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RESEARCH ARTICLE

CHANGING TRENDS AND EMERGING AREAS IN HISTORIOGRAPHY

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Abstract

Historical writing conveys thought from one generation to another generation. In different space and time its format has been changing, so has been its interpretation. It should be accepted that various kinds of pressures, prejudices or predilections work in our minds when we begin to write history. So there is always a revision in history. Four thousand years ago, our forerunners in civilization did not possess what we call the idea of history. It was because they did not possess the thing itself. History did not exist. There existed, instead, something which in certain ways resembled what we call history. In fact it is the fifth century historians of Greece, Herodotus and Thucydides who took the concept of historiography into a new world. They made the pioneering attempt to prove that Greek history is not legend but a work based on research. More over it was all attempts to get answers to definite questions about matters of which one considers oneself as ignorant.

Keywords: Historical writing, New World, Herodotus, Thucydides, Forerunners in Civilisation

Introduction

Historical writing conveys thought from one generation to another generation. In different space and time its format has been changing, so has been its interpretation. It should be accepted that various kinds of pressures, prejudices or predilections work in our minds when we begin to write history. So there is always a revision in history.

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itself. History did not exist. There existed, instead, something which in certain ways resembled what we call history. In fact it is the fifth century historians of Greece, Herodotus and Thucydides who took the concept of historiography into a new world. They made the pioneering attempt to prove that Greek history is not legend but a work based on research. More over it was all attempts to get answers to definite questions about matters of which one considers oneself as ignorant.

The subject of history was meant to have the following four characteristics.

- (i) That it is scientific and begins by asking questions, whereas the writer of legend begins by knowing something and tells what he knows.
- (ii) (ii) It is humanistic as it asks questions about the deeds done by men at specific times in the past
- (iii) (iii) It is rational or bases the answers to the questions
- (iv) (iv) It is self-revelatory or exists in order to tell man what man is by telling him what man has done.

There is so much diversity in historical writing today because of the vast literature available and due to the tremendous development made in the field historiography.

History is a Greek word meaning simply an investigation or enquiry. The conversion of legend writing into the science of history was a fifth century invention and Herodotus was the man who invented it. Thucydides emphasized the humanistic purpose and the self-revelatory function of history. He made an improvement upon Herodotus as he did not insist on evidence, whereas Thucydides said explicitly that historical inquiry rests on evidence.

Roman Historiography

The development of historiography owes a lot to Roman historiographers. The Greeks were known for the depth of their thought and analytical approach. The Romans were mostly descriptive and largely political in outlook. Though the pattern of writing was descriptive, they had a good role to play in the development of historiography.

From the rational approach of the Greeks and the political treatment of the Romans in the ancient period, the medieval historiography gets our attention. During medieval period, every human activity was considered to have been ordained by the Almighty. To the church historian everything that appeared good or bad was a link in the long chain of divine planning. Historical phenomenon was considered to be out of the limits of human control. But the study of history aims at studying the role of various factors in the

historical process. The function of the study of history in a modern university is to teach students how to think historically so that they can apply the historical method of analysis to new problems as they arise and be encouraged to keep on learning thorough out life.

The period of Renaissance and reformation witnessed a very brisk activity in historical investigation. The intellectual thirst that developed during renaissance had its impact on historical writing also. Following the Greeks and Romans the French had a passion for history. History that got relief from the hands of the Romans, who had reduced it to a descriptive catalogue of political events and personalities, but slipped again into philosophic trend, that sought to explain historical change in terms of transcendental forces. The church historian always believed that historical events were taking place according to divine planning. The church history considered history as charismatic, linear, universal and impersonal.

It was charismatic because man was considered to be merely a blind instrument in the cosmic order which had unique and strange patterns to offer in the life of man. History was considered to be linear because history was not cyclical but a continuous flow in which the Divine will manifests itself and directs events towards a purpose which is best known only to the sublime power.

