UNIT 1 GENERALISATION

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

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?

1.2 WHAT IS A GENERALISATION?

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.

1.4 OBJECTIONS TO GENERALISATION

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.

1.5 ROLE OF GENERALISATIONS

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. May be 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 generalide 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.

1.6 SOURCES OF GENERALISATION

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) Anther 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.

1.7 HOW TO IMPROVE ONE'S CAPACITY TO GENERALISE?

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 practioners 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 19th and early 20th 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.

1.8 SUMMARY

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.

1.9 EXERCISES

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?

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UNIT 2 CAUSATION

Structure

2.1 Introduction

2.2 What is Causality ?

2.3 Social Sciences and Causation

2.4 Historians and Causation

2.5 Summary

2.6 Exercises

2.7 Suggested Readings

2.1 INTRODUCTION

All scientific inquiry begins with the question 'why?' Why does oil float on water? Why do we have earthquakes? Why do famines occur? Why did England industrialise before Germany? Why was India colonised? In one form or another all disciplines ask the question `why?' History is no exception. Like other natural and social sciences it too addresses the 'why' interrogative. Even as historians study the past they try to explain why a particular event or phenomenon did or did not occur. They ask, for example, why did the Roman Empire decline? Why did World War I occur? Why did the British transfer power to India in August 1947? Why did Gandhi withdraw the Non-cooperation Movement? The writing of history thus begins with why questions. However, unlike many other social sciences history does not focus upon generalities. It does not explain a category of events but analyzes a specific occurrence. Instead of offering an explanation for why de-colonisation occurs, or why civilisations decline, or why revolutions occur, it examines why the British left India in 1947, why the Minoan population decimated, why the socialist revolution occurred first in Russia. Historians, in other words, explain the occurrence of specific events. In place of treating the event as an instance of a general category it perceives it as, to borrow a phrase from Patrick Gardiner, a unique particular. Consequently it concentrates on those dimensions that are specific to the given event and offers an account that explains fully why the event *E* happened when it did.

2.2 WHAT IS CAUSALITY?

Even though the event is taken to be a unique particular, historians nevertheless endeavor to explain its occurrence. The analysis of an event as a particular does not undermine either the effectiveness of the offered explanation or its claim to represent the truth. Like other social scientists, historians offer a complete explanation of the phenomenon under consideration, and they do this by determining what caused that event to occur. Search for causes is thus central to historical analysis. Up until the eighteenth century philosophers and historians commonly believed that the cause must be an antecedent event - one that occurred prior to the event that is being explained; and that the antecedent event must be regularly associated with the effect. However, following upon the work of John S. Mill, the cause is no longer identified as an event that occurs before. Rather it is conceived as a condition or a set of conditions that are always present when the event *E* occurs, and always absent when *E* does not occur

The cause, in other words, is a condition that is both necessary and sufficient for bringing about the given event *E***.** It is said to be necessary because its absence implies the

absence of the effect *E*, and it is sufficient because its presence yields the given result *E*. If a study shows that individuals with Vitamin A deficiency suffered from night-blindness, and in all those individuals where Vitamin A was present in sufficient measure, night-blindness did not occur, then all else being the same, we can say that deficiency of Vitamin A is the cause of night- blindness. We can designate Vitamin A as the cause because its absence meant night-blindness and its presence meant the absence of the effect – namely, night-blindness.

Three points need to be emphasised here. First, the relationship of necessity is significantly different from that of sufficiency. Second, the cause is considered to be a condition that is both necessary and sufficient; and third, constant conjunction is not an adequate indicator of a causal relationship. If in a given instance cardiac arrest leads to the death of a person, we may say that heart failure was a condition that was *sufficient* for producing the effect – namely, the death of a person. However to assert that cardiac arrest was a *necessary* condition for the death of the individual we need to show that the absence of cardiac arrest would have meant absence of the effect - death. If death could have occurred due to some other condition – for example, liver failure or hemorrhage, then cardiac arrest may have been a sufficient condition but it cannot be designated as a necessary condition for the occurrence of the event - death of the individual. Since the person could have died due to the presence of other conditions the absence of cardiac arrest would not have prevented the effect. Hence, it cannot be a condition that is necessary for the event under consideration. What is being suggested here is that **the relationship of necessity is different from that of sufficiency, and in philosophies of science the cause has been conceived as being both a necessary and a sufficient condition.**

If the cause is a necessary and sufficient condition, it implies that it is regularly associated with the given effect. That is, it is always present when the effect *E* occurs, and always absent when the event *E* is absent. **Constant conjunction is thus an important observable attribute of causation**. Further, the causal condition is almost always antecedent to the effect. However, this does not mean that a condition that is regularly observed before the event *E* takes place is the cause of the latter. Constant conjunction and spatial contiguity are features of a cause-effect linkage but the cause cannot be identified on this basis alone. On a record, songs appear in a specific sequence. However, the song that comes first is not the cause of the one that follows. Likewise, lightning may be regularly observed before we hear a thunder but this does not mean that it is the cause of the latter. It is possible that both lightning and thunder are the visible effects of an altogether different cause. What needs to be underscored here is that regular association is not by itself sufficient for claiming that the condition that is observed first is the cause of that which comes after. To show that something is the cause of an event we need to show that its absence would have implied the absence of the event being explained.

Similarly, listing events in the correct sequential order does not also provide an explanation of an event. We may enumerate in the correct time-sequence all that happened on a particular day but that may not offer an explanation of why *E* happened. For instance, simple listing of events that happened one-after-another may give us no indication why the concerned person met with an accident or fell ill. We may learn how a particular event occurred – e.g., the correct sequence in which things occurred when the accident took place but it cannot provide an explanation as to why the accident occurred or why the person was fatally injured. Likewise, the historian may place events that occurred from January 1947 to August 1947 in the proper time sequence, but these would not constitute an explanation of why the British left India in 1947. Once again, explanation or answering the question why requires something more then the mere sequencing of

events one-after- the-other in the correct order. At the very least it requires that we show that the presence of a particular condition, that may have come before, yielded that effect and that the absence of that condition may have meant non-occurrence of that event. In brief, identifying the cause is not a matter of placing things one-after-another. One needs to locate a condition that was necessary: that is, a condition without which the event may not have occurred.

2.3 SOCIAL SCIENCES AND CAUSATION

In the natural sciences researchers conduct controlled experiments to determine what is the necessary and sufficient condition. By controlling and manipulating one condition while all others remain exactly the same they determine the impact that the condition has on the effect. If the elimination of condition *C* results in the absence of *E* while all else is the same, then *C* is said to be the cause of *E*. In the social sciences it is not always possible, or even desirable, to conduct experiments under controlled conditions. For example, if we are analysing the cause of communal violence that occurred in a given region, it is not possible to set up a controlled experiment. Since the event that is being explained has already occurred, the experiment cannot be conducted in its natural setting. The experiment can only be re-created in an artificial or laboratory condition and it is indeed questionable whether we should produce conditions in which individuals inflict physical harm upon each other. In addition to it, there is the difficulty of finding exactly similar groups of individuals whose behaviour is replicable. Given all these considerations, conducting controlled experiments poses innumerable problems in the social sciences, and researchers in these disciplines do not rely on this technique for arriving at causal explanations.

Social scientists identify causes by using what John Stuart Mill called the Method of Agreement and the Method of Disagreement or Difference. The Method of Agreement draws an inventory of all those circumstances/conditions that are present whenever the event *E* occurs. It identifies a condition that is invariably present in all instances where *E* has occurred. The method of Difference, on the other hand, searches for that condition in terms of which the antecedent circumstances and the phenomenon differ. That is, a condition whose absence translates into the absence of that event. Social scientists combine these two methods to determine what caused *E* to occur. They pinpoint the cause by studying a number of positive and negative instances: instances where event of the type *E* occurred and situations where *E* did not occur. If in all cases where *E* occurred condition *C* was always present and in all cases where *E* did not occur condition *C* alone was absent, then *C* is regarded as the cause of *E*.

To take an example: if the analysis shows that in all instances where factionalism existed Congress lost elections and in all those states where the party was free of factional politics, it won the support of the voters, then it can be said that factionalism was the cause of party losing elections. The causal condition is identified here by studying contrast cases – contexts where Congress won elections and states where it lost. It is of course assumed that the states compared differed only in this one aspect and that all other prevailing conditions were more or less the same. If, for instance, factionalism is found in states where Congress has been loosing successive elections or where opposition parties have been increasing their vote percentage over the years, then factionalism cannot be identified as the cause. Alternately, if the states in which Congress won elections were marked by a high concentration of rural population and there is previously some evidence that these are sections that have supported the Congress in the past, then again one cannot easily conclude that factionalism is the cause of winning elections. And, if the states in which it lost elections were also those that had witnessed a spate of communal violence, then again, the disparity in initial conditions existing in the two kinds

of states would prevent one from inferring that factionalism is the causal condition. The existence of one common condition – namely, factionalism within the party - in states where it lost elections and the absence of that one condition in states where it won is not in itself sufficient for claiming that factionalism is the cause of lost electoral support. The election may have been won and lost due to completely different causal conditions. Hence, the crucial factor is that all other conditions in the compared situations must be "at par". If the compared units differ in significant respects then it is not possible to infer with any degree of certainty what the causal condition is.

It follows from the above discussion that in social sciences a cause is identified by studying a number of situations that are similar in terms of their antecedent conditions but different with regard to the outcome or phenomenon that occur. However, what happens when comparable contexts are not available? What happens when we study and try to explain events are unique? How do we then identify a cause? One option is to say that in all such cases there is no satisfactory way of identifying the causal condition. Indeed several philosophers have, on account of the distinctiveness of the object and purpose of inquiry in history, argued that we abandon the search for causes. The natural sciences, they maintain, are generalising sciences. They aim to discover law-like generalisations. History, by comparison, focuses on that which is unique to the case being analysed. Further, natural sciences seek to gain knowledge with a view to enhancing technological control. Causes are sought not only to explain why something happened but also to predict circumstances in which we might expect similar events to occur and what might be controlled – manipulated or altered – to ensure that the said event does not occur. History, on the other hand, seeks to *understand* why the event occurred. It tries to make sense of a phenomenon by identifying the meaning that it had in a given historically defined context. Since its aim is to enhance communication and interaction, it is permeated by a different knowledge interest and therefore relies on a different methodological orientation. In place of identifying a condition that causes or produces a given effect it makes sense of the event by treating it as an expression of a specific world-view. It, in other words, explores the link between life, expression and a historical *weltanschauung* and understands rather than explains a given event.

Here it needs to be emphasised that determining the cause of an event that is unique, or a one-time occurrence, poses a serious challenge. Historians, who affirm the relevance and importance of causal form of inquiry, have met this challenge by redefining the idea of cause. In particular they have attempted to dissociate explanation from prediction and argued that the cause refers to a condition that made the *crucial difference* in a given situation. While the cause was previously associated with the assertion, 'whenever *C* also *E'*, they claim that the identified cause *C* only explains a given event *E* rather than all events of the type *E*. In saying that the cause explains fully why a specific event occurred at a given time and place, they suggest that historians search for a condition that was necessary *under the circumstances.* They make, what might be called, singular causal assertions.

2.4 HISTORIANS AND CAUSATION

In offering singular causal assertions historians separate explanations from predictions. They argue that a complete explanation does not entail accurate predictions. In fact several philosophers of history maintain that explanation and prediction are two different kinds of activities, involving different kinds of evidence and justifications. Prediction assumes regularity and recurrence of sequence. We can say that the sun will rise in the East tomorrow and the day after that only because we believe that the structure of the universe and the laws by which it is governed will continue to operate unchanged. It is the assumption that patterns and regularities observed today will recur and repeat

themselves that allows us to predict the future course of events. However, this assumption is irrelevant for stipulating causal connections. We can determine with reasonable accuracy what caused *E* to occur even when *E* is a one-time occurrence, or a unique particular. In the absence of the presupposition that social reality will remain unaltered and existing patterns will recur we cannot claim that whenever *C* occurs, *E* will follow.

A distinction is here made between explanation and prediction. In empiricist theories of science, explanation and prediction are inextricably linked together. Indeed one is considered to be a condition of the other. When it is said that *C* is the cause (necessary and sufficient condition) of the event *E*, it is simultaneously suggested that whenever *C* is present *E* will necessarily follow. And, *vice-versa* a successful prediction is considered to be an indicator of the accuracy of the explanation. Thus, explanation and prediction are taken as two sides of the same coin. In history, particularly, this proposed link between explanation and prediction is questioned. Instead it is argued that causal inquiry and explanation is distinct from the act of prediction. Complete explanation does not entail a successful prediction and *vice-versa* a successful prediction is no indication of the accuracy or the truth of the offered explanation. We may, on seeing dark clouds in the sky, predict accurately that there will be rainfall in the next twelve hours. But making a successful prediction here does not give us any explanation of why this event occurs. Similarly, on seeing red spots on the face of a child we may accurately predict that he is coming down with measles. But once again making the correct prediction is no indication of the fact that we have an adequate explanation of this occurrence. The act of prediction is thus different from that of explanation, and historians may not offer predictions but they nevertheless can, and do, provide complete explanation of why a particular event occurred.

By de-linking explanation from prediction, historians not only challenge the 'general law model' of explanation used by positivists, they redefine the concept of causation. In place of conceiving the cause as a necessary and sufficient condition they see it as a condition that is *necessary under the circumstances*. The need to visualise the causal condition as one that is necessary under the circumstances is further reinforced by the realisation that most historical events are over-determined. That is, they are characterised by the presence of more than one causal condition. Since each of these conditions could have independently yielded the same result, the analyst cannot specify a condition that was necessary in absolute terms. All that can be said is that it was necessary under the circumstances.

Let me elucidate this further with the help of an illustration. If we know that rioting mobs are headed towards an assembly hall with the intention of burning the place, and around the same time lightning could strike the building, thereby burning down the hall, then we cannot say which was the necessary and sufficient condition for the burning of the hall. The assembly hall could have been burnt by the violent crowd as well as by lightning. If the crowds had not planned on this action, the lightening would have burnt the hall and, *vice-versa*, even if lightening had not struck the building the marauding crowds would have yielded the same result. Thus the absence of one condition would not have meant the absence of the effect – namely, burning down of the hall. In situations of this kind, which are marked by the presence of two or more conditions each of which could have produced the same result, we cannot identify the necessary moment. All we can do is to say which condition intervened first. If lightning struck before the crowds could embark on their action we can say that it was the condition that was *necessary under the circumstances*.

Situations that historians analyse are, it is said, of a similar kind. Being unique and most often over-determined, the researcher can at best identify a condition that was necessary

under the circumstances. For example, based on existing understanding of the processes of de-colonization and a survey of available documents, the historian may conclude that popular assertions against the Raj as well as adverse balance of payments were making it extremely difficult for the colonizing power to continue ruling over India. A calculation of the British military and strategic interests in the region also favoured the transfer of power to India. Since each of these conditions pushed in the same direction what might we identify as the cause of British leaving India, and more specifically, of British leaving India in August 1947? The historian seeks to answer this question by pinpointing a condition that made the *crucial difference* in the given conjuncture. Available documentary evidence is drawn upon to assess which of these conditions was perceived by the British as being most significant, and which generated pressures of a kind that made the administration of the colony extremely difficult, if not also unviable at that point.

In identifying the causal condition that was necessary under the circumstances evidence is drawn from within the case. Comparisons are made with analogous situations before and perceptions and actions of different agents are used to assess the relative significance of different existing conditions. Objective conditions and subjective reasons are thus woven together to determine what made the crucial difference. Since most historical analysis draws upon purposes and actions of agents as well as operating external conditions it is sometimes said that historians explain a given event /phenomenon by describing how it happened. That is, they answer the 'Why' interrogative by analyzing what happened and how it happened. Two points need to be made in this regard. First, as was mentioned earlier, merely placing events in a sequence does not provide an explanation of an event. Telling a story with a beginning, middle and end is therefore never enough. At the very least the historian needs to identify the configuration of external material structures within which particular actions are conceived and performed, and within which they yield a specific result. Second, and this is of the utmost importance, an exhaustive description of all possible conditions and range of actions does not constitute a causal explanation. The latter requires that we determine a condition that was *necessary* at least under the circumstances.

The difference then between simple story telling and causal analysis of a historical event is that the latter, unlike the former, focuses upon what made the crucial difference. It does not merely link the different moments together in a way that makes sense but goes a step further. It identifies a condition in the absence of which the event may not have occurred at the precise time that it did. In other words, it locates a necessary moment. The necessary moment may be a single condition or a part of a complex of conditions. Analysing the issue of transfer of power to India in 1947, a historian may argue that mutiny in the naval ratings made the crucial difference. That is, it was the causal condition – the necessary moment in the absence of which transfer of power may not have taken place at that time. Alternately, the historian may argue that mutiny in the naval ranks was the necessary moment of a set of popular mobilisations and these collectively yielded the result – namely, transfer of power.

When historians endorse the latter path they define the cause as an INUS condition. That is, the cause is considered to be a condition that is an *insufficient* but *necessary* moment of a complex of conditions that is *unnecessary* but *sufficient* for producing the given event. Let me explain it further. In identifying mutiny in naval ratings as the cause all that the historian is saying is that this condition made the crucial difference. Had it not been for this mutiny transfer of power may not have occurred in August 1947. Further, the mutiny in naval ratings yielded this effect in association with other popular assertions, such as, the Quit India movement and peasant rebellions. Collectively these constituted a complex of minimal sufficient condition and in this complex the

mutiny in navy was the necessary moment. However, this complex of conditions cannot be regarded as necessary for the event (transfer of power). Had this condition not prevailed, adverse balance of payments or calculation of strategic interests may still have led to the British leaving India, albeit not in August of 1947. Consequently, popular mobilisations cannot be regarded to be a complex that is necessary in absolute terms. All we can say with confidence is that under the given circumstances it was sufficient to bring about that result. The mutiny was, in this way, a necessary moment of a complex of conditions that are collectively unnecessary. The same event could have been produced by another set of conditions but at this time the mutiny along with other popular mobilisations was sufficient for producing the result – namely, transfer of power to India.

What bears some repetition here is that historians redefine the idea of causality. Instead of treating the cause as a necessary and sufficient condition they regard it as an INUS condition or a condition that is necessary under the circumstances. The idea of causality is conceptualised in this form because the events that they deal with are taken to be unique occurrences, constituted by a conjuncture that is specific to that context. And the context itself is characterised by the presence of several conditions each of which could produce the same result though not in the same way or at the same time. The redefinition of cause does not however affect the explanatory potential of the inquiry. To put it in another way, even though the causal condition is seen as being necessary only under the circumstances, or in conjunction with other conditions, nevertheless it explains fully what happened and why it happened. It does not allow us to predict what might happen in other similar circumstances with any degree of certainty but it does enable us to explain the event that occurred.

When the cause is defined as a necessary moment of a complex of condition or as a condition that is necessary under the circumstances, it is assumed that the historian is only explaining why the event *E* occurred in this instance. The explanation is complete but it is offered *post-hoc* (i.e., after the event has occurred) and no prediction follows necessarily from this explanation. To use an example given by J.L.Aronson, 'Suppose we had a gun that shot bullets through a force field at a screen, what is special about the force field is that it is composed of force vectors that change with time in a completely randomized fashion'. In this situation we cannot predict in advance where the bullet might land, but once the bullet makes it to the screen we can explain as to why it reached in that position. We can, after the event, examine the speed of the bullet, the angle at which the vectors must have been when the bullet hit it, the position of the gun, friction and other intervening elements, and on the basis of these explain why the bulled arrived at the point *P* on the screen. The offered explanation is complete in so far as it provides a satisfactory answer to the `why' interrogative but it cannot help us to predict where the next bullet will arrive on the screen.

Historical explanations are often of a similar kind. They explain fully what happened and why it happened but do not, by and large, predict. Laws may be implicit in the stipulated causal connections but the historian neither "dredges up" these laws nor regards it as his task to do so (see, Dray 1970). Historical accounts do not aim to discover general laws and the causal explanations they offer must therefore be distinguished from predictions. The fact that they do not seek to predict or pinpoint a set of laws and the initial conditions under which they operate does not imply that they offer partial explanations. Contra what is argued in the "Covering Law model" used by Carl Hempel and other positivist philosophies of social science (Hempel 1959), historians explain completely what happened through singular causal assertions.

What needs also to be clarified here is that these singular causal assertions are distinct from explanations involving reasons and purposes. Events that historians study – e.g.,

rebellions, battles, treaties of peace, movements, revolts, etc. – are all outcomes of the actions of individuals and groups. In studying these events historians often make sense of what happened and why it happened by mapping the intentions and motivations of actors. They explain, for instance, the withdrawal of Non-cooperation movement in terms of the intentions of its leaders – in this case, Gandhi. The reasons they accept are at times those that are avowed by the agents themselves, or else, those that can be deduced from the purposes that are either averred by them or purposes that may reasonably be attributed to the agents. Whatever be the basis of identifying the relevant reason what is significant is that events are treated not merely as happenings in the external world, rather they are perceived as performances of particular agents that can be explained by uncovering their reasons and motivations. Such reason-action explanations are frequently treated as being similar to causal explanations and reasons are often confused with causes. It appears that reasons explain by building a link between purposes/motivations and action just as causal explanations link a cause with an effect. However, even though beliefs and motives are often seen as producing a given event it is essential to remember that reasons are not the "right kind of causes" (Ryle 1980:109).

In a causal explanation, causes are external conditions operating in the physical world and the cause is linked to the effect contingently. Reasons, by comparison, are linked internally and the connection between a reason and action is a logical one. For example, when we explain why *A* murdered *B* by pointing to revenge as the motive for this action we suggest an intrinsic link between the motive – reason – and the action – murder. We also assume that referring to revenge as the reason for murder does not require any further elucidation for the latter can follow from the former. While we may need evidence to show that murder was committed by the said person and that he could have had this motivation, the link between motive and action requires no external corroboration. Indeed the action is said to follow from the motive and having this motivation provides good reason for assuming that he could have performed this action. Similarly when we say that the loss of popular support was the reason for the decision to withdraw the strike an internal connection is stipulated between the reason and the action. Further, the postulated connection rests upon the assumption of rational behaviour. It presupposes a background of beliefs that prompt the given action. For instance, the decision to withdraw the strike because it was loosing support among the cadre assumes that the leadership considered it desirable to withdraw before the strike fizzles out; or that they preferred to call off the strike so that they do not loose the gained advantage. Such rational calculations of interests is an integral part of reason-action explanation but these considerations are not, and must not indeed be, considered as initial conditions under which certain laws operate.

Reason-action explanations are teleological in nature. Here, the desired end-state that is to be realized through the action is also the motive or the purpose. It therefore logically precedes the action. In a causal explanation, on the other hand, the effect is subsequent to the cause. That is, it comes after the causal condition and it follows it due to the presence of certain conjunctive conditions. Historians, in offering causal explanations seek to identify the set of conditions that collectively yield a given effect; and within that collectivity they aim to pinpoint a condition that made the crucial difference. Such explanations are distinct from explanations based on reasons as well as the covering law model used by the positivists. In addition, as was argued earlier on, these are explanations that tell us why a specific event occurred at a given time. They are, in other words, singular causal statements that seek to explain and not predict future events. The relative neglect of prediction in these explanations however does not weaken these explanations nor does it render them inadequate. The offered explanations are complete and their truth can be debated by the community of historians on the basis of available evidence and documentation.

2.5 SUMMARY

The discipline of history, as other social sciences, constantly seeks the causes which give rise to various phenomena. The search for causes is crucial to historical analysis. The causes are **not** specific events which occur before certain other events whose origins can then be traced back to the former. Rather the causes are conceived as a set of conditions under which particular events take place. These conditions provide both the necessary and sufficient ground for the occurrence of certain events. However, unlike in the natural sciences, the search for causes in history cannot be conducted in a controlled atmosphere as in a laboratory. Instead, the social scientists look for similar and different conditions for the occurrence of an event. In other words, they look for the conditions which are present and those which are absent when an event takes place. Moreover, causes are generally sought to explain a phenomenon and not to predict it.

2.6 EXERCISES

1) What is causality? How is it used to explain an event or phenomenon?

2) Discuss the different approaches of the natural scientists and the social scientists in seeking the causes of a phenomenon.

3) Discuss the method followed in history for establishing the causality and explaining the occurrence of an event.

2.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 3 OBJECTIVITY AND INTERPRETATION

Structure

3.1 Introduction

3.2 What is Objectivity?

3.3 Development of the Principle of Objectivity

3.4 Critiques of Objectivity

- 3.4.1 Constraints of Evidence and Individual Bias
- 3.4.2 Cultural Relativism
- 3.4.3 Linguistic and Postmodern Turn

3.5 Historian's Concern

3.6 Possibility of Objectivity

3.7 Summary

3.8 Exercises

3.9 Suggested Readings

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The principle of objectivity has been the most important principle of the Western historiography over the ages. In fact, it is the foundation on which the edifice of historical profession stands. In the Western world, the historians since the early ages have believed that their writings about the past are true and objective. This belief was challenged by many philosophers and thinkers who said that the quest for objectivity was futile. However, the mainstream of historiography remained stuck to the notion of objectivity. In the words of Peter Novick, an American historian and a radical critic of the principle of objectivity, it was 'the rock on which the (historical) venture was constituted, its continuing raison d'etre.' Most, if not all, historians wrote in the belief that their writings presented an objective picture of the world. Even when they disagreed among themselves, they believed that their accounts were more objective than those of others whom they criticised. Thus the historical battles were fought on the grounds of objectivity. However, it is since the 1970s that the notion of objectivity faced its most serious challenge. Now it has become rather difficult to forcefully assert that objectivity is possible to achieve in the writing of history. In fact, some of the critics of objectivity even doubt whether it is desirable to achieve it. The controversy has become really bitter, even though most of the functioning historians still go about their work believing in the possibility of presenting a true account of the past. This Unit will acquaint you with many sides of this controversy.

3.2 WHAT IS OBJECTIVITY?

Objectivity has been the founding principle of the historiographical tradition in the West. Right since the days of Herodotus, the historians have believed in the separation of the subject and the object, in the distinction between the knower and known and in the possibility to recover the past. Peter Novick, a critic of the principle of objectivity, has clearly defined it in the following words:

> 'The principal elements of the ideal of [objectivity] are well known and can be briefly recapitulated. The assumptions on which it rests include a commitment to the reality of the past, and to the truth as correspondence to that reality; a sharp separation between knower and known, between fact and value, and above all, between history and fiction. Historical facts are seen as prior to and independent of interpretation : the value of an interpretation is judged by how well it accounts for the facts; if contradicted by the facts, it must be abandoned. Truth is one, not perspectival. Whatever patterns exist in history are "found", not "made". Though successive generations of historians might, as their perspectives shifted, attribute different significance to the events in the past, the meaning of those events was unchanging.'

(Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream : The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession*, Cambridge : CUP, 1988, pp. 1-2)

For this purpose, however, the historian has to be impartial and should not take sides. He/she should be able to suspend his/her personal beliefs and rely only on the truth of the evidences. In the words of Peter Novick :

> 'The objective historian's role is that of a neutral, or disinterested, judge; it must never degenerate into that of an advocate or, even worse, propagandist. The historian's conclusions are expected to display the standard judicial qualities of balance and evenhandedness. As with the judiciary, these qualities are guarded by the insulation of the historical profession from social pressures or political influence, and by the individual historian avoiding partisanship or bias—not having any investment in arriving at one conclusion rather than another. Objectivity is held to be at grave risk when history is written for utilitarian purposes. One corollary of all this is that historians, as historians, must purge themselves of external loyalties : the historian's primary allegiance is to "the objective historical truth", and to professional colleagues who share a commitment to cooperative, cumulative efforts to advance toward that goal."

Thomas Haskell, a historian, has questioned this conflation of objectivity and neutrality. In his article 'Objectivity is not Neutrality', he has argued that objectivity and neutrality are two different things, even though in most of nineteenth-century historiography they were equated with each other. Now, 'among the influential members of the historical profession the term has long since lost whatever connection it may once have had with passionlessness, indifference, and neutrality'. He cites the cases of historians, particularly, Eugene Genovese, the American historian on slavery, whose history is objective, though not neutral. Haskell further clarifies his position :

> 'My conception of objectivity … is compatible with strong political commitment. It pays no premium for standing in the middle of the road, and it recognizes that scholars are as passionate and as likely to be driven by interest as those they write about. It does not value even detachment as an end in itself, but only as an indispensable prelude or preparation for the achievement of higher levels of understanding ….'

We, therefore, now have two somewhat differing perceptions of objectivity, so far as its relation with neutrality is concerned. However, in other areas such as objectivity's position as the founding principle of the historical profession, its distance from propaganda and from wishful thinking, its reliance on evidence and logic, and its requirement for a minimum level of detachment are common to all its definitions.

5.2 DEVELOPMENT OF THE PRINCIPLE OF OBJECTIVITY

The belief that there is a reality of the past and it is possible to historically capture it has been engrained in the dominant tradition of the Western historiography. The mainstream historiography in the Western world since the time of Herodotus maintained that the historical records referred to a real past and real human beings. The objectivist tradition believed in both the reality of the past as well as in the possibility of its mirror representation. It maintained that there was a correspondence between the intentions and actions of the people and the historians should exert themselves to comprehend the mental world of the people in the past.

The development of modern science added a new dimension to this belief. It was now asserted that the methods used in the sciences could be applicable to various branches of human knowledge. The Positivists asserted this claim most strongly, even as it developed as a common belief in the nineteenth century. August Comte, the founder of Positivism, believed that the inductive method used in the natural sciences needed to be applied to the history as well as the humanities in general. He also claimed scientific status for the humanities. He thought that all societies operated through certain general laws which needed to be discovered. According to him, all societies historically passed through three stages of development. These stages were :

i) The 'theological' or fictitious stage, during which the human mind was in its infancy and the natural phenomena were explained as the results of divine or supernatural powers.

ii) The 'metaphysical' or abstract stage is transitional in the course of which the human mind passes through its adolescence. In this stage, the processes of nature were explained as arising from occult powers.

iii) The 'Positive' stage which witnessed the maturity of human mind and the perfection of human knowledge. Now there was no longer a search for the causes of the natural phenomena but a quest for the discovery of their laws. Observation, reasoning and experimentation were the means to achieve this knowledge. This was the scientific age which is the final stage in the development of human societies as well as human minds.

The followers of Comte, also known as the Positivists, time and again asserted the existence of universal laws applicable to all societies and all branches of human knowledge.

However, it was another tradition which laid the foundation of objectivist history in the nineteenth century. It was the tradition starting with Niebuhr and Ranke in Germany. Although it was Niebuhr who first introduced the critical method in writing of history, it was Ranke who truly and elaborately laid the foundation of a genuinely 'objective' historiography. He clearly distinguished history from literature and philosophy. By doing so, he attempted to rid it of an overdose of imagination and metaphysical speculation. For him, the historians' job was to investigate the past on its own terms and to show to the readers 'how it essentially was'. It did not mean, however, that Ranke had a blind faith in the records. He, in fact, wanted the historians to subject the sources to strict examination and look for their internal consistency so as to determine whether they were genuine or later additions. He wanted the historians to critically examine and verify all the sources before reposing their trust in them.

But, once it was proved that the records were genuine and belonged to the age which the historian was studying, the historian may put complete faith in them. He called these records as 'primary sources' and maintained that these sources would provide the

foundations for a true representation of the contemporary period. Thus the historians should trust the archival records more than the printed ones which might be biased. He, however, believed that it was possible to reconstruct the past and that objectivity was attainable.

This trend emphasised that the facts were in the records which the historians needed to discover. If the historians were impartial, followed a proper scientific method and removed his / her personality from the process of investigation, it was possible to reconstruct the past from these facts. There was an enormous belief in the facts in the nineteenth and the early decades of the twentieth centuries. It was thought that once all the facts were known, it was possible to write 'ultimate history' which could not be superseded. As Lord Acton, the Regius Professor of History and the editor of the first edition of the *Cambridge Modern History*, said :

> 'Ultimate history we cannot have in this generation; but we can dispose of conventional history, and show the point we have reached on the road from one to the other, now that all information is within reach, and every problem has become capable of solution.'

This confidence in being able to get hold of all the sources and to write 'ultimate history', even though at a future date, was reflected in his belief to achieve complete objectivity which would transcend nationality, language and religion. Therefore, in his instructions to the contributors to the volumes of the *Cambridge Modern History*, he wrote :

> 'Contributors will understand that our Waterloo must be one that satisfies French and English, German and Dutch alike; that nobody can tell, without examining the list of authors, where the Bishop of Oxford laid down the pen and whether Fairburn or Gasquet, Libermann or Harrison took it up.'

This belief in possibility of uncovering all the sources and thus writing 'ultimate history' was asserted in an extremely popular text book in historical method by French historians, Langlois and Seignobos :

> 'When all the documents are known, and have gone through the operations which fit them for use, the work of critical scholarship will be finished. In the case of some ancient periods, for which documents are rare, we can now see that in generation or two it will be time to stop.'

The scientific status of history was forcefully asserted by J.B.Bury, Acton's successor to the Regius Chair at Cambridge. He believed that although history 'may supply material for literary art or philosophical speculation, she is herself simply a science, no less and no more'.

Even George Clark, in his general introduction to the second *Cambridge Modern History*, though he did not believe in the possibility of writing 'ultimate history', made a distinction between the 'hard core of facts' and the 'surrounding pulp of disputable interpretation'.

It is evident that in such thinking interpretation had very little role to play. The writing of history was simply related to the documents. It did not matter who the historian was as long as verified documents for the period were available. In this view, as E.H.Carr put it :

> 'History consists of a corpus of ascertained facts. The facts are available to historians in documents, inscriptions and so on, like fish in the fishmonger's slab. The historian collects them, takes them home, and cooks and serves them in whatever style appeals to him.'

But even before the nineteenth century ended, such beliefs started to look implausible. Application of some new techniques in archaeology and other areas uncovered ever-increasing information even about most ancient societies. Moreover, in the beginning of the twentieth century, historiography moved to other directions away from political history which the nineteenth-century historians specialised in. Social, economic and cultural histories began to be written. The historians started to look at already available documents from new perspectives and for different purposes. It was also pointed out that the works of even those historians, including Ranke, who believed in complete objectivity and professed the use of 'primary sources' were full of rhetorical elements and were many times based on printed 'secondary sources'.

The Rankean tradition was criticised in the twentieth century for being too naïve and being concerned with individual facts instead of the general patterns. Moreover, it was also criticised for being narrowly political and being concerned with elite individuals. The new trends in the historiography in the twentieth century focused on economy and society as opposed to the political and on common people as opposed to the elite. The most influential among these trends were the Marxist and the *Annales* schools of historiography. However, they shared with the Rankean tradition two fundamental themes. They believed that history could be written scientifically and objectively and that there was a direction in which the history was moving continuously.

However, the scientific and objectivist claims of historiography suffered somewhat between the wars. The records and facts were blatantly manipulated by various national political establishments. The continued tension led to partisan assertions both by various governments and respective intelligentsia. History-writing was also affected by this. After the Second World War, the Cold War also influenced the academia and prompted the intellectuals to take sides or, conversely, to hide their opinions to avoid repression.

But most of functioning historians retained their faith in the possibility of achieving objectivity in history. The proponents of objectivity from Ranke in the 1820s to Robert Fogel in the 1970s believed in the scientific status of history. They thought that if proper scientific methods of inquiry were used, it could be possible to get close to what really happened in the past. It was also necessary for them to make a sharp division between history and literature.

3.4 CRITIQUES OF OBJECTIVITY

By the late twentieth century the confidence in the objectivity and scientificity of history faced increasingly radical challenges. Anthropologists like Calude Levi-Strauss denied that the modern western civilisation, based on rationality and science, was in any way superior to the pre-modern, or even 'savage', communities so far as successfully coping with life is concerned. At another level, many historians and theorists of history began to think that history was closer to literature than to science. Moreover, the new linguistic theories starting with Sassure strongly professed that the role of language is not to refer to reality but to construct reality. Thus the world which is conveyed to us through language is not the real world. Similarly, the historians' accounts of the past does not refer to the real past, but to the world imagined by the historians. History, therefore, is the story told by the historian. In the words of Louis Mink, an American philosopher of history, 'Stories are not lived but told.' Mink further argued that life 'has no beginnings, middles or ends'. Such sequences belong only to stories as well as to history. And, therefore, history is much like the story.

Although they are related in certain ways, there are broadly three lines of criticism on the notion of historical objectivity : constraints of evidence and individual bias, cultural relativism and postmodern and linguistic turn.

3.4.1 Constraints of Evidence and Individual Bias

Ironically, it was Kant, the great German philosopher influenced by the ideas of Enlightenment, who propounded the ideas which were taken up by Dilthey, Croce, Collingwood and Oakeshott for criticising the philosophical quest that the human world could be comprehended in the same way as the natural world. Kant's formulation that there was a separation between the real world and the subject trying to make sense of it led to the idea that it was not possible to reconstruct the reality and that the correspondence theory of truth was not valid. This view was developed later to challenge the notion that history could be like science. It was, however, the tradition of philosophical thinking that followed Nietzsche which posed a more serious challenge to objectivist historiography.

Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911), a German philosopher, clearly demarcated between scientific knowledge and cultural knowledge. In his book, entitled *Introduction to Historical Knowledge* and published in 1883, and in some later articles, he differentiated between science and history on the basis of their different fields of research, different experiences and different attitudes of the researchers. According to him, while the scientist was external to the reality in nature, the historian was involved in the process of constructing reality. Thus, unlike the scientist, the historian could not be just an observer. It is, therefore, impossible to achieve objectivity in history-writing.

Benedetto Croce (1866-1952), the Italian historian and thinker, followed Dilthey in the belief that there is a fundamental distinction between science and history. According to him, the past exists only through the mind of the historian. He declared that 'all history is contemporary history'. It was, however, R.G,Collingwood (1889-1943), a British historian and philosopher, who provided a detailed exposition of this line of criticism. In his posthumously published book, *The Idea of History*, Collinwood elaborated his idea of historical relativism. He believed that 'the past simply as past is wholly unknowable'. Therefore, the history was not at all about the real past but a creation of the historian. In his opinion, 'historical thinking means nothing else than interpreting all the available evidence with the maximum degree of critical skill. It does not mean discovering what really happened….' Each historian writes his / her own history which may or may not have things in common with others. He wrote:

> 'St Augustine looked at history from the point of view of the early Christian; Tillamont, from that of a seventeenth-century Frenchman; Gibbon, from that of an eighteenth-century Englishman; Mommsen from that of a nineteenth-century German. There is no point in asking which was the right point of view. Each was the only one possible for the man who adopted it.'

History is, therefore, written by the people who are basically concerned about the present. And there is nothing wrong with it. Collingwood thought that 'since the past in itself is nothing, the knowledge of the past in itself is not, and cannot be, the historian's goal. His goal, as the goal of a thinking being, is knowledge of the present; to that everything must return, round that everything must revolve.'

Thus the present is, and should be, historian's only concern. And since all history is historian's ideas about the past, 'all history is the history of thought'.

E.H.Carr approvingly summarises some of these views. He says that the historians are products of their own times and their mental world is shaped by the ideas and politics of their contemporary world. They are driven by contemporary concerns and their viewing of the past is through the lens of the present. It is, therefore, difficult for them to be objective in the representation of the past. Their researches and presentations are always coloured by their present concerns. Even the evidences they collect do not present the whole picture of the past because they are chosen according to their contemporary

preoccupations and ideological bent. Moreover, even the records which the people in the past bequeathed to us are selective. In Carr's words, 'Our picture has been preselected and predetermined for us, not so much by accident as by people who were consciously or unconsciously imbued with a particular view and thought the facts which supported that view worth preserving.' It is difficult to rely upon the evidences and be complacent about the facts because 'the facts of history never come to us 'pure', since they do not and cannot exist in a pure form: they are always refracted through the mind of the recorder.' It is in this light that Carr concludes :

> 'No documents can tell us more than what the author of the document thought – what he thought had happened, what he thought ought to happen or would happen, or perhaps only what he wanted others to think he thought, or even only what he himself thought he thought.'

Thus there are two levels at which the process of selection goes on : one by the contemporary recorder who decides what is worth recording and second by the historian who further narrows the selection by deciding what is worth presenting. In this opinion, the past, therefore, is doubly constructed for us.

3.4.2 Cultural Relativism

Inspired by the cultural anthropologist, Clifford Geertz, some of the recent historical thinkers have argued that the historians' accounts of the past are coloured by the ideas, concepts and language of their own societies. This means that such narratives are necessarily influenced by the cultural prejudices and social preoccupations of the historians. Since different cultures perceive the world differently, the descriptions of a different society or of the past, which belongs to a different culture, cannot be objective. These descriptions are culturally determined. Thus a solar eclipse may be described variously by people belonging to different societies. Similarly, the death of a king may be attributed to evil spirits, illness or conspiracy by his enemies. Therefore, the history written by the historian is shaped by the concepts and beliefs of his / her own culture. Paul A. Roth has argued in support of this belief that 'There is no warrant for maintaining that there is some static past world which diligent research in the archives … uncovers.' He, therefore, suggests that it is important to rid 'oneself of a notion of historical truth', because

> 'past events exist, qua events, only in terms of some historically situated conception of them. The notion of a historical truth for events, that is, a perspective on happenings untainted by human perception and categorisation, proves to be incoherent. There exists a world not of our own making, but any subdivision of it into specific events is our doing, not nature's.'

Moreover, Geertz also derives from the new linguistic theories in his conception of culture as an 'interworked system of construable signs'. In his opinion, culture should be seen as 'an assemblage of texts' which are 'imaginative works built out of social materials'. Even society is 'organised in terms of symbols … whose meaning … we must grasp if we are to understand that organisation and formulate its principles.' Thus society and culture become 'texts' whose meanings can be understood only through semiotic codes. He further emphasised the point about the textual nature of society and culture by asserting that 'the real is as imagined as the imaginary'. In such a theoretical framework, any notion of reality, and history, disappears. As Gabrielle Spiegel, an historian of medieval Europe, remarked:

> 'If the imaginary is real and the real imaginary and there are no epistemological grounds for distinguishing between them, then it is impossible to create an explanatory hierarchy that establishes a causal relationship between history and literature, life and thought, matter and meaning.'

3.4.3 Linguistic and Postmodern Turn

This tradition offers the most radical critique of the possibility of retrieving truth from the past. It considers language, instead of reality, as constitutive of social meaning and human consciousness. It all started with Ferdinand de Saussure, a Swiss linguist, who propounded the theory of structural linguistics. His theories influenced many intellectual movements such as structuralism, semiotics and poststructuralism.

In his book, *Course in General Linguistics*, posthumously published in 1916, Saussure radically questioned the referential function of language. According to him, language is a close autonomous system and words in any language (which may be called 'signifiers') refer to concepts (which may be called 'signified') and not to concrete things in the world. In other words, the language does not refer to real things in the world. It is not a medium to communicate meaning of the world, and the relationship between the language and the world is arbitrary. Language, according to Saussure, creates meaning on its own and human thoughts are constituted by language.

Rolland Barthes, a renowned French linguist and thinker, carried the arguments further. According to him, the claim of the historians to write about the reality of the past is fake. The history written by them is not about the past but 'an inscription on the past pretending to be a likeness of it, a parade of signifiers masquerading as a collection of facts'. According to Barthes, historians' description of the past basically refers to a number of concepts about the past and not the reality of the past. He states that :

> 'Like any discourse with "realistic" claims, the discourse of history thus believes it knows only a two-term semantic schema, referent and signifier…. In other words, in "objective" history, the "real" is never anything but an unformulated signified, sheltered behind the apparent omnipotence of the referent. This situation defines what we might call the *reality effect*.'

Thus Barthes considers objectivity as 'the product of what might be called the referential illusion'. This illusion lies in the historians' belief that there is a past world to be discovered through meticulous research. In fact, the past, which the historians refer to, is all their own creation. All the paraphernalia fashioned by the historical profession such as verbatim quotation, footnotes, references, etc. are façade to create a make-believe world which the readers may consider real. In fact, Barthes says, these are the devices to produce the 'reality effect' which may persuade the readers to believe in the world created by the historian.

The most radical challenge to history-writing came from the theory of deconstruction developed by Jacques Derrida. It completely denied the possibility of human beings to comprehend reality outside the language-system of which they are a part. And the language does not refer to an external reality but is a self-contained system which has no relationship to reality. Even the author has no role to play in determining the meaning of the text. Moreover, the language itself has no logical and coherent pattern. Derrida considered language as a system of arbitrary codification without any fixed meaning. Thus the text contains several meanings which may be at variance with each other. Derrida states that a text

> 'is henceforth no longer a finished corpus of writing, some content enclosed in a book or its margins, but a differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself, to other differential traces. Thus the text overruns all the limits assigned to it so far.'

Therefore, Derrida proposes the use of 'deconstruction' to reveal the hidden meanings in a text. However, deconstruction ultimately does not bring out any meaning from the

text. It only shows the incapacity of language to refer to any reality outside its own boundaries. In Derrida's difficult prose, this process is explained:

> 'Through this sequence of supplements a necessity is announced: that of an infinite chain, ineluctably multiplying the supplementary mediations that produce the sense of the very thing they defer: the mirage of the thing itself, of immediate presence, of original perception.'

Gabrielle Spiegel, an historian of medieval period, critically puts Derrida's position in slightly simpler language as follows:

> 'Behind the language of the text stands only more language, more texts, in an infinite regress in which the presence of the real and the material is always deferred, never attainable. According to deconstruction, we are confined within a "prison house of language" (to use the fashionable Nietzschean phrase) from which there is no exit….'

If the words in the language cannot refer to any external reality, if the language has no fixed meaning and if the text contains infinite meanings, how it is possible to write history objectively. It is precisely this that the deconstructionists are trying to attack. As Richard Evans points out:

> 'They imply that authors can no longer be regarded as having control over the meaning of what they write. In the infinite play of signification that constitutes language. The meaning of a text changes every time it is read. Meaning is put into it by the reader, and all meanings are in principle equally valid. In history, meaning cannot be found in the past; it is merely put there, each time differently, and with equal validity, by different historians. There is no necessary or consistent relation between the text of history and the texts of historians. The texts which survive from the past are as arbitrary in their signification as any other texts, and so too are texts which use them.'

Other historians have also expressed their apprehensions regarding dissolution of meaning. Thus Lawrence Stone remarked that 'If there is nothing outside the text, then history as we have known it collapses altogether, and fact and fiction become indistinguishable from one another'. Gabrielle Spiegel also expressed her concern that 'if texts – documents, literary works, whatever – do not transparently reflect reality, but only other texts, then historical study can scarcely be distinguished from literary study, and the "past" dissolves into literature'.

