

Schools Of Thought on Indian Historiography - An Interpretation.

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Abstract : *The study of history as a scientifically developed discipline began only in the 19th century. It was only then that the historians tried to absorb the lessons of early historical writings and could develop new methods and techniques. It was during this venture to know the art of historical writing of the earlier period did historiography emerged as a part of history. Historiography simply means the history of the art of historical writing. In other words, it is the history of history or the history of historical thought. As we know the colonial modernity and knowledge which brought a historical sense to Indians. Systematic historical writing began in India during the early period of British colonialism. The earliest and one of the positive results of British conquest was the recovery of ancient Indian history on modern lines of historiography. It was essential to them to know about the past, society and culture, and establish their authority over India. It was an outcome of the administrative necessity of the Britishers also. The rulers encouraged those who shown interest in the past, resulted the investigation of the past and bringing up of new interpretations and perceptions on Indian history .*

INTRODUCTION

Modern Indian historiography began with the writings of the scholar- administrators of the English east India Company and they found history as an instrument to legitimise the colonial rule by put making some interpretations. Thus emerged different school of thoughts or historiographical trends in Indian history. They are colonial or imperialist, nationalist, Marxist, Cambridge, and subaltern.

2 COLONIAL OR IMPERIALIST HISTORIOGRAPHY

It was the product of the British colonialism in India. In modern Indian history, the school or tradition of history writing which was influential in the late 19th and 20th centuries. Many intellectual influences co existed in this tradition. The indologists and orientalist were the real force behind the development of such enquiry. They laid

the foundation for the development of the investigation on India's past and culture. These colonial writers upheld different ideologies in their writings that are the Utilitarians, the Evangelicals and the administrative historians.

3.THE UTILITARIAN SCHOOL.

The utilitarian school of political philosophy was started by Jeremy Bentham in England. It was a bye product of the enlightenment of Europe. The utilitarians stood for that the power vested within the hands of the rulers must be utilised for the benefit of the society. The utilitarian was another school headed by the James Mill who believed that the backwardness of the Indian society could only be improved through the introduction of enlightened despotism. His History of British India was the most dominant historical work among the Britishers during the 19th century. It was published in the year 1828, became a trend setter for the subsequent historical works produced by colonial writers .and the most controversial too .He never visited India and it was the first comprehensive history on India in the modern period. It covers the history of India from the beginning of the Christian era to the 19th century. He divided Indian history into three separate periods, namely, Hindu, Muhammeden and British .It was a deliberate attempt by him to designate the ancient and medieval periods of Indian history as Hindu and Muslim .He skilfully avoided designating the modern period as Christian, instead he used the term British. This periodisation was used by the subsequent colonial historians. In fact it was the recognition of the divide and rule policy of colonial authorities in India.

4.THE EVANGELICAL HISTORIANS.

The evangelical historians—Indian history written by them should be seen in relation to their attitude to Indian religions, particularly Hinduism—two such attitudes —one of hostility and one of sympathy. During the 19th century they were following or having hostility towards India but later their attitudes become sympathetic. They were the missionaries came to India in order to convert Indians and they even believed that god had

allowed them to conquer the country for this purpose. The main theme of their historical writing was better criticism of all Indian things and an uncritical justification of all British rules. They believed that the people of India could only be changed progressively through Christianity and missionary education: Thus stressed on the conversion of Indians to Christianity.

Charles Grant was the prominent evangelical writer in this period, his work *Observation on State and Society* published in 1813 emphasis on the backwardness of this country was due to the Hindu religion. According to him the only solution to put an end to this backwardness was the acceptance of Christianity by the Indians. According to him by the introduction of English language falsehood could be weakened and variety must be flourished. To them Britain had an important function to fulfil in the history of India and it was a part of some divine plan.

The industrial revolution and the spread of Protestantism were also caused for the evangelism in India. William Wilberforce was forefront in this movement. The new evangelism contributed two things that is combined religion with science and they gave kind of emphasis on science. A large number of mission societies appeared in India after this.

Christian mission extended the philosophy inaugurated by Grant. His work is entitled *Indian antiquities*, 4 volumes, in which tried to examine the general historical background of the Indian sub continent from the early period itself. He attempted tolerate Indian history with the dominant philosophy of the 19th century Europe, namely, the Hegelian dialectics. By this he was trying to relate Indian history with the general stream of the European philosophy and history.