It was universal because historical forces are determined by a general law made by God and its applications is worldwide and universal. The complicated church view of history was simplified for the lay public by the concept of the city of God by St. Augustine, who was the dominant historical thinker of the period whose views were current until the dawn of the modern age.

Yet another school of thought the appeared and made significant contribution of history originated with the advent of Islam in the Middle East. The sense of history was well owned by the Arabs which under the religious motivation gave different dimensions in terms of range, interpretation and technique of writing history. The zeal of the Arabs took them to different lands and people. The

history of such lands were recorded, thereby widening the scope of history by adding a new branch called travel accounts. The Arab historian Iban Kaldun was such a great thinker as to be called as Father of Science of culture. He was the one, who initiated discussion on the theory of science of culture and thus anticipated historical thought. In general, history received very serious attention at the hands of the scholars of both the church and Arabs schools, whose zeal to put it to a divine purpose thus making it a very sacred instrument.

Modern Period

The contributions of the historians of ancient and medieval periods added a rich legacy to the historical tradition. The traditions were further sharpened with the dawn of modern period. Ranke, the father of modern history, held the view that the whole of modern history needed to be torn to pieces and resembled with the help of available manuscript sources. He devised the historical method which eliminated all errors and presented events in their true colour. It was Karl Marx who revolutionized the sensational theory of the materialistic interpretations of history which was destined to be the very picture of the world.

French historiography had a few unique features of its own. In this context the contribution of Voltaire is great, who coined the phrase 'Philosophy of History', and who was the prophet of enlightenment. The contribution of Italy to the emergence of European historiography was also considerable. Italy was in the forefront of thought during Renaissance and Reformation periods and this had a very great influence on the literary contributions. Two names stand out prominently among the Italian philosophers of history. One is of Vico and the other is of Croce. Vico is a philosopher of cultural history and law, who attempted to bring about the convergence of history from one side and the social science from the other, so that their interpretation could form a single science of humanity. He is the father of cyclical view of history and his impact is quite profound.

Tocqueville's Paradigm

It dominated the thinking of western historians. He held that things were changing but remained the same. Tocqueville's claim to greatness as an historian rests upon a single work published in 1856, was intended as the first volume in the history of the entire revolutionary and Napoleonic period.' Though Tocqueville had already come to believe that the 19th century world witnessed a great development in democracy, but he did not start out with any predisposition in its favour. He combined a capacity for keen observation with a flair for generalization from the evidence which he accumulated. He was always ready to modify his views as new evidence came to light. He brought to the study of eighteenth century France that the techniques which he had used in studying contemporary society in the United States. Unlike the most of his predecessors in the field, Tocqueville was determined to get beyond the purely literary evidence - memories, letters, pamphlets and to work from the documentary archives and his sense of continuity of history pervades the whole book. He set a new trend for many historians to employ the methodology.

Indian Context

Ancient India has scholars but not historians. Our scholars had a very great contribution to the sphere of science and education, but the art of systematic recording of history did not developed. While the other countries of the contemporary" period witnessed growth, Indian scenario was devoid of historical sense and consciousness. The Hindu mythological writings, Buddhist Jatakas, Jain Prapathans, and Tamil classics were full of educative and moral value. Of all them Kalkana's Rajatharankini is considered to be the finest historical treatise. Subsequently the medieval history witnessed a good historical tradition. With the advent of the Muslims, the Arabic and Persian traditions of historiography also came to India. The Muslim rule in India encouraged the historical writing considerably. In fact historiography had a good development during the period of Delhi Sultanate and Mughals.

Modern Indian Historiography had its origin only with the advent of European tradition of historical writing. The progress made in the western

thought and writing had its impact on Indian writing also. Because of the advent of the Europeans and due to the influence of British historians, Indian historical writing underwent a remarkable change. The historiography of modern India was dominated by the British administrative historians. The beginning of 20th century with the onset of freedom movement witnessed the emergence of nationalist historians who gave new approach to Indian historical tradition.