These apprehensions were not wide of the mark as was proved by the works of Louis Mink, a philosopher of history, and Hayden White, an American historian and theorist. Mink spoke about an internal contradiction in history-writing ;

> 'So we have a … dilemma about the historical narrative: as historical it claims to represent, through its form, part of the real complexity of the past, but as narrative it is a product of imaginative construction, which cannot defend its claim to truth by any accepted procedure of argumentation or authentication.'

Hayden White is more extreme in considering that the historical narrative cannot lay any claim to truth and it should be considered as a form of fiction. In many books and articles, White argues that there is no difference between history and fiction. In his view, historical writings are 'verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much invented as found and the forms of which have more in common with their counterparts in literature than they have with those in sciences'.

Closely allied with this is the postmodernist position which considers that modern historiography is too closely related to western imperialist expansion to be impartial. It has all along justified the notion of the superiority of modern Europe over other peoples and cultures. Therefore, its claims to objectivity and impartiality are suspect.

3.5 HISTORIAN'S CONCERN

In the recent past many historians have started expressing concern about this total denial of the possibility of achieving objectivity. Lawrence Stone, a British-American historian, stated it clearly as follows :

> 'During the last twenty-five years, the subject-matter of history – that is events and behaviour – and the problem – that is explanation of change over time – have all been brought seriously into question, thus throwing the profession, more especially in France and America, into a crisis of self-confidence about what it is doing and how it is doing it.'

According to Stone, these threats to historical profession came from three different sources which were related – the theory of deconstruction developed by Jacques Derida, cultural anthropology enunciated by Clifford Geertz and the New Historicism.

Another historian, Gabrielle Spiegel, is equally concerned about this development. She outlines the process thus :

> '… the paradigms that have governed historical and literary study since the nineteenth century no longer hold unquestioned sway. The confident, humanist belief that a rational, "objective" investigation of the past permits us to recover "authentic" meanings in the historical texts has come under severe attack in postmodernist critical debate. At stake in this debate are a number of concepts traditionally deployed by historians in their attempts to understand the past : causality, change, authorial intent, stability of meaning, human agency and social determination.'

Based on this observation, she concludes that 'Looking at the current critical climate from the vantage point of a historian, the dominant impression one takes away is that of the dissolution of history, of a flight from "reality" to language as the constitutive agent of human consciousness and the social production of meaning.'

These are not misplaced concerns. The postmodernists also think the same way that their theories would lead to the withering of history. Keith Jenkins, a postmodern thinker, proclaims the demise of both the 'upper and lower case histories'. He says that 'history now appears to be just one more foundationless, positioned expression in a world of foundationless, positioned expressions'.

Even before that, Peter Novick, concluded his famous book by stating that 'As a broad community of discourse, as a community of scholars united by common aims, common standards and common purposes, the discipline of history had ceased to exist'.

Patrick Joyce, another adherent to this idea, proclaims the 'end of history' because 'social history is the child of modernity' which does not engage in the process of 'innocently naming the world but creating it in its own political and intellectual image'.

Even in the field of Indian history, this concern is now increasingly evident. Many historians have reacted against the postmodernist tilt of the later subaltern studies. Prominent among such historians are Sumit Sarkar, Rosalind O'Hanlon, C.A.Bayly, Ranajit Das Gupta and David Washbrook. They have questioned the shift towards culturalism in theme and relativism in approach in Indian studies. We will discuss these issues in detail in Unit 25. Here we will conclude this section by reiterating that the postmodernist intervention in historiography has unsettled the long-lasting notions so far as the philosophy of history is concerned.

3.6 POSSIBILITY OF OBJECTIVITY

Faced with such radical attacks on the possibility of objectivity, one wonders whether it is at all possible to achieve any measure or kind of objectivity, whether it is possible to have any understanding of the past or of different societies and cultures. These critics have made us aware that a simple correspondence theory of truth is not quite reliable. Our knowledge of the world is mediated through our present concerns, ideological commitments, cultural environment, and intellectual atmosphere. The historians also accept that the sources are not unproblematic. They are suffused with levels of subjectivity which are sometimes quite alarming. And, despite our critical evaluation, it is not always possible to do away with the bias in our sources. Similarly, despite our conscious attempts, it is often difficult to annul all culturally induced biases in our own thinking as historians. Most historians now recognise that it is not possible to get a full picture of the past. Sources are varied and their interpretations are innumerable. In such situation any claim to fully represent the past may well be a hollow claim.

However, a total denial of the possibility of objectivity is to stretch the point to another extreme. The fact that total objectivity is not possible does not mean that no objectivity is possible, that any quest for objectivity is useless. Even though it may not be possible to tell the whole truth of the past does not mean that even partial truth cannot be reclaimed. As Noel Carroll, one of the critics of the relativist position, has pointed out :

> 'In one sense, historical narratives are inventions, viz., in the sense that they are made by historians; but it is not clear that it follows from this that they are made-up (and are, therefore, fictional).'

He further emphasises this point by stating that :

> '… narratives are a form of representation, and, in that sense, they are invented, but that does not preclude their capacity to provide accurate information. Narratives can provide accurate knowledge about the past in terms of the kinds of features they track, namely, the ingredients of *courses of events*, which include : background conditions, causes and effects, as well as social context, the logic of situations, practical deliberations, and ensuing actions.'

Carroll criticises Hayden White and others for believing that only a mirror-image of the past can satisfy the truth condition for a historical narrative. If it fails to provide a picture image of the past, it will remain at the level of fiction. So, either it is a mirror-image or it is a fiction; there is nothing in between. Many historians have reacted against this view and have appealed for what Brian Fay has called a 'dialectical middle ground which preserves the insights of each Attitude and prunes each of its excesses'.

3.7 SUMMARY

The principle of objectivity has provided the basis for the writing of history in the Western world since ancient times. That there is a past world beyond human subjectivity led to the attempt to recover it. This endeavour was given a solid foundation in the early nineteenth century by the German historian, Wilhelm Ranke. Several generations of historians followed Ranke and wrote objectivist and empiricist histories. This tradition is still broadly accepted within the historical profession. However, there have been many critiques of this tradition. The most common criticism focused on the inability of the historians to completely abandon their ideological and cultural biases. Moreover, it stressed that the reality of the past was impossible to recover due to bias in the sources. Another type of criticism emphasise that our knowledge of the world is entirely through the language which the historians or others speak and in which they write. Thus, there is no world beyond its linguistic representation. Any kind of objectivity is, therefore, impossible to achieve. These critiques sometimes question the very basis of historiography. Most practicing historians, however, tread a middle ground between the claims of total objectivity and its total denial by some critics.

3.8 EXERCISES

1) What is objectivity? Discuss the historiographical traditions which take the principle of objectivity as their basis.

2) Why are historians so concerned about the criticism levelled against the principle of objectivity? Do you think objectivity is possible to achieve in history-writing?

3) Who were the earliest critics of objectivity in history? What are their arguments? Do you agree with them?

4) Write notes on the following :

   a) Cultural Realtivism

   b) Linguistic Turn.

3.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

C.Behan McCullagh, *The Truth of History* (London, New York, Routledge, 1998).

C.Behan McCullagh, *The Logic of History* (London, New York, Routledge, 2004).

Richard J. Evans, *In Defence of History* (Granta Books, London, 1977).

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Keith Jenkins (ed.), *The Postmodern History Reader* (London and New York, Routledge, 1997).

Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, *Postmodern Theory : Critical Interrogations* (London, MacMillan, 1991).

Georg G. Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century : From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (Hanover and London, Wesleyan University Press, 1997).

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UNIT 4 HISTORY, IDEOLOGY AND SOCIETY

Structure

4.1 Introduction

4.2 Ideology in History

4.3 Meaning of Ideology

4.4 Some Later Writers

4.5 Summary

4.6 Exercises

4.7 Suggested Readings

4.1 INTRODUCTION

An ideology consists of a system of views, beliefs and ideas. It may render support for a socio-economic formation (along with its political position and alignments) by corroborating the latter's legitimacy in terms of some acceptable norms, cultural preferences and/or theoretical understanding of society and human living. Necessarily, the scope of an ideological position spreads over a wide range of human social appraisals and their choices about economic relations, ethical norms, religious faith, aesthetic appreciation, philosophical thought and political judgment. The question of support should not be taken only as encouragement for some *status quo*. An ideology may be linked to supporting a social order which is yet to emerge in actual reality. Indeed, any visionary aspiration for a major social change can form the core of an appropriate ideological thrust. An ideology can then be conservative, or radical, or even a mixture of those contrary trends. Thus, history abounds in examples of several conflicting ideologies in the same society, some bent on defending the *status quo*, and others striving for reforms or even a revolutionary social transformation to change the prevailing order of things. The important point is that ideologies contain and maintain visions of history and **create certain predispositions in interpreting history**.

4.2 IDEOLOGY IN HISTORY

History embraces past, present, and future. The future is yet to happen. It is real only in the sense of being what the interested people may envisage through their understanding of the past and the present. Such understanding of different persons and groups may be quite variable. Time past and time present are both perhaps present in time future. Any human society in historical process is not fully known on the evidence alone of what has actually happened. It calls for a perception of what is yet to happen and remains unknown from what is already known. The ideological elements have their important role in a historical account to commingle all those dimensions.

An example from ancient Greece may be taken to focus on the point in question. Thucydides, a citizen of Athens in the fourth and fifth centuries B.C., wrote a history of *The Peloponnesian War.* The cities at war were Athens and Sparta. Athens was a democratic state (but the slaves were precluded from all rights and the city was full of slaves at the peak of her liberty) and, from the 6th century B.C. onwards, had been passing through changes bearing on democratic advance, maritime extensions and naval power. In addition to expanding trade, maritime superiority led to the rise and growth

of an Athenian empire. All this could account for far-reaching changes in the ways of Athenian life and thought. On the contrary, Sparta was subject to oligarchic rule and extremely conservative in its attitude to economic activity and social design of living, their sanctions and prohibitions.

Though an Athenian, Thucydides was an anti-democrat and had little sympathy for the changes in Athens breaking away from her old moorings. In several places of *The Peloponnesion War,* Thucydides made descriptions and comments which betrayed his oligarchic sympathies. Also the coverage of the subject as planned by him concluded with the defeat of Athens in 404 B.C. While such an end could be used to demonstrate the weaknesses of the democratic systems, the actual course of events in the subsequent year moved in a different direction. Even with their largely diminished manpower, the Athenian democrats rallied back and defeated the oligarchic forces which were ruling Athens with the support of a Spartan garrison stationed in the city. No doubt the clash of interests between the democrats and the oligarchs had its links with variable economic interests. On the whole, however, the sway of particular moral principles, the conflicting points of view evoked by different beliefs and cultural preferences had considerable influence in the choice of sides in Greek history. This is where we do find an element of ideological import in the history written by Thucydides.

The 'middle ages' appear to be a handy label to denote the period dividing the Greco-Roman antiquity in Europe from its modern times. This stage of history was characterised by the feudal society and economy. The hierarchy of the feudal landlords, their different levels, the church with its clerical arrangements, and the toiling peasantry mostly bound to serfdom, required that the relatively lower strata would be obliged to render some specified service to the king, the noblesse and the clergy. The typical forms of division among the people according to their status and the legal place were known as social estates (e.g. the nobles and the gentry constituting the higher estates; the peasants, petty artisans and tradesmen belonging to the lower estates). The dominant form of social existence among the peasant workers was known as serfdom. For the allotment of land received from the lord, the serfs were subject to the compulsion of unpaid labour service on the lord's lands. Accordingly, the arrangement was based on labour rent. The feudal system passed through several forms of rent payment (viz. labour, kind, money) over time. It had its own dynamic phase (10th – 12th centuries) of expansion and improvements. Eventually, however, the rise of the bourgeoisie along with the tendencies of more and more independent production units coming to existence and expansion of trade led to the collapse of the feudal system. The role of peasant revolts was crucial in the process of abolition of feudalism.

The feudal order had its own ideology of self-defence and legitimation. A system of ideas and beliefs did emerge to glorify the interests and actions of the ruling forces. For example, the idea of chivalry associated with the feudal knights placed a large premium on their role as protectors of the weak and defenders of the Christian faith. No unbiased views and observations would however bear out the truth of such an estimate of medieval knights. Indeed, much of the content of medieval ideology was derived from a concept of God ordaining that the prime over of life and of human history is located outside the world. It follows that human destinies are invariably determined by the will of God. For the believers in God as such, what really matters in history is not the transitory greatness of empires, but salvation or damnation in a world to come.

A meaningful aspect of this kind of other-worldliness was noted by Karl Mannheim, 'As long as the clerically and feudally organised mediaeval order was able to locate its paradise outside of society, in some other-worldly sphere which transcended history and dulled its revolutionary edge, the idea of paradise was still an integral part of mediaeval society. Not until certain social groups embodied their wish-images into their actual

conduct and tried to realize them, did these ideologies become utopian' (*Ideology and Utopia*, Ch. IV).

In large parts of Europe, particularly in its western countries, the middle ages were superseded by the beginning and development of capitalism. It was a historical transition ranging over four centuries which were distinguished by an unprecedented advance of science, and far reaching technological-cum-organisational changes in material production. As for the corresponding charges in human thought and values, we should take note of the religious movement of Reformation (16th Century) starting in Germany and the Renaissance developing primarily in Italy and then in Elizabethan England. The rise of humanist culture and a series of important scientific discoveries accounted for the main features of the Renaissance philosophical thought. Humanism placed a large premium on freedom of the individual, opposed religious asceticism and vindicated man's right to pleasure and satisfaction of earthly desires and requirements. Some of the most prominent humanists were Petrarch, Dante, Bocaccio, Leonardo da Vinci, Bruno, Copernicus, Shakespeare and Francis Bacon. In the Renaissance sense, humanism conceived of God as approving all those views propagated from its position. The negative feature of this kind of humanism was its distance from the working people and their issues of suffering and distress. Thus in the class context, it could at best be an ideology of the nascent bourgeoisie of Europe in those days.

The religious *Reformation* had a similar bias. Pitted against the principles of Catholicism and the Papacy, it facilitated the emergence of secular, national states. Martin Luther (1483-1546), an eminent and also the earliest leader of the *Reformation*, denied that the church and the clergy could be mediators between man and God. But he could neither be positive in his views on the positions helping the material interests of German burghers, nor support the ideas of early burghers, nor promote the ideas of early bourgeois humanism. Luther supported the ruling classes during the Peasant War (1525). Marx's comment in this connection is noteworthy, 'Luther has conquered slavery based on belief in god only, by substituting for it slavery based on conviction'.

The position of John Calvin (1509-1564) was different. He held that in response to one's 'calling', the committed person could prove his worth for God's grace. No other means of salvation are available since, like Luther, Calvin also rules out the scope of clerical mediation between man and God. It follows that the quantity and quality of work in this world remains the only route of human salvation. Asceticism in spending was considered to be an attribute that would aid saving and accumulation. This is how the Calvinist ethic of *Reformation* comes to fit in with the requirements of capitalism in history. Marx Weber (1864-1930), the well-known German sociologist, distinguished for his studies in the relation of Protestant ethic to capitalism, observed, 'Asceticism was in turn influenced in its development and its character by the totality of social conditions, especially economic. The modern man is, in general, even with the best will, unable to give religious ideas a significance for culture and national character which they deserve. But it is, of course, not my aim to substitute for a one-sided materialistic an equally one-sided spiritualistic causal interpretation of culture and history'. (*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, Ch V*). The most important aspect of such formulations about the reciprocity between economic religious and the extensive cultural spheres relates the ideological pulls and pushes of the participants in the process of history.

The rise of economic individualism and *laissez faire* accounted for a new balance of relations between religion, state, and civil society. The principal strength of a new leadership for the capitalist transition and its social goals obtained in the redemption of private property and its uses from the political and religious obligations of the feudal order and its ecclesiastical authority wielded by the church. Thus, along with its economic

prominence, the challenge of the bourgeoisie had to work itself through manifold levels of religious beliefs and attitudes, priorities of value judgment and numerous other aspects of human social living and culture. All this would be incumbent on the nascent capitalist forces in the process of achieving their social hegemony.

The ideological contributions of the Renaissance and the Reformation have already been noted. What comes next in European history's chronology of the transformation of society and ideas is the Enlightenment, a major event of intellectual history beginning roughly after the Glorious Revolution in England in 1688 and ending with the French Revolution a century later. Diderot, Votaire, Rousseau, Montesquieu, Adam Smith, Goethe, Schiller and many other thinkers of abiding importance were among the followers of the philosophy of Enlightenment. They proceeded from the first assumption that enlightened individual consciousness would have a decisive role in the elimination of social wrongs and vices. Their aim was to spread ideas of goodness, liberty, justice and scientific knowledge. Despite their differences, the common points could be taken as a materialist view of human beings, relentless optimism about man's progress through education and some utilitarian notions about society and ethics.

The linkage of the Enlightenment philosophies with the ethos of capitalism is revealed as we take account of their main principles of social life and organisation. Such common denominators of the Enlightenment thought are autonomy of individuals, freedom, the equality of all men, the universality of law, inviolability of contract, toleration and the right to private property. It is noteworthy that the aforesaid elements are essential for a system of market exchange. The idealised social norms of the Enlightenment then imply an all-round accreditation of capitalism.

4.3 MEANING OF IDEOLOGY

Probably, the word 'ideology' was first used in France by rationalist philosophers to indicate what was then understood as the philosophy of the human mind. In English usage, ideology conveyed the meaning of the science of ideas. The analytical emphasis on scientific social ideas had an important role in the promotion of the Enlightenment philosophies which largely contributed to the making of the French Revolution of 1789. This revolution faced numerous difficulties in achieving popular sovereignty. By the end of the following decade, there occurred the *coup d'etat* of Napoleon Bonaparte (Napoleon – I), who criticised the Enlightenment philosophers for diffusing metaphysics and a critical failure to adapt their socio-political ideas 'to a knowledge of the human heart and the lessons of history'. Napoleon's attack imparted to ideology a sense of having unreal, impractical and even fanatical tendencies.

Napoleon blamed the ideologues, for they misled the people by elevating them to a sovereignty which the same people were incapable of application. He berated the principles of enlightenment as ideology. An element of rationalisation becomes a feature of ideology. It is not rationalisation in the sense of direct action to improve something, nor in the sense of finding appropriate theoretical principles to explain some empirical observations. The ideologues' support for popular sovereignty must have been based on their views about the people and their capacity. Napoleon's critique implies that the ideologues considered people more as what they would like them to be, and less as what those people were in actual reality. This is a kind of rationalisation influencing the habit of mind inclined to promote ideologies.

In an important sense, Napoleon's emphasis on 'knowledge of the human heart and the lessons of history' also had an ideological nuance opposed to the position of the Enlightenment thinkers. This is a case of conflict between democratic and

undemocratic sanctions about the nature of political power. Not that Napoleon's pleas for singular one-man authority could justify itself on any historical criterion of universal excellence. He had to be a creature of pure and simple pragmatism. In some circumstances, pragmatism may serve as the way out of an immediate problem. But even pragmatism cannot rid itself of a rather mundane ideological dictum enjoining that 'nothing succeeds like success'. As we have already noted, every ideology grows either in support or in opposition to an existing social order, its economy, politics, and culture. The variable patterns of cognitive and moral beliefs embedded in different ideologies can then have a vital influence on the historical processes of action, reaction and change.

Let us note the two different senses in which the term ideology has been used in the evolution of human thought about history and society. It may mean a set of ideas belonging to any particular society. Such ideas are likely to differ from one class to another, reflecting separate class interests, which can be antagonistic or conciliatory. This is how an ideology comes to have the label of being 'bourgeois' or 'proletarian' and so on and so forth. An ideology of a class cannot but have the tendency of justifying the particular interests thereof. The usual manner of such justification consists in projecting that the promotion of particular interests, under consideration, conforms to the general well being of the entire society.

The other usage of the term ideology is pejorative. It means a delusion born of false observation and inference, the sense in which Napoleon sharply criticised the ideologies of popular sovereignty. The critique implied a kind of distinction between knowledge based on sensible experience and ideology. In their early writings, criticising the mode and content of Hegelian idealism, Marx and Engels applied the term ideology in this sense. They had the same critical approach while exposing the limitations of Ludwig Feuerbach's materialism. Marx's critiques of the Hegelian philosophies of the *State* (1843) and *Right* (1843-44) and his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844) made no explicit mention of ideology. The emphasis was on the inversions of Hegel. For example, the true relationship of thought to being is that being is subject and thought the predicate; Hegel sets thought as the subject and being as the predicate.

The Hegelian inversions led to innumerable ambiguities and erratic conclusions. To cite a few of them, Hegel's apotheosis of an authoritarian absolute state did not fit in with his stated course of history as the progress towards consciousness of freedom. Further Hegel's idea of God creating man entails an inversion of the same kind. Ludwig Feuerbach, himself a radical Hegelian, rightly argued in his book *The Essence of Christianity* (1814) that God is a creation of man in his own image, invoking the human ideals of knowledge, will and love endowed with infinite power. In connection with this theme, Marx analysed the nature of religion, tracing its roots in the contradictions and sufferings of the real world: 'Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.' *(Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, Introduction).*

In his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844), Marx no longer travelled only in the world of philosophy. His criticism then extends to the economic relations obtaining in a capitalist society. This was Marx's first analysis of alienated labour and its severe contradictions in the domain of private capitalist property. Also, some significant points were made on the motives of greed and envy working as serious obstacles to human redemption from the bondage of alienation.

Another important text planned and prepared by Marx and Engels during 1845-46 was not published during their lifetime. It (*The German Ideology*) appeared for the fist time in Moscow in 1932. In his preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of*

Political Economy (1859), Marx referred to the then unpublished manuscript to The German Ideology in the following words :

> 'We resolved to work out together the opposition of our view to the ideological view of German Philosophy, in fact to settle accounts with our previous philosophical conscience. The resolve was carried out in the form of criticism of post-Hegelian philosophy. The manuscript, two large octavo volumes, had long reached its place of publication in Westphalia when we received the news that altered circumstances did not allow of its being printed. We abandoned the manuscript to the gnawing criticism of the mice all the more willingly since we had achieved our main purpose – self-clarification.'

Marx and Engels started as radical Hegelians. This clarifies their move 'to settle accounts with our previous philosophical conscience'. Confirming their departure from Hegelian idealism, The German Ideology presents the first Marxian statement of historical evolution through different stages conditioned by the nexus of productive forces and production relations. Indeed, the focus of observation shifts from ideas to practical human – sensuous activity. Marx observed in his eighth thesis on Feuerbach, 'All social life is essentially practical. All the mysteries which urge theory into mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice'. (*Theses on Feuerbach, 1845).* He was also critical of all materialism incapable of understanding the object as sensuous human activity, as practice.

The term ideology appears in the very title of the book. The inversion that is involved relates to treating consciousness as prior to material reality. Marx holds that the critical human problems are rooted in real social contradictions. It is utterly misleading to trace their origin in mistaken ideas. The book's preface had an amusing story from Marx to prove the point :

> 'Once upon a time an honest fellow had the idea that men were drowned in water only because they were possessed with the idea of gravity. If they were to knock this idea out of their heads, say by stating it to be a superstition, a religious idea, they would be sublimely proof against any danger from water. His whole life long he fought against the illusion of gravity, of whose harmful results all statistics brought him new and manifold evidence. The honest fellow was the type of new revolutionary philosophers in Germany.'

In the subsequent theoretical writings of Marx we find little or no use of the term ideology. No doubt, the major books of this genre are *Grundrisse* (1857-58), *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859), and *Capital* (vol.1, 1867). Further, a detailed analysis of the historical evolution of economic thought was contained in the three volumes of the *Theories of Surplus Value* (1861-63) which have their own significance and help us to assess the relativity of economic thought in reference to the different stages of capitalist development in Europe, especially that of England and France. Again, Marx expressed his reactions to many events happening in contemporary Europe and commented on the omissions and commissions affecting the strategies opposed to capitalism e.g., *A Critique of the Gotha Programme* (1875). In this critique we get a glimpse of some Marxian ideas about the course of historical transition from capitalism to socialism, the distributive and executive problems bearing upon the elementary and the advanced stages of socialism. The advanced stage ushers in the arrival of communism, which features a classless society capable of fulfilling all the needs of each and every person, thus ensuring complete and effective freedom for the entire people. As for the collapse of capitalism, Marx focuses on the growing contradictions between capitalist private property, its tendencies of ever-growing

accumulation along with scientific advance of productive forces and the insatiable urge of capital to maximize profits at the expense of the proletariat. It is through these antinomies of the process of capitalist expansion that the capital-labour production relation becomes a fetter on the advance of productive forces. Marx sets forth the logic of socialist revolution as follows: 'The monopoly of capital becomes a fetter upon the mode of production which has sprung up and flourished along with, and under it. Centralisation of the means of production and socialisation of labour at last reach a point where they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. This integument is burst asunder. The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated.' (*Capital vol. 1, ch. 32*).

We have noted already that the use of the word ideology is extremely rare in Marx's later texts. Of the two senses of ideology, the strictly negative one had also been taken as synonymous with false consciousness in some writings of Engels. Even in its negative uses, ideology referred to distortions with a view to veiling some contradictions in reality. While capitalism abounds in contradictions and brings severe distress to the exploited, the bourgeois ideology, in Marx's words, presents the system as the 'very Eden of the innate rights of man. There alone rule, Freedom, Equality, Property and Bentham'. And so, the synonymity of ideology and false consciousness may be misleading without appropriate specification of the contraries which are being concealed.

Moreover, in his preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy (1859*), Marx observed that 'The distinction should always be made between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production which can be determined with the precision of natural science and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophic – in short ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out'. Such ideological forms neither express false consciousness, nor are they pure delusious. Marx is taking account of an entire cultural complex and its manifold dimensions. Lenin made exactly the same use of the term ideology and often specified the class that was associated with a system of ideas (e.g. bourgeois ideology, proletarian ideology). Antonio Gramsci, a leading Italian Marxist of the early twentieth century, often cited the above-noted passage of Marx in order to strengthen his arguments about the importance of the ideological dimensions of social hegemony.

The importance of ideological forms in any social order can also be linked to Marx's conceptualisation of the base and superstructure as a clue to our understanding the relation of a society's sphere of economic activity to its manifestations of social living in law, religion, arts, philosophy and politics. Marx's point is that the sum total of production relations at the economic base constitutes the economic structure of society. This is the real foundations on which rises a legal and political structure and to which corresponds definite forms of social consciousness and their expressions.

The particular metaphor of base and superstructure carries a suggestion of economic determinism. Marx, however, does not stress the necessity of any one-way relation of causality proceeding from the economic sphere to the domain of ideology marked by its creative diversity. There remains scope for reciprocal influence between material and spiritual production. The superstructures of ideas must not be conceived as a mere passive reflection of the state and forms of material production. Marx cites examples of legal and aesthetic production not quite reducible to the corresponding stage of material production, e.g. the survival of elements of Roman private law in the stage of capitalist production; the heights attained by Greek art and literature amidst a rather undeveloped state of material productions.

4.4 SOME LATER WRITERS

In our approach to the meaning of ideology, we have used the elements of Marxian thought in some details. The dynamics of history tend to be vitally influenced by the relative capacities of the conflicting classes to maintain their leadership in the sphere of social production. We have noted that, for Marx, the conflict between the growing productive forces and the existing relations of production matures into a revolution that brings about a new society under a new class leadership. Marx's evidence and proof of such a theory of historical change were by and large confined to the capitalist transition.

The next stage of history will coincide with the arrival of socialism. This will come through the worldwide revolution waged by the proletariat against the capitalist order. Since the proletariat moves by stages towards a classless society, there will be no further need for ideological defense and deceptions in the interests of a dominant ruling class. This is the usual reply of the Marxists to the comment that as a protagonist of the proletariat and its class interests, the Marxian theory cannot but have its own ideological elements.

Again, the point about the determination of consciousness by social being must not indicate a connection similar to what is meant by the statement that a fall in temperature turns water into ice. It is Marx's own statement that while the economic conditions of production may be ascertained with the precision of natural science, the ideological forms are subject to all the complications of social consciousness trying to grapple with its surrounding reality at different levels. Karl Mannheim (1893-1947), the German sociologist, wrote in his book *Ideology and Utopia* (First German edition 1929, English translation 1936) that ideologies are mental fiction used to conceal the real nature of a particular society. On the country, utopias are wishful dreams that inspire the opposition against vested interests. Thus, Mannheim made a meaningful distinction between pro- and anti-*status quo* ideologies.

Class consciousness is an extremely important element of Marx's theory of social change. George Luckacs (1885-1971), a notable Marxist thinker and activist, made many important contributions in writing over a large area of subjects ranging from aesthetics and literary criticism to philosophy, sociology and politics. His book *History and Class Consciousness* (1923) proved extremely controversial among the communist establishments of those days. However, it had great influence over a large section of the radical non-conformist intelligentsia in many countries. Lukacs' analysis of class consciousness was distinct for its critiques of 'economism' and 'scientism'. It emphasised that the proletarian revolution would not emerge merely from the economic contradictions of capitalism, nor from any scientific laws of historical change without the constant consciousness and action of the working people. Moreover, in considering the revolutionary roles of workers' councils, Luckacs stressed the need for the proletarian practice of self-government through a conscious social agency.

Louis Althusser's (1918-1990) interpretation of the Marxist, as available in his *Reading Capital* (1970) and *For Marx* (1969), focuses on 'mature' Marx with his framework of interlocking combinations of political, economic, ideological, and theoretical structures and practices which, in their totality, can come to determine social forces and their actions. Althusser includes ideology (in addition to the economy and polity) among the main instances of history as structured social formations. An ideology then contains the meaning of the relations lived by men in a society.

Antonio Gramsci's (1891-1937) concept of hegemonic power as not merely dependent on coercion, but also 'directing' by the token of consent obtained from the governed, may endow an ideology with some new significance. Gramsci distinguished between

historically organic ideologies and those which were purely arbitrary. To the extent that ideologies are historically necessary , they 'organise' human masses, and create the terrain on which men move and acquire consciousness of their position and struggles. The organic ideologies have a 'psychological' validity of considerable influence on the processes of history.

Ideologies are often inseparable from socio-political theories and their projects throughout the twentieth century. It is almost impossible to conceive of a human society, which is without a supporting ideology and, on the other hand, which is entirely free from any critical questions about its goals and their achievements. This is where the path of history and the vision of history will continue to be involved in the rise and fall of ideologies.

4.5 SUMMARY

The term ideology is often used in two different ways. In one sense, it is a set of ideas, views and beliefs which sustains an individual or a social order. It may be used to maintain the *status quo*; but it may also be used to oppose the system. There may be various ideologies, sometimes antagonistic to each other in a given social system. It may also differ according to classes. Various social, economic and political systems in history have been sustained by certain dominant ideologies.

In another sense, ideology is also interpreted as false consciousness as opposed to the real, scientific knowledge of the world. In this sense, it is used to mislead people and influence them to support the *status quo*.

4.6 EXERCISES

1) What do you understand by the term 'ideology'? Discuss the various usages of the term.

2) What role has the ideology played in influencing the course of history?

4.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

Tom Bottomore *et al* (ed.), *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought* (entry on "Ideology by Jorge Larrain)

David L.Sills (ed.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* vol. 7 &8, "Ideology by Edward Shils and "Ideology and the Social System" by Harry M. Johnson.

John Plamentaz, *Ideology.*

T.Z. Lavine, *From Socrates to Sartre the Philosophic Quest*, Parts 4 & 5.

Robin Blackburn (ed.), *Ideology in Social Sciences*.

Karl Lowith, *Meaning in History*.

Istvan Meszaros (ed.), *Aspects of History and Class Consciousness*.

R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History.*

Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*.

E.P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory & Other Essays* (the last essay bearing the title of the book).

Martin Selinger, *The Marxist Conception of Ideology*.

Sholmo Avineri, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx.*

UNIT 5 GRECO-ROMAN TRADITIONS

Structure

5.1 Introduction

5.2 The Contexts of History-Writing

5.3 The Objectives of History-Writing

5.4 Defining and Drawing on Sources

5.5 Style

5.6 Understanding Historical Events and Processes

5.7 Summary

5.8 Exercises

5.9 Suggested Readings

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Many of you are probably aware that the term "History" is derived from a Greek word 'istoria' which means inquiry. The first known author who used the term to describe his work was Herodotus, often considered as the father of history. In many ways, the works of Herodotus and his successors have been regarded as a yardstick for measuring other compositions. As such, it becomes important for us to understand some of the features associated with these works. In this Unit you will learn about some of the historians in ancient Greece and Rome and the historical works written by them.

5.2 THE CONTEXTS OF HISTORY-WRITING

The four historians we have selected for study are amongst the best-known in antiquity: Herodotus and Thucydides, who wrote in Greek, and lived in the 5th century BCE (BCE means Before Common Era, also known as BC while CE means Common Era, also known as AD), and Livy and Tacitus, who lived during the Augustan era of the Roman empire (c. 1st century BCE -1st century CE) and wrote in Latin. The 5th century BCE is often regarded as constituting a classical age in the history of Greece in general and Athens in particular, while the Augustan era is viewed as marking the heyday of the Roman empire.

The works of these historians can be located within these political and cultural contexts. Nonetheless, it is worth bearing in mind that there are no easy correlations between these contexts and the specific forms of historical investigation that emerged. We might expect that these histories were composed to justify, eulogise, or legitimate contemporary political changes. While this expectation is not belied entirely, it is also evident that Livy and Tacitus were highly critical of their contemporaries: these histories are not simply eulogistic but are marked by anxieties about the present.

Herodotus probably lived between c. 484-425 BCE. He was born in a Greek colony in Asia Minor, but travelled widely, through parts of West Asia, including Palestine and Babylon, North Africa, especially Egypt, through several islands in the Mediterranean Sea, and in mainland Greece. His writing is marked by a deep admiration for Athens, and in fact, his work can be understood at least in part as being an attempt to memorialise what he regarded as the historic victory of the Greeks over the Persians, a contest that he visualised as one between civilization and barbarism.

Thucydides' (c. 460-400 BCE) association with Athens was even closer. He was an Athenian, and served as a general (although a somewhat unsuccessful one) during the Peloponnesian war, a conflict between Athens and Sparta that lasted for about thirty years. This was a war in which most other Greek states were also embroiled, as supporters of one or the other. After his failure as a general, Thucydides was evidently exiled, and spent several years amongst the states that were hostile to Athens. His work reflects his rich experience in a variety of ways.

Herodotus and Thucydides were thus products of what has often been projected as the classical age in the history of Greece in general and of Athens in particular. We know from other sources that this was the age of philosophers such as Socrates, and of playwrights such as Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. The works of the historians do not, however, directly reflect these cultural developments. What we find instead is a preoccupation, especially in Thucydides, with militaristic activities. In fact, if these histories are rich in detail, they are also marked by an extremely narrow focus. Indeed there are times when the present-day reader cannot help but wishing that these writers had devoted some of their considerable skills to a wider range of issues.

As we have seen, Livy and Tacitus were located very closely within the contexts of empire. The Roman empire was a unique institution. It spanned parts of three continents (Europe, Asia and Africa), and lasted for nearly five centuries. It was also remarkable for its ruling elite, membership of which was fairly flexible.

Livy (c. 64 BCE- 17CE) was a contemporary of the most famous imperial figure in Roman history, Augustus. However, he was not part of the senatorial elite, nor was he directly associated with politics. Yet, it is perhaps not accidental that he chose to write a monumental history of Rome, which ran into 142 books. Unfortunately, more than a hundred of these books were lost, and some survive only in summaries written by later authors. In its entirety, the work traced the history of Rome from its legendary origins to c. 9 BCE.

Tacitus (c. 55-119 CE) was closely associated with imperial administration, and a well-known orator. His *Annals* delineated the history of the Roman empire for about fifty years (between c.14 and 65 CE). The work begins with the end of the reign of Augustus, and represents the concerns of the military/administrative elite, its preoccupations with questions of succession, and the role of the army in political affairs. What distinguishes his account is that, although he was an "insider", he was often critical of imperial policies and intrigues. In other words, his work suggests that the Roman elite was by no means a homogeneous entity.

We can perhaps suggest then, that while the concerns of these early historians were obviously shaped by their contemporary milieu, the connections between the context and the author were by no means simple or unilinear.

5.3 THE OBJECTIVES OF HISTORY-WRITING

It is evident that history writing was undertaken with self-conscious deliberation, and with explicitly stated objectives. These could include preserving memories of what were regarded as great, spectacular, or simply important events. Almost inevitably, warfare and battles dominate the narrative. Yet, other goals are also explicitly and sometimes implicitly articulated. We find, for instance, that Herodotus was concerned with providing a narrative that was full, interesting, even fascinating, and included ethnographic accounts that often bordered on the realm of fantasy. His successors were generally more restrained, and, the Latin writers in particular adopt a solemn, moral tone. This has been regarded as a feature of the Augustan age, where the ruler visualised his role in terms of restoring pristine traditions, amongst other things.

Most of the writers state their objectives at the outset. For instance, Herodotus begins his work by declaring:

> These are the researches of Herodotus of Halicarnassus, which he publishes, in the hope of thereby preserving from decay the remembrance of what men have done, and of preventing the great and wonderful actions of the Greeks and the Barbarians from losing their due meed (share) of glory; and withal to put on record what were their grounds of feud.

To an extent, this initial assertion is justified by some of his concluding remarks (Book IX, section 71): even while recording and celebrating the victories of the Greeks in general and the Athenians in particular, he recognises the heroism of the Persians as well as the Spartans.

It is evident that what was regarded as being worthy of memorialisation was a great war and its outcome. In a sense, this perspective was shared by Thucydides, whose account begins as follows:

> Thucydides, an Athenian, wrote the history of the war between the Peloponnesians and the Athenians, beginning at the moment that it broke out, and believing that it would be a great war and more worthy of relation than any that had preceded it. (Book I, section 1)

This focus on histories of warfare characterised the works of Livy and Tacitus as well. At one level, this may not seem surprising, given that the expansion of the Roman empire was inevitably marked by warfare, which was duly memorialised. What is perhaps more unexpected is the tone of moral concern that distinguishes these accounts. While we customarily regard the Augustan age as the heyday of Roman imperialism, it is interesting that these contemporary writers voice a sense of discomfort, and even agony at what was perceived to be a state of decline. Livy's prefatory statement is illuminating:

> I invite the reader's attention to the much more serious consideration of the kind of lives our ancestors lived, of who were the men and what the means, both in politics and war, by which Rome's power was first acquired and subsequently expanded. I would then have him trace the process of our moral decline, to watch first the sinking of the foundations of morality as the old teaching was allowed to lapse, then the final collapse of the whole edifice, and the dark dawning of our modern day when we can neither endure our vices, nor face the remedies needed to cure them.

The preoccupation with military activities, in a somewhat different context, is evident in the work of Tacitus as well. Yet, Tacitus was not simply attempting to valorise marital heroes: he was also, if not more concerned with offering a critique of the contemporary situation:

> My purpose is not to relate at length every motion, but only such as were conspicuous for excellence or notorious for infamy. This I regard as history's highest function, to let no worthy action be uncommemorated, and to hold out the reprobation of posterity as a terror to evil words and deeds. (*Annals*, Book III, section 65)

He was also acutely conscious that what he documented might seem insignificant:

> Much of what I have related and shall have to relate, may perhaps, I am aware, seem petty trifles to record. But no one must compare my annals with the writings of those who have described Rome in old days. They told of great wars, of the storming of cities, of the defeat and capture of kings, or whenever they turned by preference to home affairs, they related, with a free

> scope for digression, the strifes of consuls with tribunes, land and corn-laws, and the struggles between the commons and the aristocracy. My labours are circumscribed and inglorious; peace wholly unbroken or but slightly disturbed, dismal misery in the capital, an emperor careless about the enlargement of the empire, such is my theme. Still it will not be useless to study these at first sight trifling events out of which the movements of vast changes often take their rise. (*Annals* Book IV, section 32)

Both Livy and Tacitus regarded their works as educative. The former argued:

> What chiefly makes the study of history wholesome and profitable is this, that in history you have a record of the infinite variety of human experiences plainly set out for all to see, and in that record you can find for yourself and your country both examples and warnings.

And Tacitus, more despondent, wrote:

> So now, after a revolution, when Rome is nothing but the realm of a single despot, there must be good in carefully noting and recording this period, for it is but few who have the foresight to distinguish right from wrong or what is sound from what is hurtful, while most men learn wisdom from the fortunes of others. Still, though this is instructive, it gives very little pleasure. Descriptions of countries, the various incidents of battles, glorious deaths of great generals, enchain and refresh a reader's mind. I have to present in succession prosecutions, faithless friendships, the ruin of innocence, the same causes issuing in the same results, and I am everywhere confronted by a wearisome monotony in my subject matter.

The dreary weight of the present deterred such historians from venturing into the realm of the fantastic. This was in stark contrast to the work of Herodotus who was evidently fascinated by what he considered to be extraordinary, and took great pains to record these elements, even when he realised that it could strain one's credulity. His accounts of India, which he never visited, are especially marked by elements of fantasy, as for instance in his story about gold-digging ants (Book III, section 104,105).

Writers like Tacitus are far more cautious in their accounts of the fabulous. This is evident, for instance, in his brief digression on the fabled phoenix (*Annals*, Book VI, section 28):

> The bird called the phoenix, after a long succession of ages, appeared in Egypt and furnished the most learned men of that country and of Greece with abundant matter for the discussion of the marvellous phenomenon. It is my wish to make known all on which they agree with several things, questionable enough indeed, but not too absurd to be noticed. ….As to the number of years it lives, there are various accounts. The general tradition says five hundred years. Some maintain that it is seen at intervals of fourteen hundred and sixty one years….But all antiquity is of course obscure.

5.4 DEFINING AND DRAWING ON SOURCES

The question of authorities or sources is something that is addressed both explicitly and implicitly in some of the works that we are considering. Eyewitness observations were valued, but other sources of information, derived from tradition, religious centres, chronicles, interviews, and a range of documentary sources were tapped as well. The possibility of mutually conflicting versions was also recognized and strategies were evolved for resolving such situations. For instance, Herodotus, in discussing the history of the Persian ruler Cyrus states:

> And herein I shall follow those Persian authorities whose object it appears to be not to magnify the exploits of Cyrus, but to relate the simple truth. I know besides three ways in which the story of Cyrus is told, all differing from my own narrative. (Book I, section 95)

The archives and traditions clustering around shrines were obviously important sources that were drawn upon. The classic example of this is provided by the shrine of Delphi, whose oracle was invariably consulted by rulers and states before any major event, e.g., going to battle. Herodotus records several of the predictions of the oracle, often couched in (perhaps deliberately) ambiguous language. He also details the offerings sent to the shrine on the successful completion of an enterprise.

Herodotus also provides the reader with first hand accounts, the result of his many travels. Here is his description of agriculture in Mesopotamia:

> Of all the countries that we know there is none which is so fruitful in grain. It makes no pretension indeed of growing the fig, the olive, the vine, or any other tree of the kind; but in grain it is so fruitful as to yield commonly two hundred fold, and when the production is the greatest, even three-hundred fold. The blade of the wheat plant and barley plant is often four fingers in breadth. As for the millet and the sesame, I shall not say to what height they grow, though within my own knowledge; for I am not ignorant that what I have already written concerning the fruitfulness of Babylonia must seem incredible to those who have never visited the country.

First hand observation is also evident in the vivid description of forms of greeting practised by the Persians:

> When they meet each other in the streets, you may know if the persons meeting are of equal rank by the following token: if they are, instead of speaking, they kiss each other on the lips. In the case where one is little inferior to the other, the kiss is given on the cheek; where the difference of rank is great, the inferior prostrates himself upon the ground. (Book I, section 134)

Occasionally, Herodotus drew on folk traditions. For instance, he cites a long conversation between Croesus, a king who was supposed to be incredibly wealthy, and Solon, one of the founding fathers of the Athenian constitution. Croesus, according to this story, is confident that he is the happiest person on earth, but Solon gently, but repeatedly demurs, saying that he could be declared to be the happiest only if his end was known. By this argument, only after his death could it be said that a man had lived a happy life.

Thucydides deliberates far more self-consciously on his sources and attitudes towards the past. He says:

> The way that most men deal with traditions, even traditions of their own country, is to receive them all alike as they are delivered, without applying any critical test whatever….So little pains do the vulgar take, accepting readily the first story that comes to hand.

In contrast, he considers his own procedure far more rigorous:

> The conclusions I have drawn from the proofs quoted may, I believe, safely be relied on. (Book I, section 20, 21).

A system of keeping annual records was evidently in existence in Rome for several centuries. These records, known as the *Annales Maximi*, were compiled and maintained by priests. They contained the names of magistrates who were

appointed each year, and chronicled what were regarded as important events. Apart from this, elite families had traditions of funerary orations, which were drawn on by later historians.

Perhaps because such traditions and the works of earlier historians such as Polybius could be drawn upon, Livy and Tacitus seem less overtly concerned about their sources. In the case of Tacitus, we find that his insider status vis-à-vis the ruling elite is virtually taken for granted. Nevertheless, there are occasional references to sources, both written and oral, (e.g. Book II, section 88) which he drew on to reconstruct his detailed history of events, including battles, intrigues, senatorial proceedings, building activities and populist measures, that he painstakingly plotted through his *Annals*, a year by year account of the empire. And like Thucydides, he makes a point about sifting through rumours about intrigues and murders in the imperial family, explicitly denying what he considers to be particularly outrageous speculation:

> My object …..is ….to request all into whose hands my work shall come, not to catch eagerly at wild and improbable rumours in preference to genuine history which has not been perverted into romance. (*Annals*, Book IV, section 11).

5.5 STYLE

The authors under consideration evidently wrote for an elite, literate audience, although some of their compositions may have been disseminated orally as well. Virtually every sentence was carefully crafted, with consummate skill that often survives even in translations. Thucydides appears to be most self-conscious in this respect. He assumes a tone of deliberate solemnity and warns the reader:

> Assuredly they will not be disturbed either by the lays of a poet displaying the exaggerations of his craft, or by the compositions of the chroniclers that are attractive at truth's expense. (Book I, section 21)

This solemn tone was often combined with exemplary precision. Perhaps the most outstanding instance of this is provided by Thucydides' graphic description of the plague that hit Athens during the second year of the war. Here is how he delineated the symptoms:

> people in good health were all of a sudden attacked by violent heats in the head, and redness and inflammation in the eyes, the inward parts, such as the throat or tongue, becoming bloody and emitting an unnatural and fetid breath. (Book II, section 49)

His depiction of the implications of the long-drawn conflict is also incisive:

> In peace and prosperity, states and individuals have better sentiments, because they do not find themselves confronted with imperious necessities; but war takes away the easy supply of daily wants, and so proves a rough master, that brings most men's characters to a level with their fortunes. (Book III, section 82)

And yet, he incorporates speeches, characterised by Finley (1987:13) as "the most interesting and seductive section" of the text. It is intriguing to read what Thucydides himself declares about these:

> With reference to the speeches in this history, some were delivered before the war began, others while it was going on; some I heard myself, others I got from various quarters; it was in all cases difficult to carry them word for

> word in one's memory, *so my habit has been to make the speakers say what was in my opinion demanded of them by the various occasions, of course adhering as closely as possible to the general sense of what was really said.* (italics ours, Book I, section 22).