He is also a great believer in the organized hierarchy of gods and the proper order of apportioning the oblation among various levels of gods. He is one of the Prajapatis and is sometimes regarded as their chief. He is charged with the responsibility of ensuring perpetuation of life on earth, as also the richness and dignity in life. He is a very prominent person of the established order; and, in fact, is at its very core.

5. THE ADMINISTRATIVE HISTORIANS.

The administrative historians were another category for the development of historical writing in India. They wrote on as a part other official duty. So these writers were mainly used the official records and reports for their writing. Hence these

were a one sided view on history in general. The important administrative historians were V.A. Smith, who produced several works on India, ,Macaulay, William Wilson Hunter, B Malleson ,Henry Maine,J.Tallboys wheeler, Alfred Lyall, W.H.Moreland, J.D.Cunningham, James Tod,Mark Wilks, Grant Duff, Robert Orme,T. R Holmes, M.S.Elphinstone, John Dawson, E.J Stephenson ,J.Stratchy, Sir Wolsely Haig, Elliot etc.

It opened up new chapter in the historical writing in India.It influenced the history of writing India as well as the European history writing on India.Their approach and attitudes which led to the emergence of nationalist, a native historical writing in India, a reaction against to colonial distortion of Indian history.

6. NATIONALIST HISTORIOGRAPHY

The 19th century British historians played a crucial role in provoking a nationalist reaction. This reaction came in the form of a nationalist approach in historiography. An important element in this approach was an effort to restore national self esteem and the glorification India's past .Another element was the propagation of economic nationalism through the depiction of the ruinous economic consequences of British rule in India. Most important of all, nationalist historiography tried to re-discover India for the modern Indian mind and promote political integration and anti imperialist sentiments to further the cause of nation building in India. The nationalist history had to contend with not only the earlier imperialist bias in historiography but also a communal interpretation of history that began to gain influence from the early decades of the century.

Nationalist historiography played an important role in providing an ideological basis of the freedom struggle and in analysing the economic consequences of imperialism. The focus of nationalist attention was on external that is imperialist exploitation of India, not so much the internal i.e., class exploitation and consequent class conflict within Indian society. Greater concentration on the latter aspect was the consequence of the influence of the Marxist approach, an influence increasingly evident from the 1940s.

The phrases nationalist school and nationalist history can only be understood in the background of the colonial domination and colonial historiography. History in its ,modern sense was not written in the pre- colonialindia.the introduction of English education helped the Indian middle class to learn the value of historical

knowledge and to get in touch with the history of India as well as the history of the world outside India. Thus newly educated Indians began to study the writings of colonial historians. The nationalist historians began to rectifying the historical writing did by the colonialists. So they had possessed some sort of bias on their writings.

The phrase nationalist historians were first used by R.C. Majumdar, to denote those historians of India whose writings had nationalist bias, especially during the period of colonial occupation. The nationalist historiography helped for unearthing of wide range of sources and re examination of all the available sources. In the course of time it received new impetus from the country wide agitation for political freedom and it slowly became a part of the movement itself.

The nationalists also gave importance to the study of the religion or society of India. In other words they try to defend religion and society in their studies. The material side of Hindu culture was also defended with equal zeal against European criticism. Rajendrala Mitra who started the nationalist writing in India with publication of some Vedic texts and the book entitled Indo-Aryans. He was proud of ancient Indian heritage and adopted a comparative rational view of ancient Indian society. The writings of Mitra, Bhandarkar and some of the distinguished oriental scholars of Europe were brought together in three volumes entitled Civilization in Ancient India, by R C Dutt in closing years of 1880s. According to Majumdar, this may be regarded as the first nationalist history in the best sense of the term. R.K Mukharjee, the fundamental unity of India, which maintained that the religious and spiritual fellowship among Hindus all over India and their ideal of an all-India empire were the basis of Indian nationalism in the past. K.P Jayaswal in his Hindu Polity also deals the thesis of oriental despotism. Dadabhai Naoroji and R.C. Dutt in their criticism of the British government on economic grounds. It created the economic nationalism, the poverty and unbritish rule in India and the economic history of India. They popularised the drain theory and exposed the exploitative character of colonialism and revolutionised the national movement. They cleverly used history as an instrument for making India as a nation on different realms, even though had some defects.

