sports, etc.
- iii) Theories of history, society, culture and politics such as those of Marx, Weber and Freud are another major source of generalisation.
- iv) Historians also derive generalisations from the study of the present. For example, movements of dalits and other anti-caste groups, and of the tribal people. Similarly popular discontent and opposition movements can throw up many generalisations pertaining to the Indian national movement.
- v) Many generalisations are derived from life:
  - a) Common sense is a major source. In fact many historians who do not accept the need for a conscious process of acquiring generalisations, use their common sense as their usual source of generalisation.
  - b) Another usual source is historian's personal experience or life-experience. This experience is, of course, limited by various factors : area of one's activity; quality of one's life; one's status or position in life as also one's upbringing. One example is the tendency of some historians to see political struggle among

groups, parties and individuals in terms of quarrels in the family or in a government or company office.

- vi) We also derive generalisations from active data collection, that is, from systematic analysis of the sources. However, this does not so much help in acquiring of generalisations but the testing of generalisations. In other words, one does not first gather or take notes and then generalise but rather constantly comment on evidence of notes even while taking them. The point to be noted is that even while taking notes, the student or scholar must not be passive recorder but should function with an active mind.

Thus, the skill to make or generate generalisations is best acquired by having an active mind, doing everything one learns to make a correction the way a child does. A child asks even the most stupid-looking questions to make connections, many of which he may discard later. For example, when meeting a new male person: who is this uncle? Why is he an uncle? Where is his wife? Why has he not brought his children? Why have you asked him to eat with us? Why do you address him as sir and not other uncles who visit us? Why do you serve him a drink and not other uncles? Why is he fair or dark or why has he got a beard and so on. A child's questions can open up so many aspects of a society. **A historian has to be like a curious child.** Thus if one reacts to the sources, etc., like a child and asks questions and generalises while reading and noting them, his thesis would start getting forward.

Thus a generalisation is basically a connection, which can come to one's mind any time, especially when one's mind is 'full' of the subject. Many possible connections or generalisations come into one's mind when reading, taking notes or thinking on the subject. Many of them would be given up later, but some will survive and form the basis of one's research paper or thesis. They will be stuff of one's original contribution. They are what we mean when we say that an historian is original and he has something new to say.

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## 1.7 HOW TO IMPROVE ONE'S CAPACITY TO GENERALISE?

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Or how does one acquire and improve the capacity to grasp the underlying deeper connections and not rely on surface or superficial connections? This is perhaps a very much open area and the answers are both tentative and inadequate. The reader has enough scope for improvisation.

To start with, the problem may be restated, so that it also provides a part answer. Having recognised the need for generalisations, this need should become a part of one's very approach or mind-set. One should acquire the habit of always looking out for relationships or linkage between events and things not only when researching but also in day-to-day life. In other words, one should acquire a generalising and conceptualising mind.

- i) One should acquire and improve the capacity to handle ideas since all generalisations are grasped as ideas. One should learn to handle ideas, however poorly one may do so in the beginning. One should constantly conceptualise one's problems in place of mere narration. Even while narrating, one should see one's material as an illustration of the general, at however low a level.
- ii) One should learn to apply logical principles. Logical fallacies such as circular reasoning have to be avoided. Restatement of a question in a positive form is not an answer to it. For example, to the question why does wood float in water, the

answer that it has the quality to float in water is not an answer; it is merely a positive form of the question. Similarly, the answer to the question why Akbar was a great ruler because he knew how to rule is no answer.