Emergence of New Approaches

Positivism

The great political upheavals of the late 18th century had its influence on the historical writing of the contemporary period. The 19th century intellectuals were also influenced to a far greater level than any of their predecessors. It attempted to portray history on scientific lines, wherein historical philosophy was based on things that could be felt or seen, than on surmise. In this process, the historical events were sought to be explained along with the underlying currents that triggered the events. Previously positivists attempted to take historical writing to a higher plane thereby liberating it from the hold of theology and metaphysics and to ascertain the facts. It also attempted to unravel the historical laws to the study of social development. The positivists are called social scientists and Augustus Comte is considered to be the founder of Positivist movement.

Emergence of Marxism

The emphasis and importance given to positive history led to the growth of scientific historiography and Leopold Von Ranke is considered to be the father of scientific history. This concept further led to the emergence of scientific socialism.

The scientific socialism lays stress on the economic aspects of the society that decide the course of history. It was the intention of Karl Marx to focus on the history of economic activity. It was his firm belief that the material development of the mankind was the prime mover of history, thereby historical materialism is the basis of mankind which is considered to be the logical development of historical materialism.

designed an approach for the study of tribal movements. It attempts to explore and explain history in a different style. This approach has brought out the multiple dimensions of people's movement and the

Annales Historiography

Marc Bloch, Professor of Ancient history in France initiated this trend as one of the founding fathers of *Annales of Histoire Economique et Sociale*. He served in the university and army as well and his contributions to historical thought is unique and praiseworthy. Bloch was of the conviction that historian has to be courageous in his search for causes and in his recognition that such causes can be complicated and multiple also.

The annales school comprises an international group of leading historians who, do not follow any of the set pattern of historical investigation. But they have a kind of distinct philosophy, a system of analysis and explanation, literary style etc. This school has rejected the concepts of studying any subject in isolation. This school has emphasized upon the reconstructing of total and dynamic history encompassing all aspects of human life. The historians of the Annales school take into account even small happenings in human society. The annales school has caused so much of impact on many scholars all over the world. It is a historical venture and after establishing itself in France under the able leadership of scholars like Marc Bloch, Lucien Fabre, Fernand Braudel etc., this thought has extended to other countries also. This study has brought to the notice of historians such source material as they had never earlier bothered to consult.

Subaltern History

The idea of "History from below" aims at constructing the paradigm of Subaltern consciousness, that has reflected in different forms. The main concept of Subaltern studies is to appreciate people's consciousness and their action. This will enable the historians to assess the changing mentalities of the society.

The credit of initiating such a study can be given to Ranajit Guha and his colleagues who society is able to understand the working of various social aspects. From the study of various tribal movements of 1793-1900 period, Guha has constructed

six paradigmatic forms negation, ambiguity, modality, solidarity, transmission and territoriality.

Though mainly 'insurgencies' should form the part of movements, protests and mobilization, which are not insurgent in character, because certain resistance that developed since the phase of planned rural development are not insurgent in character and the subaltern studies aims at the development of all these aspects that helps a reader to have a good understanding of the progress of the society.

History of Tamil Nadu

The historical literature of Tamil Nadu is rich but uneven in coverage as well as quality.¹² The earliest available literature of historical content in Tamil is found in parts of the Ettthogai, the poems on love and war. Similarly there are scattered references of historical interest in other literary sources also. Similarly a considerable work is being done on the modern and contemporary history of Tamil Nadu also, yet a lot has to be done. Research should focus on the use of archival sources and new areas should be brought under investigation so that a well connected historical account can be obtained.

The history of ancient Tamil Nadu was constructed on the basis of available literary sources and corroborative archaeological sources. In recent times considerable work has been done in the field of archaeology and the findings have thrown light on various aspects of human life. It is the need of the hour that such findings are integrated with the existing knowledge which will lead to the

enhancement of literature and this should be carried out with a sustained effort. This necessitates a comprehensive study of history alongwith archaeology and Tamil literature. When the three arms are coordinated, the ancient history of TamilNadu can be visited and retold in a more meaningful manner.

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