An example can perhaps serve to clarify how such speeches were used by the author. This excerpt is from a speech attributed to the Corinthians who apparently tried to win the support of the Spartans against the Athenians. Thucydides uses this opportunity to insert a eulogy of Athenian character:

> The Athenians are addicted to innovation, and their designs are characterised by swiftness alike in conception and execution; you (i.e. the Spartans) have a genius for keeping what you have got, accompanied by a total want of invention, and when forced to act you never go far enough. …Further, there is promptitude on their side against procrastination on yours, they are never at home, you are never from it: for they hope by their absence to extend their acquisitions, you fear by your advance to endanger what you have left behind. (Book I, section 70)

Succinct descriptions mark the work of Livy as well. Here is an instance from his description of the conflict between the common people and the senators (c. 494-493 BCE):

> Great was the panic in the city, and through mutual fear all was in suspense. The people left in the city dreaded the violence of the senators; the senators dreaded the people remaining in the city….

And Tacitus provides us with a graphic summary in his *Histories* when he proclaims (Book 1, section 2)

> I am entering on the history of a period rich in disasters, frightful in its wars, torn by civil strife, and even in peace full of horrors.

5.6 UNDERSTANDING HISTORICAL EVENTS AND PROCESSES

The most apparent concern of these early historians was with providing a detailed narrative of what they regarded as central events. Rarely do they pause in their relentless sequencing of events to speculate on the whys. Events are carefully located in space and time, but beyond that, there is little obvious reflection on why a particular course of events occurred. Yet, it is possible to discern the perspectives that shaped the narrative. On the one hand, beyond the immediate milieu and its political exigencies, the authors worked with a range of ideas that were probably shared by most literate men of their times. These included, in some instances, an acceptance of fate, which was often interwoven with an acceptance of the validity of omens as indices of future events. Others worked with a notion of a long term steady decline in human fortunes from a golden past. But, in yet other instances, we find an implicit if not explicit recognition of the importance of the human agent. Occasionally, the framing arguments are provided by an acknowledgement of the fickleness of human fortune, a fairly commonplace sentiment. Consider, for instance, this statement of Herodotus:

> For the cities which were formerly great have most of them become insignificant; and such as are at present powerful, were weak in the olden time. I shall therefore discourse equally of both, convinced that human happiness never continues long in one stay. (Book I, Section 5)

Related to this is a belief in omens and signs. Herodotus declares categorically:

> It mostly happens that there is some warning when great misfortunes are about to befall a state or nation….(Book VI, section 27)

In fact, omens and their implications are strewn across the pages of his narrative. We will cite just one example, a prodigy that was evidently seen by the troops of the Persian ruler Xerxes as he marched towards Greece.

> a mare brought forth a hare. Hereby it was shown plainly enough, that Xerxes would lead forth his host against Greece with mighty pomp and splendour, but, in order to reach again the spot from which he set out, would have to run for his life. (Book VII, section 57)

Other authors, such as Thucydides, noted spectacular occurrences without comment. For instance, he mentions the eruption of the volcanic Mount Etna, in Sicily, but makes no attempt to correlate this with contemporary events. (Book III, section 116) Divine wrath is also occasionally invoked. Livy for instance records (Book IX, sections 29-30) how a man named Appius instructed public slaves to perform certain ritual functions. He adds:

> The result is wonderful to relate and should make people scrupulous of disturbing the established modes of religious solemnities: for though there were at that time twelve branches of the Potitian family (to which Appius belonged), containing thirty grown up persons, yet they were every one, together with their offspring, cut off within the year; so that the name of the Potiti became extinct, while the censor Appius also was, by the unrelenting wrath of the gods, some years after deprived of his sight.

Yet, we would be mistaken to dismiss these authors as simply superstitious. The human agent, with all his/her failings and triumphs, is also duly acknowledged. Herodotus, for instance, recognized that the Athenian attempt to resist the Persian invasion by creating a formidable fleet was critical. He argues that if the Athenians had opted for peace instead, the rest of Greece would have come under Persian control sooner or later. He writes:

> If then a man should now say that the Athenians were the saviours of Greece, he would not exceed the truth. For they truly held the scales; and whichever side they espoused must have carried the day….and so, next to the gods, they repulsed the invader.

As interesting is Thucydides' assessment of the past (Book II, section 2). He argued that fertile lands were more open to invasion, that Attica (the state of which Athens was the capital) was free from invasions owing to the poverty of its soil, and that hence people from other states came here to seek refuge.

At another level, his explanation of the Peloponnesian war is both succinct and telling:

> The real cause I consider to be the one which was formally most kept out of sight. The growth of the power of Athens, and the alarm which this inspired in Lacedaemon (the state of which Sparta was the capital), made war inevitable (Book I, section 23).

Tacitus rarely allows himself to move beyond the nitty-gritty of the chronicle to speculate on larger issues. On one of these rare occasions (*Annals* Book III, section 26) he delineated the origins of legal systems from a state of pristine harmony:

> Mankind in the earliest age lived for a time without a single vicious impulse, without shame or guilt, and, consequently, without punishment and restraints.

> Rewards were not needed when everything right was pursued on its own merits; and as men desired nothing against morality, they were debarred from nothing by fear. When however they began to throw off equality, and ambition and violence usurped the place of self-control and modesty, despotisms grew up and became perpetual among many nations. Some from the beginning, or when tired of kings, preferred codes of laws.

And elsewhere (*Annals,* Book VI, section 22) he speculates on fate and its influence on human fortunes:

> Indeed, among the wisest of the ancients and among their disciples you will find conflicting theories, many holding the conviction that heaven does not concern itself with the beginning or the end of our life; or. in short, with mankind at all; and that therefore sorrows are continually the lot of the good, happiness of the wicked; while others, on the contrary, believe that, though there is a harmony between fate and events, yet it is not dependent on wandering stars, but on primary elements, and on a combination of natural causes. Still, they leave us the capacity of choosing our life, maintaining that, the choice once made, there is a fixed sequence of events.

5.7 SUMMARY

It is perhaps this **recognition of humanity as a critical element** that accounts for the enduring legacy of these early historians. We may find their focus narrow, and their concerns **parochial**. Yet, they provide us with some of the earliest instances of raising and addressing questions of **authenticity and plausibility**. They also grapple with possible historical explanations. We may differ with them on specific grounds, but their quest remains part of the historian's endeavour even after centuries.

5.8 EXERCISES

1) You must have already read the Unit 3 on 'Objectivity and Interpretation' in Block 1. Where would you place the histories written by Herodotus and Thucydides on the scale of objectivity?

2) What were the aims of the historians discussed in this Unit for writing history?

3) Write a note on the style adopted by these historians in their histories.

5.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

A.H. M. Jones (ed.), *A History of Rome through the Fifth Century* Selected Documents, vol. 1 (The Republic) and vol. 2 (The Empire) (New York, Harper and Row, 1968-70)

George Rawlinson (tr), *The History of Herodotus* (the translation originally published during1858-60)

Richard Crawley (tr), *Thucydides: The History of the Peloponnesian War* (the translation in 1910, reprinted in 1952)

Alfred John Church and William Jackson Brodribb (tr), *The Annals and the Histories of Tacitus* (Modern Library, 2003)

M.I. Finley, *Ancient History: Evidence and Models* (London, Penguin, 1985)

UNIT 6 TRADITIONAL CHINESE HISTORIOGRAPHY

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6.1 INTRODUCTION

"I have gathered up and brought together the old traditions of the world which were scattered and lost. I have examined the deeds and events of the past and investigated the principles behind their success and failure, their rise and decay…. I wished to examine into all that concerns heaven and man, to penetrate the changes of the past and present."

Thus wrote the Grand Historian Sima Qian, the pioneering author of China's first great work of history, the *Shi Ji* (*Historical Records*), in the 1st century B.C. Sima Qian inaugurated in China a sophisticated and unbroken tradition of history writing that has few parallels anywhere else in the world. About this tradition, the scholar W.T.de Bary has written that it represents "the most complete and unbroken record of its past possessed by any people". Charles Gardner, in his pioneering study of Chinese traditional historiography, wrote: "No other ancient nation possesses records of its whole past so voluminous, so continuous, or so accurate." In a similar vein, J.K.Fairbank wrote: "No people have been more interested in their past than the Chinese, for to them it was the model for the present and the primary source of information on human society, the

subject that concerned them most. No people have shown a greater realisation of being actors on the stage of history or greater interest in the future judgement of history on themselves."

Historiography was a supremely important part of the classical tradition in China. It was intimately linked with her traditional philosophy, morality and statecraft. The great works of historical writing were also among the most widely read and revered elements in China's literary tradition.

In the rest of this Unit, we will examine some of the main aspects of the great Chinese historiographical tradition. Specifically, we will look at the key factors that conditioned the writing of History in pre-modern China. We will also try to analyse the changes or developments in the historiographical tradition over time, and the main issues of debate among historians in imperial China. Lastly, we will examine some of the most distinctive characteristics of this tradition.

6.2 BACKGROUND

In this section we will discuss Confucianism which shaped the mental world of the Chinese scholars and helped them in formulating their ideas about the past. Most of these scholars were also officials who were part of the imperial state.

6.2.1 Confucianism

Confucianism is the name given to the teachings of Confucius, a 6th century B.C. scholar and petty official of the Chinese state of Lu, along with their further elaboration by his followers in subsequent centuries. Hardly a religion in the commonly accepted sense of the term, Confucianism nevertheless exercised the most profound influence on the spiritual and intellectual tradition of the Chinese people, and on their social and political behaviour. For various reasons which we shall now look into, Confucianism exerted a particularly powerful influence on the Chinese historiographical tradition.

The prime importance attached to the study and writing of History in the Chinese tradition can to a great extent be attributed to certain key elements of Confucianism. These can be summed up as:

- humanism
- reverence for the past
- emphasis on moral education
- concern with order in all things

We shall now look a little more deeply at each of these.

Humanism: History is above all the study of Man, of the affairs of human beings. In the Confucian world outlook, the central focus was not on God or some divine being, but on Man. How humans related to their fellow beings, how they ordered their affairs in this world, what values they inculcated in themselves and in others – this above all, was the main concern of Confucius and his philosophy. A deep interest in human affairs naturally provided a firm foundation for interest in History.

Reverence for the past: Even before Confucius, the Chinese had a tradition of reverence for the past, as reflected in their practice of a form of ancestor worship from very early times. However, Confucius gave a philosophical underpinning to this tradition. Living in a time of growing political anarchy and flux, Confucius looked on the ancient

past as a golden age of order and well-being. He was convinced that in the past could be found the models of moral, political and social behaviour that would help to end degeneration and chaos and to regenerate society.

Emphasis on moral education: According to Confucianism, the key thing that was needed to maintain harmony and well-being in the society as a whole was the existence of truly moral men. Although the dominant trend within Confucianism held that men were inherently good by nature, the real 'men of virtue' were expected to actively cultivate the right qualities in themselves through education. How to behave correctly under different circumstances, how to judge what was right or wrong, was to be learnt primarily through studying and drawing the proper lessons from the actions of men, past and present. Of the Five Classics regarded as essential for all educated men to master, it was no coincidence that two (the *Classic of History* and the *Spring and Autumn Annals*) were essentially works of History.

Concern with order: The study of History is concerned not only in general with the affairs of Man, but specifically with finding some order and meaning in the way human society has developed over time. Those acquainted with the Chinese historiographical tradition are usually struck with its passion for order and classification, as well as its attempts to understand cause and effect and to identify recurring patterns over the course of human history. The Confucian concern with establishing and maintaining order in the present thus also influenced the way the past was conceived.

6.2.2 The Imperial Bureaucratic State

History in China was written by the scholars. There is nothing unusual about that, but what was distinctive about traditional China was that the scholars were also **officials.** Even those historians who were not actually holding an official position at the time of writing their histories were either officials in retirement or aspiring officials, as the Sinologist Etienne Balasz once noted. It was Balasz who also tersely characterised Chinese historiography as "written by officials for officials".

What this meant, in effect, was that History writing reflected the concerns of the imperial state which the scholar-official class served. One important concern was to uphold the legitimacy of the Emperor and his ruling house or dynasty. The Confucian emphasis on 'rule by virtue' meant that it was not enough for an Emperor to base his right to rule on his de facto hold on power. No matter how an Emperor or dynasty came to power, they needed to justify their power at all times according to some well-established Confucian norms and conventions. Writing the history of previous dynasties or previous rulers in such a way as to enhance the prestige of the current ruler and his family, and to ensure their glory in succeeding ages, was therefore a major concern of the historian. The major works of History were usually either sponsored or commissioned by the rulers.

Despite this bias in favour of the current rulers, Chinese historiography, according to Balasz, "often evinced a degree of objectivity that was remarkable in the circumstances." The following anecdote recorded in a great 11th century historical work, the *Zizhi tongjian*, illustrates the extent to which official historiographers could, if they were determined, maintain their independence of judgement:

> *"The* [Tang dynasty] *Emperor T'ai-tsung spoke to the Imperial Censor Ch'u Sui-liang, saying: "Since you, Sir, are in charge of the Diaries of Action and Repose* [i.e. the edited notes of the emperor's activities maintained by the court historians], *may I see what you have written?" Sui-liang replied: "The historiographers record the words and deeds of the ruler*

of men, noting down all that is good and bad, in hopes that the ruler will not dare to do evil. But it is unheard of that the ruler himself should see what is written." The emperor said: "If I do something that is not good, do you then also record it?" Sui-liang replied: "My office is to wield the brush. How could I dare not record it?" The Gentleman of the Yellow Gate [one of the courtiers] *Liu Chi added: "Even if Sui-liang failed to record it, everyone else in the empire would"; to which the emperor replied: "True."*

This passage also illustrates another concern of historians, and that was to teach both the rulers and the officials by providing them with information needed for fulfilling their responsibilities, and by drawing lessons from past experience. The very name of the historical work from which this passage has been extracted means "Comprehensive Mirror for the Aid of Government". As the range of concerns of the State expanded in the later imperial period, so too did the range of matters considered worthy of the historian's brush. That is why many of the later works of History were truly encyclopedic in size and scope.

6.3 DEVELOPMENT OF THE HISTORIOGRAPHICAL TRADITION

We will now trace the development of the tradition of history-writing in pre-modern China over the centuries.

6.3.1 The Annals

The Chinese word "*shi*", which came to mean "history", originally referred to the court scribes who recorded astronomical events or other matters considered important to the rulers. The earliest form of historical writing consisted of brief chronological records of court events maintained by such scribes, which were known as "annals". These date from the Eastern Zhou period (approximately 8th to 3rd centuries BC). The earliest extant example is from the state of Lu from where Confucius hailed. The style of writing followed in the annals was extremely terse, with just a bare mention of major events. For example, in one particular year, 715 BC, the only entry was a single character or word: "Pests"! Based on the annals, historians compiled the completed record of the reign period of individual rulers, known as the "Veritable Records". Fairly consistently maintained throughout much of China's history, the Veritable Records are a valuable and reliable source of historical information.

6.3.2 The *Historical Records (Shi Ji)* of Sima Qian

Undoubtedly the greatest historian of pre-modern China was **Sima Qian** (d.85 BC), who wrote his path-breaking *"Historical Records"* (*Shi Ji*) in the period of the Former Han Dynasty. Sima Qian was the first to write a comprehensive history of China from antiquity down to his own times, breaking out of the limitations of the annals format. What was more, he also established a format for historical works that was followed by historians down to modern times, which can be termed the "annals + monograph + biography" format.

In fact, the *Historical Records* had a complex 5-part structure, but the two key innovations that Sima Qian introduced was to have a section on topical essays or monographs, and one on biographies. The monograph section included subjects like rituals and music, calendars, astrology and astronomy, rivers and canals, and 'weights and measures' (which was actually a treatise on the economy). In later centuries, the

emphasis in the monograph section gradually shifted away from somewhat esoteric subjects like rites and rituals, astrology, etc., towards subjects with more practical relevance for administrators (like law, administration, waterworks and transport, etc.). Nevertheless, monographs formed a key part of almost every major work of History.

Sima Qian also included a section on biographies, covering not just outstanding individuals, but also groups of people, like 'honest officials', 'despotic officials', 'chaste widows', etc. This is also the section in the historical works in which one can find accounts of foreign peoples.

Not just the structure, but the *methodology* used by Sima Qian was adopted by later historians in important respects. He began the practice of faithfully reproducing the text of the sources he relied on. And where there were several versions, even differing versions, of the same subject or event, he reproduced them all, leaving it to the reader to decide on their relative reliability. He also broke away from the rigid and formal annals style of writing, and had a vivid style of his own. One of the greatest tributes to him was paid by the next great historian after him, Ban Gu, who said about the Grand Historian:

"He discourses without sounding wordy; he is simple without being rustic. His writing is direct and his facts sound. He does not falsify what is beautiful, nor does he conceal what is evil. Therefore his may be termed a "true record"."

6.3.3 Dynastic Histories

One of the most impressive elements in the entire corpus of Chinese historical writing is the collection of 24 "Standard Histories". Each Standard History was basically the history of one particular dynasty and its times, *written by the succeeding dynasty.* The interest of a new dynasty in compiling the history of the preceding dynasty lay, as mentioned earlier, in the need to justify the legitimacy of its own accession to the Imperial Throne. But in the process was created a unique historical record of a people and a civilisation, remarkable for the consistency and comprehensiveness of its coverage.

Although by tradition and veneration, the *Historical Records* of Sima Qian are considered the first of the Standard Histories, it was not the history of just one dynasty. The first of the real dynastic histories was the creative work of the 1st century AD historian Ban Gu, along with his father Ban Biao and his sister Ban Zhao. Ban Gu, living in the Later Han period, sought to write the history of the Former Han dynasty, following essentially the same format as Sima Qian with minor modifications. His was not initially an officially commissioned work. In fact, he was arrested by the Xianzong Emperor when it was reported that he was privately compiling a work of history! However, after his enterprising sister interceded on his behalf and arranged for the Emperor to read the partially completed draft, the Emperor was convinced of the importance of the project and in fact ordered Ban Gu to complete his work, which he did over the next 20 years. Later dynastic histories were mostly officially commissioned.

Following the downfall of the Han dynasty in the 3rd century A.D., the Empire several times broke up, and the line of succession to the Imperial Throne was not always clear. The interesting thing is that, even during these periods of disunion in China's history, the tradition of writing dynastic histories was maintained in the different kingdoms that competed with each other for power. That is why there are 24 recognised Standard Histories, even though the number of dynasties that ruled over a united Chinese Empire was far less. Even after the Empire was finally overthrown in 1911, the succeeding Republican government sought to continue the tradition of the Standard Histories, and

had the history of the last (Qing) dynasty written up. However, this work has generally not been recognised as one of the 24 Standard Histories.

6.3.4 The Later Imperial Period

After a gap of more than 350 years following the collapse of the great Han dynasty, China was reunified under the founding emperor of the Sui dynasty in 689 AD. Thereafter, except for a period of 50 years of warfare after the end of the Tang dynasty (from 907 to 960), the unity of the Chinese empire was maintained in a more or less unbroken fashion for nearly one thousand years until the 20th century.

This was to have its reflection on the tradition of historiography in China. The major works of history were thereafter almost uniformly commissioned by the imperial rulers. They increasingly tended to be the work not of individual scholars, but of groups of historians organised under the imperial Bureau of Historiography. In fact, they could be considered as official compilations of historical information. This was the era of the great encyclopedic histories, in which the histories of different institutions achieved a breadth and comprehensiveness that far surpassed the treatment of these subjects in the monograph section of the Standard Histories. The encyclopedic histories served the need of scholars and officials in an era in which the range and complexity of state activity had greatly increased. The increasing importance in this period of the competitive civil service examinations, as the main route to enter officialdom, also increased the usefulness to scholars of works that gathered all relevant information on a particular subject in one place.

Despite the ponderous and somewhat bureaucratic nature of much of the work on History in the later imperial period, the Tang and particularly the Song periods were also a period of intellectual inquiry in the field of historiography. Scholars and intellectuals sought to challenge some of the formalism and rigidity in history writing and to break new ground.

The first work of critical historiography in China was that of the Tang dynasty scholar Liu Zhiji. He wrote a book, called simply *On History* (*Shi tong*), which directly addressed the question of how history was and should be written. The great historian of the Song period, Sima Guang (1019-1086), squarely confronted the question of how to deal with the problem of divergence of evidence when writing history. Although he did not directly challenge the dynastic history format, he managed to break out of its limitations in writing his *Comprehensive Mirror for the Aid of Government (Zizhi tongjian)*. This monumental work provided a chronological account of 1362 years of China's history, from 403 BC till 959 AD, and was one of the most profoundly influential works of history of the later imperial period. Other historians also directly questioned the usefulness of breaking up history into dynastic chunks, and even felt that Sima Guang had not gone far enough in challenging it. They sought to fill the gaps by writing topical histories and institutional histories that did not observe the conventional periodisation based on dynasties.

Historians of the Song period, which saw a revival of the prestige of Confucianism after its partial eclipse during the heyday of Buddhism in China, were particularly concerned with understanding the underlying order of the past and with drawing the correct moral lessons from history. This was well articulated by Lu Ziqian, who wrote:

> *"Most people, when they examine history, simply look at periods of order and realize that they are ordered, periods of disorder and recognise their disorder, observe one fact and know no more than that one fact. But is this real observation of history? You should picture yourself actually in*

the situation, observe which things are profitable and which dangerous, and note the misfortunes and ills of the times. Shut the book and think for yourself. Imagine that you are facing these various facts and then decide what you think ought to be done. If you look at history in this way, then your learning will increase and your intelligence improve. Then you will get real profit from your reading."

After the Song period, we do not find the same breadth of intellectual inquiry among historians of imperial China. Nevertheless, the tradition of assiduously and meticulously writing history and of compiling and classifying historical works continued. In particular, the use of history and historical analogy to try and understand the problems of the day and to arrive at the right solutions to these problems remained a major preoccupation of Chinese scholars and intellectuals right till modern times.

6.4 HISTORICAL THEORIES

The writing of history always involves some theoretical framework or the other. Even those historians who claim complete neutrality take recourse to general principles to organise their material. History-writing in pre-modern China was no exception. Here we will discuss some of the theoretical bases of traditional Chinese historiography.

6.4.1 Dynastic Cycle

Traditional historiography was dominated by the concept of the dynastic cycle. According to Chinese tradition, the first ruling family of China were the Xia, who were overthrown by the Shang, who were replaced in turn by the Zhou, and so on. As the Chinese saw it, the rise and fall of dynasties followed a clearly defined pattern. The dynastic cycle theory proved useful to traditional historians in two ways. Firstly, it allowed them to deal with their past in manageable chunks. Few dynasties lasted more than 300 years, while some lasted just a few decades. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the dynastic cycle accorded well with the moral objectives of history writing. The rise and fall of dynasties was attributed to the personal moral qualities of the individual rulers. Invariably a dynasty's founding ruler or rulers were presented as men of great wisdom and ability, who put an end to disorder and laid the foundations for a period of general wellbeing. The last rulers were portrayed as weak and ineffective individuals, given to indulging themselves and letting the affairs of state slide into chaos. Hence, the founder of the *current* dynasty (the one that commissioned the writing of the earlier dynasty's history) emerged in a positive light as someone who put an end to the chaos and degeneration. He was considered to have received the "Mandate of Heaven" to rule from his unworthy predecessors. And so the cycle went on. It was a not so subtle warning to rulers to be conscientious in their duties, and to follow accepted conventions and norms of statecraft, so as not to lose their "Mandate of Heaven'' to some challenger.

According to Fairbank, the dynastic cycle proved to be "a major block to the understanding of the fundamental dynamics of Chinese history". In focusing on only short-term changes, it obscured the more fundamental and long-term changes that were taking place in Chinese society. By emphasising the repetitiveness of history, it obscured and denied the possibility of real change. It kept statesmen and scholars chained to the past, looking for clues to solving the dilemmas of the present in the ages gone by, because it was believed that every current problem had some precedent in earlier epochs.

This was to produce a crippling mind-set when China was confronted with spectacularly new and unprecedented problems, particularly in the 19th century. At the same time, Fairbank concedes, the dynastic cycle did have a kind of limited usefulness, particularly in showing how, within the great dynastic periods, administrative and fiscal weakness repeatedly interacted with challenges from foreign peoples to create periods of crisis, upheaval and foreign conquest.

6.4.2 'Continuous History'

The dynastic cycle framework had its critics even in traditional China. As mentioned earlier, particularly during the Tang and Song periods historians opposed its limitations, and sought to break out of it. Some like Sima Guang did not openly discard the dynastic framework, but the scope of his work transcended any one dynasty. Others like Zheng Qiao directly criticised the venerable historian Ban Gu for having started the process of writing dynastic histories, and openly espoused the notion of "continuous history". Yuan Shu inaugurated the method of taking up one topic and writing about it "from beginning to end" without observing the limitations imposed by the dynastic framework. Ma Duanlin tried to strike a compromise by suggesting that while it could make sense to deal with political history in terms of the dynastic framework, the same could not be applied to the history of institutions. "To understand the reasons for the gradual growth and relative importance of institutions in each period," he wrote, "you must make a comprehensive and comparative study of them from their beginnings to their ends and in this way try to grasp their development; otherwise you will encounter serious difficulties." In general, one could say that later histories followed his approach, strictly following the dynastic principle in dealing with political developments, but adopting a more comprehensive treatment when it came to writing institutional history.

6.5 DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF TRADITIONAL CHINESE HISTORIOGRAPHY

As we can see, the Chinese historiographical tradition contained both elements that were similar to other great traditions of writing history, as well as some features that were quite unique and closely bound up with the distinctive features of Chinese civilisation as a whole. We can summarise the main features of this tradition as follows.

6.5.1 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" (*sishi*), 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 important to historians in other societies, such as land deeds, private contracts, litigation records, etc., were rarely used by traditional Chinese historians.

6.5.2 Normative History

Historiography was essentially normative, meaning that it was meant to serve as a guide to those who read it. We have already seen that the dynastic cycle pattern was meant

to convey a message to later rulers about how they should rule. However, the lessons were not just for the emperors. Every conscientious official faced with any problem in his area, whether about how to deal with troublesome foreigners or how to organise grain transport or how to curb banditry or rebellion, was expected to look into history to see how his predecessors had dealt with such problems. It was not just information that was sought in the books of history, but models of conscientiousness, moral uprightness and wisdom in the words and deeds of former rulers and officials, that could educate and inspire the scholars and officials of the day. A clever official could also seek to justify his actions to his superiors or emperor by quoting precedent.

6.5.3 Standard Format

The main works of history followed a remarkably consistent format. The dynastic histories and the "comprehensive histories" over the centuries contained on the whole remarkably similar sections and sub-sections. This has made it easier for later historians and scholars to navigate through the maze of information contained in them. A historian today, for example, doing research on a particular period of China's past or a particular institution would be able to zero in on the relevant sections fairly quickly.

6.5.4 Objectivity and Integrity

From the time of the Grand Historian Sima Qian, it has been considered the duty of the historian to record the facts as objectively as possible. This is one of the remarkable paradoxes of traditional Chinese historiography, considering that the emphasis on official history and normative history would not be expected to support objectivity in historical writing. Nevertheless, no less authoritative a scholar than Charles Gardner has said that "an assumption of complete objectivity underlies the whole Chinese conception of historical writing." The historian's own individual personality and opinions were not meant to intrude into the material he was recording. Where the historian has seen fit to make his own, usually brief, comments, these are usually clearly demarcated from the rest of the text. In addition, the need to be true to his sources has meant that the very often the historian, rather than paraphrasing or rewriting something in his own words, would instead faithfully reproduce verbatim the passages from the texts on which his work was based. Far from being considered a form of plagiarism, this was considered to be the most natural and logical method of historical reconstruction. This method resulted in the distinctive "cut-and-paste" appearance of standard Chinese historical works, which often appear to be careful compilations or arrangements of previous writings rather than original works. While the "cut-and-paste" format occasionally makes for tiresome and lengthy reading, it has one major advantage. Many works, particularly from the early period of China's history, which are no longer extant, are still not completely lost to us because long sections are to be found cited accurately in later, preserved, works of history.

6.6 SUMMARY

In conclusion, we can say that historians in imperial China, particularly after the time of the great Han historians, were very conscious that they were part of a great historiographical tradition. Sometimes, this curbed their freedom to experiment, because they felt obliged to follow the patterns set by their venerated predecessors. But in another sense, it resulted in a truly remarkable record of the past, whose consistency and continuity and general reliability were rarely matched by other societies or civilisations. All dynasties, great or small, of native Chinese or alien origin, were morally obliged to keep up the tradition, and to not allow a break in the continuity of the historiographical

tradition. The sense that they were part of a great tradition added to the prestige of historians and their craft in China. It contributed to the reverence for History and for the striking importance attached to it in the classical tradition.

6.7 CHRONOLOGY OF MAJOR DYNASTIES

Shang	ca.1751 – 1122 BC
Zhou	1122 – 221 BC
Western Zhou	1122 – 771 BC
Eastern Zhou	770 – 256 BC
Spring and Autumn period	722-468 BC
Warring States period	403-221 BC
Qin (first unification of China)	221 – 203 BC
Han	202 BC – AD 220
Former Han	202 BC – AD 9
Later Han	AD 23 – AD 220
Period of Disunion	220 – 589
Sui	589 – 618
Tang	618 – 906
Five Dynasties	907 – 960
Song	960 – 1279
Northern Song	960 –1126
Southern Song	1127 – 1279
Yuan (Mongols)	1260 – 1368
Ming	1368 – 1644
Qing (Manchus)	1644 – 1911

6.8 A BRIEF NOTE ON PRONUNCIATION

Various systems have been used to transcribe Chinese names into Western languages. The one used here is the *pinyin* system which is now widely recognised as the standard form of romanisation. In this system, words are pronounced more or less as they seem, with the following notable exceptions which the student may find in the above text:

- "qi" is pronounced like "chee" (with a hard, aspirated "ch" sound)
- "xi" is pronounced like "shee" (with a sharp, hissing "sh" sound)
- "ian" is pronounced like "yen" (hence, "Qian" is like "Chien")
- "si" is pronounced like "suh" (somewhat like "sir" without the "r")
- "song" is pronounced like "soong" (with a short "oo" sound)
- "shi" is pronounced like "shr"

6.9 EXERCISES

1) How did Confucianism influence the writing of history in ancient China?

2) Discuss the development of historical writing in pre-modern China.

3) Write a note on the theories involved in writing of history in pre-modern China.

4) What were the distinctive features of traditional Chinese historiography?

6.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

William Theodore de Bary (comp.), *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, Vol.1 (New York and London, Columbia University Press, 1960)

Charles S. Gardner, *Chinese Traditional Historiography* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1961)

John King Fairbank and Edwin Reischauer, *East Asia : The Great Tradition* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1958, 1960)

Etienne Balasz, *Chinese Civilization and Bureaucracy* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1964)

Endymion Wilkinson, *Chinese History : A Manual* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, Harvard University Press, 2000)

J, Meskill (ed.), *The Pattern of Chinese History : Cycles, Development, or Stagnation?* (Boston, Heath, 1965)

UNIT 7 HISTORIOGRAPHICAL TRADITIONS IN EARLY INDIA

Structure

7.1 Introduction

7.2 Earliest 'Histories': The Vedic *Danastutis*

7.3 Are the Epics Historical Narratives?

7.4 Puranic Genealogies and What They Tell Us

7.5 Courtly Traditions: *Prasastis*

7.6 Courtly Traditions: *Charitas*

7.7 A Poet / Historian: Kalhana and the *Rajtarangini*

7.8 Other Traditions of Historical Writing

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7.1 INTRODUCTION

It might seem rather trite to say that history is a study of the past, but, for understanding ancient traditions of historiography, it is perhaps useful to remember that definitions of history have been changing over time.

Today, our understanding of the scope of history has expanded considerably. We no longer understand history to be simply a chronicle of kings. Instead, historians are interested in, explore, and attempt to reconstruct histories of the environment, of gender relations, of social categories and classes that were regarded as marginal, subordinate or even insignificant, of processes, and of regions that were considered peripheral. Many of these concerns find little or no place in ancient works that we identify as historical. What then was the focus of these works?

As we will see, many of these works were composed by literate men, generally (though not always) brahmanas, for consumption by the ruling elite. They were designed to proclaim and legitimize claims to power by new aspirants (who might otherwise have been dismissed as upstarts or interlopers). They were also deployed to consolidate claims of more established rulers. Thus the concerns of both authors and patrons seem rather narrow. Vast sections of the population, including common women and men, find little or no place within such narratives.

It may seem easy, and even fashionable to dismiss these works on account of their limitations. Yet, it is worth remembering that their significance has been debated for nearly two centuries, and that a critical appreciation of the traditions within which these texts were located can enrich our understanding of the past.

Initially, these texts were opened up for scrutiny using modern techniques of analysis in the colonial context. Works that purported to be *itihasas* (literally 'so it was') and *puranas* ('old') were compared with histories produced in ancient Greece and Rome, and were found wanting. They were found to be especially deficient in terms of spatial

and chronological precision, which was regarded as the minimum requirement of a historical work. And this was then used to argue, implicitly and often explicitly, that, as they lacked a sense of history, early Indians and by extension their descendants were intellectually inferior to their western counterparts. Clearly, history and notions of the past were inextricably enmeshed in notions of power.

As may be expected, attempts to suggest that Indians were somehow incapable of writing histories led to a reaction, where virtually any and every textual tradition which had some semblance of chronological underpinnings, was valorised as embodying historical "fact." These responses have in turn been critically examined and questioned. It is useful to keep these perspectives and contexts in mind as we examine specific examples of early texts and traditions that have historiographical significance.

7.2 EARLIEST 'HISTORIES' : THE VEDIC *DANASTUTIS*

If we understand histories as recording events that were regarded as significant by those who chronicled them, some of the earliest examples of these come from the *Rgveda* (c. 2nd millennium BCE). These include verses that were identified as *danastutis* (literally 'in praise of gifts'). These were composed by the recipients, who were priests, and usually mention the name of the donor. Here is a typical example. These verses are from the second hymn of the eighth mandala or book of the *Rgveda:*

> Skilled is Yadu's son in giving precious wealth, he who is rich in herds of cattle.
>
> May he, Asanga's son, Svanadratha, obtain all joy and happiness.
>
> Asanga, the son of Playoga, has surpassed others, by giving ten thousand.
>
> I have got ten bright coloured oxen….

As we can see from this example, the recipient acknowledges the gifts he receives and prays for the well-being of the donor. Such acknowledgments or proclamations were a part of major rituals such as the *asvamedha* as well. As part of the ritual, the sacrificial horse was let loose to wander for a year. During that period, a brahmana priest was expected to sing about the generosity of the patron every morning, while a ksatriya was to sing about his war-like exploits every evening. It is likely that many of the stories that were later compiled in the epics and the Puranas developed out of such narrative practices.

It is perhaps worth reflecting on what would get recorded and why. Only what was regarded as positive or desirable from the point of view of the brahmana or the ksatriya would find a place in such eulogies. Other activities, or failures, would tend to be glossed over or even obliterated from memory. We may also note that recalling the generosity and prowess of the patron was not meant to be a simple, objective recounting, but was in fact meant to ensure that the patron would continue to live up to expectations. As such, these histories were related to a context of patronage.

7.3 ARE THE EPICS HISTORICAL NARRATIVES?

Traditionally, the *Mahabharata* is recognised as an *itihasa* while the *Ramayana* is regarded as a *mahakavya* (great poem). Each of these texts has a long and complicated history. The kernel of the stories contained in the epics may date back to the early centuries of the 1st millennium BCE, but the texts were finally written down much later (c. 4th-5th centuries CE). As such, the texts have undergone alterations and additions

over several centuries. The Kurus and Pancalas in general are mentioned in later Vedic literature (c. first half of the 1st millennium BCE). While both these lineages were important in the *Mahabharata*, references to specific personages mentioned in the epic are relatively sparse in the Vedic corpus. References to the locale of the *Ramayana*, Kosala and Videha, are even fewer, and, once again, the principal characters of the epic hardly figure in later Vedic literature. Archaeological excavations and explorations indicate that sites such as Hastinapura and Indraprastha (associated with the *Mahabharata*) and Ayodhya (associated with the *Ramayana*) were small, pre-urban settlements during this period.

The literal historicity of the events depicted in the epics is unlikely to be established. Nevertheless, the texts can and have been analysed in terms of the genre that they represent. Significantly, both epics contain genealogies. The *Mahabharata* contains the genealogies of the lunar (*chandravamsa*) lineage, while the *Ramayana* contains the genealogy of the solar (*suryavamsa*) lineage. Several ruling families in the early medieval period (c. 7th century CE) traced descent from these lineages. While the genealogies may not be literally true, they are important for what they suggest about socio-political processes.

7.4 PURANIC GENEALOGIES AND WHAT THEY TELL US

By the middle of the 1st millennium CE, another category of literature, the Puranas, was written down. Like the epics, the antecedents of the Puranas can be traced back for several centuries. And as in the case of the *Mahabharata*, a social group known as the *sutas* evidently played an important role in the composition, compilation and transmission of at least some of the narratives that were included in the Puranas. The *sutas* are often regarded as bards. They were important in early states, so much so that they are listed amongst the "jewels" or principal supporters of the raja in the later Vedic texts. They were expected to act as messengers of the king, accompany him in battle, and maintain as well as narrate stories about his exploits. However, *sutas* are also mentioned as low status people in the Dharmasastras such as the *Manusmrti*. This would suggest that at least some people in society, perhaps the brahmanas, were contesting the claims of the *sutas* to be both close to the king and transmitters of royal lore. And when the epics and Puranas were finally written down, the authors were recognised as brahmanas rather than as *sutas*.

We find two or three types of genealogies in the Puranas. The first includes lineages of sages. Such lineages, which perhaps served as markers of legitimate transmission of knowledge, are found in some of the Upanisads and Dharmasastras as well. The other genealogies are those of rulers. These in turn are divided into two categories, those that pre-date the onset of the *Kaliyuga* and those of rulers who are post- *Kaliyuga*. The first category, delineating the original solar and lunar lineages, includes the heroes of the epics. In fact, the war that constitutes the central event of the *Mahabharata* is recognised as marking the turning point (for the worse) in human history, and the beginning of an age of decline, i.e. the *Kaliyuga*. The genealogy of the second category of rulers, clearly lesser mortals, is marked by an interesting feature. All these genealogies, which in some cases run till about the 5th century CE, are constructed in the future tense. For instance, a verse about the Gupta rulers, who ruled in north India from c. 4th century CE, runs as follows:

> Kings born of the Gupta family will enjoy all these territories: viz. Prayaga (Allahabad) on the Ganga, Saketa (eastern Uttar Pradesh) and Magadha.

Why were these genealogies compiled, and why did they take such a curious form? There are no easy answers. It is likely that the final compilation was undertaken during the time of the Gupta rulers, as (with few exceptions) later rulers are generally not mentioned. Was the future tense adopted so as to suggest that these rulers were destined to rule, and was this then a possible strategy for legitimation? It is likely that this would have also created an illusion of stability and permanence that may have been valuable in a fluid political situation. What is interesting is that many (though not all) of the rulers mentioned in the Puranic genealogies are known from other sources such as inscriptions and coins as well. At the same time, not all rulers who are known from other sources find place in these genealogies. Clearly, traditions of recording the names of rulers as well as the duration of their reigns were widely prevalent, and were more or less systematised within the Puranic tradition.

It has been suggested that genealogies become particularly important during certain historical moments, when attempts are made to either contest or consolidate power. Invoking genealogies at such moments may become a means of asserting status, which may be especially important when these claims are somewhat tenuous. Claims to continuity, implicit in invoking lineage identities, are also particularly significant when there are major resources that are accumulated and handed down from one generation to the next. These resources could include land, and in the ultimate analysis, kingdoms.

What is also important is to focus on the principles of inclusion and exclusion that underlie genealogies. We can examine whether kinship is traced bilaterally (i.e. through both parents) or is patrilineal or (in some rare instances) matrilineal. We can also examine the positions assigned to elder and younger brothers in these texts. Thus the genealogies often provide information about the kind of kinship networks that were valorised.

What is evident then is that such genealogies need not be literally true. Nevertheless, insofar as they appeal to selected events and ancestors in the past, they allow us to speculate on the circumstances in which such strategies of drawing on or even constructing a mythical past may have been important.

7.5 COURTLY TRADITIONS : *PRASASTIS*

Much of the literature we have been considering so far was written in relatively simple Sanskrit verse. Although access to Sanskrit learning was limited, the Puranas and the epics contain provisions that suggest that these could and probably were read out to all categories of people, including women and *sudras*, who were otherwise denied access to Sanskrit texts. In other words, there were certain kinds of 'histories' that were meant to be accessible to all sections of society. These were not only meant to provide an understanding about the past, but were also probably visualised as a means of disseminating information about social norms. In a sense, these agendas were complementary.

There were at the same time, other categories of texts that were probably meant for circulation amongst a more restricted, elite audience. These were associated with the royal court, and were usually written in ornate Sanskrit, with prolific use of similes, metaphors, and other strategies to render the text weighty. Examples of these texts are found in *prasastis* or eulogistic inscriptions as well as in *caritas*. While some of the earliest examples of *prasastis* are in Prakrit, the best-known examples are in Sanskrit. Such inscriptions become particularly common from c. 4th century CE. These were often independent inscriptions, but could also be part of votive inscriptions, commemorating the generosity of the royal donor.

Perhaps amongst the best-known of such *prasastis* is Samudragupta's **Prayaga prasasti**, also known as the Allahabad Pillar Inscription (it is inscribed on an Asokan pillar). It was composed by Harisena, who evidently was a skilled poet, apart from holding several offices. The inscription describes how the ruler was chosen by his father, his numerous exploits, and the strategies whereby he won the allegiance of rulers of distant lands, his heroic qualities and his boundless scholarship. In short, the ruler is idealized as an all-rounder, someone who excelled in just about everything. It is likely that some of the descriptions of the ruler's exploits are true. Nonetheless, the element of poetic exaggeration is also more than apparent. To cite just one example: the ruler's body was described as having become even more handsome as it was adorned with the wounds caused by axes, arrows, spikes, spears, darts, swords, clubs, javelins and other weapons. Such elaborate descriptions, couched in ornate Sanskrit, were probably meant to impress the ruling elite. While the inscription was literally visible, its contents would probably have been accessible only to a relatively limited audience.

Another famous *prasasti* is that of Pulakesin II, the Calukya ruler of the 7th century CE. The poet who composed this particular *prasasti*, Ravikirti, compared his skills to those of Kalidasa and Bharavi. Once again, we have a description of Pulakesin's accession to the throne, and his military exploits, which included pushing back the contemporary ruler of north India, Harsa, when he attempted to cross the Vindhyas. Ravikirti's composition is part of a votive inscription that also records how the poet donated a house for a Jaina teacher.

7.6 COURTLY TRADITIONS : *CHARITAS*

Another genre of text associated primarily with the courts was the *charita*. These were meant to be accounts of the lives and achievements of 'great men.' Most of the surviving examples of *charitas* are in Sanskrit, and, like the *prasastis*, the style of these compositions is extremely ornate. Given the length of these texts, it seems likely that these were composed entirely for elite consumption. Somewhat paradoxically, one of the earliest *charitas* that survive is the *Buddhacharita*, composed by Asvaghosa (c.1st century CE). Although purporting to be the life of a world renouncer, the author dwells at length on the luxuries of courtly life, including elaborate descriptions of women. It is possible that this was meant to serve as a representation of life at the Kusana court. Perhaps the best-known of the *charita* genre is the *Harsacharita*, composed by Banabhatta. This is an account of the early years of Harsa's reign. Bana's composition contains some of the most complex prose sentences in Sanskrit literature, carefully crafted so as to lend an aura of exclusiveness to the ruler who was eulogized. The description of Harsa's feet, cited below, is just one example of this style:

> His feet were very red as if with wrath at insubordinate kings, and they shed a bright ruby light on the crowded crests of the prostrate monarchs, and caused a sunset of all the fierce luminaries of war and poured streams of honey from the flowers of the crest garlands of the local kings, and were never even for a moment unattended, as by the heads of slain enemies, by swarms of bees which fluttered bewildered by the sweet odour of the chaplets on the heads of all the feudal chiefs…..

The writers of *charitas* adopted other strategies as well. We find that Sandhyakaranandin, a poet who eulogized the Pala ruler Rama Pala of eastern India (c. 11-12th centuries CE), composed the *Ramacharita* in such a way that each verse could be interpreted as referring either to the life of the epic hero or to that of his patron.

It is likely that both *prasastis* and *charitas* were especially valuable in situations where rulers were somewhat insecure. In the case of all the four rulers we have mentioned, it is evident that their claims to the throne did not rest on primogeniture. In Samudragupta's case Harisena states that he was chosen by his father, ignoring the claims of rivals. Pulakesin was the nephew of his predecessor. Harsa succeeded to the throne on the sudden death of his elder brother, and claimed the kingdom of his deceased brother-in-law as well. Rama Pala, too, had no direct claim to the throne. It is possible that these elaborate texts were to some extent visualized as strategies for exalting rulers who might otherwise have been vulnerable.

7.7 A POET/HISTORIAN : KALHANA AND THE *RAJTARANGINI*

It is often said that the only truly historical work produced in ancient India was the *Rajatarangini*, or the river of kings, authored by Kalhana, (12th century CE). The *Rajatarangini* is, at one level, a history of Kashmir since its inception (the account begins with the creation of the land from primeval waters). It consists of eight books or *tarangas*, and is composed in verse.

