

Subject : Historiography

Towards Attaining Objectivity: Some Schools of Thought since Renaissance

Rev.Dr. M.Arockiasamy Xavier SJ

Associate Professor

Dept. of History

Introduction

- Historiography is the history of History .
- It is the product of Greek mind.
- It is an independent branch of History.
- Historiography is the history of historical thought.
- It also comes under the history of ideas.
- It is a study of ideas which prompted a historian to adopt a particular line of thought.
- It has developed so well over the period that it attempted to include some important aspects from various disciplines of social sciences.

Towards Attaining Objectivity : Some Historical Personalities & Their Schools of Thought

- Some Attempts / Initiatives from **different perspectives** :
- Age of Reason during the Enlightenment Era
Rene Descartes, Sir Issac Newton and John Locke
- **Edward Gibbon** – Enlightenment Era
- **Auguste Comte** – Positivism
- **Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel** – Romantic Idealism
- **Karl Marx** – Economic Interpretation of History
- **Antonio Gramsci** – Subaltern Historiography
- **Lucien Febvre** - Annales school
- **Frederick Jackson Turner** – New History &
- Other trends

Earlier Period

- Herodotus, an Ionian, is the Father of History who wrote history in narrative style.
- Thucydides had a deep reflective power and was very particular in verifying the sources. He was good in analytical skill while bringing out the historical events. He had a deep reflective power as he wanted to know why an event happened. It was he who taught us that the history is the study of events as facts which are connected one to other in a rational and systematic way.
- Thus historiography continued from ancient days to medieval historiography.
- A radical shift came during the renaissance period since ancient period.

RENAISSANCE – AGE OF REASON

The historians of Renaissance in Italy displayed a critical spirit and an objective attitude in a degree that had not been found for long since the end of the ancient period.

ENLIGHTENMENT ERA

As the result of the Renaissance, secular subjects received importance of historical writing.

Sources of information came in for critical study, area of interest widened so as to include such matters, as the people, system of philosophy and progress of civilization.

- Modern historical writing in spirit and method is largely a product of the era of Enlightenment , and historical composition played a great part in the mature phases of Enlightenment - the seedbed of the modern mind.- Paul K. Conkin

- ✓ As a political thinker and a historian, Machiavelli gave importance to causes and liked the political development with a natural phenomenon. He asserted that only historians could explore the reality of politics.
- ✓ The works and writings of three eminent thinkers, Rene Descartes, Sir Issac Newton and John Locke initiated the Intellectual revolution in Europe and it had great impact on historiography. Since then intellectuals from different fields started looking at history from different perspective.
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Edward Gibbon



One of the greatest of the English historians, Gibbon occupies a conspicuous place among the historians of the Enlightenment. For, he rejected the theological interpretation of history and **attributed historical change to human nature** instead of supernatural forces.

- Gibbon published the first volume of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. As a historian he was never contented with the second hand accounts, when primary sources were available and was not happy with the compilations which certain writers attempted. Though he had taken a vast theme, he bestowed attention upon all details - analysis, criticism and accuracy.

Positivism : Auguste Comte

Auguste Comte (1798- 1857), an eminent sociologist, was the high priest of positivist school of thought .

- To him it meant two things: **first, ascertaining facts;** secondly, framing laws. Under this influence **POSITIVIST HISTORIOGRAPHY** arose.
- The methodology introduced by the positivists to study all **socio-historical phenomena came to be called phenomenological.** Positivism takes its name from comte's doctrine that the only knowledge of any value is positive knowledge which comes from sciences.
- He introduced into the **study of society the same scientific observation of the laws** which prevail in Sciences.
- **As history was the raw material for the understanding of society, he applied the same ideas in his attempt to discover a set of working laws for the interpretation of history.** Further, he considered the social evolution as a continuation of biological evolution.



Idealism : Friedrich Hegel

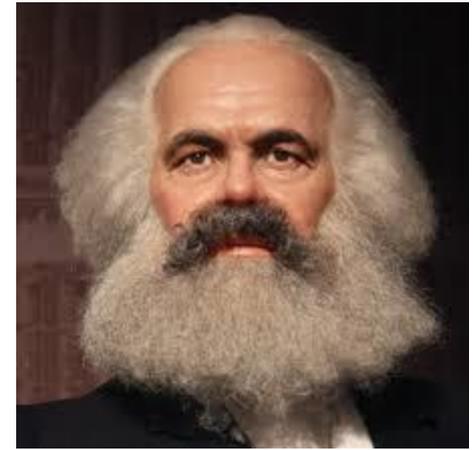
The most influential philosopher of the **Romantic idealist Movement** was George Wilhelm Hegel (1770-1831). The central theme of Hegel's philosophy was the idea of purposive evolution. Hegel believes that dialectic is the very moving principle of history. It refers to debate and implies contradiction. But as a theory, as used by Hegel, it describes the way in which **any concept stands in a necessary relation to its own opposite, generating the opposite at first and then negating it, so that the way in which the concept lives is by creating and overwhelming oppositions**. In other words, each stage or thesis, being short of perfection contains in itself an opposition or anti-thesis. There will be a **struggle between the thesis and anti-thesis until a synthesis is created**.



