1. What do you understand by ‘microhistory’? Describe the historians and their works related to this tradition of history-writing.

Ans: Microhistory is the intensive historical investigation of a well-defined smaller unit of research (most often a single event, the community of a village, or an individual). In its ambition, however, microhistory can be distinguished from a simple case study insofar as microhistory aspires to "large questions in small places", to use the definition given by Charles Joyner. The most distinctive aspect of the microhistorical approach is the small scale of investigations. Microhistorians focus on small units in society, as a reaction to the generalisations made by the social sciences which do not necessarily hold up when tested against these smaller units. For instance, Ginzburg's 1976 work The Cheese and the Worms – "probably the most popular and widely read work of microhistory" – investigates the life of a single sixteenth-century Italian miller, Menocchio. The individuals microhistorical works are concerned with are frequently those Robert Tristano describes as "little people", especially those considered heretics. Carlo Ginzburg has written that a core principle of microhistory is making obstacles in sources, such as lacunae, part of the historical account. Relatedly, Levi has said that the point of view of the researcher becomes part of the account in microhistory. Other notable aspects of microhistory as a historical approach are an interest in the interaction of elite and popular culture, and an interest in the interaction between micro- and macro-levels of history.

Voltaire

French philosophe Voltaire (1694–1778) had an enormous influence on the development of historiography during the Age of Enlightenment through his demonstration of fresh new ways to look at the past. Voltaire's best-known histories are The Age of Louis XIV (1751), and his Essay on the Customs and the Spirit of the Nations (1756). He broke from the tradition of narrating diplomatic and military events, and emphasized customs, social history and achievements in the arts and sciences. He was the first scholar to make a serious attempt to write the history of the world, eliminating theological frameworks, and emphasizing economics, culture and political history. Although he repeatedly warned against political bias on the part of the historian, he did not miss many opportunities to expose the intolerance and frauds of the church over the ages. Voltaire advised scholars that anything contradicting the normal course of nature was not to be believed. Although he found evil in the historical record, he fervently believed reason and educating the illiterate masses would lead to progress.

David Hume

At the same time, philosopher David Hume (1711–1776) had a similar effect on the study of history in Great Britain. In 1754 he published The History of England, a 6-volume work which extended "From the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688". Hume adopted a similar scope to Voltaire in his history; as well as the history of Kings, Parliaments, and armies, he examined the history of culture, including literature and science, as well. His short biographies of leading scientists explored the process of scientific change and he developed new ways of seeing scientists in the context of their times by looking at how they interacted with society and each other – he paid special attention to Francis Bacon, Robert Boyle, Isaac Newton and William Harvey. He also argued that the quest for liberty was the highest standard for judging the past, and concluded that after considerable fluctuation, England at the time of his writing had achieved "the most entire system of liberty, that was ever known amongst mankind.

Edward Gibbon

Edward Gibbon's Decline of the Roman Empire (1776) was a masterpiece of late 18th-century history writing. The apex of Enlightenment history was reached with Edward Gibbon's monumental six-volume work, The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, published on 17 February 1776. Because of its relative objectivity and heavy use of primary sources, its methodology became a model for later historians. This has led to Gibbon being called the first "modern historian". The book sold impressively, earning its author a total of about £9000. Biographer Leslie Stephen wrote that thereafter, "His fame was as rapid as it has been lasting."

Gibbon's work has been praised for its style, its piquant epigrams and its effective irony. Winston Churchill memorably noted, "I set out upon...Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire and was immediately dominated both by the story and the style... I devoured Gibbon. I rode triumphantly through it from end to end and enjoyed it all. Gibbon was pivotal in the secularizing and 'desacralizing' of history, marking, for example, in the 'want of truth and common sense' of biographies composed by Saint Jerome. Unusually for an 18th-century historian, Gibbon was never content with secondhand accounts when the primary sources were accessible (though most of these were drawn from well-known printed editions). "I have always endeavoured," he says, "to draw from the fountain-head; that my curiosity, as well as a sense of duty, has always urged me to study the originals; and that, if they have sometimes eluded my search, I have carefully marked the secondary evidence, on whose faith a passage or a fact were reduced to depend." In this insistence upon the importance of primary sources, Gibbon broke new ground in the methodical study of history.

2. Discuss the distinctive features of traditional Chinese historiography.

Ans: Chinese historiography is the study of the techniques and sources used by historians to develop the recorded history of China.

1. Official History

Chinese historiography was predominantly official historiography. This implies several things. Firstly, it was written almost exclusively by officials. Secondly, it was usually commissioned or sponsored by the rulers, particularly after the initial period. There were some exceptions to the rule. But “private history” (shishi), while it definitely existed and even enjoyed a certain respectability, never challenged the dominance of officially written history. Third, the content of historical writing largely reflected the concerns of administration, and more narrowly those of the ruling house and emperor. Fourth, the main sources on which history writing was based were official documents, to which the historians had relatively easy access since they themselves were officials. Sources so