The first three *tarangas* deal with the history of the region till the 7th century CE, *tarangas* 4 to 6 carry the story forward till the 11th century, while the last two *tarangas* (which are also the longest) deal with the 12th century. What is interesting is to see how the tone of the narrative changes: in the first section, the author, who was a brahmana, the son of a minister, and a learned Sanskrit scholar, paints a picture of what, from his point of view, was an ideal world, one in which sons succeeded fathers, and in which the brahmanical norms of varna and gender hierarchies were strictly followed. However, in the next two sections, he documents in detail how these norms were violated. Amongst the "horrors" according to Kalhana is the phenomenon of women rulers. As is obvious, not all present-day readers will share Kalhana's perspective, even as they might derive information from his writing.

What makes Kalhana's work unique is that he mentions at the outset the sources he consulted. These included *sasanas* or royal proclamations pertaining to religious endowments, *prasastis* or eulogies, and the *sastras:*

> By the inspection of ordinances of former kings relating to religious foundations and grants, laudatory inscriptions, as well as written records, all wearisome error has been set at rest.

He also attempts to distinguish between the plausible and the fantastic, and offers explanations for changes in fortune. These are, more often than not, in terms of invoking fate, whose ways, according to the author, were mysterious.

Kalhana is scathing in his critique of earlier writers, whose works, according to him, were full of errors and lacked style. Unfortunately, none of the works of his predecessors have survived, so we have no means of assessing his claims. He himself set a precedent that was emulated by later writers, who continued his narrative down to the times of the sultans of Kashmir.

Kalhana regarded himself as a poet. Ideally, according to him, a poet was supposed to be endowed with divine insight, (*divyadrsti*), and was almost as powerful as Prajapati, the god recognised as the creator within the brahmanical tradition. He also envisaged his work as a didactic text, meant especially for the education of kings. There is an emphasis on trying to offer impartial judgments, and to cultivate a sense of detachment. As a poet, moreover, Kalhana functioned within the Sanskritic tradition according to

which every composition was expected to have a dominant *rasa* (emotion, mood or sentiment). The *rasa* he valorised was the *santa rasa* (tranquility), although there are sections where the heroic tone dominates. There are also sections where the horrors of war and the destruction it leaves in its trail are graphically highlighted. Interestingly, although Kalhana was clearly close to the court, he was not the court poet.

7.8 OTHER TRADITIONS OF HISTORICAL WRITING

While most traditions of historical writing were related to kings, other traditions developed around religious institutions. These included the Buddhist, Jaina, and brahmanical institutions. Of these, the early Buddhist tradition is perhaps the best-known at present.

Buddhist traditions record the convening of three (according to some versions four) Buddhist councils, where early Buddhist doctrines and teachings were recorded. Gradually, as the monastic order was consolidated, more systematic records were kept, and a system of chronology, marking years in terms of the *mahaparinirvana* or the death of the Buddha, was evolved. Maintaining such records probably became more important as monasteries became rich institutions, receiving endowments of villages, lands, and other goods, as well as cash, from benefactors including kings. Such chronicles were best preserved in Sri Lanka, where there was a close bonding between the state and the monasteries. This relationship was documented in texts such as the *Dipavamsa* and the *Mahavamsa*.

7.9 DATING SYSTEMS

Chronologies are crucial to history, and it is in this context that it is worth examining the varieties of dating systems that were used in early India. One of the earliest systems to be documented, and one that remained popular for several centuries, was the use of regnal years. This was a system whereby kings took the first year when they began ruling as a starting point, counting years of their rule in terms of this beginning. This was used by the Mauryan emperor Asoka, for instance. He used dates derived from the time of his *abhiseka* (sprinkling with sacred water). We learn from his thirteenth major rock edict that he attacked Kalinga eight years after he had been installed as king.

In other instances, dynastic eras were developed. Perhaps the best-known example of this is provided by the era of the Guptas. This was projected as beginning from c. 320 CE, the date assigned to the first important Gupta ruler, Chandragupta I. Interestingly, the use of the era began with retrospective effect, from the time of Chandragupta II, about 80 years after the date from which it was supposed to begin. Clearly, it was only after they had consolidated their power that the Gupta rulers thought it fit to begin an era, pushing back the antiquity of their claims to power as far back as possible.

Other eras that have endured for about two millennia are the Vikrama era (c. 58 BCE) and the Saka era (c. 78 CE). Both of these eras were probably of royal origin, but there is little or no consensus regarding who the kings in question were. The Vikrama era is particularly problematic from this point of view, as several kings in early India adopted the title of *vikramaditya* (literally the sun of valour), and we have no means of determining which one amongst these initiated the era which is still in use. The Saka era may mark the beginning of the reign of Kaniska, arguably the most illustrious of the Kusana rulers. However, it is worth remembering that the Kusanas and Sakas were different groups of Central Asian peoples. What is possible is that the term Saka was used as a generic term for foreigners, and an era that may have been begun by the Kusanas came to be known by this name.

7.10 SUMMARY

It is evident then that a sense of history, if by this we mean an awareness of the past, was well-developed in early India. There were several systems of reckoning dates that were in existence, and that were commonly used, as is evident from finds of inscriptions bearing dates. These have been found throughout the subcontinent. Inscriptions and in textual traditions tell us about how elites thought about the past and attempted to both use and manipulate it through specific strategies of recording. These include recording the names and deeds of generous patrons, as for instance in the Vedic *danastutis*. Genealogies, too, could be constructed to meet political exigencies, and could be extended in innovative ways. Besides, distinctive genres were developed to proclaim the status of rulers, most evident in the *prasastis* and the *charitas.* Yet, there seem to have been other traditions as well. Kalhana's *Rajatarangini*, though for and about kings, is very different in its tone and tenor.

It is when we search for histories of non-elite groups that we run into problems. These were clearly of marginal interest to the literate few, who compiled the textual traditions we have examined. So we are left with the sense of historiographical traditions that were rich, but restricted.

7.11 EXERCISES

1) Write notes on the following :

   a) Vedic *Danastutis*

   b) *Charitas*

   c) *Prasastis*

2) Discuss the tradition of Puranic genealogies.

3) Who was Kalhana? Discuss his historical work.

4) Write a note on the dating systems used by various dynasties in early India.

7.12 SUGGESTED READINGS

V.S. Pathak, *Ancient Historians of India* (London, Asia Publishing House, 1963).

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A.K. Warder, *An Introduction to Indian Historiography* (Bombay, 1972).

UNIT 8 MEDIEVAL HISTORIOGRAPHY – WESTERN

Structure

8.1 Introduction

8.2 Christian Historiography

8.3 Changing Concept of Time and Historiography

8.4 Historians and their Works

8.5 Summary

8.6 Exercises

8.7 Suggested Readings

8.1 INTRODUCTION

In the European Middle Ages *historia and chronica* were two terms used for sequencing and inscribing the past. According to a famous contemporary definition given by Isidore of Seville (c. 560-636) *historia* was '*narratio rerum gestarum*' (a narration of facts). If the term *historia* was used formally as a mere narrative of events, a deeper meaning came to be associated with it with the use of the expression *chronica* (chronicle), which gave to history a sense of 'historiography' or an explicable 'chronicle' of the past. These gave to history both a terminological coherence as well as a coherence of substance. Historiography was seen as that which linked the present to the past in an intellectual 'representation' of the past through the narrative contained in the *chronica*. Thus, from the beginning Christian historiographers were deeply concerned with the proper attribution of facts to their corresponding dates or times and to place them correctly within a continuous chronology.

8.2 CHRISTIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

The oldest Christian histories were universal histories written for the simple purpose of satisfying the demand to integrate Biblical history (which was not at all clear in its temporal exactness) into an ancient chronology, involving a vast pre-Christian past and spread over various eras. Contemporary political developments in Europe, principally that of the formation of vast feudal lordships and monarchies also cast their shadows over the writing of history. Historiography, thus also became charged with the task of establishing a concurrence between these various Christian and secular traditions. Thus, Meister Eckhart (c.1260-1327), while locating Christ as the centre of salvational history also used the new formations of political power as his reference points. Otto of Freising (c.1111-1158) composed his history of the world in 1146, usually called *The Two Cities*. Though he adopted a theological concept of history, he also concluded each book with a narrative of political change in history thereby indicating the transitoriness (*mutabilitas*) of the world. This fluid sense of chronological boundaries is also visible in the chronicles of the high Middle Ages. Here two chronological systems dominated: the incarnation era and the registering of reigns and pontificates, and numerous chroniclers strove to establish a factual as well as a narrative unity of these elements. This resulted in a belief in the natural changeability and the ephemeral nature of history as such, because all earthly things were ruled by time. For the medieval chroniclers, historical change was primarily a cycle of growth and decay of regents and kingdoms.

The medieval concept of the past thus was determined by an extremely peculiar, ambiguous, even paradoxical, mixture of belief in historical progression on the one hand and its immutability on the other, of an epochal change and at the same time a continuity of times and historical situations. In the final analysis, it lacked a sense of the truly historical characterisation of the past. However, owing to its emphasis on verifiability of the chronological arrangement, this understanding cannot be classified as being truly timeless, but in various ways it nevertheless lacked a sense of assigning a specific peculiarity to each passing epoch. The past was perceived as a (temporal) development corresponding to the *saeculum*, the earthly time, with an unchanging character and essence. This engendered a widespread tendency to order historical events according to their respective time which was in no way seen as contradictory to the opposing tendency to detach the subject matter of the same events from their chronological order. Regarding the medieval concept of the past, time was an essential part of earthly existence, yet at the same time it was a symbol of the eternal world. Historiographical thinking was combined with the theological needs of history. However, the fact that change occurred was also undeniable. Even in the Bible the coming and going of three world-empires had been described, and, since St Augustine (354-430) no one would deny the changes that had occurred or were going to occur in consequence of the advent of Christianity. Also, St Augustine had given a perfectly acceptable explanation for historical change. He had argued that only God had perfect ever-lasting stability, whereas change in the temporal world was the consequence of the very imperfection of human existence.

The Bible in the middle ages was seen not simply as a literal description of the unfolding of a Christian religion, but also as a chronicle of a succession of spiritual parts. The diverse texts of the Christian tradition were unified in the Bible, thus giving it a coherent history in a historiographical frame of reference which was blended with a unified system of symbolisms, so uniting history with tradition and representation. The acceptance of Catholicism strengthened this historical homogenisation, for one of its core elements was its character of being a universal religion which had little space for the particularist rules, norms and values of specific groups. The earliest Christian historical works were chronologies designed to link events from scripture with political events, and to create a universal history of humanity. Though the belief in the divine origin of the rulers militated against fundamental principles of Christian theological doctrine, the past was constituted by the narratives which were written down in the Holy Scriptures, and assigned no value to the particularistic traditions which were transmitted within political groups. Also, the Christian Church enforced the rule that believers in the Christian faith had to respect the Holy Scriptures as the ultimate source of both tradition as well as justice. Church history thus could now become universal history.

8.3 CHANGING CONCEPT OF TIME AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

A conscious concept of time was an essential element in every historiographical work of the middle ages. From the deep interpenetration which existed between theology and history in the middle ages, 'time' became purely 'temporal' (that is, an inseparable condition of earthly existence) because it was directly connected with creation and the essence of having been created by the Creator. Thus, it was situated in opposition to eternity, which, as God's 'time', was timeless and unmoving. This temporality of earthly time was described in the early twelfth century as 'a shadow of eternity; it has begun with the world and will end with the world'. Such a clear separation between God's 'time' and temporal 'time' was crucial in developing the notions of chronology, as a measurable sequence of the passage of time in history. Even more important was the methodological relationship — time was henceforth a necessary constitutive element of historiography. In the prologue

of his chronicle, Hugh of Saint Victor (c.1096-1142) named three particular 'circumstances' of historical facts : 'The knowledge of facts particularly depends on three aspects: the persons (personae) by whom they have been done, the places (*loca*) where they have been done, and the times (*tempora*) when they have been done. To this can be added the notion of 'action' (*negotium*). A typical medieval narrative was determined by these four elements. Therefore place, time, and history formed not only the contents of medieval encyclopaedias, but that some chronicles started with 'time tables' or even with theoretical discussions on time. In medieval perception, chronicles were seen as *rerum gestarum* (narration of facts) and, consequently, *series temporum* (sequence of time).

According to the contemporary perceptions, there were five specific reckonings of historical time which delimited the subject of history from other genres:

1) By the choice of its facts, in the sense that any author had to choose those which were worth remembering (*memorabilia*), and this made historiography distinct;

2) By claiming to recollect the truth (the real facts), it was distinguished from fiction;

3) By its examination of the past and, especially, the 'origins' (*origines*), it was separated from the prophecies about the future (which nevertheless were also regarded);

4) By its intention to hand down the corpus of known facts of the past to posterity (*memoriae commendare*), it was constituted as historiography;

5) By its specific manner of representation, the chronological order, it acquired its proper character.

It is significant that this sense of time developed quite early in the west European traditions of history-writing. One of the principal moving spirits behind this novel reckoning of time and its historiographical significance was 'the Venerable' Bede (672-735). Once again, the root of this shift lay in the attempts to historicise the Bible. Remarkably, Bede, who had used the word *chronica* as the title for his previous writings on the Biblical traditions, in 731 in entitling his work 'Ecclesiastical History of the English People', chose the conventional word *historia* in order to denote his synthetic way of commemorating the past. In doing so Bede was drawing from a pre-Christian tradition, from Latin where the word *historia* had meant a secular account of the past compiled from a variety of sources and describing events of the human world set apart from the divine world. However, Bede expanded the range of the meaning of *historia* by adding a single major qualifying attribute which was to be the cornerstone of medieval European historiography, namely, that his *historia* was to be an ecclesiastical one, thus, integrating the account of the history of the Church into the universalism represented it Biblical traditions. This last purpose of history was always to be forefront in his mind, at least alongside the need to be accurate of which he was so conscious. Additionally, he became the first historian to use the AD, that is, from Christ's birth, chronology and in doing so set the standard for historiographical time reckoning in Europe. This method was adapted into general use through the popularity of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* and the two works on chronology. This also enabled him to date the change from Roman universal rule over Britain to the establishment of local rulers through a chronology that was not tied to the Roman administrative institutions but focused on Christ. At a more fundamental level, Bede tried to weigh the relative evidential value of the several sources available to him, thereby initiating a quiet methodological departure from the group-centred oral traditions of contemporary historical thinking. Orally transmitted traditions had retained their validity and authenticity without fundamental change by virtue of being handed down from generation to generation in particularist groups. In contrast, Bede, like the historians

of late Antiquity, committed himself to the writing and publication of a text which he expected to be communicated through reading and copying and whose reception, by virtue of these communicative techniques, would no longer be confined to one particularist group.

8.4 HISTORIANS AND THEIR WORKS

As in antiquity, the best medieval works were accounts of contemporary history by men who had participated in the events that they were describing. It is, however, very significant that some of the writers that are prized most highly today survive in only very few manuscripts and were presumably not appreciated by most of their contemporaries. One such work was the *Historia Pontificalis* ('Pontifical History') covering the period 1148-52, of John of Salisbury (circa 1115-1180), one of the most accomplished scholars of his age, who was writing about the period when he was in the papal service. In 12th-century Europe secular history writing emerged, shown in the work of Geoffroi de Villehardouin (circa 1160-1213), and the chronicles of Jean sire de Joinville (1224-1317), Jean Froissart, and Philippe de Comines (1445-1509) in successive centuries.

Another feature of medieval historical writing in Europe was that it seemed perennially poised at the crossroads between eschatological aspirations of a universal Christendom and the objective conditions of the real world. It was this conflict which forced another remarkable contemporary chronicler, Bishop Otto of Freising (c.1112-58), half brother to the then reigning King Conrad III, to present a rather gloomy narrative of human history from the expulsion from paradise up to his own times. The History of the Two Cities, sometimes also referred to as Chronica, provided an account of history in seven books, to which Otto added a speculative eighth book on the future of the City of God when there would be no history. Otto completed his work in 1146, the year in which the abortive Second Crusade began and in which he, his nephew and the future Emperor Frederick, as well as King Conrad, took part. Otto's narrative abounded with laments about the volatility of empires which he felt to be increasing during his own time. This feeling led Otto to believe that he and his contemporaries were living at the end of times; with the end of the world as the most fundamental of all changes approaching. And although he credited human actors with some degree of freedom of promoting or resisting change, he insisted that transitoriness had been divinely ordained and was therefore an unalterable quality of human existence. In this way, chronology itself became a means of demonstrating the changeability of the past and the conditions of life in the present before the coming of the City of God.

In this fashion, world history came to be established as a computable, finite, yet unstable entity under the control of change in the historiographical traditions of medieval Europe. But, this view of world history soon came under stress. Two factors caused the stress: first, there was the manifestly continuous existence of the world despite the eschatological belief that the predicted end of the world was close; and second, there was the reception in the Occident, during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, of the Aristotelian concept of time as an endless process. The first factor was enhanced by the use of the AD chronology itself, which helped to deal historiographically with the institutional discontinuities of the Roman Empire. Hence it was ultimately in conflict with the eschatological belief in the finiteness of the existence of the world as an earthly city. The Aristotelian definition of time, came to be reintroduced in the Occident through the Arab translations of Aristotle's original works from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. According to the Aristotelian concept, time was regarded as the mover of all things, elevated above all other divine creations. In consequence of the spread of this concept of time, it became difficult to conceive existence without time, even beyond Judgement Day. In other words, if time

was prior to everything else, existence became inconceivable outside of or beyond time and thinking about a world without change became subject to fairy tales and mere speculation.

Memory was an important repository of historical traditions in medieval Europe. In this the cult of saints and the veneration of ancestors occupied a very important place. The earliest political groups in early medieval Europe emphasised tradition in their commemoration of the past. In many of these political groups, rulers were involved in the process of passing on to future generations the inherited traditions which contained norms of behaviour as well as conventional group-related attitudes and perceptions. Therefore oral narratives were and were believed to contain records of the past, whose reliability and authenticity was to be confirmed by the social status of the person narrating them. Therefore these traditions could transmit sanctioned rules, norms and values which, in turn, authoritatively shaped the attitudes and perceptions of the group members. Gradually however, there was a shift towards the use of a wider variety of sources.

This was visible in the works of Otto who sought to adapt to his own time the various chronological frameworks which he found in his sources. From the Bible, he took the chronology of the world ages for the early parts of his work; from Orosius (d. 417) he borrowed the chronology of the foundation of Rome and the arguments through which the coming into existence, spreading and continuity of the Christian religion could be linked with the Roman Empire. But it was from Bede that Otto received the idea of counting the years after the birth of Christ, so that he could continue his narrative beyond the fifth-century institutional crisis of the Roman Empire. As he himself wrote: 'in order to remove all occasions of doubt about those things I have written, either in your mind or in the minds of any others who listen to or read this history, I will make it my business to state briefly from what sources I have gained my information'. This attitude became remarkably diffused among historians. Unlike the historians of antiquity, the medieval writers had no inhibitions about extensively quoting from official documents. In England, legal and administrative records were used extensively by contemporary historians, like Roger of Hoveden, who made their chronicles into an anthology of official records, thinly connected by the authors' brief comments.

One major problem with medieval European historical writing was its perception of history as primarily as a chronological progression.. Historical changes were seen in political rise and decline or in change of rulership, possibly complemented by spatial displacement of the centres of power, and historical events were installed in their precise temporal frame. But these changes were not estimated, interpreted, or explained according to their respective historical situations, as structural changes, changes in contemporary attitudes, or, even in the historical conditions. Owing to a linear concept of time, the authors recognized an irretrievability of history, but they did not acknowledge a thorough alteration through the coming of new epochs. Therefore, they completely lacked any sense of 'alternative pasts' or of the historical peculiarity of each epoch. The twelfth century, as a modern historian has remarked, the twelfth century was not simply concerned with 'the pastness of the past' but with 'its timeless edification'. The past and the present were thus fused in one continuous narrative.

One danger of regarding the past with the eyes of the present to such a degree easily was that of anachronism. For instance, Charlemagne was not only presented as a martial Frankish emperor but also as a knight and a crusader. In the account of Caesars (ostensible) conquest of 'Germany' the Roman camps (*castella*) became medieval castles, the legionaries (*milites*) were turned into knights, the magistrates into *ministerials*, and the Germanic peoples became Germans.

The unawareness of the meaning of anachronism helps to explain the strange wanderings of medieval annals and chronicles. If a religious community wanted to acquire a historical narrative, it copied some work that happened to be most readily accessible. A continuation might then be added at the manuscript's new abode, and, later on, this composite version might be copied and further altered by a succession of other writers. Hence there are at least six main versions of the annals known as the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. They all derive from the annals kept down to 892 at Winchester, the West Saxon capital. The tendency to link the present time with the period of the Roman Empire and to emphasise a continuity indicates a characteristic feature of the concept (or consciousness) of history in the high Middle Ages that seems to contradict the tendency to determine and record precise historic dates. On the one hand, the authors acknowledged and noted change and development, and they distinguished between epochs or phases in history; on the other hand, their perceptions of the events were imbued with an astounding sense of 'timelessness' that ignored a real difference in the epochal character insofar as this went beyond the political succession of power, reign, and kingdoms. On the contrary, it allowed events that were long past to be applied directly to the present.

Contact with Byzantines and Muslims broadened history writing by showing Westerners other points of view. Byzantine historians also extensively used the genre of writing history in the form of chronicles, although the greater unity of the Byzantine Empire and the persistence of a unified culture gave a somewhat more literary quality to the Byzantine works. Medieval Islamic historians such as al-Tabari and al-Masudi wrote histories of great scope, often employing sophisticated methods to separate fact from fable. But by far the greatest medieval Arabic historian was Ibn Khaldun, who created an early version of sociological history to account for the rise and decline of cities and civilisations. In the course of the fifteenth century, commemorating the past as the changing history of the world became more directly intertwined with the geographical, specifically maritime, exploration of the world in the quest for the seaway to India or the hypothetical southern continent which was thought to connect Africa with Asia. The extending recognition by Europeans of the pluralism of continents on the surface of the earth made an oddity of the conventional medieval world picture and the medieval way of counting years and commemorating the past.

Though the bases of Western historiographical tradition continued to be classical antiquity and Christianity, the later Middle Ages received that deposit, transmitted it with a wider variety of sources and in a strictly chronological frame. It also adapted it to wider influences which were touching the shores of Europe from outside. Therefore the criticism which has sometimes been levelled that medieval historians showed little awareness of the process of historical change and that they were unable to imagine that any earlier age was substantially different from their own seems inappropriate.

8.5 SUMMARY

In the foregoing account we have discussed the beginnings and development of historiographical tradition in medieval western world. In medieval Europe, the writing of history began with church histories. These histories had a concept of time which was changeless because it was the divine time. Gradually, however, there was a change in the concept of time. Influenced by the pre-Christian tradition of history-writing, the historians began to think of time in more temporal terms, as a measurable sequence. This change in thinking made possible the use of chronology to write history. Contacts with other regions such as the Byzantine and the Arab world brought different influences from which also the medieval European historiography benefited.

8.6 EXERCISES

1) Discuss the changing concept of time during the middle ages in the West. How did it influence the writing of history?

2) Write a note on Christian historiography.

3) Write a note on some important historians and their works in medieval Europe.

8.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

Donald R. Kelley, *Versions of History from Antiquity to the Enlightenment* (New Haven, 1991).

R.G.Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford, 1946).

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Denys Hay, *Annalists and Historians : Western Historiography from the Eighth to the Eighteenth Centuries* (London, 1977).

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UNIT 9 MEDIEVAL HISTORIOGRAPHY — ARABIC AND PERSIAN

Structure

9.1 Introduction

9.2 The Early Arabic History Writing

9.2.1 Eighth and Ninth Century Historians

9.2.2 Tenth Century Historians

9.3 Arabic Historians of the Later Period

9.4 Persian Historiography

9.5 Summary

9.6 Exercises

9.7 Suggested Readings

9.1 INTRODUCTION

The origin of historiography in Arabic (or in Islamic civilisation) is to be sought in the *Quran* and *Hadis* (i.e., Prophetic Tradition). The detailed references to the Prophets and their followers of the past contained in the *Quran* created a historical sense among the Muslims, and it grew stronger with the passage of time. It makes its readers conscious of the fact that history is a continuous process, influenced by important ideas of the great men whose appearance on human scene is a great event of history. It also provides historical information concerning the life and actions of the Prophet and the community which he gave leadership. All this created awareness about time among the Muslims who realised the need to compile the history of the life and times of their Prophet and his immediate successors for the benefit of posterity. Every effort seems to have been made by the early writers of Islamic history to ascertain the authenticity of the sources of information, because the *Quran* teaches its followers to ascertain the truth. The critical method, called *Silsilah-i Isnad* (chain of narrators) employed in ascertaining the authenticity of report about a historical event helped the historians achieve objectivity in their approach to a great extent. In fact the importance of the source and cross checking it with corroboration from other sources to establish authenticity was first established during the process of the compilation of prophets actions and his sayings (*hadis).* These compilations were done by scholars for providing interpretations of various events as also for legal purpose. The criterion was to verify the authenticity of a tradition on the basis of the chain of narrators, the teachings of the *Quran*, the life of the Prophet and also the Arabic language spoken and written during the time of the Prophet. This was an important historical method that explains the change in the character and critical accuracy of historical information amongst the Arab historians. In fact, this makes the Arabic historiography an important part of Islamic culture. Recognising its significance in the history of history-writing, the Jewish scholar, Bernard Lewis remarks: 'Interest in the past soon became a distinguishing characteristic of Muslim Civilization. Since early times Muslim entities-states, dynasties, cities, even professions have been conscious of their place in history; they have been interested in the deeds of those who went before them and anxious to record their own for those who came after. Almost

every dynasty that ruled in Muslim lands has left annals or chronicles of some kind; in many countries, including some of high civilization, serious historical writing begins with the coming of Islam.'

9.2 THE EARLY ARABIC HISTORY WRITING

However, the beginning of scientific historiography in Arabic may be traced to the second century of Islam (8th century AD) and is associated with the life and activities of the Prophet. Before it, there was a memory bank to serve as a source of information. In other religious traditions the memory banks existed for thousands of years but in Islamic tradition it was replaced by written sources after the end of the first century of Islam. No doubt, human brain has astonishing capacities to preserve information about the past, yet the long passage of time could distort the information and events. This distortion or different version of the events and actions of individuals made the task of scholars difficult. In view of this scholars tried their best to preclude that eventuality by various means of scrutiny.

9.2.1 Eighth and Ninth Century Historians

A large corpus of historical literature was produced by the Muslim scholars in Arabic during the second century of Islam. Efforts were made to collect all oral traditions floating down the stream of time. The oral traditions were critically examined and incorporated after their veracity had been ascertained on the basis of source criterion. As the writers were motivated by religious spirit to compile their works on the history of Prophet for the benefit and guidance of their contemporaries and the posterity, their works are valuable because the historical information contained therein was carefully sifted, separating facts from popular legends and fiction. In other words, the historians took pains to separate historical jewels from dust and pebbles. Of the early historians, mention may be made of Ali bin Muhammad al-Madaini (died: 840 A.D.). He was a prolific writer, reported to have composed hundreds of books. His works on the history of Caliphate and monographs on the history of Basra and Khurasan are of great importance. Though none of his works have survived the ravages of time, the passages quoted by other writes in their works testify to the importance of his pioneering efforts. By applying the sound methods of criticism, he gained fame for his work and it served as a source for the compilations of the succeeding period.

Inspired by Al-Madaini, Muhammad bin Omar al-Waqidi (died in 823 A.D.), Ibn Sad (died in 845 A.D.) and Ahmad bin Yahya Al-Balazuri (died in 811 A.D.) composed important works that left enduring impression which is discernible in the critical accuracy of historical information amongst the historians of the succeeding period. Al-Waqidi's history has been written in a plain narrative style. His *Kitab al-Maghazi* gives a comprehensive account of the campaigns led by the Prophet. Ibn Sad utilised it in the preparation of his history of the Prophet but supplements it by incorporating the Prophet's edicts, letters and copies of agreements that were available. As regards Ahmad bin Yahya Al-Balazuri, he brought to completion his celebrated history, entitled *Futuh al-Buldan*, sometime after 861 A.D. The study of the extant copy of *Fatuh al-Baldan* shows that before its completion, the compiler had prepared an earlier version which was more voluminous. Al-Balazuri seems to have incorporated all the information that he had collected from different sources. Later on, he revised it and deleted what he thought inauthentic and not corroborated by other historical facts gathered. Therefore, his revised version became invaluable and was preserved by the posterity. Besides information about the life and achievements of the Prophet and the important events that took place during the times of the Caliphs, the Arab conquests of the non-Arab lands, including Iran, Makran

and Sind provinces in India have been incorporated in this work. Like other Arab historians, he widens the scope of history by departing from pure political events and account of conquests. He also described the professions and socio-economic conditions of people in the conquered territories. For example, while describing northern Baluchistan, called Kaikan in those days he writes that it was inhabitated by a tribe of Turks who maintained horse breeding centres. He says that the horses bred by them were admired by Caliph Muaviyah as of excellent breed to serve as war horses.

9.2.2 Tenth Century Historians

The classical tradition established by the above-mentioned historians reached its culmination in the celebrated history of Muhammad bin Jarir al-Tabari (died in 923 A.D.) entitled *Tarikh al-Rasul wal-Muluk* (History of the Prophets and Kings). It needs to be pointed out that Al-Tabari was primarily a traditionalist (expert scholar of the Prophetic Tradition), and in his history he aimed to supplement his commentary on the *Quran*, by presenting the historical tradition of Islam with the same fullness and critical approach as he had done in the earlier work. But against this weakness must be set the positive excellence of the rest, which by its authority and comprehensiveness marked the close of an epoch. He spared no efforts to verify the evidence he accepted for inclusions in his work. No later compiler ever set himself to collect and investigate afresh the materials for the early history of Islam, but either abstracted them from his *Tarikh*, sometimes supplemented from Al-Balazuri, or else began where he had left. It may also be added that Tabari's history is the first source to record the great appeal that the teachings of the Prophet had among the youth and the downtrodden people in the early days of Islam. He points out that the early companions of the Prophet, most of whom were looked down upon by Meccan aristocrats for their low social status became the leaders of Islamic revolution. Further, Tabari's *Tarikh* pointed out the ideological commitment to Islam and the ideological unity of the Muslim community across the lands although the political fragmentation had taken place during his own times. In short, his *Taikh* is valuable in so far as it registers the socio-religious changes brought about by Islam, such as the rationalisation of religious and para-religious phenomenon, development of scientific curiosity and of a critical sense which entailed a new organisation of knowledge and mastery of the world imagination.

With Al-Musudi, (died in 956 A.D.), a junior contemporary of Al-Tabari, a fresh intellectual element enters into Arabic historiography. Al-Musudi is, indeed, entitled to be reckoned amongst the major Arabic historians. He was not only a historian but also a geographer in his own right. His geographical information was gained chiefly by his wide travels. He was thus able to add a new dimension to Arabic historiography by combining geography with history since human history exists in a definite environment. Al-Masudi describes the environment of a country with the history of its people in his work, '*Muruj al-zahab*' (Meadow of Gold). He recognises the principles of scientific description and of correction and coordination of human action and physical facts. Though Al-Masudi frequently indulges in 'Cosmographical' theories borrowed from earlier works, his main contribution was the application of the results of his travels and personal observations to history and the recognition of cause and effect in related phenomenon — human and physical — through the comparative study of different parts of the known world. It is also worth pointing out that Al-Masudi is the precursor of Ibn Khaldun, the late fourteenth century Arab historian who is considered a philosopher of history and the father of modern sociology. Because Al-Masudi's *Muruj al-Zabab* rests on certain theoretical foundations; its author reflected thoughtfully on the method and purpose of history. All this made early Arabic historiography rich both in content and quality. It also led the scholars to recognise it as a science in its own right. With this recognition, history entered in a period of rapid expansion. From the

third to the sixth century of Islamic era, a large number of historical works were written. These included the important works on the history of different regions of the Islamic World. Each region had its own history compiled by a regional historian. For example, Abd al-Rahman bin Abd Allah Ibn Abd al-Hakam (died in 871) composed the history of Egypt and the Arab conquests in the West. It is noteworthy that in this work the account of conquests is based on the traditions, a mix of authentic and untrustworthy local ones. More sober and matter-of-fact, probably, were the local histories compiled during the third century of Islam. All of them seem to have been lost except for one volume on the history of Baghdad, compiled by Ibn Abi Tahir Taifur. As for those which were produced after the third century, some of them have survived and contain much valuable material not available in the earlier general histories. This additional material is of great importance because it supplements a large amount of historical information. Another significant development which must be taken note of is that the 4th century of Islam onwards, the recording of political history passed mainly into the hands of officials and courtiers. This change affected form, context, and spirit of history writing. It was an easy task for such officials to compose a running chronicle rather than a critical analysis of the events and people associated with them. The sources from which they drew their information were largely official documents and their own personal contact with the court and activities taking place around them. It was inevitable that their presentation of events was to be influenced by their own bias and reflected narrow social, political and religious outlook of their class. These historians seem to concentrate mainly on the activities of the ruler and the happenings at court. However, the information provided by these authors with regard to the external political events of the age is generally more reliable notwithstanding their limitations. This is testified by the historical accounts of Egypt and of Andalusia (Arab Spain) written by Ubaid Allah bin Ahmad al-Musabbihi (died in 1029 A.D.) and lbn Haiyan al-Qurtubi (died in 1076-77 A.D.).

9.3 ARABIC HISTORIANS OF THE LATER PERIOD

With the formation of a large number of local dynasties in all parts of the Islamic world a new trend in the form of dynastic history writing emerged. This trend more pronounced from 11th century onward supplements the traditional historiography which continued during the period. This introduced a personal element in history writing as the rulers began to engage and patronise historians to write the history of their dynasty as per their wishes exaggerating their achievements. Now history became a work of artifice full of rehetoric and an involved style replaced simple narrative. This style was popularised by *Tarikh al-Yamini*, composed by Al-Utbi (died in 1035) in writing the history of Subuktigin and Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna. The writers of such accounts may not be guilty of deliberately distorting facts but their style showing servility and lack of any critical analysis places their work in the category of poor history. These works are in no case be regarded as representative of Islamic History of the classical period which had been patiently built up as a science by the early generations of Muslim scholars. One significant point to be taken note of is that the subject matter of such historical writings, produced under the patronage of the Sultans is more political than politico-religious. The element of religion is brought in them only for a specific purpose as and when required. More often it finds a place only when the patronage extended by a Sultan to the *Ulama* (religious divines) is to be highlighted or when the Sultan's God fearing nature and religiosity are to be praised. This at times led to the growth of a historiography both in Arabic and Persian from the eleventh century to glorify the actions of Sultans for the cause of Islam.

It was at this unfavourable juncture that historical works began to be written in Persian. Before passing to discuss the nature of Persian historiography, a brief reference should be made to the histories of Abu Raihan al-Biruni (died in 1048) and lzuddin lbn al-Asir

(died in 1293). Al-Biruni applied mathematical and astronomical science to the determination of chronology in his *Asar al-Baqia*, while lbn al-Asir's history marks the re-emergence of the scholar-historian along side the official historian. Ibn al-Asir's history, called A*l-Kamil* is remarkable for its compiler's attempt to give less static presentation of history, by means of grouping the events into episodes within an annalistic framework. The elegance and vivacity of his work acquired for it almost immediate celebrity, and it became the standard source for later compilers. It is also worth-mentioning that in his account of the ruling dynasties outside Arab lands, Ibn al-Asir incorporates popular tales which were devoid of historical basis. Lastly, mention should be made of the world-famous historian, lbn Khaldun (died in 1406). As a chronicler his work is sometimes disappointing. He is however, held in high esteem as a historical philosopher. His *Muqadima* (an introduction to history) is a treatise on the philosophy of history. It has been rendered in different modern languages for its importance. It is a pity that, inspite of the brilliant school of Egyptian historians in the following centuries and the vigorous cultivation of history in Ottoman Turkey (where a translation of *Muqadima* was made in the 18th century), no historian was influenced by his philosophy. There is no indication that the principles which he put forward were even studied, much less applied, by any of his successors.

As for the significance of lbn Khaldun's *Muqadima*, the sociological aspects of his historical theory, described therein are important. The originality of his *Muqadima* is to be found in his objective analysis of the political, social and economic factors underlying the establishment of political units and the evolution of the state. It may also be mentioned that the materials on which his analysis rests were derived partly from his own experience and partly also from historical sources relating to the history of Islam. The difference between him and his predecessors is that the latter begin from the global conception of human society, where as he (lbn Khaldun) begins from a dynamic conception of human association. His principles are not theocentric, and his views on causality and natural law in history are in blunt opposition to the Muslim theological view . He treats religion as no more than one factor, however important it may be. According to him, the law of the state may be derived from religion, but the state abstracts itself in practice from the whole compass of its validity and follows its own aims. The state exists for the protection of people and ensuring the order in the kingdom. It may also be added that he was not an irreligious man. He was a devout Muslim. However, in propounding his theory, lbn Khaldum tries to reconcile the ideal demands of the *Sharia* (Islamic law) with the facts of history. He believes that economic development and prosperity can be achieved if the ordinance of the *Sharia* is observed. To him the caliphate in Islam was an ideal state. He discusses in detail the organisation associated with the caliphate. He explains in the course of discussion the gradual transformation of the caliphate into an ordinary kingship due to the force of *asabiya* (love of kindred) during the later Umayyad period, the later Ummayyad caliphs had their family members regain ascendancy over the religious enthusiasm. In short it is his *Muqdima* that lifts him to the rank of a great philosopher of history.

9.4 PERSIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

As regards the beginning of history writing in Persian language, it was prompted by the emergence of Persian-speaking intelligentsia, which was not conversant with Arabic in the eastern part of the Islamic world. By the close of the tenth century A.D., the non-Arab Muslims in Iran and Central Asia felt the need to produce literature on Islam and its history in Persian language for the enlightenment of people. It is noteworthy that many of the earliest works were translations and abridgments of Arabic classics, beginning with the translation of Tabari's *Tarikh* in 963 A.D. by the Samanid Wazir Abu Ali al-Balami.

Few of the local and dynastic histories written in Persian have survived, and there is little to distinguish them from the contemporary Arabic works, produced under the patronage of kings. The surviving histories written in Persian by Abu said Gardezi (*Zain al-Akhbar*) and Abul Fazl Baihaqi (*Tarikh-i ale Subuktigin*) are outstanding contribution to historical literature in Persian. Though Gardezi drew largely from Al-Biruni's account of Hindus and their religion, yet we find additional materials in his *Zain al-Akhbar* on the reign of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna (died in 1030). The importance of Baihaqi's work appears from the fact that it was based on original state documents and a diary which the author used to maintain.

It is also to be noted that the celebrated works, *Zainal-Akhbar* of Gardezi and *Tarikh-i ale Subuktigin* of Baihaqi, (composed around 1050 A.D.) were produced in the tradition of Arabic writers on Islamic history. Neither Gardezi nor Baihaqi seem to have been influenced by the ancient Persian historiography wherein historical fact and fiction were mixed up for the sake of literary embellishment. However, the changes that took place in polity and culture under the impact of regional Sultanates should not be lost sight of by the historians. Their historical writing do reflect on the innovations in Muslim polity, yet the emphasis therein show that the compilers were serious enough to point out the virtues and evils of a reign. They were also very particular about establishing the authenticity of an event before incorporating it in their respective works. Unlike the ancient Persian historians, their works are free from mythological elements or fiction. These works became models to inspire the long line of Indo-Persian historians. It may be added that of the several volumes of Baihaqi's *Tarikh*, only one, related to Sultan Masud's reign (1030-1040) has survived. This surviving volume shows that the centralisation by Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna of political power continued under his successors also. That all the officers and soldiers were paid their salary and allowances in cash and revenue assignment in lieu of cash salary was not a regular practice. In fact, the process of enhancing military profession was caused by the war-making function of the monarchy.

9.5 SUMMARY

Inspired by the *Quran* and *Hadis*, the Arabic scholars began writing history in the 8th century. Apart from what was available in the *Quran* and other Islamic texts, efforts were made to collect the material from oral traditions also. The life and activities of the Prophet and his followers formed the main theme of these early histories in the 8th and 9th centuries. Later on, along with these earlier themes, certain different themes such as history of religion, of conquests and of Islamic rulers were also taken up. With the development of local dynasties, the dynastic histories acquired prominence and became the main theme of the later Arabic and Persian historiographies.

9.6 EXERCISES

1) Discuss in brief the early tradition of Arabic historiography upto the 9th century.

2 What are the unique features of history-writing in Arabic in the 10th century?

3) Write a brief note on the changes in the Arabic historiographical tradition in the 11th and 12th centuries.

4) Give a brief account of early tradition of history-writing in Persian. Did it follow the Arabic tradition?

9.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

D.S. Margoliouth, *Lecturers on Arabic Historians*, Lectures V and VI.

Shukrieh R. Merlet, 'Arab Historiogrpahy', Article published in the *Islamic Culture*, Hyderabad, Vol.LXIII, No.4, October, 1989, pp.95-105.

Franz Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography*, Part 1, The Introductory Chapter.

Hamilton A.R. Gibb: '*Tarikh* from the origins to the third century of Hijra' pp.108-119 in *Studies on the Civilization of Islam*, London, 1962.

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UNIT 10 MEDIEVAL HISTORIOGRAPHY: INDO-PERSIAN

Structure

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10.2 Sultanate Period

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10.4 Summary

10.5 Exercises

10.6 Suggested Readings

10.1 INTRODUCTION

The Ghurian conquest of north India towards the close of the twelfth century A.D. is an important event in Indian history. This is because an independent sultanate, founded in its wake, opened India to foreign influences on the one hand and led to the unification of the country under a strong centre on the other. It also attracted emigrants from the neighbouring countries who represented different cultural traditions. One of the traditions introduced by them was that of history writing. The historical literature produced by them in Persian language is of vast magnitude. As a matter of fact, the study of history was considered by the Muslim elite as the third important source of knowledge after the religious scripture and the jurisprudence. With the coming of the Mughals in the 16th century the tradition of history writing achieved new heights. During the Mughal period, the state patronised writing of history and we have a large body of historical literature in Persian spread over two centuries. In this Unit, we will analyse the tradition of history writing during the Sultanate and Mughal periods.

10.2 SULTANATE PERIOD

The early writings in Persian on the history of Turks who came to India are traceable to 12th Century. As far as Delhi Sultanate is concerned we have a continuity of available texts in Persian till the end of the Sultanate (1526). Many of the authors were attached to the court as officials while a few were independent scholars not associated with any official position. In general, the available histories put forward the official version of events, rather than a critical evaluation of the policies and events.

It is rare that one comes across any critical reference to the reigning Sultan. Even the style is also generally eulogising or flattering to the Sultan under whose reign it is written.

In most cases, the authors borrowed freely from the earlier works to trace the earlier period. We have referred to the constraints faced by various scholars while discussing individual works.

Apart from historical texts a number of other Persian works are available for the period. Abdu'r Razzaq's *Matla'us Sa'dain* (travelogue), Tutsi's *Siyasatnama* (administration & polity), Fakhr-i Mudabbir's *Adabu'l-Harb wa'as- Shuja'at* (warfare), are a few important ones. A few Arabic works are also available for the period. Ibn Battuta (Rihla) and Shihab-al Din al-Umari (*Masalik al-absar Mamalik al-Ansar*) have provided excellent travel accounts. Here we will study the historiography for the whole Sultanate period in separate subsections.

10.2.1 The Pioneers

The pioneer in history-writing was Muhammad bin Mansur, also known as Fakhr-i Mudabbir. He migrated from Ghazna to Lahore during the later Ghaznavid period. In Lahore he compiled *Shajra-i-Ansab,* the book of genealogies of the Prophet of Islam, his companions and the Muslim rulers, including the ancestors of Sultan Muizuddin Muhammad bin Sam (commonly known as Sultan Shihabuddin Muhammad Ghuri). The compiler wanted to present it to the sultan but the latter's assassination on his way from the Punjab to Ghazna in 1206, led him to append a separate portion as *Muqidimma* (Introduction) to it. This introduction narrates the life and military exploits of Qutbuddin Aibak since his appointment in India as *Sipahsalar* of Kuhram and Sunam in 1192 upto his accession to the throne in Lahore in 1206. This is the first history of the Ghurian conquest and the foundation of an independent Sultanate in India.

It opens with the description of the noble qualities of Sultan Muizuddin Muhammad bin Sam. But the credit of the conquest made in India is given to Qutbuddin Aibak. The Sultan is not mentioned as victor even in the details of the expeditions led by him. However, the details furnished by Fakhr-i Mudabbir about the conciliatory policy followed by Qutbuddin Aibak towards the Hindu chiefs even before his accession to the throne are interesting. Aibak set an example that inspired his successors. All the chiefs who submitted to Aibak's authority were treated as friends.

No doubt, Fakhr-i Mudabbir composed the work in the hope of getting reward by eulogising the reigning Sultan, nonetheless, the selection of historical material by him demonstrates the historical sense he possessed. Along with administrative reforms introduced by Aibak after his accession to the throne in Lahore, he also provides details of rituals that had symbolic significance. For instance, he is the first historian who informs us about the ceremony of public allegiance paid to the new Sultan on his accession to the throne in Lahore. He states that on Qutbuddin Aibak's arrival from Delhi to Lahore in 1206, the entire population of Lahore came out to pay allegiance to him as their new Sultan. This ceremony, indeed, implied operational legitimacy for Sultan's claim to authority. Equally important is the evidence about the administrative reforms introduced by Sultan Qutbuddin Aibak. He renewed land-grants made to the deserving persons and fixed maintenance-allowance to others. The collection by the officers of illegal wealth accrued through peasants or forced labour were abolished. The compiler also informs us that the state extracted one-fifth of the agricultural produce as land revenue. In short, it is the first history of the Ghurian Conquest and Qutbuddin Aibak's reign compiled in India. It was in view of its importance that in 1927, the English scholar, E. Denison Ross separated it from the manuscript of *Shajra-i Ansab* and published its critically edited text with his introduction (in English) under the title *Tarikh-i Fakhruddin Mubarak Shah*.

Another important work compiled by Mudbbir is the *Adabu'l-Harb wa'as- Shuja'at*, dedicated to Sultan Shamsuddin Iltutmish. It is written in the episodic form of

historiography. It contains chapters on the duties of king, the functioning of state departments, war tactics, mode of warfare, war-horses, their treatment, etc. The compiler, in order to illustrate his point, has incorporated important events that occurred during the period. Most of them are related to historical events of the Ghaznavid period.