R.G. Bhandarkar, H.C. Raychoudhary, J.N. Sarkar, G.S. Sardesai, S. Krishna Swami Ayyangar, Lalalajpath Roy, C.F. Andrews, Patabhi Sittaramayya, Girija Mukharjee etc were important nationalist writers. The trained or academic historians also followed this style of writing in the

post independent era, they were B.R. Nanda, Tarachand, Amal Tripathi, Bishweshwar Prasad etc. Most of these historians connected history as explanationist and propagandist. They inspired the people of India and awakened the self confidence and national pride among the mass which strengthened the national movement.

The nationalist historiography has certain defects too, that is some methodological defects, some chauvinist approaches on caste, cultural and social bias. Emotion and sentiment usurped the place of reason; and detachment, balance, perspective, and objectivity—all became a causality. They also failed and ignored certain aspects and issues like tribes, women, down trodden people, marginalised societies etc. Some sensational accounts brought a sort of communal identities. It glorified Indian past and culture and the events instead of making critical analysis.

7. MARXIST HISTORIOGRAPHY

It was a new approach in Indian historiography or historical writing in India on colonialism and nationalism. By the Marxist writing, is not meant that the writers were all Marxists but that they more or less adopted materialistic interpretation as method of understanding and tool of analysis in the historical phenomena. Their interpretation derived from historical philosophy of Karl Marx, the dialectical materialism. The essence of this new approach lies in the study of relationship between social and economic organisation and its effects on historical events. Instead of political history they gave more emphasis on the history of common people and the history of history less people.

The Marxist historiography on modern India was inaugurated by one of the founders of Marxism in India M.N. Roy with his work 'INDIA IN TRANSITION' published in 1922. It was followed by INDIA TODAY of R. Palme Dutt in 1940 and 'THE SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF INDIAN NATIONALISM' of A.R. Desai in 1959. All the three were classical Marxists and treated Indian national movement as the representation of particular stage in the development of mode of production. India today was considered as an authoritative Marxist work for a long time. It became an important school of historiography in India in later. Dutt and Desai studied the negative and positive roles of Gandhi in the national movement. They highlighted the positive as, he made the national movement at mass movement by awakening the backward masses with national consciousness. At the negative, he restricted the revolutionary tendencies contained the liberal

bourgeois nationalism to operate, as he represented the Indian bourgeoisie.

In the post independent period the historians like D.D.Kossambi, R.S.Sharma, Romila Thapar, Bipan Chandra, Sumit Sarkar, Sushobhan Sarkar, Sunil Sen, Hiran mukharjee, K.N.Panikkar, Irfan Habib and many others have dedicated their studies for the development of historiography.

The Marxist historians tried to the transformation of India in the time of colonialism and looked it as a part of the growth of world capitalism and exploitative concerns of British imperialism. Dutt's seminal work *India today*, clearly analyses the colonial phase in India as three categories. The first phase as mercantilism or merchant capitalism under the company, from 1757- 1813, followed by the stage of industrial capitalism as a result of industrial revolution, from 1813-1858 (marketisation), and the final one as finance capitalism as the capital and colonial investments. Later it became the perennial theme of the nationalist writings. The Marxist historians turned their attention on the inner contradictions of the Indian society, the marginalised sections like peasants and workers, and highlighted their role in the movement, women's role etc. They even questioned communal periodisation of India.

The early Marxists viewed national movement as a bourgeoisie movement like Dutt and Desai. But the historians like Bipan Chandra criticise this view with his newly researches on the movement and publication of the works. The Marxist writings broadened the history from the state to society. They brought the interdisciplinary approach in the recent studies, a new style of explanation to the problems.

8. NEO- IMPERIALIST APPROACH

It emerged in the 1960s and gathered momentum in the 1980s and 1990s and the publication of the books and articles brought a new trend in the historiography and by looking the national movement in the neo imperialist line. These scholars were belongs to the universities of England, America and Germany also known as CAMBRIDGE HISTORIANS. They have unearthed several source materials in the form of official records, diaries, police reports etc with the purpose of providing a new interpretation to the Indian national movement. Anil Seal and John Broomfield were the founders of this school. Anil Seal's, *Emergence Of Indian Nationalism* and Broomfield's *Elite Conflict in Plural Society*; Twentieth Century Bengal inaugurated this approach of historiography. Following them John

Galleghar, Gordon Johnson, Judith Brown, Ayesha Jalal, David Washbrook, C.J.Baker, C.A. Bayly, D.Rothermund and many other scholars also made similar interpretations. The neo imperialist writers analysed the existence of colonialism in India as political, social, economic and cultural structure and given interpretations. They had analysed nationalism too and put forward the theories on nationalism, the causative factors and its evolution and the contradictions in the national movement. They envisage colonialism as a foreign rule and the notions like the transformation of Indian economy and the beginning of the national movement was not an outcome of the British rule. They considered it as an elitist movement. To them caste and religion were the basis of political organisation and nationalism was a mere cover. The national movement represented the struggle one group of elite against the other for the British favours.