- iii) Language is a historian's basic tool. One should use clear language in thinking or writing, even if it is simple. Obscurity in language does not represent clarity or depth of thought. Postmodernist and structuralist language are prime examples of such obscurity as C. Wright Mills has pointed out in the case of structuralism. They do injustice even to the insights that postmodernism and structuralism provide. The latter two would survive and their contribution would acquire abiding character only when their practitioners learn to express themselves in simpler, easily graspable language.
- iv) One should study and examine in a systematic manner the 'things' historians talk about.
- v) Refinement of concepts and generalisations is a perpetual process. Consequently, discussion around and about them with friends, colleagues and lecturers is very important. Conversation, in any case, is important in the development and refinement of ideas, for conversation cannot be carried on without conceptualisation. Two or more people cannot go on talking merely by narrating facts to each other. For example, even while discussing a film, people cannot go on citing instances of what an actor said or did. They must argue around the quality of the dialogue and its delivery, as also other aspects of the acting in and direction of the film.
- vi) One should acquire the quality of critical receptivity to new ideas. One does not have to accept new ideas simply because they are new. (Ideas are not like new clothes!) But one should be willing to discuss them, examine them, argue about them, and accept them if found useful or reject them, as the case may be.
- vii) One should be familiar with prior generalisations in one's area of study. One should develop the capacity to utilise them after critical examination. Consequently, historiographic study of past and current generation of historians is absolutely necessary. Quite often, we do not evolve or generate new generalisations, we improve on the earlier ones, sometimes even turning them upside down or rather right side up! This is what almost all historians do. For example, I started by testing A. R. Desai's generalisation, in *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*, that the Moderate nationalists represented the commercial bourgeoisie of India, and gradually evolved the generalisation that they represented the emerging industrial bourgeoisie. Similarly, most Indian historians of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries began by examining the generalisations made by the earlier and contemporary British historians of India.
- viii) Comparative history, social sciences and natural and physical sciences are rich sources for generalisations. One can and should take 'leads' or suggestions from them. Studies of national movements in China, or Indonesia or Algeria can, for example, enable us to develop generalisations about the national movement in India. There can, however, be no direct or one-to-one application from the study of other countries or social sciences, etc. The latter should lie at the back of one's mind; they should provide broad hypotheses to be tested and possible connections for one's own materials; they should enable one to search for fresh evidence for one's own theme of research.
- ix) One should acquire better knowledge of the present; one should be in better 'touch' with the present and, in fact, should even participate in the making of the present. The capacity to understand the living would certainly enable one to better understand

the dead. There is a popular advice which parents give to the children which is quite relevant in this respect: “You will understand us better when you become a parent.” In fact we daily borrow from the present to generalise about the past. Hence, we should improve the quality of our life-experience and what is called *common sense*, for often the ‘truths’ of poor common sense can be very misleading. This is the case for such common examples of poor axioms or common sense as: there are two sides to a question. This is just not true in many cases. For example, in case of caste-oppression of the dalits, or oppression of women, or communalism or anti-Semitism, racialism, colonial oppression, and so on.

If one’s life-experience is narrow, one will have a tendency to view past events, movements and persons too from a narrow or ‘little-minded’ angle. For example, one will see the reason for the anti-imperialism of a Surendranath Banerjee, or Dadabhai Naoroji or Gandhi to lie in personal frustration.

Similarly, one may see questions of political power in terms of family quarrels with which one is familiar, or of political prestige in terms of personal insult, or of state policy in terms of personal gratefulness or vengeance or betrayal, or of national budget in terms of household or kitchen accounts.

One should also develop the capacity to see human beings in all their complexity. People can live at several levels; for example, they can be very honest at one level, and dishonest at another. There is the wrong tendency among many to link political statesmanship with personal virtuous life. It is possible for a political leader to be very humane in personal life and yet very cruel in political life. Another may not betray his wife but easily betray his colleagues or vice versa. Victorian moral outlook has been the bane of many Indian historians of earlier generations.

A historian must, therefore, expand the limits of his/her common sense. He/she must also lead a fuller life with a variety of experiences and activities. A cloistered life invariably tends to limit a historian’s vision.

Since no one person can lead a life of multi-experiences, however hard he/she may try, one way to have a multi-layered understanding of life is through literature. A good historian has to be fond of fiction and poetry – even of detective and science fiction.

I may sum up this aspect by saying that better quality of understanding of life makes for better history and better history makes for better quality of life.

- x) One’s position in life certainly influences one’s capacity to generalise and understand the march of history. Is one, for example, for change or for *status quo*? And if one is for change, what type of change? For example, does one believe in the caste system? Or in male superiority? This does not mean that one’s position in life would *determine* one’s historiographic position; but the nature of its influence will be determined by the extent to which one is *aware* of the issue.

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## 1.8 SUMMARY

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In this Unit we have tried to deal with various aspects of generalisation. Our position is that generalisation is a very important part of historical work. Although there are many objections to generalisation, no writing is possible without using general terms and concepts. These are derived from earlier works and serve as the starting points for the current work. The generalisation may keep changing as the work progresses. However, at every stage, the historians have to make generalisations which provide the basis for understanding their facts and source material.

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## 1.9 EXERCISES

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- 1) What is a generalisation? Discuss the various types of generalisations?
- 2) Do you think that there is a need for generalisation in history-writing? Discuss the various objections to generalisation.
- 3) What are the different stages in which you may generalise about your work? What are the sources on the basis of which you can generalise even before starting empirical work?
- 4) How can you improve your capacity to generalise?