The second important history of the Ghurian conquest and the Sultanate is *Tajul Ma'asir.* Its author, Hasan Nizami migrated from Nishapur to India in search of fortune. He took abode in Delhi, sometime before Aibak's accession to the throne. In Delhi, he set to compile the history of Qutbuddin Aibak's achievements after his accession to the throne in 1206. The motive behind writing was to gain royal patronage. Being a literary genius and a master of the conceits of Arabic and Persian poetry, Hasan Nizami makes abundant use of metaphors, similes and rhetoric for the sake of literary ornamentation. The work abounds in unnecessary verbiage. Sans verbiage and unnecessary details, the historical material could be reduced to almost half of the book's size without any loss of the content.

As for his approach, he begins his narrative describing the vicissitude of time he went though in his hometown of Nishapur, his journey to Ghazna where he fell ill and then his migration to India. The preface is followed by the description of the second battle of Tarain (1192). No mention has been made of the first battle of Tarain in which Prithvi Raj Chauhan had defeated Sultan Muizuddin Mohammad bin Sam. However, from the year 1192 upto 1196 all the historical events are described in detail. Thereafter Hasan Nizami takes a long jump leaving off all the battles fought and conquests made by Qutbuddin Aibak till 1202 A.D. Probably the disturbances that broke out as a result of Aibak's accidental death in 1210 disappointed the author who seems to have stopped writing. Later on, when Iltutmish succeeded in consolidating his rule, he again decided to resume his work. This time he commenced his narrative from the year 1203 because Iltutmish, whom the work was to be presented, had become an important general and was taking part in all the campaigns led by Qutbuddin Aibak. No mentions has been made by the Compiler of Aibak's conquest of Badaun in 1197 and the occupation of Kanauj and Chandwar in 1198. It is, however, to be admitted that, in spite of all hyperbolic used in praise of Iltutmish, it is to the credit of the compiler that he was able to collect authentic information about every event that he describes in his work. Besides the gap, Hasan Nizami also fails to describe the friendly treatment meted out by Aibak to the local chiefs who submitted to his authority. His description is often very brief and at times merely symbolic. For example, when he refers to the Hindu Chiefs attending the Sultan's court, he simply states, "the carpet of the auspicious court became the Kissing place of *Rais* of India". It contains no biographical details of the nobles, though many of them were the architects of the Sultanate. All the manuscript copies of *Tajul Ma'asir* available in India and abroad come to a close with the capture to Lahore by Iltutmish in 1217.

The compilation by Minhaj Siraj Juzjani of his *Tabaqat-i Nasiri* was epoch making in the history of history-writing. Minhaj Siraj Juzjani (hereafter mentioned as Minhaj) was also an emigrant scholar from Khorasan. His approach to the history of Islam and Muslim rulers from the early Islamic period upto his own time, the year 1259 A.D., seems to have been influenced by his professional training as a jurist and association with the rulers of central Asia and India. He belonged to a family of scholars who were associated with the courts of the Ghurid Sultans of Firozkuh and Ghazna. He himself served under different Ghurid Princes and nobles before his migration to India. In 1227, he came to India and joined the court of Nasiruddin Qubacha. He was appointed the head of the *Firuzi Madrassa* (government college) in Ucch, the Capital of Sultan Nasiruddin Qubacha. In 1228, he joined the service of Sultan Iltutmish after Qubacha's power had been destroyed and his territories of Sind and Multan were annexed to the Delhi Sultanate. He served as *Qazi* (Judicial officer) of Gwalior under Iltutmish. Sultan Razia (1236-40) summoned him to Delhi and appointed him the head of *Madrassa-i Nasiri* in Delhi. Later on, he rose

to the position of the Chief *Qazi* of the Sultanate during the reign of Sultan Nasiruddin Mahmud.

It was during the reign of Sultan Nasiruddin Mahmud that he decided to write the history of Islam upto his own time. In an attempt to distinguish his work from those of Fakhr-i Mudabbir and Hasan Nizami, Minhaj adopted the *Tabaqat* System of history-writing. The first two writers had produced their works in unitary form, in which each reign was treated as a unit. In the *Tabaqat* form, each dynasty of rulers is presented in a separate *tabaqa* (i.e. section) and was brought to completion in 1259.

The last five sections are very important from the point of view of history. In these we find valuable information about the rise and fall of the ruling dynasties of central Asia, Persia, India and the Mongol irruption under Chingis Khan. Undoubtedly, Minhaj is our earliest and best authority on the ruling house of Ghur. His account of the rulers of Ghur is characterised by objectivity in approach. Likewise, the section devoted to the history of the Khwarizm shahi dynasty and rise of Mongol power under Chingis Khan and his immediate successors supply information, not available in the works of Ata Malik Juvaini and Rahiduddin Fazlullah who wrote under the patronage of the Mongol princes. Minhaj's purpose was to supply the curious readers of the Delhi Sultanate with authentic information about the victory of the Mongols over the Muslim rulers and the destruction of Muslim cities and towns. He drew on a number of sources, including the immigrants and merchants who had trade relations with the Mongol rulers. Moreover, before his migration to India, he had first hand experience of fighting against the Mongols in Khurasan. Therefore, the last *tabaqa* of the work is considered by modern scholars invaluable for its treatments of the rise of Mongol power and the dissolution of the Mongol Empire in 1259 after the death of Emperor Monge Qaan.

The sections (*tabaqat*) twentieth and twenty-first devoted to India, describe the history of the Sultans from Aibak to Sultan Nasiruddin Mahmud Shah and careers of the leading nobles of Iltutmish respectively. In both the sections he displays his ability to convey critical information on issues. Conscious of his duty as a historian, he invented the method of 'conveying intimation' on camouflaging the critics of the reigning Sultan or his father either by giving hints in a subtle way or writing between the lines. As Sultan Iltutmish could not be criticised directly because his son, Nasiruddin Mahmud happened to be the reigning Sultan, Minhaj builds Iltutmish's criticism through highlighting the noble qualities of Iltumish's rivals Sultan Ghayasuddin Iwaz Khalji of Bihar and Bengal or Sultan Nasirudin Qubacha of Sind and Multan. Likewise, he also hints at policy of getting rid of certain nobles. Praising Malik Saifuddin Aibak, he says that being a God-fearing Musalman, the noble detested the work of seizing the assets from the children of the nobles killed or assassinated by the order of the Sultan. It is really Minhaj's sense of history that led Ziauddin Barani to pay him homage. Barani thought it presumptions to writing on the period covered in the *Tabaqat-i Nasiri.* He rather preferred to begin his account from the reign of Sultan Ghiyasuddin Balban.

10.2.2 The Fourteenth Century Historiography

Many scholars seem to have written the 14th century histories of the Khalji and the Tughlaq Sultans. Ziauddin Barani mentions the official history of Sultan Alauddian Khalji's reign by Kabiruddin, son of Tajuddin Iraqi but it is now extant. Amir Khusrau also compiled the *Khazainul Futuh,* devoted to the achievements of Alauddin Khalji. Khusrau also composed five historical *masnavis* (poems) in each of which historical events are described (in verse). It may, however, be recalled that neither Ziauddin Barani nor modern scholar, Peter Hardy regards Khusrau as a historian. They consider Khusrau's works as literary pieces rather than a historical work. Of the surviving 14th century works, Isami's *Futuh us Salatin(1350),* Ziauddin Barani's *Tarikh-i Firuzshahi(1357),* anonymous *Sirat-i*

Firuzshahi (1370-71) and Shams Siraj Afif's *Tarikh-i Firuzshahi* (c.1400) are important historical works. A few of these 14th century historical works need to be analysed separately.

Isami's Narrative

The *Futuh-us Salatin* of Isami is a versified history of the Muslim rulers of India. It begins with the account of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna's reign (999-1030 A.D.) and comes to a close with that of the foundation of the Bahmani Sultanate in the Deccan by Alauddin Bahaman Shah, a rebel against Sultan Muhammad Tughluq, in 1350. Though much is not known about the author, yet it may be added that his ancestors served the Delhi court since the time of Sultan Iltutmish. Ziauddin Barani includes one of the Isami family in the list of the leading nobles of Sultan Balban. Isami, himself was brought up by his grandfather, Izuddin Isami, a retired noble. he was still in his teens when his family was forcibly shifted to Daulatabad in 1327. His grandfather died on the way and the young Isami was filled with hatred against Sultan Muhammad Tughluq. The hostility towards Sultan Mohammad Tughluq is quite evident in his account and needs to be treated with caution.

The early part of Isami's narrative is based on popular legends and oral traditions which had reached to him through the time. His account of the early Sultans of India is also based on popular tales with historical facts available to him through earlier works. But the details of historical events from the reign of Sultan Alauddin Khalji are much more authentic and can be of corroborative and supplementary importance. In this part Isami supplements the information contained in Barani's *Tarikh-i Firuzshahi* about the siege operations conducted by the military commanders of the Delhi Sultanate in different regions during the Khalji and the Tughluq period. Isami's description of the foundation of Daulatabad by Muhammad bin Tughluq as the second most important city and his account of socio-economic growth of Delhi under Alauddin Khalji and other cities is graphic and insightful. Barani has precedence on Isami only in his analysis of cause and effect, connected with historical events.

Ziauddin Barani's *Tarikh-i-Firuzshahi*

Barani is, no doubt, the doyen of the Indo-Persian historians of medieval India. Born in an aristocratic family and associated with the royal court of Delhi for generations, he was obviously concerned with the fate of the Delhi Sultanate. He seems to have believed that it was his duty to present through his *Tarikh-i Furuzshahi* an intellectual composition for the enlightenment of the ruling elite of his times.

Barani's *Tarikh* begins with the accession of Sultan Balban to the throne of Delhi in 1266 and comes to a close with the account of first six years of Sultan Firuzshah Tughluq's reign, i.e. the year 1356. Barani's *Tarikh* is unique to the Persian history writing tradition prevalent till his times. It is for the first time that he tries to analyse the cause and effect of the events and developments taking place in polity and economy. In his account of the economic policies and measures of Alauddin Khalji he provides an analysis with causes and formulation of the policies and their impacts. Barani also elaborates the purpose of writing history in explicit terms :

> 'The mean, the ignoble, the rude, the uncouth, the lowly, the base, the obscure, the vile, the destitute, the wretched, the low-born and the men of the market-place, can have no connection or business with History ; nor can its pursuit be their profession. The above-mentioned classes can derive no profit at all by learning the science of History, and it can be of no use to them at any time; for the science of History consists of (the account of) greatness and the description

> of merits and virtues and glories of the great men of the Faith and State… The (Pursuit of the) science of History is (indeed) the special preserve of the nobles and the distinguished, the great men and the sons of great men.'

Barani also declares that the job of the historian is not only to eulogise the deeds and good works of the rulers but also to present to readers a critical account of the shortcomings and drawbacks of policies. Moreover, the scope of history is considerably widened by Barani with the inclusion of details about the cultural role performed by intellectuals, scholars, poets, and saints. Barani's style of history writing inspired the historians of the subsequent period, many of whom tried to follow his ideas.

10.2.3 Late Fourteenth Century Histories

Other major works of history from the second half of the 14th century are the anonymous *Sirat-i Firuzshahi, Futuhat-i Firuzshahi,* composed by the Sultan Firuz Tughluq himself and Shams Siraf Aifif's *Tarikh-i-Firuzshahi.*. The rare manuscript copy of the *Sirat-i Firuzshahi,* available in the Khuda Bakhsh library, Patna, does not contain the name of its author. It reads as an official history of Firuz Shah's reign up to the years 1370-71. It contains, besides the details of military and hunting expeditions led by Sultan Firuzshah, interesting information about religious sects, sufis, ulema, socio-ethical matters, science and technology such as astronomy, medicines, pharmacology, etc. It is really a compendium of many-sided activities, accomplishments and contribution made by the Sultan to the works of public utility. The construction of canals and water reservoirs, the foundation of the new cities with forts and repair of old monuments are described in detail.

The *Futuhat-i Firuzshahi* was originally an inscription fixed on the wall of the Jama Mosque of Firuzshah's capital. Later on, it was copied and preserved in the form of a book. Through this, the Sultan wanted to disseminate to general public about reforms and projects he undertook for public welfare.

Shams Siraj Afif, another historian of the period seems to have served the Sultan during the last years of Firuzshah's reign. He tells us that his great grand father, Malik Shihab Afif worked as revenue officer in the province of Dipalpur under Ghazi Malik during the reign of Ala-Uddin Khalji. His father and uncle supervised the management of Firuzshah's k*arkhanas.* As Chaos and anarchy began to prevail after the death of Firuzshah (1388), he seems to have retired and devoted himself to writing the history of the Sultanate from the reign of Sultan Ghiyasuddin Tughluq Shah (1320-1324). He refers to many volumes of his works, each devoted to the reigns of the individual Sultans. Of these only one, devoted to the reign of Firuzshah has survived the ravages of time. It seems to have been completed after the sack of Delhi by Timur in 1398. This work of his is full of nostalgia and portrays Firuzshah as a saintly ruler whose presence on the throne saved Delhi from every calamity. Because of this reason, he has written this volume in the form of *manaquib* (collection of virtues) like that of the spiritual biography of a saint. The name *Tarikh-i Firuzshahi* has been given to it by the editors of the Text.

The book is divided into five *qism* (parts) each containing eighteen m*uqaddimas* (chapters) of unequal length. The last (fifth) *qism* of the printed text comes to an end with the fifteenth chapter. The last three chapters seem to have been destroyed by the Mughal Emperors probably because they contained vivid details of the sack of Delhi by Timur, the ancestor of Babur. This volume of Afif is important for the information about socio-economic life and prosperity that resulted from the state-policies followed by Firuzshah. The details about the foundation of new urban centres, construction of canals, water reservoirs and the administrative reforms are invaluable. Similarily, mention made by him of the agrarian reforms introduced by Firuzshah casts light on his interest in revenue matters. It may also be pointed out that Afif does not fail to mention the abuses and

corruption that had crept in the administration; and says that officials in every ministry became corrupt. In the di*wan-i arz* (military department) the officials took one *tanka* per horse as bribe from the horseman at the time of annual muster. He also provides us with hints about the degeneration of the central army that was considered the best fighting force which could successfully defend the frontier against the Mongol invaders. On the whole it is, an important source of information about the life and culture in the Sultanate of Delhi during the later half of the fourteenth century.

After the dissolution of the Delhi Sultanate, a number of regional Sultanates and principalities arose. The capitals of these regional Sultanates replaced Delhi as the main centre of learning and culture. Delhi, which was reduced to the size of a town, was seized by Khizr Khan (Saiyid) the founder of a new dynasty. Khizr Khan (ruled from 1414 to 1421) and his son and successor, Sultan Mubarkshah (1421-1434) tried to rebuild the power of the Delhi Sultan but could not succeed. The latter was assassinated by his own nobles in the prime of his life. One of his officials Yahya bin Ahmad Sirhindi, composed the history of the Sultanate and named it after the Sultan as *Tarikh-i Mubarakshahi* in 1434. It begins with an account of Sultan Muizuddin Mohammed bin Sam, who led the Ghurian conquest of India and the account closes with the accession of Mohammad Shah in 1434. The compiler seems to have drawn information from a number of histories written in India at different times. Some of the sources utilised by Yahya are now extant but bits of information on them survived through information collected and incorporated in the *Tarikh-i Mubarakshahi*. It enhances its importance. The historian of Akbar's reign utilised the *Tarikh* in the preparation of their volumes devoted to the history of the Delhi Sultanate.

10.2.4 The Fifteenth Century Histories

In the fifteenth century a number of historical accounts were compiled about individual kingdoms and were dedicated to the regional rulers. Shihab Hakim compiled the history of Malwa and named if after Sultan Mohammed Khalji as *Maasir-i Mahmudshah*. Abdul Husain Tuni, emigrant scholar from Iran who had settled in Ahmadabad (Gujarat) wrote *Maasir-i Mahmudshahi* during the reign of Sultan Mahmud Shah Begara. Both the works are extant. Another worth-mentioning history is the *Tarikh-i Muhammadi*, compiled by Muhammad Bihamad Khani, resident of Kalpi. It is written in the *Tabaqat* form beginning with the rise of Islam in Arabia. It is a summary of the *Tabaqat-i Nasiri*, Barani's *Tarikh-i Firuzshahi* and similar other works to cover history of Firuzshah and his successors. But his account of the rise of Kalpi as a centre of culture and learning under the fostering care of its Sultans is original. He narrates the circumstances in which Mahmud Khan Turk founded the principality of Kalpi and assumed the title of Sultan after the return of Timur in 1398. The information about the nature of relationship between the Sultans of Kalpi, Jaunpur and Malwa is also of historical interest.

10.3 HISTORIOGRAPY UNDER THE MUGHALS

The most dominant feature of the historiography of the Mughal period is the tradition of history writing by official chroniclers appointed by almost all Mughal emperors till the reign of Aurengzeb. These chroniclers were appointed by the emperors and all official records were provided to them for the purpose. Another salient feature of the period is the autobiographical accounts written by emperors themselves. *Tuzuk-i Baburi* (in Turkish and not Persian) by Babur and *Tuzuk-i Jahangiri* (in Persian) by Jahangir are important works in this genre. Apart from the official works, which had obvious constrains, a number of independent works were written by independent scholars which provide a critical appraisal of the policies and events of the period. In this section we have discussed the historiography of the period during the reigns of individual emperors.

10.3.1 The Early Writings

Zahiruddin Muhammad Babur who invaded India and supplanted the Lodi rule by his own in 1526, was a prolific writer. He wrote both in his mother tongue Turkish and in Persian. His autobiography *Tuzuk-i Baburi*, written in Turkish is a literary masterpiece, containing the history of the decline and fall of the Timurid power in central Asia, his own biography, the description of life and culture in India and the diary of events that took place in the course of campaigns he led against his rivals in eastern India. Babur's account of central Asia and Khurasan is marked by objectivity. However, his account on his dealings with the ruling elite in India lacks objectivity. This is obvious because of the hostility towards those against whom he was waging war. Babur wrote in anger against the Indian ruling elite. He calls the Indian nobles untrustworthy, although he himself had deceived them. The Afghans had invited him to help them in their struggle against their own Sultan, Ibrahim Lodi thinking that he would go back after taking treasure. Babur is full of praise of India's resources and the availability of skilled craftsmen and artisans in the towns and cities. 'For any work or any employment', says he, 'there is always a set ready, to whom the same employment and trade have descended from father to son for ages'. Babur also mentions the list of *sarkars* (territorial units) with the annual revenue yields. Further, the description of towns and cities with their respective topography is interesting. The geographical details in his biography further enrich its importance. Moreover, the *Tuzuk-i Baburi* is not merely a political narration but is also considered as a naturalist's journal. His description of fauna and flora of the region he visited is graphic and insightful.

Babur's son and successor, Humayun (1530-1555) was also interested in history. He commissioned a renowned scholar, Khawandmir, to compose the history of his reign. In compliance with the royal order, Khwandmir prepared a brief account of Humayun's reign from his accession upto the year 1535 and named it *Qanun-i Humayuni*. It sheds interesting light on Humayun's state policy, particularly towards the Indian nobles and landed aristocracy. He refers to Humayun's efforts to win over Indian chiefs to his side.

10.3.2 Akbar's Reign: Official Histories

With the accession of Akbar (1556-1605) to the throne, important change took place in the concept of history writing and the class of history writers. Since the history of a dynasty served as a memorial to the dynasty, Akbar proposed to have a written history of the Muslim rulers from the death of the prophet upto his own time on the completion of the first millennium of Islam, i.e., a history of one thousand years, called *Tarikh-i Alfi*. For providing information about the lives and times of Babar and Humayun, all the officials, the nobles and relatives were asked to write their reminiscences in book form. At Akbar's instance, Gulbadan Begum, the daughter of Babur, Bayazid Biyat (an official of Humayun) and Jauhar Aftabchi (a personal attendant of Humayun) put down their reminiscences in book form. Gulbadan Begum's memoirs entitled *Humayunnama* is an important source as it sheds light on the lives and culture of the royal *harem.* . It is considered unique as it reflects a woman's perception of the events of the period. After Humayun's death, Bayazid Biyat served under Munim Khan Khan-i Khanan in Jaunpur and Bengal and was asked by Emperor Akbar to keep a watch on the governor and secretly inform the king about all developments. He has narrated the event of Humayun's life in Iran, Kabul and Later in India. Most of these he himself had witnessed. His work is entitled *Tazkirat-i Humayun wa Akbar*. Jauhar Aftabchi who had served Humayun also furnishes useful information about Humayun's life and times in his *Tazkirat-ul Waqiat*. Like collections of reminiscences of Gulbadan Begum and Bayazid Biyat, his work also does not distinguish between trivia and the historical facts. Nevertheless, all these works served as sources of information for the compilers of *Tarikh-i Alfi* and other histories of Akbar's reign including Abul Fazl's *Akbarnama.*

Akbar constituted a board of seven scholars to compile *Taikh-i Alfi*. Each member of the board was assigned a period to write its history in chronological order. As per this scheme the events are described year by year. However, the accounts of certain Indian rulers have been compiled separately in different sections. This pattern has been followed in providing the history of Muhammad Tughluq, the Lodis, fifteenth century regional kingdoms emerging after the decline of Sultanate, Sher Shah Sur, Islam Shah and Adil Shah Sur. Its concluding part is devoted to the reign of Akbar upto 1585. Not satisfied with the account of his reign in the *Tarikh-i Alfi*, in 1589-1590, Akbar ordered Abul Fazl to compile the history of his reign, beginning with an account of Babur and Humayun. A bureau was established in which competent people were employed to assist Abul Fazl. The entire archival material was placed at the compiler's disposal. It may be stressed that Abul Fazl was selected for this task because he had identified himself with Akbar's views and religious inclination. He portrays Akbar's own view about his status and role in history as conceived by emperor himself. Akbar was led by his courtiers to think of himself as the perfect representation of the spiritual profile of his age. He wanted to be remembered in history as the *Insan-i Kamil* (perfect man), gifted by God with full knowledge of Divine Unity. Therefore, in compiling the *Akbarnama*, Abul Fazl was able to come up to his royal patron's expectations. He presents Akbar as cosmic man, entrusted by God with sway over outward form and inner meaning, the exoteric and esoteric. His mission is said to liberate people from *taqlid* (tradition), lead them to truth and create an atmosphere of concord, so that people following different sects could live in peace and harmony. He was shown as "a light emanating from God."

Despite flattery, Abul Fazl was able to produce a history of Akbar's reign that is considered an important contribution to Indo-Persian historiography. It was brought to completion after five revisions that involved strenuous labour of seven years, the completion of the work was indeed epoch making. Abul Fazl did not believe that Indian history should concern itself only with the achievements of the Muslim rulers in India, nor did he try to establish any relation with the past of Islam. In his treatment of Akbar's military expeditions against the Rajputs, he emphasises on the point that there was no justification for any chief, Hindu or Muslim not to join the imperial confederation in view of the reconciliatory policy of Akbar. He feels that Akbar's state policy was calculated to bring unity, stability and economic prosperity to the country. In fact, Abul Fazl's secular interpretation of history gained ground during the subsequent century.

The *Akbarnama* and the *Ain-i Akbari* provide exhaustive details of the events and policies introduced by Akbar till the year 1602. However, Abul Fazl fails to mention or raise any issue which cast any aspersion on Akbar. It is true that the *Ain-i Akbari* abounds in economic details, but these details do not tell us anything about the life and conditions of the mass of peasantry or working class. The *Ain-i Akbari* contains statistical details which are valuable source for the study of economic history with no parallel with any historical accounts prior to it or till the 18th century. But artisans or peasants are completely absent. The *Ain-i Akbari*, the third part of the *Akbarnama* is a unique compilation of the system of administration and control through the departments of government. It also contains an account of the religious and philosophical systems of the Hindus. However, Abul Fazal's identification with Akbar's views and religious beliefs prevented him from presenting a picture in different hues, reflecting the currents and cross currents in society. Abul Fazl does not mention Shah Mansur or his successor Todarmal's contribution while dealing with revenue reforms and portrays Akbar as the genius who evolved key reforms including Ain-i Dahsala (ten years settlement) and revenue *dasturs*. The reader does not find the spirit of Akbar's age in *Akbarnama* that was successfully depicted by Abdul Qadir Badauni or even Nizamuddin Ahmad.

10.3.3 Akbar's Reign : Non-official Histories

Nizamuddin Ahmad and Abdul Qadir Badauni are two important historians of the period. Motivated by the popularity of the discipline of history, both the scholars have written history of the Muslim rule in India and have also recorded achievements of men of learning in different fields. Their works run into several volumes. Let us deal with each one separately.

Nizamuddin was the son of Khwaja Muqim Harawi, a noble of Babur and Humayun. A well-educated man, he was interested in the study of history and literature. When he look up the project of writing history of India in three volumes, he employed men like Masum Bhakkari to assist him and provide information about different regions of the empire.

A man who had gained experience in the government after having served on important positions in the provinces and at court as well, he was able to make substantial contribution through his scholarly work. His first-volume deals with the history of the Muslim rulers of India upto the fall of the Lodi dynasty in 1526. The second volume contains the account of the Mughal rulers of India upto 1593. The third volume deals with the rise and fall of the regional kingdoms in India. It is to the credit of Nizamuddin Ahmad that he mentions all the important events that took place during Akbar's reign including the controversial *Mahzar* which is omitted by Abul Fazl. However, being the *mirbakshi* (the incharge of the department of army) of the empire, he does not provide any critical evaluation. Still, it helps us in filling the gap left by Abul Fazl not only on this issue but in several other areas. His work *Tabaqat-i Akbari* was regarded by all the later writers as an authentic work and they borrowed from it.

Abdul Qadir Badauni was also a keen student of history and literature. He tells us that from his student life, he spent hours in reading or writing history. He also learnt Sanskrit and classical Indian music along with Islamic theology. Akbar employed him to translate *Muhabharat* from *Sanskrit* into Persian. The first volume of his history entitled *Muntakhabut Tawarikh* is related to the history of the Sultanate of Delhi. The second covers Akbar's reign while in the third volume we find the biographical notes on the scholars, poets and Sufi saints of Akbar's reign. His account is very readable bringing out the important facts of the period. Brevity is the beauty of Badauni's style. The first volume contains information culled from miscellaneous sources, many of which are not extant today. Moreover, Badauni possessed an analytical independent mind with different views than the official line. In fact Badauni's objective was to present a frank account of his times. It is Badauni's second volume that needs to be studied along with Abul Fazl's *Akbarnama* to have a proper understanding of Akbar's reign. Badauni does not gloss over any uncomfortable question on Akbar's ability as an administrator. For example, Badauni records the failure of the *karori* experience and the disaster it caused. Badauni is corroborated in essentials by Nizamuddin Ahmad also. Unlike Abul Fazl and even Nizamuddin Ahmad, Badauni's account of the religious discussions held in Akbar's *Ibadat Khana*, the origin of Akbar's differences with the Muslim orthodoxy that led to religious controversies is vivid depicting the currents and cross currents of thought. It certainly has precedence on *Akbarnama*, in a number of areas especially the controversial issues. It gives an impression to the readers that it is free from the official constraints, catches the realities of the time and reflect the magnitude and intensity of conflicts of the period.

10.3.4 Histories During Jahangir's Reign

Akbar's son and successor Jahangir decided to write autobiographical history of his own reign in the traditions set by Babur. Besides, he persuaded other scholars also to write the history of his reign. He requested Shaikh Abdul Haque to add in his *Tarikh* the account of his reign also. But the Shaikh was too old to take up the work, yet his son

Qazi Nurul Haque compiled the history, *Zubdatu't Tawarikh* and closed it with the account of Jahangir's reign. Like the *Tarikh* compiled by his father, Shaikh Abdul Haque, the *Zubdatu't Tawarikh* also narrates the history of the Muslim rulers of India. Another writer, who compiled the voluminous History of the Afghan tribes and the Afghan rulers, the Lodis and the Surs also incorporated a chapter on early ten years of Jahangir's reign. This *Tarikh-i Khan-i Jahani* was compiled by Nemat Allah Harawi under the patronage of Khan-i Jahan Lodi, the noble of Jahangir. As regards Jahangir's own memoirs *Tuzuk-i Jahangiri*, it is a major source for his reign.

The emperor wrote the Tuzuk himself upto the 17th regnal year till his health permitted him. Later, he dictated it to his trusted officer, Mutamad Khan. It presents to a great extent the picture of Jahangir's reign. The principal events connected with rebellions, the role of the imperial officers, their promotions and punishments as well as diplomatic relations between India and the foreign powers are described in a lucid style. It contains a year-by-year narrative. Further, we find insights into the culture of the Mughal empire as well as Jahangir's aesthetic taste, learning and his interest in nature.

10.3.5 Histories During Shahjahan's Reign

Mutamad Khan set to write the history *Iqbalnama-i Jahangiri* after Shahjahan's accession to the throne. His aim was to jsutify Shahjahan's rebellion against his father because Nur Jahan Begum wanted to harm him and clear the way for Shaharyar's accession to the throne. It is divided into three parts: the first part covers the history of Babur and Humayun, the second part contains the account of Akbar's reign while the third is devoted to Jahangir's reign. In the last part the first nineteen years are merely an abridgement of the *Tuzuk-i Jahangiri*. The account of the last years of Jahangir's reign is almost an eye witness account.

Like Mutamad Khan, Khwaja Kamgar Husaini also came from a family associated with the Mughal court. He served under Jahangir and Shahjahan both. In the preparation of his *Maasir-i Jahangiri*, he also drew on Tuzuk-i Jahangiri. His account from the 19th year of Jahangir's reign is his original work and is an important source for the events that took place during the last years of the reign. He started compiling his work in 1630. It may be pointed out that the compiler also supplemented information about certain events that took place before Jahangir's accession to the throne. For example, he furnishes details about the role played by prince Khusrau's supporters to secure the throne for him leaving Jahangir aside. No other historian supplies this information. he also portrays Jahangir as a naturalist, describing Jahangir's interest in fauna and flora, animal breeding, etc. In short, *Maasir-i Jahangiri* is one of the major histories on Jahangir's reign.

Impressed with Abul Fazl's style of prose writing and the richness of details in the *Akbarnama*, Shahjahan desired to have the history of his reign compiled by a master of Persian prose. First he tried Mohammed Amin Qazvini and suggested him to write *Badshahnama*, i.e. the history of his reign on the lines of Abul Fazl's *Akbarnama.* Like Abul Fazl, Amin Qazvini was provided with assistants and given permission to have access to the royal library and the state archives for the collection of material. In nine years Qazvini was able to complete the first volume covering the first ten years of Shah Jahan's reign. It seems that he had planned to compile a separate volume on every decade but he was stopped from working on the project. Although the volume was rich in details, his style was not liked by the emperor. According to Mohammed Saleh Kamboh, the author of the *Amal-i Saleh* (or *Shahjahannama*), Qazvini was transferred to the intelligence bureau. Abdul Hamid Lahori, another Scholar was appointed as the official historian in his place. Abdul Hamid was found competent enough to emulate Abdul Fazl's Persian prose-style. Saleh Kamboh says that Abdul Hamid was celebrated for the beauty

of his style. Like *Akbarnama*, the *Badshahnama* is also full of outbursts of laboured rhetoric.

Abdul Hamid's *Badshahnama* contains an account of twenty years of history of Shahjahan's reign. It is divided into two parts, each covering ten years of the reign. The events have been arranged chronologically year-wise. It also contains separate sections on the Princes, Princesses and the nobles of the empire. The latter have been listed in accordance with the descending order of their *mansabs* from 9000 to 500 horses. Lastly the author devotes a section on the leading *Sufi* saints, scholars, physicians and poets of the reign of Shahjahan.

Owing to old age, Abdul Hamid Lahori was retired and his pupil Mohammad Waris was ordered by the emperor to continue the work. Waris's volume contains ten years account from the beginning of the twentieth year to the thirtieth year when Shahjahan had to abdicate the throne. Waris's *Badshahnama* bears resemblance to his teacher's *Badshahnama* both in style and details.

Two other writers who produced histories of Shahjahan during the early years of Aurangzeb's reign were Sadiq Khan and Muhammad Saleh Kamboh. The former's work is known as B*adshahnama*, while the latter history is popularly called *Amal-i Saleh* (or Shahjahanama). Both these works furnish important details about the war of succession between Shahjahan's sons and the last years of Shahjahan's life.

10.3.6 Histories During Aurangzeb's Reign

The emperor Aurangzeb also followed the tradition of Akbar and Shahjahan. He appointed Muhammad Kazim the son of Muhammad Amin Qazvini to write the history of his reign. An order was also issued to the officers incharge of the royal records to make over to the official historian all such state papers as were received from the news writers and other high functionaries pertaining to important events. On the completion of the account of first ten years of the reign, its writing was stopped. The volume produced was called *Alamgir Nama* (1568). This volume reads as a panegyric in prose, portraying the emperor as a special recipient of divine grace and endowed with super-natural powers. Disgusted with flattery and exaggeration, Aurangzeb banned history writing, saying that 'the cultivation of inward piety was preferable to the ostentatious display of his achievements'. The curtailment of state expenditure seems another reason for stopping the writing of chronicle.

Later on, Inayatullah Khan Kashmiri, a trusted noble of Aurangzeb's son and successor, Bahadur Shah persuaded Saqi Mustaid Khan to compile the history of Aurangzeb's reign. Hence the compilation of the *Maasir-i Alamgiri was b*rought to completion in 1711. This fills a wide gap in the official history of Aurangzeb's reign.

Like *Akbarnama* of Abul Fazl and *Badshahnama* of Abdul Hamid Lahori, *Maasir-i Alamgiri* has been composed in the form of annals, each year has been marked off. Its style is free from literary conceits, but the work reads like a dry list of official postings, promotions, armies deputed for the conquest of forts, etc. However, the interesting bits of information are found at places where the compiler makes observation and reflection on events and particularly biographical sketches. It may be pointed out that the account of first ten years of Aurangzeb's reign in the Maasir-i Alamgiri is a concise summary of Kazim's *Alamgirnama* but the account from the eleventh year onwards is based on his personal knowledge and the state archives. It is, however, almost devoid of details about the social life and the deteriorating economic conditions in the Empire. This was the last official history of the Mughal empire. Thereafter, Khafi Khan and other historians of the 18th century composed histories but their approach was partisan, each historian wrote according to his allegiance to certain group of nobles at court.

Apart from these historical works a number of other works like *Maasir-ul Umara*, by Shahnawaz Khana collection of biographies of nobles, treatise on Administration like *Diwan-i Pasand* of Rai Chhatar Mal; Amamullah Hussain's work *Ganj-I Badawurd* (on Agriculture) *Baharistan-i* Ghaybi of Mirzanathan (1623) are a few other important works of history for the Mughal period.

10.4 SUMMARY

Among the Muslim elite, history was considered as the third important source of knowledge after the religious scripture and jurisprudence. Therefore, the study and writing of history were accorded great importance after the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate in the closing years of 12th century. The pioneers of history-writing in the Indo-Persian tradition was Muhammad bin Mansur, popularly known as Fakhr-i Mudabbir. His writings included a book of genealogies of the Prophet of Islam and the Muslim rulers, including Qutbuddin Aibak. Minhaj Siraj Juzjani was another important historian of the 13th century. However, the most important figure in the Indo-Persian historiography was Ziauddin Barani in the 14th century. His *Tarikh-i Firuzshahi* is a milestone in the tradition of history-writing in medieval India. It was written for the enlightenment of the rulers of his times. Under the Mughals this tradition of history-writing continued and reached new heights. Abul Fazl, Nizamuddin Ahmad, Abdul Qadir Badauni, Khwaja Kamgar Husaini and Abdul Hamid Lahori were some important historians of the Mughal period.

10.5 EXERCISES

1) Give a brief account of Minhaj's style of history-writing.

2) Discuss the important works of history written during the 14th century.

3) Why is Ziauddin Barani considered as the most important historian of the Sultanate period?

4) Compare the writings of Abul Fazl and Badauni on Akbar's reign.

5) Write a brief note on the historical works during Jahangir's reign.

10.6 SUGGESTED READINGS

Iqtidar Husain Siddiqui, 'The origin and growth of an Islamic Historigraphy in India', *Journal of Objective Studies*, Vol. 1, Nos. 1-2, July-October, 1989, Jamia Nagar, New Delhi.

Hasan Barani, 'Ziauddin Barani', *Islamic Culture*, Hyderabad, Deccan, Vol. XII, No.1, Jan.1938.

Norman Ahmad Siddiqui, 'Shaikh Abul Fazl' *in Historians of Medieval India*, ed. By Mohibul Hasan, Meerut, 1968.

K.A. Nizami, 'Historical Literature of Akbar's Reign' in *On History and Historians of Medieval India*, Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 1983.

UNIT 11 LOCAL HISTORY

Structure

11.1 Introduction

11.2 Local History

11.3 Oral History

11.4 Microhistory

11.5 Summary

11.6 Exercises

11.7 Suggested Readings

11.1 INTRODUCTION

In the first three Units of this block, you have learnt about the historiography in the Middle Ages in Asia and Europe. The present Unit straddles the boundary between the pre-modern and modern periods. In this Unit we have discussed three different types of historiographical practice under the head of 'local history'. These are 'local history', 'oral history' and 'microhistory'. All three concentrate on localised fields, even though their theoretical input and impact are not necessarily local. Moreover, two of these – 'local history' and 'oral history' – employ methodologies with roots both in the pre-modern and modern historiographies. By concentrating on the small scale and on the ordinary people, these histories contest the dominant historical discourses of both the pre-modern and modern periods.

11.2 LOCAL HISTORY

Local history is generally described as 'a range of historical writings focusing on specific, geographically small areas, frequently produced by non-professional historians for a non-academic audience'. In the western countries, particularly in Britain, France and the United States, local histories were written in the 18th and early 19th centuries by the local elites. In the late 19th century, this process acquired momentum and several societies were formed to undertake local studies. Under the impact of industrialisation, urbanisation and migration, the local communities were destabilised and a crisis of identity emerged. This resulted in a desire among the local educated people to record their history at local and regional levels. From the 1860s onwards, several history groups emerged which were interested in promoting the studies of their regions. Their works covered many aspects of their past — 'from the history of local churches and parishes to reports on the discovery of flint axe-heads in previously unknown sites of archaeological importance'. Studies on genealogy and family history were some other areas of interest in local history. In the United States, the late 19th century was a particularly good period for local history. Under the patronage of the local elites interested in consolidating or raising their social status, these histories recorded the establishment of particular regions, lists of early politicians and life-histories of local notables.

Local history started as amateur attempts to promote the locality and community as a matter of pride and even now such trends prevail and the term 'local history' continues to be linked with antiquarianism and amateur historiography. However, since the 1930s, there was a certain professionalisation in this sector. Several books were written in the next two decades which centred on localities but could be considered on par with any

national history in terms of professional achievement. A.H. Dodd's *Industrial Revolution in North Wales* (1933), W.H. Chaloner's *The Social and Economic Development of Crewe, 1780-1923* (1950), W.G. Hoskins's classic *The Making of the English Landscape* (1955) and J.D. Marshall's *Furness and the Industrial Revolution* (1958) were some of the books which revolutionised the writing of local history in Britain. Bjorn Hansen's *Osterlen* (1952) in Sweden, Guy Thuillier's works in France and Joseph Amato's works on the American midwest further strengthened this trend towards professionalisation in local history.

This trend was given an academic shape by the establishment of the first university department of local history in 1947 at Leicester in Britain. Academic local history there is still dominated by the perspective developed by what came to be known as the 'Leicester School'. H.P.R.Finberg, in a 'mission statement' in 1952, outlined the objectives of this 'School' :

> 'The primary aim of the department, then, will be to foster, in our own minds and in the minds of any who look to us for guidance, a reasoned conception of local history, such as will set a standard of performance by which our own work and the work of others may be judged.'

Finberg and Hoskins, the two important historians associated with the School, criticised the traditional local history on a number of points. According to George and Yanina Sheeran :

> 'Ideologically, Finberg and Hoskins were opposed to the elitist conservative approach which underpinned much traditional local history – that is, they criticized the emphasis on the fortunes of armigerous families and the neglect of the common man. Metodologically, they objected to the antiquarian, fact-collecting tradition, the lack of order and method, and the overdependence on documentary sources. Philosophically, they criticized the lack of "a central unifying theme", which would serve to distinguish local history as a discipline….'

To overcome these inadequacies in the traditional local history, Finberg suggested that job of the local historian should be 'to re-enact in his own mind, and to portray for his readers, the Origin, Growth, Decline and Fall of a Local Community'. However, Finberg and Hoskins did not define what constituted a 'Local Community'. They took its existence as self-evident and its size as ranging 'from small parishes to counties'. Their successor at Leicester, C. Phythian-Adams, in his book *Re-thinking English Local History* (1987), tended to outline its contours as a shire county. The basic characteristics of the Leicester School may be summarised as 'dogged empirical research and fieldwork, a concentration on the pre-industrial period, the celebration of the common man and the concept of community'.

The local history in Asia and Africa is differently situated. Here the traditional form belongs mostly to oral tradition. Royal lineages and achievements in battles form the basic staple of this tradition. Parts of these histories were in written form also, but the oral form was the predominant mode of presentation. In India, *Bakhar* (in Maharashtra), *Raso* (in Rajasthan) and *Vamshavalis* (in south India) were some of the ways in which the traditional local histories were presented. They are genealogies and chronicles narrating the family history of the ruling dynasties and commemorating the achievements of warriors in the battles. In African countries also this tradition was sustained through myths and tales, through theatrical performances, and through more formal narratives. Axel Harneit-Sievers remarks in the introduction to the edited volume, *A Place in the World : New Local Historiographies from Africa and South Asia* (2002):

> 'In many societies in Africa and South Asia certain individuals or groups are widely regarded as traditional specialists for the transmission of historical knowledge. There are more or less formalized ways of doing this : In one place, it may just be an elder in the village, generally recognized by the community as the most knowledgeable person on local history. In other places, specifically-trained people like the *griots* in Mali act as professional historians, or even hold official legitimation as keepers of history and royal genealogies, like the *Isekhurhe* and *Ihogbe* title-holders at the Oba of Benin's court in Nigeria.'

With the colonial domination and the introduction of the western education system, new elites began to emerge in Asia and Africa. Their world-view was influenced by the western education. The establishment of the university system in the late 19th century in India and during the 1940s in Africa brought the historical knowledge within more formal academic purview. However, quite a lot of history-writing was still done by the people outside the university system. Local history was a particularly attractive field for the amateur and non-academic historians who felt interested in the past of their locality and community. Most of these historians were and are born and brought up in the localities and communities they write about and most of them are non-professional historians outside the formal academia. It is true that some of local histories are written within the universities. However, most of it is written by people outside the universities.

Harneit-Sievers uses the term 'new local histories' for these writings. In comparison with the traditional local histories which were mostly oral, the new local histories are written and published. Moreover, they are 'attempts to (re-)construct local identities within larger contexts by means of reference to the past – and as forms which appropriate and adapt "modern" historiography to local needs and purposes'. They are aimed at providing knowledge about the locality and at increasing local self-awareness. They also seek to accord prestige to the locality before the wider world and make its name known.

The new local histories are not completely cut off from the tradition. They use local oral and other primary sources and interact with the local communities to maintain the continuity of tradition. It is true that they hold the power of the written word as against the oral tradition. However, they are not antagonistic to the old histories and the communities concerned consider them as objects of local pride. The new local historians, on their part, 'frequently view their own undertakings not as a threat to "old" history, but rather as a mission to rescue it in view of vanishing historical knowledge caused by urbanization, the spread of formal education, or by war and displacement'.

History has served as a tool all over the world to 'imagine' and 'construct' a sense of community. The new local histories in Asia and Africa also endeavour to recreate a sense of identity for the localities and communities by referring to a common past. Within the boundaries of a nation-state, the local communities have become 'modern localities' which are, in Arjun Appadurai's words, parts of 'a complex phenomenological quality, constituted by a series of links between the sense of social immediacy, the technologies of interactivity, and the relativity of contexts'. The changing atmosphere, inter-regional migration and long-distance communication have created a situation where the members of the local communities are no longer confined to a particular locality either physically or emotionally. The new local histories try to take account of this changed environment and, as Harneit-Sievers points out :

> 'New local histories may do so by trying to reduce the complexity of a community's external interaction and embeddedness, presenting the image of a "traditional", self-contained and homogeneous locality …. They may also stress historicity and change, and the importance of being part of larger contexts, as a matter of local pride and indicator of modernity. Many of them oscillate between these extremes and combine both perspectives. The tension between

> "the local" and the wider world is present – in more or less explicit forms – in virtually every new local history.'

The new local histories in Africa and Asia 'construct' the locality in several ways : by referring to common ancestry, common culture, ancient kingship, kinship relationships and religious, cultural and political achievements. This way they try to portray the locality as 'a moral community that shares, or should share, a common value-system'. This is done by an acceptable mixture of local traditions and modern academic historiography.

The writing of the new local histories in Asia and Africa is largely influenced by the western methods of research and presentation of material. These histories are chronological and there are large-scale references to the sources. Moreover, they are generally conceived within an evolutionist perspective. The conceptualisation is not in religious or mythological terms, but in modern, secular terms. However, in terms of content, they derive largely from the traditional oral and written sources and their use of sources are generally uncritical. Although they sometimes adopt a linear sense of time as per the western model, they often include in their narrative tales of origins and mythical and legendary heroes whose lives and actions cannot fit into any chronology and cannot be verified. Thus while the form of these histories may resemble the western concepts and methods, their content and narrative technique are based on local traditions.

The audience of these histories are both local and national or even wider. Since they are written and published and use the modern academic methods of presentation, their reach is beyond the locality. Still, they deal with the locality and its traditions. Moreover, these local histories are not simple academic texts. They also act as agents in establishing local pride and providing a sense of community and local identity.

The new local histories in Africa and Asia, therefore, operate at two levels – local and translocal. Their writers are generally products of the modern education system and adopt the modern historical concepts and methodology which may be alien to the local society. At the same time, their works derive from local traditions and directly participate in local discourse. Even as these histories challenge the traditional ways of representing the past, they thrive on and do not necessarily replace the local traditions.

11.3 ORAL HISTORY

The boundaries of oral history are extremely porous. It crosses the lines between the pre-modern and the modern periods, between the pre-literate and literate cultures, between the individual and the collective, and between the subject and the writer. Thus Ronald J. Grele, in his entry on 'Oral History' in Kelly Boyd (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Historians and Historical Writing, (1999),* writes with exasperation :

> 'When oral historians, or those who use the term "oral history" in their writings, describe what it is they do, they mix genres with abandon. Sometimes what is being described is oral tradition; at others life history, life review, or life course. For some oral historians the practice is the collection of interviews for archival purposes, to provide a record for the future. For others it is the conduct of interviews for particular publications or public history projects, and for still others it is a pathway to "community empowerment". In addition the term "oral historian" is applied with great looseness. Some argue that the oral historian is the person who conducts the interview, others that the oral historian is the person being interviewed – the narrator who tells the history. Neither is there any agreement on what to call people being interviewed : they can be interviewees, narrators, subjects, respondents. In recent years oral history has become a noun, the thing itself is the thing being collected, rather than the

> activity for interviewing for historical purposes. Indeed there is even debate over whether oral historians simply collect oral histories, or create them.'