The neo- imperialist historians argued and supported a pro attitude and severely criticises the national movement and the national leaders. They consider it as instrument of the elitist for their own selfish interests and leaders were motivated by the power and material benefits and consider it as a play for power. They consider Gandhi, Nehru and Patel as the chief political brokers and Gandhi is characterised by them as a compromiser between Indian people and British government. They portrayed all agitations and movements as high dramas of the leaders and they also point out this by explicating the constitutional reforms and the following agitations, the doses of constitutional reforms, Montford reforms followed by N.C.M, the Simon commission by the C.D.M and the Cripps mission by the Quit India Anil Seal out rightly questions the nationalism and tried to denigrate the national movement by picturing as a mimic warfare. Unlike the early imperialist writers, the imperialist cornered their studies to the localities but like them, it also tried to justify and legitimize the colonial rule in India.

9. SUBALTERN STUDIES

The subaltern studies introduced a new trend in the historical research in modern Indian historiography. the development of the historical writing in the 1960s was the beginning of this new style of enquiry for the history of history less people. this new initiative was taken by the historians like Rodney Hilton, E.P. Thompson, Eric Hobsbawm, George Rude, Sobul etc had a direct influence on writing by placing common people in the centre of the studies. they characterised this trend as history from below, or peoples history, or grassroots history etc. the appearing of this new trend was in

the last two decades of the twentieth century as the subaltern studies.

Subaltern a term taken from the Antonio Gramsci's, the Italian socialist and thinker, his manuscript 'Prison Notebooks', meaning of inferior ranker, or common people; whether of class, caste, age, gender etc. it brings to light the lower sections of the Indian people hitherto neglected by historiography.

A series of subaltern studies volumes were published on Indian national movement under the editorship of Ranajit Guha. He protests that the historiography of Indian nationalism is beset with a prejudiced elitism of two kinds, the colonial or imperialist approach and the nationalist approach. Thus he insists the relevance of the subaltern approach and stated that the hitherto historiography of Indian nationalism has been dominated by elitism-colonial elitism and bourgeois elitism-both originated as the ideological product of British rule in India.

To the subaltern historians there are only two sections in the society-the elitists and the subaltern., so it is the time to write the history of subalterns. Thus the subaltern historians focussed on the subjugated or subordinated people such as tribals, peasants, oppressed women, workers, poor and other marginalised sects of the society who have played a key role in making the history and society. They severely criticised the existing notion of the history because of the partial history., all the history was the history of the elites. The subaltern writers have produced several articles on hitherto unexplored or the virgin areas of research on different titles, topics, issues, events, incidents, rebellions, etc related with the history and society of India.

The important subaltern writers like David Arnold, Gyan Pandey, Partha Chatterjee, Shahid Amin, Tanika Sarkar, Sumit Sarkar, Gayathri Spivak, Julie Stephens, Aravind Das, N.K Chandra, Stephen Henningham, Dipesh Chakraborty, Goutam Bhadra, etc have enriched the subaltern historiography. But later some of these writers also criticised it.

They have criticised the colonial, Cambridge, nationalist and Marxist schools of historiography. The necessity of the re writing of Indian history is asserted by them, but the term subaltern itself a curious one and it is a mixture of different groups with different aspirations.

CONCLUSION

T.R.Adams defines, colonialism in his book 'Modern colonialism: Institutions and Policies' as the political control of an under developed people whose social and economic life is directed by the dominant power. The word colonialism, alleged policy of exploitation on backward or weak people by a large power. There will be the political sovereignty, it can be achieved by force, by political collaboration, by economic, social or cultural dependence.

Colonialism makes the colonial societies an integral part of world capitalism. A colony is integrated into world capitalist system, but without taking part in industrial revolution of the development of capitalist production. It was a phenomenon after the 15th century. The decline of feudalism or the transformation of the society and development of new knowledge system which paved the way for the emergence of capitalist system in the world. As a result of this transformation the social change was one of the important features. The emergence of joint stock companies and merchant classes and the revival of trade directly led to the capital system in the world, change in the feudal mode to the capital mode of productions. This powerful mercantile group or class became the most influential people in the society.

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