Karl Marx

Historical materialism or materialist conception of history, is a methodology used by some Marxist historiographers that focuses on human societies and their development through history. Thus they argue that **history is the result of material conditions rather than ideals**.

This was first articulated by Karl Marx (1818–1883) as the "**materialist interpretation of history**". The union of a society's productive forces and relations of production fundamentally determine society's organization and development.



Historical materialism looks for the causes of developments and changes in human society in the means by which humans collectively produce the necessities of life. It posits that social classes and the relationship between them, along with the political structures and ways of thinking in society, are founded on and reflect contemporary **economic activity**. Many Marxists contend that historical materialism is a scientific approach to the study of history.

Antonio Gramsci

The term “subaltern” is a German word meaning “inferior rank” or “of secondary importance”. This term was first given wide currency by Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Communist thinker and writer (1891-1937). He developed this concept and gave articulation to it in his Prison Notebooks, written between 1929 and 1936, as well as in an article entitled “Notes on Italian History”. Gramsci believed that the revolutionary movement should start with the every day life of the ordinary working masses. His integrative interpretation and vision of the mass movement led to the emergence of the Subaltern Studies.



It was felt by the subaltern historians that the time had come to reverse the dominant trend by examining horizontally the socio-cultural awareness of the people at the bottom-line or at the border of the society. These historians believed that they were witnessing the emergence of a true “history from below.” This social history would add a new dimension to class struggle by presenting the totality of society in all its interconnectedness and density of emotional, psychological, and economic life.

The nine volumes of the *Subaltern Studies*, by Ranajit Guha in India published so far, reveal that the focus of the studies are those who are exploited and occupying subordinate position in the Indian society – women, children, landless labourers, peasants, Dalits, tribals, gypsies and such groups.

“ Partly the task of the historian is to make the history of the people as a whole.” Irfan Habib

THE ANNALES SCHOOL

The founders of this journal were the famous French historians Lucien Febvre (1878-1956) and



Marc block (1886-1944). They became the leading historians of the school. This illustrious group of scholars shaped the destiny of the school by **developing a more integrated social history.**

The Annaelist historians was those times **attempted comprehensive history** – the historicist and positivist, individualist and collectivist, social and cultural, economic and political, issues and events, dynamic and static, diachronic and synchronic approaches to history.

History, as one of the recognized social sciences, was expected to focus not on leaders or elites but on whole populations and should try to trace changes in society over long periods. “The new social historians boasted of bringing history down from the corridors of upper-class culture to mingle with the common folk, and showed a strong interest in economic history”.

To this new type of historiography, the Annalistes eventually brought a new kind of expertise, one born out of a multidisciplinary approach to historical problems.

Anticipating later trends in historical scholarship, Bloch and Febvre insisted that the historian should explain, not merely describe; that he should exploit non documentary sources and theories of social sciences.

They were very much in favour of a total history which dealt with all aspects of life. The total history, advocated by the Annales School, was one which truly encompassed all human life.

THE AMERICAN “NEW HISTORY”

The New History School was greatly influenced by the revolutionary views of Frederick Jackson Turner. He argued that American history must not be viewed from the Atlantic coast alone since “the real lines of American development, the forces dominating our character, are to be studied in the history of westward expansion”

It questioned Eurocentric historiography in general and the older Rankean school of history in particular.

It laid enormous stress on colourless or just-as-it happened ideals of perfect objectivity. They advocated a history that was comprehensive rather than specialized, explanatory rather than descriptive and analytic rather than episodic.

The New History lays stress on the study of groups of ordinary people and the realities they confront in daily life. And they are convinced that history must consider the masses as well as the elite, day-to-day events as well as dramatic episodes.

It attempted to make the best use of social science theories and scientific methods of proof, for they sincerely believed that history is one of emerging social sciences.

Emphasis on quantifiable data and statistical methods of analysis is another hallmark of the New History school of thought.

The New Historians have also made social history less descriptive and more explanatory.

CONCLUSION

- **INTERPRETATIONS** are part of the process of constructing history. Each time when a historian looks at the past fresh interpretation is possible. The present, instead of being a hindrance, provides new tools, new techniques, and **new perceptions of human motivation**. This not only helps in new understanding of the past but also in acquiring surer sense of past generations due to new interpretations and notions of events and people.
- Each school emphasised one or few aspects of human societies and interpreted the history accordingly.
- These schools tried to attain objectivity in their presentation.
- They made use of various sources for constructing history from their point of view.
- “History is the hard core interpretations surrounded by a pulp of disputable facts” E. H Carr.

THANK YOU