Such confusion apart, oral history in any form is unacceptable to the hardliners trained in the Rankean tradition which places enormous premium on the 'primary sources'. Anything else is the second best, and the oral testimony is, of course, the worst. To the literate culture of the modern West, anything which is not written did not exist. Hence, Hegel declared in 1831 that Africa 'is not historical part of the world'. As late as 1965, Hugh Trevor-Roper stated that Africa had no history. He said that 'Perhaps in the future there will be some African history to teach. At the present there is none, or very little : there is only the history of Europeans in Africa'. As for the value of the oral sources for writing history, A.J.P. Taylor firmly announced : 'In this matter, I am an almost total sceptic. Old men drooling about their youth? No!' Besides these extreme reactions, there are those who are doubtful towards this exercise because its form is imprecise, chronology is uncertain, the data are unsupported and it can be practiced only at a very small scale.

Such derision has expectedly invited angry retort from the oral historians. Paul Thompson, one of the leading figures in oral history, writes in his famous book, *The Voice of the Past : Oral History* (1978), that

> 'the opposition to oral evidence is as much founded on feeling as on principle. The older generation of historians who hold the Chairs and the purse-strings are instinctively apprehensive about the advent of a new method. It implies that they no longer command all the techniques of their profession. Hence the disparaging comments about young men tramping the streets with tape-recorders.'

Jan Vansina, another great oral historian who has worked in Africa, is equally assertive about the importance of oral sources in history :

> 'Oral traditions have a part to play in the reconstruction of the past. The importance of this part varies according to place and time. It is a part similar to that played by written sources because both are messages from the past to the present, and messages are key elements in historical reconstruction. But the relationship is not one of the diva and her understudy in the opera : when the star cannot sing the understudy appears : when writing fails, tradition comes on stage. This is wrong. Wherever oral traditions are extant they remain an indispensable source for reconstruction. They correct other perspectives just as much as other perspectives correct it.'

It is clear that the lines are drawn between the mainstream history which relies almost exclusively on written sources and the oral history which accords great significance to the oral sources for reconstruction of the past. It should, however, be recognised that oral history now is not simply concerned with enriching the archives by collecting interviews. Instead, it has matured into a branch of historiography which seeks to understand all forms of subjective experiences. Popular beliefs, memory, myths, ideology, perceptions and consciousness have all become legitimate grounds for exploration by oral historians. Oral history now hold great promise for being a new kind of historiographical effort which is involved in 'not just the creation of documents of the heretofore ignored populations but the ways in which those in the community become their own historians and present their history'.

Despite disparagement from the mainstream historians, the oral historians have broken new grounds and produced many works of great quality. Paul Thompson's *The Voice of the Past : Oral History* (1978) joins issue with positivist and empiricist orientation of much of historiography and seeks to correct it. It is, moreover, concerned about the presentation of history of those who have been neglected not only by the professional

historiography but also in the written sources. Jan Vansina, in his *Oral Tradition as History* (1985), explores in detail how oral traditions can serve as rich sources of historical evidence. His another masterpiece, *Paths in the Rain-forest* (1990), deals with the pre-colonial history of equatorial central Africa. *The Death of Luigi Trastulli, and Other Stories* (1991), Alessandro Portelli's insightful study of the Italian workers and of people of several Appalachian communities in the United States, is a great contribution to oral history. David K. Dunway and Willa K. Baum (eds.), *Oral History* (1984, 1996) contains essays on oral history in various countries. Luisa Passerini's *Fascism in Popular Memory* (1984), Devra Weber's *Dark Sweat, White Gold* (1994), Deborah Levenson-Estrada's *Trade Unionists Against Terror* (1994), Raphael Samuel's *Theatres of Memory* (1994) and Kim Lacy Rogers's *Righteous Lives* (1995) are some important studies using oral sources effectively. Apart from these writings, the *International Journal of Oral History*, the *History Workshop Journal*, and some others have endeavoured to create forum for oral history in various countries. There are several formal and informal oral history associations in Britain, America, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Russia, Spain, South Africa, Sweden, and in many other countries. There have been several international level seminars and conferences on oral history. From these developments it is clear that oral history has arrived on the international scene as an important historiographical practice.

However, there is a creative tension which oral history faces in its efforts to produce history which can equal the document-based history in richness. Even those advocating the use of oral sources concede that there are certain problems involved in it. Thus Eric Hobsbawm writes that 'most oral history today is personal memory, which is a remarkably slippery medium for preserving facts. The point is that memory is not so much a recording as a selective mechanism, and the selection is, within limits, constantly changing'. He argues that the importance of such history is not just to record facts but to understand the mentalities of people, to know 'what ordinary people remember of big events as distinct from what their betters think they should remember, or what historians can establish as having happened; and insofar as they turn memory into myth, how such myths are formed'. Even though this suggestion is important as it lifts oral history above the routine work of 'checking the reliability of the tapes of old ladies and gentlemen's reminiscences', it dampens the enthusiasm of oral historians to rival their traditional counterparts. It is true that oral history has now acquired an independent status insofar as it is no longer a recording activity but a historiographical practice in its own right. It succeeds in those areas and situations which the conventional history has either ignored or where it has failed. Nevertheless, it is conceded even by its practitioners that oral sources alone may not be sufficient for a knowledge of the past. In conclusion, we may quote in detail from Jan Vansina, one of the most distinguished oral historians :

> 'Where there is no writing, or almost none, oral traditions must bear the brunt of historical reconstruction. They will not do this as if they were written sources. Writing is a technological miracle. It makes utterances permanent while not losing any of their faithfulness, even though the situation of immediate intimate communication is lost. Hence, where writing is widely used, one expects very detailed and very diverse sources of information, which also allow for a very detailed reconstruction of the past. Historians who work with the written sources of the last few centuries in any of the major areas of literacy should not expect that reconstructions using oral materials will yield as full, detailed, and precise a reconstruction, barring only the very recent past. The limitations of oral tradition must be fully appreciated so that it will not come as a disappointment that long periods of research yield a construction that is still not very detailed. What one does reconstruct from oral sources may well be of a lower order of reliability, when there are no independent sources to cross-check, and when structuring or chronological problems complicate the issues.'

11.4 MICROHISTORY

Microhistory has a curious relationship with local history and oral history. It resembles local history as its subject matter is often confined to a locality. Moreover, its sources are local in origins and nature. The oral sources, folk tales and legends and local records, which are staple of local history, are also used extensively by the microhistorians. But the resemblance ends here. M.M. Postan once distinguished between 'microscopic' and microcosmic' studies. 'Microscopic' studies are those which remain confined to issues of local interests and significance, whereas 'microcosmic' studies are based on an intensive research of small area located within a larger context. In this perspective, while a large part of local history belongs to the 'microscopic' studies, the microhistory almost entirely belongs of the 'microcosmic' variety.

Carlo Ginzburg, one of the best-known historians identified with microhistory, traces the first use of this term to an American scholar, George R. Stewart. In his book, *Pickett's Charge : A Microhistory of the Final Charge at Gettysburg, July 3, 1863*, published in 1959, Stewart uses the term. The book is centred on an event which lasted for only about twenty minutes. In 1968, Luis Gonzalez used the term 'microhistory' in the subtitle of his book which deals with the changes experienced over four centuries by a tiny, 'forgotten' village in Mexico. In fact, as Gonzalez himself pointed out, the term was also used in 1960 by Fernand Braudel. But, for Braudel, it had a negative connotation and was synonymous with the 'history of events'. The word appears in a novel by Raymond Queneau in 1965. This novel was translated into Italian by Italo Calvino in 1967. From this and from its use in Primo Levi's *The Periodic Table* (1975) that this word came to be used extensively for certain kind of historical practice. Giovanni Levi was the first Italian historian to extensively use this term.

Thus microhistory, as a conceivable historical practice, emerged during the 1970s and the 1980s in Italy. Although it had its variants in Germany in *Alltagsgeschichte* or the 'history of everyday life', and in France and the United States in the new cultural history, it is the Italian microhistorians who set most of the agenda for writing this version of history. Carlo Ginzburg, Giovanni Levi, Carlo Poni, Edoardo Grendi and Gianna Pomata are some of the Italian historians who made the word famous through their writings. Ginzburg's *The Cheese and the Worms : The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (1976), *The Enigma of Piero : Piero della Francesca* (1981), and *Ecstasies : Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath* (1990), and Giovanni Levi's *Inheriting Power : The Story of an Exorcist* (1985) are some of the representative texts of this historiographical trend. The Italian journal *Quaderni Storici*, right since its foundation in 1966, has served as the channel for this trend in historiography. However, microhistory is part of a wider trend which includes intensive local and individual studies by Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie in France, Hans Medick in Germany, and Robert Darnton and Natalie Zemon Davis in the US.

Microhistory is a late modern, sometimes, postmodern, response to the problems of modern historiography. The microhistorians are critical of not only the Rankean paradigm (about which you have read in the **Unit 3** and will read more in **Unit 12**), but also the macrohistorical paradigms developed by Marxism, the Annales School (see **Unit 14**) and even the old social history. The microhistorians do not have an optimistic view about the various benefits brought about by the modern technology. Thus the objection to the macrohistorical discourse is not only methodological, but also ethical and political. The macrohistorical conception, they argue, praise the achievements of modernisation, modern science and technology while ignoring the human cost; they also neglect the experiences of the 'little people' who has to bear the brunt of 'progress'. The microhistorians define their historiographical practice against approach of the analytical

social science, metahistory of Marxism and the non-human grand history of the *Annales* School, particularly Braudel.

The microhistorians trace the origins of this trend to the crisis of macrohistory in the 1970s. There was an increasing disenchantment with grand narratives and the social scientific studies based on quantitative data not because these approaches were inherently wrong but because they did not capture the reality at the micro level. According to the microhistorians, the attempt should be 'to open history to peoples who would be left out by other methods' and 'to elucidate historical causation on the level of small groups where most of life takes place'. Giovanni Levi, one of the founders of this trend, points out that it is now generally accepted that 'the 1970s and 1980s were almost universally years of crisis for the prevailing optimistic belief that the world would be rapidly and radically transformed along revolutionary lines'. Moreover, 'many of the hopes and mythologies which had previously guided a major part of the cultural debate, including the realm of historiography, were proving to be not so much invalid as inadequate in the face of the unpredictable consequences of political events and social realities – events and realities which were very far from conforming to the optimistic models proposed by the great Marxist or functionalist systems'. This crisis also entailed conceptual and methodological failure to comprehend the reality at the ground day-to-day level. Levi states that the 'conceptual apparatus with which social scientists of all persuasions interpreted current or past change was weighed down by a burden of inherited positivism. Forecasts of social behaviour were proving to be demonstrably erroneous and this failure of existing systems and paradigms required not so much the construction of a new general social theory as a complete revision of existing tools of research'. Microhistory was one response to this comprehensive crisis. It was a groundbreaking and radical response and it took the historiography away from its focus on the 'big structures, large processes and huge comparisons'. Instead, it concentrated on the small units in society. It was severely critical of the large quantitative studies and macro-level discourses because it distorted the reality at small level. It focused on the small units and on the lives of the individuals living within those units. It was felt that this would lead to better understanding of reality at samll level. As Giovanni Levi put it : 'The unifying principle of all microhistorical research is the belief that microscopic observation will reveal factors previously unobserved.' However, according to Levi, it was not at the theoretical level that its significance should be seen. Microhistory is 'essentially a historiographical practice whereas its theoretical references are varied and, in a sense, eclectic'. It was a historiographical experiment which has 'no body of established orthodoxy to draw on'.

There were various other reactions to this crisis. One of them was, in the words of Levi, the resort to ' a desperate relativism, neo-idealism or even the return to a philosophy riddled with irrationality'. However, Levi believed that the 'historical research is not a purely rhetorical and aesthetic activity'. He firmly takes the side of historians and social scientists who believe that there is a reality outside the texts and it is possible to comprehend it. Thus the microhistorian is 'not simply concerned with the interpretation of meanings but rather with defining the ambiguities of the symbolic world, the plurality of possible interpretations of it and the struggle which takes place over symbolic as much as over material resources'. Thus, for Levi, microhistory is poised delicately between the approach of the analytical social sciences and the postmodernist relativism

> 'Microhistory thus had a very specific location within the so-called new history. It was not simply a question of correcting those aspects of academic historiography which no longer appeared to function. It was more important to refute relativism, irrationalism and the reduction of the historian's work to a purely rhetorical activity which interprets texts and not events themselves.'

Carlo Ginzburg supports Levi 'against the relativist positions, including the one warmly espoused by Ankersmit, that reduce historiography to a textual dimension, depriving it of any cognitive value'.

The adherents of microhistory in Italy had started as Marxists and, in keeping with their Marxist past, they retain three elements of the Marxist theory of history. They believe :

i) that social and economic inequality exists in all societies;

ii) that culture is not completely autonomous, but is associated with economic forces; and

iii) that history is nearer to social sciences than to poetry and is, therefore, based on facts and requires rigorous analysis. Moreover, the subject matter the historians deal with is real.

Thus microhistory, although recognising that 'all phases through which research unfolds are *constructed* and not *given*', is categorised, according to Ginzburg, by 'an explicit rejection of the skeptical implications (postmodernist, if you will) so largely present in European and American historiography of the 1980s and early 1990s'. It is defined by its 'insistence on context, exactly the opposite of the isolated contemplation of the fragmentary advocated by Ankersmit'. It focuses on what Edoardo Grendi, one of its ideologues, called the 'exceptional normal'. Methodologically, as Levi points out, it is characterised 'as a practice based on the reduction of the scale of observation, on a microscopic analysis and an intensive study of the documentary material'. He further emphasises that 'For microhistory the reduction of scale is an analytical procedure, which may be applied anywhere independently of the dimensions of the object analysed'. The microhistorians believe that it is only at the small level that the real nature of various values and beliefs held by people may be revealed. Roger Chartier, commenting on Ginzburg's famous book, *The Cheese and the Worms*, captures this aspect of microhistory clearly :

> 'It is this reduced scale, and probably on this scale alone, that we can understand, without deterministic reduction, the relationships between systems of beliefs, of values and representations on the one hand, and social affiliations on the other.'

The study of the small scale is also undertaken by the cultural anthropologists, led by Clifford Geertz, whose method of thick description finds resonance in some of the works of these historians. However, there are many points of differences between the two. Firstly, the microhistorians accord more importance to theory than what Geertz and his followers do. Secondly, they are not willing to go far in the direction of relativism. And, lastly, they criticise a homogeneous conception of culture in the works of Geertz. As Levi says :

> 'It seems to me that one of the main differences of perspective between microhistory and interpretive anthropology is that the latter sees a homogeneous meaning in public signs and symbols whereas microhistory seeks to define and measure them with reference to the multiplicity of social representations they produce.'

Levi summarises the basic features of microhistory : 'the reduction of scale, the debate about rationaltiy, the small clue as scientific paradigm, the role of the particular (not, however, in opposition to the social), the attention to reception and narrative, a specific definition of context and the rejection of relativism'.

But microhistorians should not be viewed as a monolithic bloc even in Italy. There are wide differences between them. On the one hand, there is Levi who is theoretically much closer to the analytical history and believes that history is a social science, and not a work of art. On the other hand, Gianna Pomata believes that there is 'a dazzling prospect of a history that would be thoroughly up to the most rigorous standards of the craft while also matching, in terms of vitality and intensity of vision, the work of art'. Carlo Ginzburg stands somewhere in the middle. On the whole, it may be said, as Georg G. Iggers points out, that microhistory 'has never been able to escape the framework of larger structures and transformations in which history takes place'. However, it can be said in defence of the microhistorians that it is a conscious choice and not some theoretical slip. Most of them have chosen to criticise the methodology of macrohistory; but, at the same time, they have thoroughly rejected the relativism associated with the linguistic turn, postmodernism, and cultural relativism.

11.5 SUMMARY

In this Unit we have dealt with three branches of historiography which focus on the local areas and communities, on the small scale and on the ordinary people and groups generally ignored by the mainstream historiography. In this sense, these streams of historiography serve as corrective to national, large-scale and macro-level histories. They attempt to capture the lives of little people and neglected communities. They also energise and re-orient the practice of history both in terms of interests and sources. Two of these streams – local history and oral history – cross the lines between the pre-modern and the modern and between the pre-literate and literate societies. Moreover, they are cherished and nurtured by the communities concerned, and they, in turn, help the communities to develop an identity and reconstitute themselves. The third stream discussed here – microhistory – differs from these two in many significant respects. Although it focuses on the locality and the ordinary people, it has nothing traditional about it. It is a late modern reaction to the disenchantment from the macro-level histories. Starting in the 1970s and 1980s, microhistory focussed on the small units, individuals and groups. The microhistorians felt that it was only at this micro level that it was possible to know the reality.

11.6 EXERCISES

1) What is local history? Discuss the differences between the old style of local history and the new one.

2) Do you think that oral history can come under the category of proper history? Give your answer with example.

3) What are the points of similarities and differences between microhistory on the one hand, and local and oral histories on the other?

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UNIT 12 POSITIVIST TRADITION

Structure

12.1 Introduction

12.2 Auguste Comte and the Positivist Philosophy

12.3 Empiricist Tradition

12.4 Rankean Tradition

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12.1 INTRODUCTION

What we commonly understand as the positivist view of history derives basically from three traditions :

a) The Positivist Philosophy enunciated by the French thinker Auguste Comte;

b) The Empiricist Tradition which had a long history but was most deeply entrenched in the British philosophical and historical tradition; and

c) The tradition of history-writing which followed the guidelines laid down by the German historian Leopold von Ranke.

These three traditions fused in various mixtures to produce, what E.H.Carr calls, 'the commonsense view of history'. At philosophical level, these traditions cannot be said to be one. In fact, there are many contradictions between them. Sometimes, these contradictions, as between Positivism and Empiricism, may be seemingly opposed to each other. For example, while Positivism enunciated universalistic principles, general laws and had a teleological view of history, Empiricism doubted the grand theoretical schemes and relied on sense impressions and the knowledge gained from that. Nevertheless, in the sphere of history-writing, they have been used interchangeably, both by their followers and critics. In this Unit we will discuss all the three trends separately as well as their combined impact on the writing of history. Let us start with the Positivist philosophy.

12.2 AUGUSTE COMTE AND THE POSITIVIST PHILOSOPHY

Auguste Comte (1798-1857), a French thinker, enunciated the Positivist Philosophy. He followed the Enlightenment tradition which believed in universalism. The Enlightenment thinkers believed that what was applicable to one society was valid for all the others. They, therefore, thought that it was possible to formulate universal laws which would be valid for the whole world. Comte also favoured this universal principle and was opposed to individualism which the Romanticists were preaching. Comte was a disciple of Henri Saint-Simon (1760-1825), a utopian socialist, from 1814 to 1824.

Apart from Saint-Simon, the other influences on him were those of John Locke (1632-1704), David Hume (1711-1776) and Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). All these influences went into the making of his own system of philosophy. The main books he published were titled : *The Course of Positive Philosophy* and *The Course of Positive Politics*. It is in the first book, published in six volumes from 1830 to 1842, that he elaborated his theoretical model about history.

According to Comte, there was a successive progression of all conceptions and knowledge through three stages. These stages are in chronological sequence : 'the Theological or fictitious; the Metaphysical or abstract; and the scientific or Positive'. Of these three stages the first one is the primary stage through which the human mind must necessarily pass. The second stage is transitional, and the third stage is the final and the 'fixed and definite state' of human understanding.

Comte also sees a parallel between this evolution of thought in history and the development of an individual from childhood to adulthood. According to him, the first two stages were now past while the third stage, that is, the Positive stage, was emergent.

Comte considered that the Positive stage was dominated by science and industry. In this age the scientists have replaced the theologians and the priests, and the industrialists, including traders, managers and financiers, have replaced the warriors. Comte believed in the absolute primacy of science. In the Positive stage, there is a search for the laws of various phenomena. 'Reasoning and observation', Comte said, 'are the means of this knowledge.' Ultimately, all isolated phenomena and events are to be related to certain general laws. For Comte, the Positivist system would attain perfection if it could 'represent all phenomena as particular aspects of a single general fact; such as gravitation, for instance'.

Positivism, therefore, upheld that knowledge could be generated through observation. In this respect, Positivism had very close resemblance to the Empiricist tradition which emphasised the role of sense experience. Thus observation and experience were considered as the most important and essential function. Facts were the outcome of this process. However, at its most fundamental level, the Positivist philosophy was not concerned with individual facts. They, instead, believed in general laws. These laws were to be derived through the method of induction, that is, by first determining the facts through observation and experience and then derive laws through commonness among them. For Positivists, therefore, general laws are only colligation of facts derived from sense experience. Thus, facts are determined by sense experience and then tested by experiments which ultimately leads to the formation of general laws. These general laws, like those in the sciences, would be related to the basic laws of human development. Once discovered (and formulated), these laws could be used to predict and modify the patterns of development in society. In such a scheme, individual facts, or humans for that matter, were of no consequence. Comte, therefore, looked down upon the historians as mere collectors of facts which were of no relevance to him once general laws were known.

There were three major presuppositions in Comte's system of philosophy :

1) He envisaged that the industrial society, which Western Europe had pioneered, was the model of the future society all over the world.

2) He believed that scientific thinking, which he called the positivist philosophy, was applicable both for the sciences and for the society. Moreover, he thought that this thinking, and by implication the positivist philosophy, would soon become prevalent in the whole world, in all societies.

3) Comte believed that the human nature was the same everywhere. It was, therefore, possible to apply the general laws of development, discovered by him, to all societies.

Some of these ideas were common in Comte's age. The belief that the age of religion was over and the age of science and industry had arrived was shared by many.

Comte's main ideas derived from two sources – principle of determinism found in thoughts of Montesquieu (1689-1755), a French political philosopher, and the idea of inevitable progress through certain stages propounded by Condorcet (1743-1794), another French philosopher. Thus Comte's central thesis can be stated in Raymond Aron's words as follows;

> 'Social phenomena are subject to strict determinism which operates in the form of an inevitable evolution of human societies – an evolution which is itself governed by the progress of the human mind.'

Armed with this principle, Comte strove to find in the human world a basic pattern which would explain everything. Thus, for him, 'a final result of all our historical analysis' would be 'the rational co-ordination of the fundamental sequence of the various events of human history according to a single design'.

The Positivist method, as envisaged by Comte, would consist in the observation of facts and data, their verification through experimentation which would finally lead to the establishment of general laws. This method was to be applied in the sciences as well as in humanities such as sociology, history, etc. And, as in the sciences, the individual had not much role in determining the process of development.

Thus, for the historians, Comte's method could have following implications :

1) History, like sciences, is subject to certain general laws which could explain the process of human development.

2) Human mind progresses through certain stages which are inevitable for all societies and cultures.

3) Individuals cannot change the course of history.

4) The inductive method, which Comte believed was applicable in sciences, consisting of observation of facts, experimentation and then formulation of general laws, should be applied in the writing of history as well.

12.3 EMPIRICIST TRADITION

The word 'empiricism' derives from the Greek word 'empeiria' which means 'experience'. In philosophy, it means that all knowledge is based on experience and experience alone is the justification of all knowledge in the world. According to the Empiricists, the knowledge acquired through tradition, speculation, theoretical reasoning or imagination is not the proper form of knowledge. Therefore, the bodies of knowledge derived from religious systems, metaphysical speculations, moral preaching and art and literature are not verifiable and therefore not reliable. The Empiricists believe that the only legitimate form of knowledge is that whose truth can be verified. Both the Empiricists and the Positivists maintain that only the observable world which is perceptible can provide the source of genuine knowledge. They include texts as the physical objects which can form part of the knowledge. They reject the metaphysical, unobservable and unverifiable modes of knowledge.

Empiricism has a long history. In western philosophical tradition, the earliest Empiricists were the Greek sophists who made the concrete things the focus of their enquiries. They did not rely on speculations as did many of other Greek philosophers. Aristotle is also

sometimes considered as the founder of the Empiricist tradition, but he may equally be claimed by other traditions opposed to Empiricism. In medieval Europe, Thomas Aquinas believed in the primacy of senses as the source of knowledge. He said that 'there is nothing in the intellect that is not first in the senses'.

In Britain, there existed a very strong Empiricist tradition. In the 16th century, Francis Bacon believed that an accurate picture of the world could be derived only through the collection of observed data. He tried to base philosophical enquiries on scientific grounds. In the 17th century, John Locke was the leading Empiricist philosopher. The other important Empiricist philosophers in Britain were George Berkeley (1685-1753), David Hume (1711-1776), and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873).

The theories of Empiricism hold that our senses (eyes, ears, nose, etc.) act as mirrors for the things and events in the world. It is on the basis of those impressions that we understand the world and establish connections between things and events. The world in all its particulars corresponds to how we describe it in language. Thus when we say potato, it exactly denotes a particular material thing in nature.

Empiricism can be said to have generated the following ideas:

1) The real world as we experience is made of concrete things and events and their properties and relationships.

2) Individual experience can be isolated from each other and from its object and from the position of its subject. Thus an experience can be described without reference to the person who experienced it or the circumstances which generated it. In relation to the practice of history, it means that the facts can be separated from the individuals or groups or societies that produced them, and from the researchers who have supposedly uncovered them.

3) The person who experiences a particular object should be like a clean slate who is influenced only by the object he/she experiences. His/her earlier experiences and ideological orientation are not important. In terms of history-writing, it means that the historian or the collector of facts should be influenced only by those facts that he /she has collected and not by previously held ideology or beliefs.

4) The nature of the world can be can be derived only through inductive generalisation. All such generalisations, however, should be verified through experiments and can be displaced or corrected by further or different experiences.

5) All knowledge consists of facts derived through experiences and experiences alone. Therefore, any claimed knowledge of transcendental world or any metaphysical speculations have no basis in reality.

The historians, according to the Empiricists, should repose their trust in the evidences about the past that are presented for us by the contemporaries through their sense impressions and if historians look at these sources closely, they can present a true picture of the past.

12.4 RANKEAN TRADITION

Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886), the nineteenth-century German historian, is generally considered as the founding father of the Empirical historiography. It was with him that a completely new tradition of history-writing started which is still the predominant mode of historiography today. It is true that before Ranke, Edward Gibbon (1737-1794) had established the modern historical scholarship with his monumental book, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, published between 1776 and 1788. He based his book on

available sources and evidences. However, his work, along with those of others, such as Voltaire, Hume, etc., who wrote historical pieces in the 18th century, was seriously wanting in many respects. These deficiencies were mostly due to the nature of historical research in the 18th-century Europe. Those problems may be listed as follows:

1) The first was their concern for establishing the universal principles of human and social behaviour. Moreover, they could not analyse the patterns of change and development in society and polity. Except Gibbon, most of the 18th-century historians were not seriously concerned with providing empirical details. There was also a lack of critical acumen among many of the practitioners of history with regard to their sources. Most of them relied completely on the sources and took their accuracy and truth for granted.

2) There was also the problem of the non-availability of primary sources and documents. Most of the archives were not open to the scholars. Moreover, most of the rulers practised censorship and did not allow publication of books and accounts which did not agree with their views. In addition, the Catholic Church was still powerful and was able to enforce its own censorship prohibiting the books critical of the Church.

3) Another associated problem was the lack of formal teaching of history at the university level. Because of this, the historians often worked as individuals and never as a team. This led to an absence of mutual checks and informed criticism.

By the early 19th century, mostly due to the French Revolution and many political reforms introduced in its wake, it became possible to overcome many of the problems discussed above. This great revolution changed many ideas and concepts about the human nature and society. Now people started to think about change and development in social and individual behaviour. Sources and documents were now more carefully and critically evaluated before deciding on their veracity. The Danish scholar Barthold Georg Niebuhr (1776-1831) is generally considered as the pioneer of this new critical method and the source-based historical research. He used the advanced method of linguistic studies and textual analysis for the study of the sources and writing of his book, *History of Rome*, which was published in 1811-12. Niebuhr had worked in Prussia since 1806 and was appointed in the recently founded University of Berlin. In his lectures on Roman history, he critically examined the sources, especially the work of the classical writer Livy (59 BCE — 17 CE). For this, he used the most advanced philological methods and exposed several weaknesses in Livy's work. Niebuhr thought that such method would bring out the bias in the contemporary sources and would enable the historians to present true state of things. He believed that 'In laying down the pen, we must be able to say in the sight of God, "I have not knowingly nor without earnest investigation written anything which is not true."

Although Niebuhr was a crucial figure in developing method of history-writing, it was Ranke who must be credited with the beginning of the modern historiography. In 1824, he published his first book, *The History of the Latin and Teutonic Nations*. In the Preface of the book, as the statement of his purpose, he wrote the passage which became the foremost justification of empirical historiography:

> 'To history has been assigned the task of judging the past, of instructing the present for the benefit of the future ages. To such lofty functions this work does not aspire. Its aim is merely to show how it really was.'

The Rankean approach to history-writing can be summarised as follows:

1) As is clear from the above-quoted statement, Ranke believed that the past should be understood in its own terms and not those of the present. The attitudes and behaviour

of the people of the past ages should be discerned by the incisive study of that particular period and should not be viewed by the parameters of the historian's own age. In Ranke's opinion, the historian should avoid the present-centric concerns while studying the past and should try to understand what issues were important to the people of the age he/she was studying. This idea of Ranke and the Empirical school introduced the notion of historicity. It meant that past has its own nature which was different from the present. It is the duty of the historian to uncover the spirit of a particular age.

2) Ranke was an Empiricist who believed that the knowledge is derived only through the sense experience. And the knowledge of the past can come from the sources which are the objective embodiments of the experiences of the people of that particular period. Thus the historian should rely only on the material available in the sources. The historian should not take recourse to imagination or intuition. Any statement to be made about the past should find reference among the sources.

3) But Ranke was also critical towards the sources and did not have blind faith in them. He knew that all sources were not of equal value. He, therefore, advocated the hierarchy of the sources. He gave priority to the sources which were contemporary with the events. These are known as the **primary sources**. Among these, the records produced by the participants or direct observers should be given preference to those written by others in the same period. Then there are the other sources produced by people later on. These are known as the **secondary sources** and should be accorded lesser credence than the primary sources while studying the events. Thus the precise dating of all sources became a matter of prime concern.

4) Ranke also emphasised the importance of providing references. This way all the assertions and statements could be supported by giving full details of sources from which they were derived. Here he further refined and elaborated the technique already followed by Gibbon and other historians before him. This practice was important because it provided the opportunity to cross-check the evidences cited by the historians. This would lead to corrections and modifications of the views and interpretations of historians.

5) Ranke differentiated between facts and interpretations. He emphasised on the primacy of facts which were supported by the evidences based on the sources. The historians' job is to first establish facts and then interpret them. Thus, in Ranke's opinion, the historian should not look into the sources to confirm his/her hypotheses, but, instead, build his/her hypotheses on the basis of the facts found in the sources.

Ranke's own output was enormous. He wrote several multi-volume books, the best known among them are : *The Ottoman and the Spanish Empires in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, The Popes of Rome, their Church and State, in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* and *History of Reformation in Germany.* Through his books Ranke tried to set the example for the future historians.

Ranke and his followers not only established the methodology for professional history but also helped in developing the institutions to support it. Ranke started graduate seminars in the University of Berlin in 1833 where young researchers were systematically trained. It created a group of scholars in Germany in the 1840s who were devoted and who were involved in writing professional history. Even before that, in 1823, the Prussian government had started the publication of *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* which strove to publish all important sources for German medieval history for the historians. By now, more than 360 volumes have appeared.

Ranke conceptualised history as a rigorous science which should abstain from metaphysical speculations and value judgments. He further emphasised that the historians must put the sources to philological criticism in order to determine their veracity. In contrast to the Comtean positivism, Ranke stressed the uniqueness of the events and not their universality. For him, it was important to look for the exact details and not for the general laws. By 1848, all German-speaking universities had adopted the Rankean method for writing history. And after 1870, in most European countries, the United States and Japan, the Rankean model was adopted for historical studies. Journals began to be published in several languages to promote scientific history. Thus the journal *Historische Zeitschrift* began publication in German in 1859. It was a trend-setter. It was followed by *Revue Historique* in French in 1876, *Rivista Storica Italiana* in Italian in 1884, the *English Historical Review* in 1886, the *American Historical Review* in 1895 and several similar journals in many languages and countries.

12.5 POSITIVIST/EMPIRICIST VIEW OF HISTORY

Despite their differences, what all these traditions shared became crucial for the development of historiography. Firstly, they all maintained that history (along with sociology, politics and economics) was a science and similar methods of research and investigation might be applied in both areas. Secondly, history dealt with reality and facts which existed outside and independent of the perception of the historians. Thirdly, history moved in more or less linear sequence in which events followed the earlier ones in linear chronological time.

Some of the hard-core Positivist historians were Numa-Denis Fustel de Coulanges and Hippolyte Taine in France and Henry Thomas Buckle in England. Coulanges asserted that what could not be perceived did not exist. Hyppolyte Taine, in his book *Les Origines de la France Contemporaire* (1874-93), attempted to explain history as 'geometry of forces'. Buckle, in his *History of Civilisation in England* (1857-61), tried to explain English history in terms of such factors such as climate, geography and innate psychology.

The contribution of such historians to the mainstream historical tradition has been rather limited. It is the Rankean and Empiricist traditions which have proved crucial to the development of historiography. Theodor Mommsen (1817-1903), the great German historian was a follower of Ranke. He became famous for his classic *Roman History* written in 3 volumes. This book was a prime example of his meticulous scholarship. He wrote about the history of Roman republic from its inception to its fall by using numismatic, philological and epigraphic sources. His other writings were *Provinces of the Roman Empire from Caesar to Diocletian,* and the *Roman Public Law* and he edited the *Corpus of Latin Inscriptions.*

Lord Acton (1834-1902) was another major figure in this tradition. His most lasting contribution was the editorship of the first edition of the *Cambridge Modern History*. Acton believed that in near future when all the facts would be accessible it was possible to write 'ultimate history'. He instructed the contributors to volume to 'meet the demand for completeness and certainty'. He wrote to them :

> 'Contributors will understand that our Waterloo must be one that satisfies French and English, German and Dutch alike; that nobody can tell, without examining the list of authors, where the Bishop of Oxford laid down the pen and whether Fairburn or Gasquet, Libermann or Harrison took it up.'

J.B.Bury (1861-1927) was another important English historian in this tradition. He also firmly believed in the scientific status of history and exhorted the historians to be accurate, erudite and exact in their search and presentation of facts. He maintained that although

history may provide material for writing literature or philosophy, it was different from both these because it was a science. He wrote many important historical works including the *History of Greece* and *A History of the Later Roman Empire*.

This view of history was summarised by an immensely influential textbook entitled *Introduction to the Study of History* written by C.V. Langlois and Charles Seignobos, published in 1898. The authors declared that the objective of history-writing was 'not to please, nor to give practical maxims of conduct, nor to arouse emotions, but knowledge pure and simple'.

Even though there were many critics of this view, this tradition dominated in the 19th century and even in the 20th century most of the professional history followed this trend. Most historians believe in its central premises that facts have a separate and independent existence and that most of our knowledge of the physical world ultimately derives from sense impressions.

12.6 CRITIQUES

There has been widespread criticism of the positivist and empiricist views of history. Right since the Rankean era there have been historians who criticised this trend of history-writing. Johan Gustav Droysen (1808-1884), professor of History at Berlin from 1859 to 1884, described the objective approach of Ranke as 'the objectivity of a eunuch'. The work of Jacob Burckhardt (1818-97), Profesor of History at Basle from 1845, provided an alternative approach to that of Ranke. He was a disciple of Ranke, but reacted against his method of history-writing and followed the approach of Augustin Thierry (1795-1856) and Jules Michelet (1798-1874). Thierry and Michelet criticised the straightforward empiricism and gave rise to ideas which are associated with the school of 'historical romanticism'. This trend of historiography stressed the points which the Rankean and Positivist schools had rejected. The historians associated with this trend emphasised the importance of historian's intervention in the writing of history. They believed that the historian should be passionate and committed rather than detached. They also emphasised the moral side of history-writing in opposition to rational approach. The local and the particular were given more importance as against universal and general. The history of the community as a whole was emphasised as against the approach which gave prominence to the leaders. As Thierry said that his aim in writing history was to 'envisage the destiny of peoples and not of certain famous men, to present the adventures of social life and not those of the individual'. This school believed in the importance of literary skills in the writing of history and stressed that history was as much art as it was science. They criticised empiricism for its cult of sources and its emphasis on neutral interpretation. They, in its place, stressed the role of sentiments and feelings in history-writing.

Although there were many historians even before 1914 who seriously questioned the possibility of a scientific, neutral and value-free history, the events of the First World War and their aftermath severely jolted the belief that historical accounts could be produced which would satisfy persons of all nationalities. In fact, the historians of many countries wrote histories which contradicted the ones written by those in other countries. They interpreted events which justified their respective nations. Even though there were exceptions to this rule, the overall tendency was to write nationalist histories rather than 'scientific' histories. In fact, the nationalist histories were flaunted as scientific histories. The Rankean and Positivist ideals of producing 'scientific' and 'objective' history came under severe strain.

The Positivists believed in the methods and 'truths' of the natural sciences. They wanted to apply these methods to the study of society as well. Hence, they designated these

disciplines as social sciences. They believed that, by the use of inductive methods, it was possible to predict about the future of society as in the natural sciences. But in the 20th century, the nature of the natural sciences also changed at theoretical level. Albert Einstein's **General Theory of Relativity**, propounded in 1913, changed the very nature of research in natural sciences.

The thinking about history was also influenced by these developments. The Positivist certainty and Rankean objectivity now seemed a thing of the past. Many thinkers now emphasised the relativistic nature of history. Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) in Germany, Benedetto Croce (1866-1952) in Italy and R.G. Collingwood (1889-1943) in England were among the more influential thinkers in this regard. Croce declared that 'All history is contemporary history' which meant that history is written always in the light of the present concern and is shaped by the ideological tool available to the historian in his/her own era. The Amerian historian, Carl Becker, denied the existence of facts at all by saying that 'the facts of history do not exist for any historian till he creates them'. Collingwood went even further by provocatively stating that 'all history is the history of thought'. What these thinkers were challenging was the usual distinction between fact and interpretation which most of the pre-First World War historians were prone to do.

Their views received wide acceptance among historians. The role of the historian now acquired huge prominence, as the role of sources had early on. The work of interpretation was always considered the prerogative of the historian. But now even the decision about what should be considered as facts was thought to be the privilege of the historian. As E.H.Carr states that 'the necessity to establish these basic facts rests not on any quality of the facts themselves, but on *a priori* decision of the historian'. The facts no longer spoke for themselves, as was the case with the empiricists; they now have to be made to speak in the diction of the historian. To quote E.H.Carr again :

> 'The facts speak only when the historian calls on them: it is he who decides to which facts to give the floor, and in what order or context.... a fact is like a sack — it won't stand up till you've put something in it.'

E.H.Carr presents these views as the Collingwood view of history. He himself adopts a more cautious approach which gives equal weightage to facts and historians. Most of the working historians generally adopt this approach.

12.7 SUMMARY

In this Unit we have attempted to familiarise you with the Positivist tradition of history-writing. This tradition is, in fact, constituted by three different traditions of thought — the Positivist philosophy enunciated by August Comte, the tradition of history-writing started by Leopold von Ranke and the Empiricist tradition predominant in Britain. The interaction of these three traditions tried to put the practice of history on a scientific basis. This tradition claimed that the sources were all-important, that the facts existed independent of the historian, that neutrality is a desired goal, that total objectivity is possible in the writing of history and that history can be considered as science. This view of history was criticised even during the 19th century by historians like Burckhardt and philosophers like Wilhelm Dilthey. However, more serious challenge came in the beginning of the 20th century. Thinkers like Croce, Carl Becker and Collingwood questioned the very foundations of such an approach of scientificity, neutrality and objectivity. They denied the existence of facts independent of the historian and gave overwhelming importance to interpretation in history-writing. Such views of total relativism were also not helpful to most practicing historians who tried to adopt a more balanced view which accorded even importance both to the facts and the historians.

12.8 EXERCISES

1) What are the differences and similarities between Positivism and Empiricism?

2) Who was Leopold von Ranke? Discuss his views on history.

3) Discuss the positive and negative points of Rankean view of history.

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UNIT 13 CLASSICAL MARXIST TRADITION

Structure

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13.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous Unit you read about the Positivist / Empiricist view of history. Its main protagonists in history-writing were Ranke and Mommsen in Germany, Acton, Bury and Huckle in England and Coulanges and Taine in France, besides many others all over the world. It was the most influential school of historiography in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, its focus on political and administrative history was too narrow for later historians who wanted to explore other areas of human existence. Moreover, the historians in the twentieth century also visualised the past differently than what the Empiricist historians had done. This led to the adoption of Marxist view of history by a large number of historians. In fact, the Marxist approach to history became the most important in the twentieth-century historiography. In this Unit we will discuss the establishment of this tradition by looking at the works of Karl Marx himself apart from some others immediately following that tradition.

Karl Marx (1818-83) is famous for good many reasons. He is recognised as the founder of scientific socialism or communism. This is associated with his distinct philosophical position, which could yield an innovative understanding of history in terms of ceaseless interaction between the economic and non-economic forces of human social living and consciousness. Marx argued how the simultaneous action of all this would open up the probability of achieving a classless human society. Becoming free from all exploitation of man by man, a communist society ensures the elimination of all social causes accounting for alienation and human degradation.

13.2 UTOPIA AND SCIENCE

The socialist ideal has a longer tradition than what we have from Marx and Engels. The bourgeois revolutions in history had often aligned a mass following of working peasants and labourers who looked beyond the abolition of feudal order to a transformation not limited by the capitalist seizure of power and property. To cite one or two examples, we may remember the role of John Lilburne and his followers in the English Revolution of 1647. They were known as the Levellers consisting of small Yeoman farmers, shopkeepers, the less wealthy tradesmen, artisans and apprentices who stood for equality along with the plea for a broad-based democracy. Another group knows as 'Diggers' and led by Gerrard Winstanley struggled not for political rights alone and were unrelenting in their demand for common ownership of land. Again, during the French Revolution of

1789, there was the example of Babouvism led by Gracchus Babeuf (1760-97) as an effort to reach a republic of equals for improving the condition of the working people.

Indeed, the goal of common land ownership featured as an ideal in the programmes of peasant uprisings even during the feudal period of Europe's history. The great peasant war (1515) in Germany found a leader like Thomas Munzer (1470-1525) who urged the rebels to establish "God's Kingdom" on earth, meaning thereby a classless society free of private projects and without any government. Thomas More (1478-1535) wrote a book by the name *Utopia* in 1516 during the reign of Henry VIII in England. Perhaps, till the end of the eighteenth century, it remained the most important writing on socialist thought. The Greek word 'Utopia' means non-existent or no place. More chose this to emphasise a still unattained social ideal thriving on communism, universal education and religious tolerance. While the image of an ideal human society had been well presented in More's narrative, the ways and means of realising such an ideal were left, in the main, to the working of a noble prince. Utopia is then unhistorical and could happen only as a miracle. Thus, the very word 'Utopia' acquired the meaning of an imaginary society which was never attainable.

Along with the development of capitalism, utopian socialist ideas rising in opposition appeared in various forms and complexities. Among such thinkers were Saint –Simon (1760-1825), Fourier (1772-1837), Proudhon (1809-1865) of France, Sismondi (1773-1842), a German Swiss of French descent, who was familiar with the economic conditions in England, Italy and France, Robert Owen (1771-1859) of England, Wilhelm Weitling (1808-1871) of Germany. Despite their differences, a common socialist bias was evident in the emphasis on the need for a social approach as distinguished from the pursuit of individual self-interest to achieve social well-being. Further, most of them shared some kind of distrust in politics and favoured different alternatives to ensure just and proper management of human affairs.

Their ideas about the nature of institutions for the conduct of such management were different. The Fourierists and the Owenites thought of covering the earth with a network of local communities, while the followers of Saint-Simon propagated for the transformation of nation-states into large productive corporations where scientists and technical experts should have effective power to do things for the widest social benefit. Wilhelm Weitling was a very popular figure among German exiles in places like London, Paris and Brussels. No less significant was his influence over German workers in their own land. He wrote a booklet by name *Mankind as it is and as it ought to be*. Weitling had no trust in intellectuals and depended, in the main, on poor-friendly homilies and adventurist anti-statism for his ideas of achieving socialism. Weitling had a preacher's style and his addresses to mass meetings were in quasi-religious terms.

Around 1845-46, when their manuscript of *The German Ideology* had been nearing completion, Marx and Engels took initiative for setting up a Communist Correspondence Committee to act as the coordinator of various communist theories and practices which were then being evident in the European capitals. At a time when Marx was engaged in his understanding of history as passing through stages related to the interaction of productive forces and production relations, the other expressions of socialist thought like that of Weitling would appear to be extremely puerile formulations of an ignorant mind. Their differences were sharply manifest at a meeting in Marx's Brussels residence where he stayed with his family during 1846-47.

P.V. Annenkow, a Russian tourist, who was present at the meeting on Marx's invitation, gave an account of its proceedings. (*The Extraordinary Decade*, Ann Arbor, 1968). In his opening statement, Engels emphasised the need for a common doctrine to act as a banner for all those devoted to improving the condition of the working people. It was

especially necessary for those who lacked the time and opportunity to study theory. Engels was yet to complete his argument when Marx asked Weitling, 'Tell us, Weitling, you have made such a noise in Germany with your preaching : on what grounds do you justify your activity and what do you intend to base it on in the future?'

Weitling spoke for a long time, repeating and correcting himself and arriving with difficulty at his conclusions. He tried to make clear that his aim was not to create new economic theories but to adopt those that were most appropriate, as experience in France had shown, to open the eyes of their workers to the horrors of their condition and all the injustices which it had become the motto of the rulers and societies to inflict on them, and to teach them never to believe in any promises of the latter, but to rely only upon themselves, and to organise in democratic and communist associations. (This summary is largely taken from David Mclellan, *Karl Marx: His Life and Thought*, Macmillan, London (1973)).

Marx checked Weitling from speaking further and sarcastically commented that 'in Germany, to appeal to the workers without a rigorous scientific idea and without positive doctrine had the same value as an empty and dishonest game at playing preacher, with someone supposed to be an inspired prophet on the one side and only asses listening to him with mouths agape allowed on the other.'

Pointing to Annenkov, Marx said that in the Russian motherland of their guest, a country not yet entirely free from barbarism, some people could still be found to care for 'saintly' observations like that of Weitling. But, 'In a civilized country like Germany…. People could do nothing up to now except to make noise, cause harmful outbreaks, and ruin the very cause they had espoused.'

Here is a telling instance of Marx's vehement emphasis on assimilation of socialist thought with what can be recognised as scientific understanding of history and society linked to their laws of movement and change. For Marx, unlike his utopian forerunners and also some contemporaries, socialism was not a morality play in which the virtues of love, kindness, and fraternity have to prevail over the vices of greed, graft and exploitation. Since the onset of the Renaissance in the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries, the growth of scientific knowledge and experiments had cumulatively added to human uses of nature and its objects for the expansion and improvements of social production. In Marx's own world, science had already furnished the technical bases of the industrial revolution in west Europe. But the outlook for human consciousness and social relations was still subject to pre-scientific constraints.

On the other side the ideals of liberty, fraternity and equality, though of immense importance for the demolition of the old order, were yet to satisfy the criterion of being really absorbed in the making of a society and state. The experience of the French Revolution could not fully uphold the theories and ideals of the Enlightenment philosophers. Nor did the Reign of Terror under the radical Jacobin leadership augur well for the foundation of popular sovereignty. Moreover, the transition from feudalism to capitalism and its economic climax in an Industrial Revolution brought about gross inequities and dehumanisation as they were manifest in the new form of capital-labour relationship.

An acute and intense awareness of those problems was expressed in Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844), also known as *Paris Manuscripts*. It was written in Paris where Marx was then living, exiled for his radical views and political position from Germany, his own homeland. The *Paris Manuscripts* was his first discourse linking up philosophical ideas and ideals with an explicit presentation of the economic aspect of social being. It contains Marx's first analysis of alienated labour under capitalist exploitation. Subsequently, along with Engels, Marx was committed to a search for the

laws of historical movement and changes. Some such discovery was essential for placing the socialist ideal on a scientific basis. We know how strongly the point was emphasised by Marx in his argument with Weitling. We should sift and explain the principal ideas of the subsequent texts by Marx and Engels to have an understanding of classical Marxism.

13.3 MARX'S DEVELOPING IDEAS

The century spanning the years 1760-1860 is known as the period of industrial revolution in England. It was distinguished by far-reaching cumulative changes in the technical bases of production and marked a peak point of Britain's capitalist transformation. The pace of capitalist development largely varied between the countries of Europe. To cite a few examples, the course of change was rapid in Holland and even more radical than that of England; while the French monarchy faced its doom in 1789, capitalist economic growth and political order did not come to have a sustainable pattern before the last quarter of the 19th century; prior to the unification of German territories in 1871, the course of capitalism in that land was subject to numerous obstacles and eventually its bourgeois transformation was mixed up with feudal residues and political autocracy, an experience which Marx described in his preface to the first volume of *Capital.*

> 'Alongside of modern evils, a whole series of inherited evils oppress us, arising from the passive survival of antiquated modes of production, with their inevitable train of social and political anachronisms. We suffer not only from the living, but from the dead, *Le mort saisil le vif!* (The dead holds the living in its grasp!)'

Born in 1818 in Trier, a prominent town in the Rhine province of Prussia, Karl Marx grew up amidst practically the last phase of capitalist transition in Europe. In the previous section of this study, we have taken note of the various socialist ideas and perspectives invoking mass support for the bourgeois struggle to supersede the feudal order, and later shaping into good many doctrines to defend the working people against the onslaught of capitalism in power. Along with the triumph and consolidation of capital's wealth and power in any country, its labouring people were inevitably ousted from any holding of their own means of production and had to seek their subsistence as wage-labour of capitalist entrepreneurs / employers.

While elaborating the nature and conditions of capital and labour in his *Paris Manuscripts,* Marx indicated three aspects of labour's alienation, viz. (1) that from the material, objective product of his work, (2) that from the labourer's work activity itself, and (3) that from other fellow human beings. Considering the date of the *Paris Manuscripts,* it appears that Marx did not consider the effects of capital-labour production relation (the term production relation not used in *Paris Manuscripts*), only in terms of the sphere of production. He pointed to its envelopment of the entire framework of capitalist social relationship (i.e. alienation of human beings from one another). Thus, capitalism brings about a kind of alienation that violates the very nature of man as a species- being. For Marx, all this had to be comprehended not merely as an image of capitalist evils. He was bent on arriving at a theoretical understanding which would clarify the reality of capitalism as a historical stage subject to its own contradictions. Such contradictions have to be appropriately resolved for any transition to socialism.

The historical course towards socialism would depend on discerning the nature of those contradictions and their bearing upon the negation of capitalism. There arises the need for a theory which can account for the experience of history passing through its various stages in terms of the relative weights of the actors and the factors influencing the pace, pattern and content of the changes. Our knowledge of how the present has emerged out of its past should enable us to recognise the incumbencies of acting for the future in an unceasing historical process. The truth of such knowledge can be constantly verified

in reference to the ever-growing evidence of men and women in society, their class positions and activities. Moreover, such knowledge can often gain in precision with more and more inputs from practical social experience. History is no independent metaphysical entity. It is purposeful activity of human beings. They make history on a creative understanding of circumstances surrounding them in real social life.

We have just noted the broad purport of Marx's view of history. It helps us to see the relevance of Marx's emphasis on scientific knowledge in his argument with Weitling. He places a large premium on the general character, universality, necessity, and objective truth – all this considered to be attributes of scientific knowledge – in the pursuit of historical reality. Before entering into further details of the Marxian theory, we may note the major influences of Europe's intellectual tradition (viz. German classical philosophy, especially of the Hegelian system, materialism of the Enlightenment philosophers, English classical political economy and the various versions of utopian socialism as already noted in the previous section of this study), which had their roles in the development of Marx's thought. Indeed, many of the components of Marx's theory can be best understood in the light of his acceptance/rejection of the ideas articulated by his forerunners/contemporaries about Europe's capitalist transition and the subsequent agenda of moving towards socialism.

During his student days at the Bonn and Berlin universities, particularly at the latter, Marx was largely influenced by the method and range of Hegelian philosophy. He joined the 'Young Hegelians' whose interpretation of Hegelian philosophy and criticism of Christian thought presented a kind of bourgeois democratic thought and political interest. Friedrich Engels (1820-95) met Marx in 1844 and they became life-long friends and collaborators. Both of them were critical of the idealist philosophical position of 'Young Hegelians' and emphasised the need for investigating material social relations at the roots of the spiritual life of society. Earlier, Ludwig Feuerbach (1807-72) had pointed to the idealist weakness of the 'Young Hegelian' position. In his important book *The Essence of Christianity.* (First German edition in 1846, English translation in 1854), the formulation of human beings creating god in their own image was a significant step forward in materialist prevalence over idealist thought.

The Holy Family or the Critique of Critical Critique (1845), jointly written by Marx and Engels, launched a piercing attack on philosophical idealism. The 'Young Hegelians' were facetiously named the 'Holy Family'. The book upheld the position of the Enlightenment philosophers for their emphasis on empirical test of truth. At the same time, the dialectical method was rigorously applied to arrive at an adequate idea of changing social relations and also that of recognising the proletariat as the gravedigger of capitalism. Capitalist private property necessarily creates its own antagonist in the proletariat. And as private property grows, the proletariat develops as its negation, a dehumanised force becoming the precondition of a synthesis to do away with both capital and wage labour in opposition to each other.

The German Ideology was the next joint work of Marx and Engels. Though written in 1845, the book could not be published in their lifetime. It appeared for the first time in the Soviet Union in 1932. In his preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859), Marx referred to *The German Ideology* (still unpublished) as an effort to settle accounts with their previous philosophical conscience. In addition to their critique of idealism, Marx and Engels exposed the contemplative nature of Feuerbach's materialism which failed to consider really existing active men as they live and work in the midst of any particular socio-economic formation. *The German Ideology* provided for the first time the ideas of historical stages in relation to class struggle and social consciousness to help our comprehension of movements in history.

Marx's *These on Feuerbach* (written in 1845) was found in his notebook and was first published as an appendix to Engel's *Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy* (1888). Later it was also an appendix to *The German Ideology* when the latter had been released as a book. Altogether we have eleven theses commenting, step by step, on the limitations of idealism and earlier versions of materialism (that of Feuerbach included) for not properly understanding the kind of dialectical interaction between human social beings and their surrounding circumstances. The position of idealism is caught up in abstractions without appropriate cognisance of the realities of human social living. On the other hand, earlier materialism could regard human beings only as creatures of their circumstances, failing to recognise the role of human sensuous activity in the making of circumstances. Marx's position was memorably expressed in his eleventh thesis, which was as well the last aphorism of the series, 'The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point however is to *change* it.'

We have already mentioned the Communist Correspondence Committee set up by Marx and Engels in 1845-46. Such committees started work in other places like London and Paris. A preliminary conference of those committees held in the summer of 1847 in London took the decision to unite in a body. A second meeting held in November-December, in London, named the united body as the Communist League and commissioned Karl Marx to prepare a manifesto of the Communist Party. It would then be published by the League.

The *Communist Manifesto* (1848) appeared to be jointly authored by Marx and Engels from the two names on its title page. Later, Engels pointed out that the basic thought belonged solely and exclusively to Marx and the actual writing was done by Marx. It has four sections. The first section, (viz. Bourgeois and Proletarians), gives a history of society as a succession of class societies and struggle. The laws of social development are manifest in the replacement of one mode of production by another. The second section, (viz. Proletarian and Communists), turns on the supersession of capitalism in the struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat led by the communists. The communists differ from other working class groups. But they are not opposed to such groups. The communists are distinguished for their being international and fully conscious of the role of the proletarian movement. Rejecting the bourgeois objections to communism, this chapter gives an outline of the measures to be adopted by the victorious proletariat after seizing power and mentions and need and relevance of the dictatorship of the proletariats. The third chapter, (viz. Socialist and Communist literature), contains an extended criticism of the doctrines of socialism. The reactionary, bourgeois types are merely examples of feudal atavism and bourgeois and petty bourgeois manoeuvres masquerading behind some pretensions of socialism. Some utopian socialists may be sincere in their moral sentiments and disapproval of capitalism. But they are misleading in their search for a way out of the realities of capitalist exploitation. The forth chapter, (viz. attitude of the communists towards the various opposition parties) sets forth the communist tactics in their dealing with the various opposition parties. This would certainly depend on the position of a party in regard to the stage of development of its particular country and society. The Manifesto concluded with the slogan- 'Working men of all countries, unite!' The distinction of Marx's thought is clear from the contrast in the tenor of this slogan from that of the motto — 'All men are brother' — used by Fraternal Democrats, and earlier international society including Chartists and European political exiles in London.

Marx wrote *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1847) in French. The book was directed against Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809-65), a French political figure, philosopher, sociologist, and economist, who considered the history of society as the struggle of

ideas and believed in achieving 'just exchanges' between capitalist commodity producers through the device of an ideal organisation. The book gave a definite impression of Marx's unrelenting effort to have a fuller understanding of the capitalist mode of production. He was engaged in looking for a theoretical result that would combine the structural observations of classical political economy with dialectical comprehension of a society changing under the pressure of its contradictions in the process of history.

Among many other assignments and responsibilities including the day-to-day work of the Communist League to organise the working people of Europe, Marx never neglected his project for the critique of political economy. He could see its necessity for bearing out the rationale for scientific socialism. This is where the seven notebooks written by Marx in 1857-58, now known as *Grundrisse* (Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy) — first English edition in Pelican Marx Library, Harmondsworth, England, in 1973, trs. Martin Nicolaus – bring out the precious point that the question of historical transition from capitalism to socialism can be answered in all fitness by formulating Ricardo's ideas of political economy with Hegelian language and Hegel's ideas of historical movement with Ricardian language. (Martin Nicolaus, 'The Unknown Marx' in Robin Blackburn ed. *Ideology in Social Science*, Suffolk 1972, p. 331). In his analysis of capitalist economic development Ricardo discovered 'the disharmonious' tendencies in the processes. But for him, capitalism was an immutable natural system, which could not be changed under any circumstances. On the other hand, Hegelian dialectics had a dynamic view of society, but could not discern the real core of contradiction in the material life of society. Marx combined Hegelian dialectics with his critical study of political economy and arrived at an understanding of historical supersession of capitalism by socialism. For Marx, such a fusion of economic and philosophical thoughts started with the *Paris Manuscripts* of 1844. In *Grundrisse*, it reached the point of articulating that the politico-economic interpretation of capitalism is fulfilled in the proletarian praxis of revolutionary transformation.

In his preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859), Marx made an elaborate statement of his creative theoretical comprehension of historical movement and social change. It was not very long, but immensely significant, as the following excerpt will bear out :

> 'My investigation led to the result that legal relations such as forms of state are to be grasped neither from themselves nor from the so-called general development of the human mind, but rather have their roots in the material conditions of life, the sum total of which Hegel, following the example of the Englishmen and Frenchmen of the eighteenth century, combines under the name of "civil society", that however the anatomy of civil society is to be sought in political economy…..The general result at which I arrived and which, once won, served as a guiding thread for my studies, can be briefly formulated as follows: In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will; these relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of their material forces of production. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society – the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life determines the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces in society come in conflict with the existing relations of production, or – what is but a legal expression for the same thing – with the property relations within which they have been at work before. From forms of development of the

productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an epoch of social revolution. With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed. In considering such transformations a distinction should always be made between the material transformation of economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophic – in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out. Just as our opinion of an individual is not based on what he thinks of himself, so can we not judge of such a period of transformation by its own consciousness; on the contrary, this consciousness must be explained rather from the contradictions of material life, from the existing conflict between the social productive forces and the relations of production. No social order ever disappears before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have been developed; and, new higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society itself. Therefore, mankind always sets itself only such tasks as it can solve; since, looking at the matter more closely, we will always find that the task itself arises only when the material conditions necessary for its solution already exist or are at least in the process of formation. In broad outlines, we can designate the Asiatic, the ancient, the feudal, and the modern bourgeois modes of production as so many progressive epochs in the economic formation of society. The bourgeois relations of production are the last antagonistic form of the social process of production – antagonistic not in the sense of individual antagonism, but of one arising from individuals; at the same time the productive forces developing in the womb of bourgeois society create the material conditions for the solution of that antagonism.'

Following the point of arrival in his articulation of historical materialism, Marx's immediate concern was to interpret the contradiction of the capitalist social formation. No doubt, the veracity of a new theory of social change is closely linked to the evidence of the present as history. The economics of the capitalist mode of production is the subject matter of Marx's *Capital*, which Marx considered to be his lifework. Its first volume was published in 1867; the second and the third volumes were posthumously published in 1885 and 1894 respectively, under the editorial supervision of Engels. The first volume gives us a logical elaboration of capital-labour relationship at a level of abstraction and in analytical forms that can best crystallise the most significant structural characteristic and dynamic tendencies of the capitalist system. The second and the third volumes deal with the realities of capitalism on a much lesser level of abstraction and in terms of concrete things and happenings. Their areas are circulation of capital (vol. 2) and then the process of capitalist production as a whole (vol. 3). The *Theories of Surplus Value* (1862-63) (often mentioned as the fourth volume of Capital) turned upon the historical substantiation of Marx's theory in the light of other earlier and contemporary writings on Political Economy.

Marx points to the source of profits in a competitive capitalist economy. The value of a commodity is determined by socially necessary labour time necessary to produce it. Labour power is a commodity as well as exchanged for wages. The value of labour power (i.e. wages) is equal to the value of what is needed for the subsistence and maintenance of a worker and his family. The peculiarity of labour power as a commodity is that it can create more value than what is paid in wages as its value. This difference between the values produced by labour power and its wages is surplus value. Surplus value accrues to the capitalist employer and here lies the source of profits. Larger and larger accumulation out of these profits is the main aim of capitalist production. More and more accumulation results in the advance of productive forces and increased

productivity. It also leads to centralisation of capital. In Marx's words, 'one capitalist always kills many'. Many capitalists are knocked out by the working of competition. All this is associated with cumulative increase of misery, oppression, slavery and degradation. The conditions become rife for the revolt of the working class. The advance of productive forces can no longer be compatible with the insatiable urge of capital to maximise profits at the expense of the proletariat. The tendencies towards a falling rate of profit and also that of overproduction (i.e. inadequate market demand for what is produced) appear as symptoms of capitalist crisis. The issues relating to profit rate and overproduction are analysed in some details in the third volume of *Capital*.

13.4 MARX AND CONTEMPORARY HISTORY

Marx was not merely a theoretical philosopher. He was engaged in the foundation of the Communist League in 1847 and then in writing the *Communist Manifesto* (1948). Again, Marx was the most active and influential member of the International Working Men's Association (the First International) established in 1864. Around the 1850s, the countries of Europe were in different stages of reaching the capitalist system, indicated by Marx in the *Communist Manifesto*. In his numerous appraisals of such historical situations, Marx put emphasis on the relative strength and weakness of a country's bourgeoisie. There were circumstances in which he had called upon the working people to help in the achievement of a bourgeois democratic revolution, since that would take a society nearer to the socialist transition.

Marx also encountered historical situations where the bourgeoisie had already lost, and the working class was not yet prepared to seize political command. The complex plurality of classes in such circumstances was the subject of Marx's incisive analysis in his essay on 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte' – the instance of French history when Louis Bonaparte, the nephew of Napoleon I, assumed the position of an emperor as Napoleon III after his *coup d' etat* in 1851.

Marx's analysis of the Paris Commune in 1871 is important in many respect. A large number of manual workers were among its elected members. Most of them were also members of the International. It was not a revolution that would fit in with the Marxian theory of historical change actuated by the advance of productive forces outpacing some existing production relations in a society. Still Marx underlined its significance and highly appreciated its democratic and decentred exercise of political power.

Marx's comments on not-European countries (e.g. North America, China, India) were for the most part influenced by his thoughts on Europe's historical experience of passing from feudalism to capitalism and then, as Marx saw it, to socialism achieved by a class-conscious proletarian revolution. His ideas about the Asiatic mode of production were largely derived from ideologues of British empire. They were often emphatic in their portrayal of India as a static, barbaric society whose only means of redemption obtained in submission to the 'civilising' rule of imperial Britain. Marx considered that the forced inception of capitalism in India would act as an unconscious tool of history for bringing the country up to the path of its capitalist transformation. Despite all the sordid consequences of all this, the conditions would open up the perspective of a socialist transformation in the subject country. Its probability must have a necessary connection with socialist transformation of the ruling country. For China also Marx wrote of the need for the assertion of western civilization by force. (Introduction and notes by Dona Torr, *Marx on China 1853-1860*, London, 1851). In the last decade of his life, Marx appeared to go for newer investigations, perhaps with a view to further probing into the

issues of non-European countries and their paths of social change in history. We shall come to that point at a later stage of this presentation.

As regards America, Marx interpreted the civil war (1861-65) as a struggle between two social systems – slavery versus free labour. All his support was for the north and betrayed no concern for the popular element in the resistance of the southern small holders. No doubt, the favourable attitude of the English ruling classes towards the southern slave owners and efforts to cast the same ideological influence on their own workers as well had influenced Marx's position in the matter.

13.5 CLASSICAL MARXISM AND ITS TRADITION

By now, we should have formed an idea of the content of Marx's thought. Admittedly, it has been a summary presentation avoiding some complexities of the theory and practice of Marxism, which have been a part of the historical experience over nearly two centuries. For our present purpose classical Marxism consists of ideas received directly from the writings of Marx and Engles. The point of any divergence between Marx and Engels are set aside for the present. It is well-known that Marx and Engels worked in close collaboration for a long period and often engaged in jointly writing such important texts like The *Communist Manifesto*. Let us make a point by point resume of the content of classical Marxism.

Marx adopted the logic of Hegelian dialectics as his method for understanding the dynamics of social change and transformation in history. He did not go by Hegel's philosophy of idealism. Marx held that in the relationship of being and thought, the former is the subject and the latter the predicate. Hegel inverted this relation to its opposite, setting thought as the subject and being its predicate. The materialist philosophical position taken by Marx was however different in a very important sense from the mechanistic materialism of the Enlightenment and other earlier types. It focused on the reality of mind and consciousness and did not consider human action as being a passive product of material circumstances.

Economic structure and activity are to be understood in terms of its conditions, productive forces and production relations. The **conditions of production** are set by a society's geographical location, its climate and demographic features like the size and composition of its population. **Productive forces** comprise tools, machinery, technology and skills. **Production relations** refer to the nature of property in a particular society and its forms of social existence of labour which, in their interaction, conduct what to produce, how to produce and for whom to produce, thereby deciding upon the items and quantities of production, technology deployed, and the distribution of final output.

All this goes to constitute the economic structure of a society, its **mode of production**. Marx considered the legal, religious, aesthetic, philosophic and other ideological elements as being rooted in the economic structure of society. So is the state and the political disposition of a society. Class conflict is a common feature of all social stages (excepting the primitive communist formations) indicated by Marx in regard to the history of Europe. Such stages are ancient slavery (Greece and Rome), the feudal order and capitalism. Class conflicts and struggles result from the social division between those who own the means of production and those who do not. There is the key to the contradictions within a mode of production and for that matter the thrust for changes from one mode to another.

A mode of production can be sustained as long as its relations of production are compatible with the advance of corresponding productive forces. In course of time, a mode of production may reach the stage when further advance of productive forces is

no longer workable within the existing relations of production. Thus, the property systems allied with the particular pattern of production relations and enjoying the legal sanction of the state in power, become a fetter on the growth of productive forces. This, in Marx's words, marks the beginning of an epoch of social revolution whereby a new class, which can act as the protagonist of newer production force, comes to achieve its social hegemony and political command. Equally posed against any utopian leap or shoddy conformism, Marx put some decisive emphasis on the sufficiency of material conditions for the transformation of a socio-economic order :

> 'No order ever disappears before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have developed, and new, higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured, in the womb of the old society itself'.

In Marx's comprehension, the revolutionary triumph of the proletariat leads to the beginning of a classless society free from alienation of man from man. As a propertyless class (i.e. proletariat) brings about the abolition of capitalism, society no longer harbours private property of any kind. The root cause of alienation is removed. The success of the proletarian revolution liberates all men/women from alienation and absence of real freedom.

As already noted, this study has taken the theories, ideas and comments found in the works of Marx and Engels as classical Marxism. It marks a departure from the usual sense of the word 'Marxist' to comprise thoughts and practices supposedly derived from the ideas of Marx. The ideas which can be directly found in the works of Marx and Engels are then earmarked as 'Marxian'. Such a distinction was evident even during Marx's own lifetime. We may recall what Engels wrote to Bernstein, a leading figure in the German Social Democratic Party, in a letter of 3 November, 1982, 'The self-styled "Marxism" in France is certainly a quite special product to such an extent that Marx said to Laforgue "This much is certain, I am not a Marxist."'

There are reason for our present decision to treat only the body of thought developed by Marx and Engels as classical Marxism. It should better enable us to discern the subsequent influences of a tradition set forth by classical Marxism with its combination of historical materialism and proletarian class struggle for abolition of capitalism. On account of the very methods of classical Marxism, it could never endorse an absolute submission to the set of all its original propositions in their entirety. We must be ready to face the hard fact that a sound inference and direction valid for one particular historical context, may lose its veracity in a different situation, although in both cases, the phenomena of class struggle, capitalist contradiction and the need for cohesive oppositional move towards socialism remain quite pertinent. Let us then look at some directions of classical Marxism, as we have indicated its position, and the issues coming up during the late nineteenth and the entire twentieth centuries, in respect of policies and praxis of socialist movement (e.g., the strategy and tactics of a socialist revolution, the maturity of conditions for a socialist revolution, the kind of party necessary for the movement of the proletariat, nature and working of imperialism)

In the wake of the defeat of the Paris communards in 1871, the workers movement in Europe was subject to confusing pushes and pulls from a number of ultra-left sects and anarchists. This was the background of the move to shift the headquarters of the International to New York. It was eventually dissolved in 1876. The statement regarding the dissolution contained, among other comments, the following remark, 'Let us give our fellow workers in Europe a little time to strengthen their national

affairs, and they will surely be in a position to remove the barriers between themselves and the workingmen of other parts the world.' During the period between 1848 and 1876, there were many twists and turns of the European history. All said and done, the main feature of this complicated process appeared in various instances of consolidation of capitalist power, in some countries even by forging alliance with feudal elements, against the forces of toilers' revolt having the perspective of moving to the goal of socialism.

Marx died in 1883. Six years later the Second International opened in Paris in July 1889. Bringing together 391 delegates from 20 countries, it was still then the largest international gathering in the world labour history. Almost as a parallel event, there was another international labour conference in Paris at the same time. This was a gathering of those trade unionists and legal Marxists who believed in achieving socialism through some alteration of the bourgeois legal framework. Any coalescence of such forces was opposed by Engels, even though there were proposals for such a merger in both the conferences. In any case, the merger was effected in 1891 at the Brussels conference.

Following the historical twists and turns we have already mentioned, the growth of capitalism resulted in increasing number of wage labourers in more and more countries of Europe. Similar trends were seen in North America and later by the end of the century in Japan. Correlatively, a big expansion of the trade union movement occurred throughout the capitalist countries. Moreover, in the more advanced capitalist countries, especially in Britain, the rise in productivity and also the gains appropriated from imperialist exploitation prompted a new kind of manoeuvre among the bourgeoisie to differentiate a part of the workers from the rest of the proletariat through payment of higher wages and some other concession. Reflecting on this tendency, Engels wrote in a letter of 7th October, 1858 to Marx, '……the English proletariat is becoming more and more bourgeois…..For a nation which exploits the whole world, this is of course to a certain extent justifiable.'

The *Communist Manifesto* declared the path of realising its aim by a forcible overthrow of the whole obsolete social order. Armed struggle may not be a necessary element of forcible overthrow. Marx held the view that in countries like Britain and Holland where the working people constituted the majority of the population and capitalist transformation was associated with the inception of democracy, the attainment of universal adult franchise might provide a sufficient measure for having political power to achieve socialism. In the *Principles of Communism*, Engels commented that the abolition of private property by peaceful methods is extremely desirable. Communists always avoid conspiratorial methods. However, if the oppressed proletariat is goaded into a revolution, communists will immediately rush to their support.

In his preface to the 1895 edition of Marx's *Class Struggles is France,* Engels remarked that the new techniques of military operations put up larger obstacles to the ways of barricade fighting in the traditional manner of people's revolutionary action. This was a note of caution against adventurist actions, and not an advice to abjure armed insurgency in all circumstances. But in the Social Democratic Party of Germany, Engels' formulation was time and again used by a section of the leadership in support of gradual, peaceful, and parliamentary tactics for achieving socialist objectives.

Eduard Bernstein (1850-1932) was a leading proponent of peaceful methods. He rejected the classical Marxist position regarding armed revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat. Also, Bernstein disagreed with the classical Marxist views on

industrial concentration, inevitability of economic crises and increasing working class misery. He was inclined to upholding the cause of socialism on ethical grounds. As a social democratic member of the Reichstag, he voted against war credits during the First world war and called for peace settlement. Another important leader of the German Social Democratic Party and a leading figure of the Second International was Karl Kautsky (1854-1938), whose understanding of historical materialism was cast along the lines of a natural evolutionary scheme of things analogous to Darwin's theory of biological evolution and natural selection. Accordingly, he believed that capitalism would collapse for its own inability to make efficient use of the growing productive forces. The rationale and feasibility of a proletarian revolution was therefore ruled out, since by its decrees and violence no dictatorship of the proletariat could prevail over the objective economic laws. Bernstein and Kautsky, though having differences among themselves, were branded as 'revisionists', implying their alleged departure from classical Marxist position of class struggle and revolution.

Kautsky viewed the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 in Russia as an event not in keeping with classical Marxism. This was connected with the antecedent circumstances of insufficient capitalist development in Russia. Kautsky raised the point emphasised by historical materialism as regards the maturing of economic conditions sufficient for the collapse of a mode of production ('No social order ever disappears before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have developed.'). Vladimir Ilych Lenin (1870-1924), on his part, had analysed the development of capitalism in Russia in a well-documented analysis (*Development of Capitalism in Russia*, 1899). He did not deny its backwardness. Indeed, the weakness of the Russian bourgeoisie was among the factors eventually obliging the Bolshevik seizure of state power. Expressed in simple words, though perhaps a little bizarre, the bourgeoisie appeared to be incapable of defending their own position against Tsarist autocracy, thereby making it incumbent on the leadership of the proletariat to thrust for socialist command of the state. As Lenin observed,

> 'It has been Russia's lot very plainly to witness, and most keenly and painfully to experience one of the abruptest of abrupt twists of history as it turns from imperialism towards the Communist revolution. In the space of a few day we destroyed one of the oldest, most powerful, barbarous and brutal monarchies. In the space of a few months we passed through a number of stages, stages of compromise with the bourgeoisie and stages of shaking off petty-bourgeois illusions, for which other countries have required decades.' (V.I.Lenin, *Selected Works* Vol. II, Moscow, 1947, p.308).

Lenin mentions Russian imperialism in the foregoing excerpt. A very important feature of capitalism was analysed by Lenin in *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism (1916)*. In the first volume of *Capital* Marx indicated the inevitable direction of competitive capitalism towards more and more centralisation of capital and emergence of monopolies. This was the process which, Marx argued, would swell the masses of the proletariat and bring about the doom of capitalism. Such a classical Marxist position was extended by Lenin to the discovery of links between monopoly capitalism and imperialism bent on international division and domination of the world. The subordinate territories are the targets for export of capital to make use of cheap labour and raw materials. The first world war was an imperialist war of such aspirations and conflicts. Indeed, Tsarist Russia and its not so developed capitalism was the weakest link in this imperialist nexus. Lenin cited this factor as one of the reasons for hastening the course of Russian revolution in 1917 to the socialist supersession of capitalism. It was likely to contribute to the international collapse of capitalism in the face of a world revolution.

Kautsky's analysis of imperialism was different. He argues that the imperialist era is free from conflicts between the advanced capitalist countries. There would be conflict only between the advanced and the underdeveloped countries of the world. The process of exploitation of the underdeveloped countries was not necessarily through capital exports from the imperial rich to the colonial poor and surplus appropriation in an economic context of cheaper labour and raw materials. It could happen as well through the terms of exchange between the commodities of the more or less capital intensive production. Indeed, after the Second World War, the components of Kautsky's analysis have in a way influenced the formulations of the *dependency theory* focusing on the imperialist domination over backward countries and that in a historical context where the United States stood supreme among the capitalist nations of the world. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in the final decade of the last century, the scope of such supremacy has been even more strengthened and, at any rate, there are no historical laws either in classical Marxism or its later development to obstruct the co-existence of profits from both production and circulation on an international scale.

Marx and Engels stressed the need for organising a political party without which 'the working class cannot act as a class'. During the years of the Communist League and the First International they were mostly engaged in the presentation and clarification of the Marxist perspective of history, class struggle and abolition of capitalism. The Second International had the experience of national Social Democratic Parties coming to operate in the different capitalist countries of Europe.

Before entering into some details of the principles in question concerning the period of the Second International, it should be noted that the Paris Commune, however short-lived, was a major event happening during the phase of the First International. In its measures of decentred, democratic treatment, the Paris Commune was estimated by Marx as setting a sound example of the ways and means of the dictatorship of the proletariat. There lies the question of mediation by the party of the proletariat both in its leading the revolution to victory and then in its revolutionary governance.

Despite their many critical differences, Lenin and Kautsky agreed on the point that political consciousness had to be brought to the proletariat from outside. It would not mechanically follow from their economic hardship and struggle, which was limited to the scope of trade union consciousness. Earlier, in the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels referred to the role of bourgeois ideologists who had achieved a theoretical understanding of the historical movement as a whole. They would have the role of endowing the working class with revolutionary consciousness. No doubt such a process of building up consciousness adds to the complication of mediation and of the kind of party which could fulfil the commitment.

Considering the condition of illegality and autocracy then prevailing in several countries of Europe, especially in Russia, Lenin thought it proper to build a narrow, hierarchically organised party of professional revolutionaries (*What is to be done?*, 1902). After the Russian Revolution of 1905, he favoured broadening the organisation into a mass party, but with strict provisions for democratic centralism. The division between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks in Russia started on the issue of centralism. Leon Trotsky (1879-1940) did not support centralism. Rosa Luxemburg (1871-1919) of the German Social Democratic Party was against Lenin's idea of tightly centralised vanguard party. She strove to uphold the workers' own initiative and self-activity and had immense faith in the capacity of the working class to learn from its own experience.

The experience of the communist movement all over the world through the twentieth century, of its triumphs and failures, of Lenin's own apprehensions at his death bed about bureaucratic excesses within the party, and finally of the collapse of Soviet Communism in the last decade of the last century, cannot but raise questions regarding the appropriate principles of organisation for the party of the proletariat. It should be relevant to note that the historical role attributed by classical Marxism to the proletariat 'was assigned by an invisible intelligentsia, by an intelligentsia that never made an appearance in its own theory, and whose existence and nature are therefore, never systematically, known even to itself.' ('The Two Marxisms', in Alvin Gouldner, *For Sociology*, Pelican Books, 1975, p.419.)

Classical Marxism conceived of capitalism as a world system with all its nexuses of trade, capital exports and imperialist domination. In real history, the conquest of capital, its universal role, results in a differential impact on pre-capitalist structures. The differences are manifest in many types of amalgam of capitalist and pre-capitalist modes of production. Such formations make room for capitalist surplus extraction, even though the former productive systems and power institutions remain largely unchanged. In those circumstance, classical Marxist position regarding the sequence of stages has to reckon with newer possibilities of historical transition.

It is no longer enough to move from feudalism to capitalism. Indeed, no such movement can have much meaning in terms of progress when capitalism and pre-capitalism are historically interlocked in their modes of exploitation and power. Marx and Engels did not lack in their clarification of historical conjunctures characterised by a compounding of the old and the new in the emergent complexes of exploitation and power. This situation has appeared time and again in the countries outside Western Europe and North America. It may well happen that the course of bourgeois democratic revolution cannot be pushed ahead by a weak and timid bourgeoisie. The task then falls to the proletariat and they have to proceed immediately from abolition of the feudal order to a struggle aimed at eliminating the bourgeoisie. Such a revolutionary reality was named as 'permanent revolution' and the idea was presented by Trotsky. The expression was first used by Marx and Engels in their Address of the General Council to the Communist League in 1850.

We have not yet given any clue to what happened to the expected solidarity of the international (universal?) working class revolution against capitalism. After 1917 this vital action parameter of Marx's theoretical scheme of history has never articulated in any historical change of decisive significance for transition to socialism. The Bolshevik leaders believed that the October revolution in Russia would open an era of international proletarian revolution. Defeated in the world war of four years duration, crisis-torn Germany was expected to be the first among the advanced capitalist countries to go for its socialist revolution. The facts of history were different. Bolshevik Russia had to bear the burden of building socialism in one country, an agenda which could receive little help from the classical Marxist tradition. The twentieth century witnessed another major socialist transition in china where the peasantry acted as the principal motive force of revolution. Its course of development after the communist seizure of power presents many questions that have no direct answer in classical Marxist tradition. The instances of Cuba, Chile, and Vietnam are also in the nature of exceptions to the classical Marxist views on the historical perspective of sociopolitical transformation.

Significantly, in the last decade of his life, Marx was involved in some critical study of the pre-capitalist village communes in Russia. This was in response to questions put to him by Russian Narodnik leaders like Vera Zasulich, Danielson and others regarding the potential of those communes to act as mass agencies for socialist transformation, even though the country

had no maturity in capitalist development and growth of the proletariat. Marx made it clear that his theoretical position in *Capital* was valid only for the experience of western Europe, especially that of Britain's capitalist development, and it would be utterly wrong to apply those formulations for understanding situations in a different context. As for the realisation of socialist potential of Russian communes, Marx emphasised the need for abolition of Tsarist monarchy and on the probability of being correlated to socialist revolutions in countries of west Europe. Marx distinguished the two historical tendencies inherent in the communes, viz. the private ownership principle eroding the communes and the collective principle rendering viability to the commune and making it suitable for socialist transformation. Marx elaborated these ideas in three drafts of a letter to Vera Zasulich.

During 1880-82, Marx took to studying a large amount of literature on pre-capitalist communal land ownership. It appears that Marx read in them 'an index that modern man was not without an archaic communal component, which includes a democratic and equalitarian formation, in his social being.' (Lawrence Krader, Introduction to *The Ethnological Notebooks of Karl Marx*, Lawrence Krader (ed.), Amsterdam, 1974, p.4).

13.6 SUMMARY

As things have turned out, the record of Marxism from its beginning to the end of the twentieth century has been replete with many twists and turns, contradictions even within its own following and subject to numerous interpretations and developments in response to the variations of capitalist strategies from one country to another as well as in different stages of capitalism. Marx had his own awareness about challenges to be faced by his premises and method of historical comprehension. It was manifest in the wide diversity of his analytical subjects ranging from the wonderful reflections on *The Elighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852), relating to an awful stalemate of bourgeois transition in France, to the ethnological notebooks written in the penultimate years of his life, searching for the characteristics of pre-capitalist Asian villages.

Thus the historigraphic implications of classical Marxism are immense. Nothing is arbitrary or dogmatic about the premises of historical materialism. The future of historical changes envisaged by classical Marxism may not have been fully borne out by the subsequent course of events. But the clues to such points of departure can also be found in classical Marxism, its ways of exploring historical experience in all its relations of social, economic and cultural dimensions.

An intense sensibility for those manifold dimensions is evident in the major historical writings of Marx and Engles. Moreover, historical materialism points to the relevance of the parts and the totality of any phenomenon, since a proper understanding of their relationship sets the key of the dialectical method. Indeed, the *Annales* school of France, perhaps the most innovative of the new types of history-writing that emerged through the last century, shows a kind of concern for micro-studies reminding us of the attention for both forms and fragments in Marxist historiography.

13.7 EXERCISES

1) Discuss the differences between pre-Marxist socialist thought and Marxism.

2) Write a note on the historical and other ideas of Marx's immediate successors.

3) How did Marx's ideas develop over time? Discuss with examples.

4) What is your evaluation of Marxist theory of history?

13.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

Tom Bottomore, et al (ed.), *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought* (Blackwell Reference, Oxford, 1983) (see entries Karl Marx, Marx, Engels and Contemporary Politics Parties, Rosa Luxemburg, V.I.Lenin, Capital, Leon Trotsky, Karl Kautsky, Historiography, Historical Materialism).

David Riazanov, *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels*, (Monthly Review Press, New York and London, 1973).

Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, Vol. 1. (Oxford University Press, 1978).

T.Z. Lavine, *From Socrates to Marx : The Philosophic Quest* (Bantam Books, New York\London, 1984, Parts Four and Five).

P.N. Fedoeyev et al, *Karl Marx A Biography* (Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1973), Chapter 15.

G.D.H. Cole, Socialist Thought : The Forerunness 1789-1850 (Macmillan, London, 1955).

For the writings of Marx and Engles mentioned in the notes *vide Early Writings, The Revolutions of 1848, Surveys from Exile, Grundrisse, The First International and After* (all in the Pelican Marx Library) and Karl Marx, *Selected Works* Vol. 1, (Moscow, 1946).

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List of Courses

MHI-2 : M.A. History

Course : Code.	Title of Course	Credits
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Block-07	Religious Throught and Belief in India	8
Block-08	History of Ecology and Environment: India	8

MHI-03 : Historiography

Block-01	Understanding History	8
Block-02	Pre-Modern Traditions-1	8
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UNIT 14 THE *ANNALES* SCHOOL

Structure

14.1 Introduction

14.2 Social and Intellectual Context

14.3 Foundation of the *Annales*

14.4 New Trends in Historiography

14.5 Contribution of the *Annales* School

14.6 Summary

14.7 Exercises

14.8 Suggested Readings

14.1 INTRODUCTION

The *Annales* School of historiography, widely considered as one of the most important developments in the twentieth-century history-writing, formally emerged with the foundation of the journal *Annales d'histoire economique et sociale* (Annales of Economic and Social History) in 1929 by Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre. In terms of thematic range and methodological innovations, this School remained foremost in France and influenced history-writing in many other countries for decades and had followers all over the world. In this Unit you will learn about the context of its emergence, its contributions to history-writing, and the various new historiographical trends it gave rise to.

14.2 SOCIAL AND INTELLECTUAL CONTEXT

The decade of the 1920s witnessed two paradoxical developments in France: The First World War had ended and its formal conclusion had occurred at Versailles, near Paris, under the Presidentship of the French Prime Minister, Clemenceau. Symbolically thus it was the victory of France over its traditional rival Germany, much more than the collective victory of the rest of Europe. The great French Impressionist painter, Claude Monet, had done the most renowned of his works, *Les Nympheas*, the Water Lilies, 'as a bouquet of flowers presented to France after the victory', and a special museum structure, *L'Orangerie*, was built in the heart of Paris to display them. There was therefore an aura of celebration in the French air.

The air, however, was also beginning to show traces of gloom in the latter part of the decade with the spectre of the Great Depression gradually extending its shadows over it; the Depression was soon to overwhelm societies and economies around the world, the more so the ones that had most to lose. France was among them.

There was thus a palpable restiveness around, a puzzle that perplexed everyone: How could it be possible that a nation, which had vanquished an old and powerful enemy so recently, could stare helplessly before a debilitating circumstance? This was an entirely new situation, which posed an encompassing question and waited for a new and encompassing answer. Old answers would by their nature be inadequate. New answers demanded new perspectives and new methodologies. If history was to contribute to this quest, it must first renew itself by self-questioning. This was the social context of the

discipline's self-renewal, marked by the founding of the journal *Annales d'histoire economique et sociale*.

There was besides an intellectual context. The Nineteenth Century had witnessed the birth of several new disciplines, notably social and cultural anthropology, human geography and psychology. Young and energetic as these were, their practitioners looked at the old discipline of history sceptically. Durkeheimian sociology in particular was expansive and ambitious, claiming the capability of a totalising explanation, explaining, in other words, the entire spectrum of societal dynamics. Human geography too was not far from extending similar claims, focusing on social, cultural and institutional forms of organisation.

History came in for a degree of derision for its exclusive concern with 'the event' – the unique, short term, the immediate and transient. This was how history was studied then: focusing on change of a reign or a dynasty, wars, battles, administrative measures. As John Seeley had put it pithily: 'History is past politics and politics is present history.' No long term dynamics interested historians. What then was the point of studying history if all it explained was how one ruler replaced another and how one battle added or deleted a little bit of land from the territory ruled by him? The 'event' was like the surf in the ocean, ephemeral and therefore insignificant; the real 'movement' in the ocean was invisible to the naked eye, below the surface. This, the anthropologists and the geographers felt, was ignored by the historians.

A second question was the use of historical sources. Archives had acquired a sanctity for the historians that became almost a moral precept. All statements made by them must be traced back to some or the other empirical evidence stored in dusty archival files. Anything short of it failed to constitute 'facts', so sacred for the historian. Even as late as the 1970s, historian Jacques Leonard questioned the legitimacy of philosopher Michel Foucault's intervention in the problems of history by threateningly demanding if he had ever soiled his hands in the dust of archival files ('The Historian and the Philosopher') and Foucault responded by making fun of the sanctity of archival dust ('The Dust and the Cloud'). The historian accepted as true whatever was on the surface of the documentary evidence; that the document itself was a cultural construct, a highly subjective construct never bothered the historian. The objective reality lay hidden in the very long drawn formation of human behaviour, their habits, value systems, and their responses to situations in life. All these were formed at the subconscious level within the family, the community, the neighbourhood. None of these was either the result of, or recorded in written documents, nor was any of it obvious. These subtleties were missed out in the discipline of history in its preoccupation with the 'event', the immediate and the obvious. A sort of vision of 'Social Science' was emerging from which history was excluded.

14.3 FOUNDATION OF THE *ANNALES*

The lambasting of history left two friends, young historians in a far away corner of the French academia, Strasbourg, very restless. Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre were unhappy with the kind of history they had learnt and were forced to teach; they were sensitive to the insights the younger disciplines could provide. They were dissatisfied that disciplines that were such close kin should be at war with each other and each had erected impermeable boundaries around itself. In January of 1929 they launched a new journal, *Annales d'histoire economique et sociale.* Initially, the journal focused on issues of contemporary concerns to seek to understand the genesis of the emerging crisis; as time passed, it turned increasingly to medieval and early modern history, the ones practiced by Bloch and Febvre.

In the all too brief Editorial in the journal's inaugural issue, the editors movingly emphasised the necessity and the benefits of what later came to be called interdisciplinary research, even as one remained firmly grounded in one's own discipline. 'Of course, nothing would be better than if each one, absorbed in his own legitimate specialisation, assiduously tilling his own patch of land, made at the same time the effort to understand the work of his neighbour. But the separating walls are often so high that they block our view. And yet, what a host of valuable ideas on method and interpretation of facts, what insights into culture and advances in intuition would germinate through more frequent intellectual interaction amongst all these different groups! On this depends the future of economic history, as also the right knowledge of facts which shall tomorrow constitute 'all history.'

'All history' was what *Annales* was keen to constitute, in place of partial history; this will also be the 'true history.' True history was not being counterposed here to false history but to any form of partial history. 'All history' and 'true history' would comprise an ever expansive domain for the discipline; no part of the past and no aspect of it was beyond its purview. Space was thus being created for meeting the challenge of other disciplines as well as incorporating their insights.

Consequently, newer themes opened up for the historian's exploration. Marc Bloch himself created a comprehensive and grand structure in his study of feudalism by looking at all its aspects in one book of two volumes, *The Feudal Society*, 1936. He spent a considerable time living in the French countryside in order to sensitize himself to the remains of that society, whether as abandoned agricultural fields or as cultural attitudes and values. Lucien Febvre on the other hand was more keen to explore the area of emotions and beliefs. His book, *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century: the Religion of Rabelais (*1942) dwelt upon one central character, François Rabelais, critical of Christianity to the point of unbelief. The character was however a point of entry for Febvre's study of religion in all its myriad aspects in the context of society in the sixteenth century. His celebrated essay, 'Sensibility and History: How to Reconstitute the Emotional Life of the Past' was a watershed in extending history's concerns into new domains. Indeed it starts with the assertion: 'Sensibility and history – a new subject: I know of no book that deals with it. I do not even know whether the many problems which it involves have anywhere been set forth. And yet, please forgive a poor historian for uttering the artist's cry, and yet what a fine subject it is!' In some ways the essay was to set the tone for what was later to be explored on a very large scale by *Annales* historians, i.e. the history of *mentalités*, mentalities.

History was thus beginning to become part of the Social Sciences. In 1903 François Simiand had visualised Social Science in the singular and history outside it, though he had also shown the way for it to enter the arena of social science in his essay, 'methode historique et science sociale':

> 'If the study of human facts wishes to establish itself as a positivist science, it must turn away from the singular facts and address itself to recurring facts, that is set aside the accidental for the regular, eliminate the individual for the social.'

It was an invitation to historians to learn from Economics, Sociology, Anthropology and Geography to focus on what was then conceived of as the 'laws' of social movement and change which are inherent in the general rather than the particular. The essay was reproduced in the *Annales* in 1960 by Fernand Braudel 'for the benefit of young historians to enable them to gauge the distance travelled in half a century and to comprehend better the dialogue between History and the Social Sciences which remains the objective and the raison d'être of our journal.'

The first responses to the invitation to study the long-term regularities were a merger between Economics and History and the emergence of economic history as an autonomous discipline. Ernest Labrousse's work, *La crise de l'économie française à la fin de l'Ancien Régime et au début de la Révolution* (The Crisis of the French Economy at the end of the Ancient Regime and the beginning of the Revolution, 1944) and Fernand Braudel's *La Méditerranée et la monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II* (The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II, 1949), both sought out the long term trends in history that would help us understand, and to an extent predict, social and economic change. Unlike in the sphere of industrial economy, where overproduction leads to economic crisis, in agriculture underproduction of food grains lies at the base of a crisis situation which then spreads to other sectors of economy and society, was Labrousse's conclusion. Braudel on the other hand had studied the extremely slow change in the ecology around the Mediterranean and the long term and long distance impact of intercontinental trade. Braudel's interest in these themes remained abiding, though through his later works he constantly kept extending their frontiers. The three volume study under the general title, *Civilization and Capitalism* and the titles of individual volumes, *The Structures of Everyday Life, The Wheels of Commerce* and *The Perspectives of the World* both continues with his earlier concerns and incorporates new ones, such as the history of the diet, into them. One branching out from the long-term history was the history of the climate, which spans several centuries. Emmanuel Leroy Ladurie was among the early historians of the 60s who introduced this new theme into European historiography.

A new territory was being explored here, the territory of long-term history of the economy and its ramifications in society. The new problematics also demanded new visions of history, new sources and new methods of investigation. Economic changes were not left to general impressions: they had to be based upon quantitative data, a new concept, further buttressed by the coming of computers in the 1960s. Of sources too, Lucien Febvre had reacted to the assertion of Fustel de Coulanges in another context, 'History is written through the use of texts', by declaring: 'texts, certainly, but all kinds of texts… and not texts alone…' Marc Bloch, as we have noted above, lived in the French countryside in the mode of an anthropologist to get insights into the working of the feudal system.

Fernand Braudel had taken seriously the criticism of the historians' preoccupation with the 'event', the immediate and therefore with the single, unidimensional conception of Time. His own studies took him a long distance away from the immediate. He was therefore able to conceptualise different rhythms of historical time in different problematic contexts. In an influential essay, 'History and the Social Sciences: the *Longue Durée*', 1958, Braudel earmarked three temporal rhythms: the *long term*, or the structure, which moves ever so slowly as in writing the history of ecology and social and economic systems, such as capitalism; the *conjunctures*, which provide the method for mapping the history of medium term change such as inter-decennial change in patterns of long distance trade; and the *event*, the immediate.

14.4 NEW TRENDS IN HISTORIOGRAPHY

Three offshoots of these new ventures were the history of mentalities, the history of groups at society's margins and comparative history.

Lucien Febvre had already embarked upon the territory of mentalities in his essay on 'Sensibility and History'. Marc Bloch himself had explored the theme of royal thaumaturgy in *Le rois thaumaturges* in 1924, the healing powers of kings, translated into English as *The Royal Touch*, 1973. The early explorations had ignited enough

interest and the study of mentalities began to grow substantially. Michel Vovelle extended the quantitative method to the examination of testamentary wills preserved in church records to map the changing attitudes towards death in medieval and early modern France. Jacques Le Goff looked at how attitudes towards Time were changing in the Middle Ages in his highly celebrated essay, 'Merchant's Time and Church's Time in the Middle Ages.' Church's time was cosmic, immeasurable, extending from the Creation of the Universe to the Day of Judgment; merchant's transactions on the other hand required Time that was precise, measured to the day and was a commodity open to sale through commercial transactions. The conflict between the two was a major social conflict in the Middle Ages in Europe. Le Goff is a towering figure in the *Annaliste* historiographical tradition, extending its boundaries far into the field of the history of mentalities.

So too was Georges Duby until his death in 1996. Beginning with the history of land and labour in the medieval European context, (*Rural Economy and Country Life in the Medieval West*) Duby went into the study of marriage, family and women, the Cathedrals and the study of medieval imagination, especially the values that guided the working of the medieval society.

Philippe Ariès loved to call himself 'an amateur' historian, for even as he was a practicing historian, he was yet outside the profession. He was the initiator of some major new themes in history. He constituted the notion of death and the attitude towards children as veritable subjects of historical investigation. He brought the history of the family centrestage, with the issues of sexuality, the household and interpersonal relationships at the core. His works, *Centuries of Childhood*, 1962, traced the history of the recognition of childhood and its separate needs, for the child had hitherto been treated merely as a young adult; and *The Hour of Our Death*, 1981, dwelt upon the perceptions of death. These were major interventions in redefining social history. The renowned Cambridge group on the history of the family led by Peter Laslett and Jack Goody in the 1970s and 80s followed up these breakthroughs and published some astoundingly innovative research works: Peter Laslett and Richard Wall, eds., *Household and Family in Past Time*, 1972; Peter Laslett, *Family Life and Illicit Love in Earlier Generations*, 1977; Richard Wall, J.Robin and P.Laslett, eds., *Family Forms in Historic Europe*, 1982; Jack Goody, *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe*, 1983.

Three sets of recent collaborative endeavours have taken the history of menatilities further: Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby, general eds., *A History of Private Life*, 5 vols., Georges Duby and Michelle Perrot, general eds., *The History of Women*, 4 vols., and Giovanni Levi and Jean-Claude Schmitt, general eds., *A History of Young People*, 2 vols. A large portion of each of these works dwells upon mentalities.

G. Vigarello followed up the theme of mentalities in his delightful book, *The Concepts of Cleanliness*, Cambridge, 1988, while Jean-Claude Schmitt had edited a special issue of the journal *History and Anthropology* on the theme of gestures in 1984.

The groups at society's margins had been a point of attraction for the historian for long; what was lacking until the 1960s and 70s was a conception of marginality and its relationship with mainstream society. The marginals were not merely those who were poor, without means; they were the ones living not only at the mainstream society's territorial margins – at the borders of the village, in hermitages or hideouts in the forests or the hills etc. – but whose norms of life were at variance with the mainstream norms whether perforce or by choice: The beggars, the lunatics, hermits, thieves and robbers. It was Michel Foucault, the philosopher, who set the parameters of this problematic especially in his *Discipline and Punish* and *Madness and Civilization*. The study of

marginality, he argued, was important because it was the 'other' of the mainstream; the study is an entry point into mapping the contours of the mainstream itself. Foucault introduced the central concept of the relation of power in the study of social phenomena. The creation of marginality was an emphatic expression of the relation of power in that the elite values at the mainstream determined the notion of marginality. Whoever does not to conform to those values gets excluded into the margins as prisoners or lunatics or whatever. The birth of Psychiatry for him was the chief expression of the creation of marginality as a relation of social power.

In setting up this perspective, Foucault was questioning a fundamental assumption of the discipline of history, i.e. that the 'facts' recovered from the archives possessed an unassailable objectivity. For Foucault 'facts' were culturally constructed: they expressed a relation of power. The objectivity of history was then at one go relativised. This was a serious challenge to *Annales* as much as to positivist history. Some of the *Annalistes* incorporated Foucauldian insights into their study of marginality. The Polish historian Bronis³aw Geremek's major work, *The Margins of Society in Late Medieval Paris*, originally published in Polish in 1971, in French in 1976, and in English in 1987 was written under Foucault's influence.

The comparative history framework was implicit in the *Annales* vision from the inception. Comparative history was not quite an invention of *Annales* historiography as Marc Bloch had emphasised in his famous essay, 'A Contribution Towards a Comparative History of European Societies' (1928). For him the comparative method rested on dissimilarities underneath apparent similarities between two phenomena or situations. A comparison between these two would highlight the salient features of each and therefore become a very useful tool for developing each one's profile. However, the study of phenomena such as feudalism or capitalism as a large, comprehensive theme itself makes it comparative inasmuch as their conceptualisation could only result from a comparative study of their vast and varied structures.

14.5 CONTRIBUTION OF THE *ANNALES* SCHOOL

Any assumption that *Annales* historiography has since its inception over seven decades ago has proceeded along a straight line and a single strand, without much variation and without much inner conflict and contradiction, would clearly be quite mistaken. Indeed, the several alterations in the subtitling of the journal during its life are pointers to both its innate tensions and its dynamism. Even as the term *Annales* gave the journal a permanent identity, its original subtitle, *histoire economique et sociale* gave way to *economies, sociétés, civilisations* and lately to *Histoire et sciences sociales*.

Some of the major tensions arose from the *Annales'* own project. In some important ways *Annales* historiography was on one hand opposed to the legacy of Positivism as well as Marxism and on the other inherited this legacy. Positivism as well as Marxism envisioned a dichotomy between an objective truth in history and a subjective perception of it by the historians. Positivism predicated the unveiling of the objective truth upon scientific rationality: the objective truth is embedded in historical records; through the employment of reason the historians will be able to uncover it bit by bit and this will bridge the gap between the observer, the historian, and the observed, the objective reality. Marxism reached the same end through the prism of class struggle. All history can be explained thus.

Annales historiography too dreamt of some day capturing 'total history', which will be 'true history'. But the telling difference between them was that if Positivism rested all historical explanation on scientific reason and Marxism on class struggle, in *Annales*

historiography there was no such permanent structuring of historical explanation. That is, not all historical phenomena or episodes or movements were 'in the last instance' brought down to either economic base or politics or psychology or whatever. It rather preferred to study moving conjunctures, each phenomenon, episode or movement with its own causal hierarchy. Yet, however muted, the very vision of the ability to compose a total and a true history some day was not without the underpinnings of Positivist and Marxist assumption of objective reality.

Indeed, the *Annalistes*, with their professed antipathy towards teleology, have nevertheless shown an astonishing, if implicit, long term hierarchisation of historical explanation. The early works in this genre mostly pertain to what might be located broadly in the area of socio-economic history, barring of course Lucien Febvre's precocious explorations in the history of sensibilities and unbelief etc. Once the 'foundation' had been laid, the 'superstructure' of the history of mentalities followed in its wake. Nothing evokes this implicit structuring more forcefully than the assertion of one of the most celebrated practitioners of *Annales* historiography, Georges Duby, that he had turned to the study of marriage, women, the family etc. of medieval Europe, *since* he had already established his grasp over its economy, production process, distribution and so forth.

Annales historiography has remained somewhat ambivalent too with regard to a problem it had itself raised, that of history's ties with chronology. If it intended to transcend the temporal bounds in its search of a true history, it implied rethinking on the conception of time and chronology: History dealt with time, for sure, but was not, and should not be, led on the leash by chronology. Indeed, if chronology was artificial, time itself was fluid. Fernand Braudel's conceptualisation of differing rhythms of historical time and Jacques Le Goff's demonstration of time as culturally constructed and therefore relative as well dynamic, rather than absolute and fixed, constituted major landmarks in redefining the dual relationship of the discipline of history to time and chronology. Inherent in the conception of 'total history' or 'history in its entirety' was a suspicion of the sanctity of strict chronological divides between antiquity, medieval and modern, for many of the themes are hard to tie down to these divides. The rhythm of change in mentalities, social values or family structures transgresses virtually any temporal boundaries set around it. Implied in the investigation of these themes was the assumption that the historian needs to rise above the terror of evidence, especially archival evidence and depend upon imagination and anthropological insights, much as Marc Bloch had done. Yet, most practitioners of this genre of historiography have adhered rather tightly to the chronological boundaries set by their evidence. Nothing expresses this tension more evocatively than the title of Fernand Braudel's major book *Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*. On one hand, Braudel seeks to cover a vast canvas of history in the two volumes; on the other, the temporal boundaries are tightly set 'in the Age of Philip II'. The diktat of evidence exercises as much terror for them as it did for their predecessors in the nineteenth century and keeps them forcefully on chronology's leash, their ambition under considerable restraint.

Nevertheless, the explorations that could be encapsulated within what has virtually become an umbrella term, the *Annales* historiography, have opened to the historian's craft vistas that allow the discipline an all-encompassing domain. At the heart of its concerns are human beings with all their life's tensions, struggles, their ambiguities, indecisions, conflicting and competing emotions, thoughts, experiences and mentalities; the study of the structures of life is subordinated here to the study of human beings rather than as self-contained, impersonal phenomena, as the subject of study themselves to which human beings relate merely as programmed actors. The expanse of the domain itself, and the complexities of explorations of its ever-growing dimensions, should ensure

the relegation of any teleological project deep into the background, whether or not the *Annalistes* have confronted it with deliberation.

14.6 SUMMARY

As we have learnt from the foregoing discussion that the *Annales* School established one of the most important historiographic traditions in the twentieth century. Historians such as Marc Bloch, Lucien Febvre, Fernand Braudel, Georges Duby, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, Robert Mandrou, Jacques Le Goff, and many others redefined the historical practice time and again by constantly innovating in themes and methods. History of economic structures, of long-term developments, of mentalities, micro-history and cultural history have all benefited by significant contribution from the historians of this School.

14.7 EXERCISES

1) Discuss the context which led to the establishment of the *Annales* School.

2) Who are considered as the founders of this School of historiography? Discuss their works.

3) What are the thematic innovations made by the historians of the *Annales* School over the years? Discuss with examples.

14.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

Peter Burke (ed.), *Economy and Society in Early Medieval Europe: Essays for Annales* (London, 1972).

Georg G. Iggers, *New Directions in European Historiography* (Middletown, 1975).

T. Stoianovich, *French Historical Method*: *The Annales Paradigm* (Ithaca, 1977).

M.Harsgor, 'Total History: The Annales School', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol.13, 1978.

Jacques Le Goff and Pierre Nora (eds.), *Constructing the Past: Essays in Historical Methodology* (Cambridge, 1985).

Maurice Aymard and Harbans Mukhia (eds.) *French Studies in History*, 2 vols. (Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1988 and 1990).

Peter Burke (ed.), *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (Oxford, 1992).

UNIT 15 RECENT MARXIST APPROACHES

Structure

15.1 Introduction

15.2 Classical Marxist Tradition

15.3 Rise of Western Marxism

15.4 Trends in Marxist Historiography in the West

15.5 Some Important Marxist Historians in the West

15.6 Summary

15.7 Exercises

15.8 Suggested Readings

15.1 INTRODUCTION

In Unit 13 you have read about the classical Marxist tradition starting with Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820-1895). In this Unit you will learn about the changes at political and theoretical levels in European countries which gave rise to markedly different approaches towards history-writing among the European Marxist scholars after the Second World War. These writings influenced the historians in many countries, including India. The new trajectories established by these historians had profound impact on the course of history-writing all over the world. The depth of their research, the volume of their output, the expanse of their coverage and their insights in understanding the past was unparalleled except perhaps by the writings of the *Annales* School. These new Marxist historians derived from intellectual resources and ventured into unexplored areas hitherto untouched by the earlier Marxist historians. Their seminal achievements in the field of history made them subject of adulation as well as criticism. In this Unit we will endeavour to familiarise you with their manifold achievements. Our special focus will be on the writings of the British Marxist historians whose influence on the Indian historians is most marked. But we will also deal with some other western Marxist historians who have been crucial for providing a new direction to the Marxist historiography.

15.2 CLASSICAL MARXIST TRADITION

One thing that must be emphasised at the outset that the Marxist tradition of history-writing is a long and diverse tradition. It has dominated the historiography in many parts of the world and has been a very significant presence in the rest. Most important historians in the twentieth century have in some way or other been influenced by the Marxist theories of history. As one important commentator, S.H.Rigby, has pointed out that to attempt a comprehensive survey of Marxist historiography is difficult because it 'would virtually amount to writing a history of the world.' In addition, it also needs to be noted that Marxist historiography does not represent a monolithic, homogeneous and orthodox position. Marxist historians have often disagreed with each other. Moreover, they have worked on various aspects of history.

The cumulative writings of Marx and Engels established the doctrine of historical materialism which challenged the idealist philosophies of various kinds. At the level of history-writing, it moved the focus away from individuals to classes, from high-level

politics to economy and mass politics, from diplomats to revolutionaries and from stray causation to mode of production and social formation. This theoretical revolution profoundly affected the course of history-writing.

So far as Marxist theory of history was concerned, S.H.Rigby has tried to show that Marx and Engels, the founders of historical materialism, passed through three different conceptions of history. In the early stage, under Hegel's influence, they perceived history in 'anthropogenetic' terms. It means that historical movement is visualised as the 'overarching, dialectical progression through which humanity comes to its full self-realization, passing through a necessary negative phase of self-alienation and social atomization before achieving a fully human, free and rational community.' Later on, during the mid-1840s, in works such as *The Holy Family* and *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels adopted a 'pragmatological' approach, where the needs of the individuals and groups become more important. Finally, in the later works such as the Preface to *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, *Capital* and *Anti-Duhring*, a 'nomological' framework was developed, where the human agency was not considered important. Instead, the human history was seen as 'analogous to a natural process taking place in accordance with "inner hidden laws" which it is the task of the historian to uncover.'

Louis Althusser also distinguishes between the 'Young Marx', whose outlook was Hegelian and humanist, and 'Mature Marx' who thought in structural terms. It was this later Marx which Althusser believed to be correct and from whom the Marxist theory of history and society may be derived. G.A.Cohen, in a major study of Marxist theory of history, has argued that according to this, the productive forces are the prime movers of society. The productive forces consist of means of production (which include instruments of production and raw materials for production) and labour process. Production relations, on their part, determine access to the society's means of production and decide the redistribution of society's wealth. The forces of production and the relations of production together constitute the mode of production.

From the various texts of Marx and Engels, a three-tier model of society may be discerned which is based on productive forces, relations of production and political and ideological superstructure. In this scheme, the productive forces determine the nature of social relations of production which, in turn, determine the political, ideological and legal superstructure. The productive forces keep developing and when they develop beyond a point, the relations of production become fetters on them. In such situation, the relations of production are burst asunder and new relations of production are organised to accommodate the developed productive forces. The superstructure is also accordingly organised. In this schema, the entire human history was divided into a few modes of production – primitive communism, Asiatic, ancient, feudal and capitalist. The future society would give rise to socialist and, ultimately, the communist modes of production. The crucial arguments in this regard have been provided by Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology* and in the Preface to *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. In the later work, Marx stated :

> 'In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relationships, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production. The totality of relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men which determines their existence but their social existence which determines their consciousness.'

The Marxist theorists and historians immediately following Marx and Engels took up this line of arguments in their theoretical and historical works. For Marxists such as Kautsky, Plekhanov, Lenin, Bukharin, Stalin and Trotsky, this interpretation of history remained the authentic part of Marxism. Many books were written to explain the Marxist theory of history. Franz Mehring (1846-1919) wrote *On Historical Materialism* in 1893; Georgy Plekhanov (1856-1918) wrote *The Development of the Monist Conception of History* in 1895; Antonio Labriola (1843-1904) wrote *Essays on the Materialist Conception of History* in 1896; and Karl Kautsky (1854-1938) wrote *The Materialist Conception of History* published in 1927. These books were intended to give the Marxist view of history a final shape. They generally upheld the primacy of the productive forces in determining the nature of production relations and hence of society as a whole. Marx's statements like 'the hand mill gives you society with the feudal lord, the steam mill society with the industrial capitalist' were often quoted.

Moreover, among the early Marxists the study of economy and mode of production acquired paramount importance. Many books were written on economic conditions and development of capitalism into imperialism. Karl Kautsky wrote a book titled *Agrarian Question* in 1899 which explored changes in European and American agriculture. In the same year, V.I.Lenin (1870-1924) wrote his famous book, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*. In 1910, Rudolf Hilferding (1877-1941) published *Finance Capital* which explored the changing nature of capitalism and its growth into monopolies, centralisation, trade wars and aggressive expansion. Rosa Luxemburg's (1871-1919) *Accumulation of Capital* (1913), Nikolai Bukharin's (1888-1938) *Imperialism and World Economy* (1915) and Lenin's famous study *Imperialsim, The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916) were studies in the same direction.

However, both Marx and Engels offered an alternative view of history where social relations of production were more important and decisive in changing the course of history. In fact, when the productive forces deterministic interpretations started becoming conventional, Engels tried to modify it. In 1890, in a letter to Ernst Bloch, Engels stated what he and Marx had thought about their theory :

> 'Marx and I are ourselves partly to blame for the fact that the younger writers lay more stress on the economic side than is due to it. We had to emphasise this main principle in opposition to our adversaries, who denied it, and we had not always the time, the place or opportunity to allow the other elements involved in the interaction to come into their rights.'

He further elaborated :

> 'According to the materialist conception of history the determining element in history is ultimately the production and reproduction in real life. More than that neither Marx nor I have ever asserted…. The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure – political forms of class struggle and its consequences, constitution established by the victorious class after a successful battle, etc. – forms of law – and then even the reflexes of all these actual struggles in the brains of the combatants : political, legal, philosophical theories, religious ideas … also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases preponderate in determining their form. There is an interaction of all these elements in which, amid all the endless hosts of accidents, .. the economic movement finally asserts itself as necessary … We make our history, but in the first place under very definite presuppositions not conditions. Among these the economic ones are finally decisive.'

Marx had already considered property relations as decisive in determining the nature of production. In *Grundrisse,* he criticises the bourgeois economists for considering production without taking into account the nature of property, that is, the social relations of production. He argues that :

> 'All production is appropriation of nature on the part of the individual within and through a specific form of society. In this sense it is a tautology to say that property is a pre-condition of production…. That there can be no production and hence no society where some form of property does not exist is a tautology.'

He further states that the real beginnings of production must be sought in 'individuals producing in society, hence socially determined production'. Thus the relations of productions are the crucial factors which define the various modes of production. Marx states in *Capital* (Vol.I) that

> 'what distinguishes the various economic formations of society – the distinction between a society based on slave labour and a society based on wage labour – is the form in which surplus labour is in each case extorted from the immediate producer, the worker.'

The historical writings of Marx and Engels, such as 'Class Struggle in France' (1850) 'Eighteenth Brummaire of Louis Bonaparte' (1852) and 'Civil War in France' (1871) and 'The Peasant War in Germany' also provided theoretical underpinnings for this interpretation.

We see, therefore, that two theories of history can be derived from the works of Marx and Engels. In one, the productive forces are paramount and they determine the course of history and the social relations are a product of material production. However, in another theory, it is the social relations of production which play a determining role. It is this second version of classical Marxist theory that appealed to much of the later Marxist historians in Europe.

Another contentious issue in the Marxist theory of history is the definition of base and superstructure and their interrelationship. Traditionally, the base has been defined as being formed by the society's relations of production which are basically determined by the economic structure. On this stands the superstructure which consists of laws, politics and ideology. This notion of base and superstructure has generated a lot of debate among the Marxists as well as the non-Marxists. The debates have mainly centred on two areas – which elements are included in each and whether there is a permanent causal hierarchy between them. Within the orthodox Marxist tradition it is generally accepted that it is the social relations of production which cause the superstructure. However, many of the later Marxists have rejected this notion of one-way determination. For example, Louis Althusser considers society as an 'organic hierarchized whole' instead of dividing it between base and superstructure. According to Althusser's structuralist interpretation of Marx, the society is depicted as a 'complex structural unity'. The social formation is 'constituted by a certain form of complexity, the unity of a structural whole containing what can be called levels or instances which are distinct and "relatively autonomous", and co-exist within this complex structural unity, articulated with one another according to specific determinations'. Thus the economic factors – forces and relations of production – do not determine the society in a simple, straight manner. All the levels have their own courses of development. Similarly, other Marxists have interpreted this differently from what was once thought as the orthodox position. The Marxist social historians generally tend to offer a more complex notion of society than the one which neatly divides society between base and superstructure in which the former determines the latter.

15.3 RISE OF WESTERN MARXISM

Almost all the important Marxist thinkers till the First World were involved in revolutionary practice in some way or the other. A large part of their theoretical production was therefore related to this reality. The failure of the revolution in advanced West European countries and its success in backward Russia posed new questions to Marxist theory.

The renewed consolidation of capitalism and isolation of revolutionary Soviet Union and the desperate struggle to save socialism in one country witnessed various adjustments in revolutionary theory and practice which the classical Marxism could not explain. Moreover, the chauvinistic role played by the Social Democratic parties in the West and the consequent disintegration of the Second International questioned the universality of proletarian solidarity. All these developments led to a schism between Marxist theory and revolutionary practice in the West. Perry Anderson, in an important study (*Considerations on Western Marxism*, 1976), states that 'It was in this altered universe that revolutionary theory completed the mutation which produced what can today retrospectively be called "Western Marxism"'. He has outlined the major characteristics of Western Marxism. According to him,

> 'The first and most fundamental of its characteristics has been the structural divorce of this Marxism from political practice. The organic unity of theory and practice realized in the classical generation of Marxists before the First World War, who performed an inseparably politico-intellectual function within their respective parties in Eastern and Central Europe, was to be increasingly severed in the half-century from 1918 to 1968, in Western Europe.'

Even though some of these Western intellectuals had been members of and in important positions in the newly-formed Communist parties, their theories were formed in more or less isolated conditions. The three important Marxist intellectuals in the 1920s, George Lukacs (1885-1971), Karl Korsch (1886-1961) and Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) were major political leaders in the Communist parties of their respective countries. However, most of their works was written either in prison (in case of Gramsci) or in exile (in cases of Korsch and Lukacs).

This has its positive results as well. Now theory could be developed in relative immunity from everyday political contingencies. A renewed interest in philosophy was one of the outcomes. The crucial catalytic factor was belated publication of the most important early work of Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, also known as *Paris Manuscripts of 1844*, in 1932 in Moscow. The Western Marxism became predominantly concerned with the aspects of superstructure. In this, culture, particularly art and literature, became prime area of study. Lukacs devoted most of his intellectual energies to literary criticism, Adorno to music, Walter Benjamin to art and literature.

This change saw its first manifestation in Germany. The establishment of the Institute of Social Research at Frankfurt, more famously known as the Frankfurt School, in 1923 started the trend of academicisation of Marxism. The most important thinkers attached to it over the period were Max Horkheimer (1895-1973), Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979), Theodor Adorno (1903-1969) and Jurgen Habermas (b.1929). The other important Marxist thinkers whose ideas had great influence on production of knowledge were George Lukacs, Antonio Gramsci, Karl Korsch, Jean Paul Sartre, and Louis Althusser. Among these Gramsci had the greatest impact on the writing of history. His theory of 'hegemony' created an altogether new conceptual tool in Marxist discourse. It sought to explain the continued ascendancy of the capitalist system through its network of cultural institutions such as newspapers, schools, churches and political parties.

Now we will deal with the major trends of Marxist history-writing in the West.

15.4 TRENDS IN MARXIST HISTORIOGRAPHY IN THE WEST

Marxist historians in France, Britain, Italy, Germany and America began to rethink the earlier base-superstructure model imputed to Marxism, both by the Marxists and their critics. These historians radically broke away from that interpretation of Marxism which

gave primacy to productive forces in a deterministic and teleological framework. Instead, they sought to develop a more integrative approach. Their historical work testified this. We will separately discuss these historians and their works in the next section. In this section we will deal with the major trends which the works of these historians brought forth.

Later Marxist historians found it difficult to accept the primacy of productive forces and thus laid more emphasis on the role of class struggle in determining the social structure. Moreover, they also questioned the dichotomy of base and superstructure and the determining role of the former.

In fact, they found support for their view in the works of Marx and Engels which led in two directions. In the abstract analysis the primacy of productive forces and a teleological development were established. But when analysing the concrete events, a more complex explanatory structure was evolved where the struggle between classes became the prime mover. Many Marxist historians took this up and professed that class struggle was the prime motor of change. For example, in his analysis of the decline of Roman Empire, F.W.Walbank argued, in his *The Decline of Roman Empire in the West* (1946), that there was no development of productive forces from Greek to Roman times. The reason for this was that the relations of production based on slavery demotivated both the slaves and the slaveowners for seeking any kind of technological innovations. It led to a situation where a top-heavy political apparatus without corresponding development of productive forces failed to survive. Similarly, Robert Brenner and Eugene Genovese locate the roots of social and political decline in the prevalent relations of production (respectively feudal relations in Europe and slavery in nineteenth-century America) rather than in the contradictions between developing productive forces and stagnant relations of production.

Although the later Marxist historians still saw the tendency of productive forces to expand, particularly under capitalism, they rejected it as a universal law equally applicable to pre-capitalist modes of production. In the context of pre-capitalist societies, Perry Anderson has argued that 'forces of production typically stall and recede within the existing relations of production…. The relations of production generally change *prior* to the forces of production in the epoch of transition and not vice versa'.

However, these historians generally maintain that the crisis and change in any society was primarily due to its internal dynamics rather than caused by any external impact. Thus feudalism declined because of its own internal contradictions rather than due to revival of trade. Similarly, the reason for the decline of the Roman Empire was its internal weakness and not the barbarian invasions.

Thus Marxist historians, writing in epochal terms, have tended to categorise various societies on the basis of their typical relations of production rather than in terms of productive forces. Moreover, there are disagreements over existence of various modes of production. For example, the concept of the 'Asiatic' mode of production is not accepted by most Marxist historians. Similarly, the slave mode of production was not found to be applicable to many societies, including India. In fact, some historians have argued that even in ancient Greek and Roman societies, slaves did not form the majority of producers and the use of chattel slavery was limited to certain areas and certain periods. Thus, it cannot be said that the ancient world can be uniformly characterised as slave mode of production.

Despite these disagreements, the Marxist historians believe that all modes of production after the hunting-gathering phase are characterised by appropriation of surplus labour of the producers by the dominant classes. This basic fact generates class struggle which

is also the prime motor of social, economic and political changes. Even in those societies which appear relatively free of explicit lower-class actions, class-struggle is present and the apparently consensual rules and practices evolve through vocal or silent negotiations.

Although the Marxist historians have been concerned about various periods of history and different facets of social structures, the rise and growth of labour movement under capitalism has attracted much attention. The visibility and collectivity of labour and its revolutionary potential in advanced capitalist countries have interested these historians. They have also written against the tendency of the elite historians to ascribe all positive developments in society and politics to dominant classes and to condemn the lower classes for their backwardness. The Marxist historians have emphasised that the lower classes should not be considered reactionary and their role in the making of social and political values must be brought out. Thus Rodney Hilton stressed that the medieval peasantry should be given its due for the development of ideas of equality and freedom. George Rude has criticised those who consider the urban rioters as irrational mobs. Instead, he pointed out, the bulk of the protesters came from respectable labouring professions whose actions were rational. Similarly, E.P.Thompson, in his famous essay 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century' (1971), has defended the eighteenth-century food rioters in England whose actions were 'a highly complex form of direct political action, disciplined and with clear objectives'. In his earlier classic *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), he is even more vehement in the defence of the mass action :

> 'I am seeking to rescue the poor stockinger, the Luddite cropper, the 'obsolete' hand-loom weaver, the 'utopian' artisan, and even the deluded follower of Joanna Southcott, from the enormous condescension of posterity. Their crafts and traditions may have been backward-looking. Their communitarian ideals may have been fantasies. Their insurrectionary conspiracies may have been foolhardy. But they lived through these times of acute social disturbance, and we did not. Their aspirations were valid in terms of their own experience; and if they were casualties of history, they remain, condemned in their own lives, as casualties.'

This defence of the lost radical causes is to be found in Christopher Hill as well. Hill saw the mid-17th century English Revolution as assertion by the emergent bourgeoisie. This, according to him, ushered in the rise of modern society in England. However, there was another, lower class, element in the upheavals, one that did not succeed. Hill urges to consider it more favourably:

> 'We can, perhaps, extend a little gratitude to all those nameless radicals who foresaw and worked for – not our modern world – but something far nobler, something yet to be achieved – the upside down world.'

In keeping with their belief in the existence of class-conflict in societies and the role of class-struggle as the prime mover of change, the Marxist historians have explained various revolutions in these terms. Thus Lefevbre, Soboul and Rude have analysed the French Revolution in terms of the leadership provided by emergent bourgeoisie. Similarly, Christopher Hill has interpreted the English Civil War as caused by the aspiration of rising English bourgeoisie. Rodney Hilton sought to show that even during the medieval society there was an intense class-struggle going on between the lords and the peasants.

The Marxist historians also view the state as a 'class state', that is, the state of the ruling class. This situation, in their opinion, has continued since the day the state was first formed. It served the interests of the dominant classes and has been used to keep the lower classes in subordination. Hilton, Hill, Anderson, Miliband, Therborn all adopted this view. E.P.Thompson, however, somewhat differs in his views and puts forward the idea that the

law should be seen differently. Although it ultimately served the interests of the ruling classes, it had to appear neutral. This appearance of neutrality may sometimes be used by the lower classes for their own agitations.

The Marxist historians generally see ideology and religion as serving the interests of the ruling classes. But they do not see such a relationship mechanically. Thus although the religions like Protestantism ultimately served the interests of rising capitalists, it should also be seen as a 'system of thought for which men were willing to kill and be killed'. But, in the final analysis, Hill argues, 'to understand Puritanism we must understand the needs, hopes, fears and aspirations of the godly artisans, yeomen, gentlemen and ministers and their wives, who gave their support to its doctrines…. It seemed to point the way to heaven because it helped them to live on earth.'

Their main contributions may be summarised as follows :

1) Criticism of economic determinism and the base-superstructure model of traditional Marxism.

2) Development of Marxism as a theory of class determination.

3) Emphasis on the history of and from the viewpoint of the oppressed people, on experience and agency of the subordinated classes as two important categories to understand the dynamics of their actions.

4) Eschewing the neutrality of the traditional historians in favour of taking sides without relinquishing objectivity.

15.5 SOME IMPORTANT MARXIST HISTORIANS IN THE WEST

In this section we will discuss the individual contributions made by some important Marxist historians in the West whose writings provided new orientation not only to Marxist historical theory and practice but to historiography in general.

Georges Lefebvre (1874-1959)

Lefebvre, a French historian, was crucial in the development of Marxist social history. He is best known for his work on the French Revolution. His book, *The Coming of the French Revolution* (1939 in French; 1947 in English) provided a general synthesis of the views which argued that the Revolution was a bourgeois one and was caused by the opposition of the French nobility to reforms in 1787-88.

Lefebvre's main contribution, however, is in his insightful studies of the French peasantry. He related the Revolution to the peasantry and argued that it was basically a peasant revolution. In his quantitative study of the French peasantry, *The Peasants of Northern France during the French Revolution* (1924), he sought to study both the structure of the peasant society and economy and the peasant mentality just before the Revolution. After a thorough study of archival material relating to feudal dues, taxation, sale of church lands, changes in religious practices and Terror records, Lefebvre outlined the differentiation within the peasant society and peasants' response to the appeal of Revolution. This study was followed by his great work on the peasant fear and hysteria during 1789 resulting from an imagined aristocratic conspiracy, *The Great Fear of 1789* (1932).

Lefebevre was also associated with the *Annales* School, as is evident in his articles 'Revolutionary Crowds' and 'The Murder of Count of Dampierre' (in the collection *Studies on the French Revolution*, 1954), where he used storytelling to explore the

mentalities of the peasants. Thus, Lefebvre's contribution ranges from quantitative history to psychological and sociological aspects of peasant's existence to history of mentalities.

Maurice Dobb (1900-1976)

Dobb was not a social historian. He was basically an economic historian, but one who, in the words of Harvey J. Kaye, 'pushed economic history beyond economics. In fact, he was quite consciously seeking to shift the focus of study in economic history and development away from a narrow economism to a broader politico-economic perspective'. Dobb's emphasis on the politico-economic and on the class-struggle as a determining factor is significant in deciding the course which Marxist social history would take in Britain.

Dobb, in his classic work, *Studies in the Development of Capitalism* (1946), discussed the origins and growth of capitalism. He criticised Henri Pirenne for considering external factors, like the rise of commerce in medieval times, as crucial to the decline of feudalism. Dobb argued, on the contrary, that it is in the internal structure of a particular society where the dynamics of change must be located. Moreover, Dobb insisted that feudalism, as any other social system, should be defined in terms of its social relations of production.

George Rude (1910-1993)

Rude was one of the most important Marxist historians who pioneered the history from below. The major area of his research was the French Revolution and the popular participation in it. In books like *The Crowd in the French Revolution* (1959), *The Crowd in History* (1964), *Revolutionary Europe : 1783-1815* (1969), *Paris and London in the 18th Century* (1970), *Ideology and Popular Protest* (1980) and *The French Revolution* (1989), he discussed in detail the nature of the Revolution and the participation of ordinary people in it. He argued that the common people who took part in the riots should not be considered as irrational mobs, but as thinking men who had particular aims in mind.

Albert Soboul (1914-1982)

Soboul was a French historian who has significantly contributed to the debates over the nature of, and reasons for, the French Revolution. Although he rejected any simple explanation of the Revolution as directly caused by the bourgeoisie, he accepted its overall bourgeois character. In his book, *The French Revolution* (in French, 1962; in English, 1974), Soboul adhered to the traditional Marxist position of characterising it as a bourgeois revolution, despite criticism of this view by Alfred Cobban in 1955.

However, Soboul's most important contribution to social history consisted in his study of the Parisian *sans-culottes* (common people). It was these people who took the Revolution to its radical conclusion. Soboul was one of the pioneers who comprehensively studied the composition and role of these people. He also wrote about the French peasantry and their role in the Revolution.

Rodney Hilton (1916-2002)

Hilton is considered as one of the greatest historians of medieval Europe. His work has immensely enriched our understanding of the peasantry of medieval Europe. In his important book, *A Medieval Society* (1967), Hilton argued that the feudal society must be defined in class terms, as a society consisting of feudal lords and subordinate peasants. Since the peasants' surplus produce was appropriated by the lords, there was always an element of class tension in this relationship. Thus, according to Hilton, feudalism was a society not only divided in class terms but also one in which there existed a continuous class struggle.

This line of enquiry was further advanced in his *Bond Men Made Free* (1973) in which he argued that the medieval peasants had been able to collectively resist the increasing exploitation by the lords. And it was this class struggle which was the main reason for social change in medieval societies.

Hilton emphasised the active role of peasantry in the socio-economic changes. The entire range of his work contrasts with those of some non-Marxist historians who consider the changes as result of abstract economic and demographic laws; it also revises the traditional Marxist notion about the passivity of the peasantry.

Christopher Hill (1912-2003)

Hill is *the* historian of seventeenth-century England. Most of his writings centred on the English Revolution of the seventeenth century. *Economic Problems of the Church* (1956), *Puritanism and Revolution* ((1958), *The Century of Revolution* (1961), *Intellectual Origins of the English Revolution* (1965), *Antichrist in Seventeenth-Century England* (1971), *The World Turned Upside Down* (1972) and *Change and Continuity in Seventeenth-Century England* (1974) are some of his major works dealing with the subject. His main thesis was that the English Revolution of the mid-17th century was a bourgeois revolution and had led to the development of capitalism. He differed from those explanations of the Revolution which interpreted it in terms of struggle for religious and constitutional liberty. Hill, instead, argued that the Revolution should be basically seen in class terms which led to the success of the bourgeois revolution and was crucial in shaping England's historical development and heritage. He, however, detected a revolution within the revolution, a radical upheaval of ideas which sought to 'turn the world upside down'.

Hill's important contribution is to explore the social basis of ideas. Although he considered ideas as very significant in the historical process, he emphasised that it was the context which gave rise to such ideas. He pointed out in the 'Introduction' of the *Intellectual Origins of The English Revolution* :

> 'Ideas were all-important for the individuals whom they impelled into action; but the historians must attach equal importance to the circumstances which gave these ideas their chance. Revolutions are not made without ideas, but they are not made by intellectuals. Steam is essential to driving a railway engine; but neither a locomotive not a permanent way can be built out of steam….
>
> 'It seems to me that any body of thought which plays a major part in history – Luther's, Rousseau's, Marx's own – 'takes on' because it meets the needs of significant groups in the society in which it comes into prominence…'

E.J.Hobsbawm (b. 1917)

Hobsbawm is among the greatest historians of the modern age. The volume and range of his historical writing are immense and they cover peasant history, labour history and world history. On the one hand, he has written on the origins of capitalism and imperialism in *Industry and Empire* (1968), and on nationalism in *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (1992) and *Invention of Tradition* (edited with Terence Ranger) (1983); on the other hand, he has extensively covered the history of ordinary people in such works as *Primitive Rebels* (1959), *Labouring Men* (1964), *Captain Swing* (with George Rude, 1969), *Bandits* (1969), and *Worlds of Labour* (1984). In the field of world history, Hobsbawm has written four volumes of complex but lucid 'total history' – *The Age of Revolution* (1962), *The Age of Capital* (1975), *The Age of Empire* (1987), and *The Age of Extremes* (1994).

E.P.Thompson (1924-1993)

Thompson was one of the pioneers of social history in England after 1945. His writings gave a new turn to histories of popular culture, labour, crime and protest. He was one of the most widely known and influential of the Marxist historians in the world.

Thompson's best-known book, *The Making of the English Working Class* instantly acquired the status of a classic after publication in 1963. It heralded a new labour history which rejected the notion of the working class as passive recipient of the industrial and economic changes. Thompson also argued against the traditional Marxist notion of class as an economic category, as something which 'can be defined almost mathematically – so many men who stand in a certain relation to the means of production'. Instead, he sought to analyse class as 'an active process, which owes as much to agency as to conditioning.' Thompson asserted that the 'working class did not rise like the sun at an appointed time. It was present at its own making.' In his opinion, class should be seen as a historical process and not as a static category :

> 'By class I understand a historical phenomenon …. I do not see class as a 'structure', nor even as a 'category', but as something which in fact happens (and can be shown to have happened) in human relationships.'

This dynamic conception of class revolutionised the practice of social history not only among Marxists but among others as well. Besides this, Thompson's work in other areas such as the 'moral economy' of urban food rioters and his emphasis to see history from the point of view of common people have also given new orientation to social history.

Eugene D. Genovese (b.1930)

Genovese, an important figure in America's New Left, emerged as America's most important social historian during the 1960s and 1970s. His reinterpretation of the slave economy and society in nineteenth-century America became very influential and controversial. His major works include *The Political Economy of Slavery* (1965), *In Red and black* (1968), *The World the Slaveholders Made* (1969), *Roll, Jordan, Roll : The World The Slaves Made* (1974) and *From Rebellion to Revolution* (1979). He described the South American slave society pre-bourgeois and pre-modern. Despite being 'Cruel, unjust, exploitative, oppressive', Genovese argued that it was 'a historically unique kind of paternalist society' in which the 'slavery bound the two peoples together in bitter antagonism while creating an organic relationship so complex and ambivalent that neither could express the simplest human feelings without reference to the other'.

On the practice of history, Genovese maintained that the historian should be able to take sides while being objective :

> '…what we stand for is the realisation that all historical writing and teaching – all cultural work – is unavoidably political intervention, but that ideologically motivated history is bad history and ultimately reactionary politics.'

Robert Brenner (b.1943)

Brenner is one of the most important of Marxist historians in the West. He shot into fame by attacking the population-based theories about the decline of feudalism in Europe. In his articles, 'Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-industrial Europe' (1976) and 'The Origins of Capitalist Development : A Critique of Neo-Smithian Marxism' (1977), he attacked those historians who focused on demography and on trade and urbanisation as prime causes for decline of feudalism in Europe. His intervention started

an intense debate about the decline of feudalism and origins of capitalism. Brenner replied to the criticism in another article, ' The Agrarian Roots of European Capitalism', published in 1982. Brenner argued that it was the class-structure and relative balance of class forces which were the determining factors of changes. Thus it was the strength of the Western European peasantry which made it capable to resist the onslaught by the landlords. On the other hand, in Eastern Europe, the peasant communities were unable to counter seigneurial pressure. Brenner thus emphasised the primacy of class struggle as the motor of change in a given society.

15.6 SUMMARY

In the foregoing discussion we have seen how the theory of history found in the works of Marx and Engels led into two directions. While one version stressed the role of productive forces, another version as well as their historical writings emphasised the crucial role of relations of production and class struggle in determining the course of history. The later Marxist historians, particularly the Marxist social historians, accepted the second version in their writings. Moreover, many of them did not consider the political and legal superstructure as simply a reflection of the economic base. They, instead, accorded it crucial importance. At another level, these historians accorded active role to the common people in making their own history. In this respect, they can be said to have pioneered the people's history in real sense. Their collective contribution to the theory and practice of history-writing has been immense and it has proved to be trend-setter for historians all over the world.

15.7 EXERCISES

1) What is Western Marxism? Who are the important thinkers identified with it?

2) Discuss the various trends in the classical Marxist interpretation of history. Which aspect of it appeal to the Western Marxist social historians?

3) What are the main trends in the Marxist historiography in the West? Discuss with reference to some of the important Marxist historians.

15.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London, NLB, 1976, Verso, 1979).

S.H.Rigby, *Marxism and History : A Critical Introduction* (Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 1987, 1998).

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Jeremy Black and Donald M. MacRaild, *Studying History* (Hampshire and London, Macmillan, 1997, 2000).

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UNIT 16 POSTMODERNIST INTERVENTION

Structure

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16.1 INTRODUCTION

Postmodernism is a reaction against modernity. In essence, it may also be called anti-modernity. However, it is not anti-modern in a simple, binary opposition. It has developed through a long process of critical engagement with modernity and its consequences. Although the anti-modern tradition is almost as old as the modernist one, what has come to be called the 'postmodern turn' has gained prominence since the 1970s. The three decades since then have seen the spread of postmodern ideas throughout the world. However, they are particularly dominant in the advanced Western world. The ideologues of postmodernism have criticised and attacked the philosophy, culture and politics which modernity had generated. In fact, postmodernism has positioned itself basically vis-à-vis modernity. It is, therefore, important to know what modernity consists of. Without understanding it, it may not be possible to understand postmodernism.

16.2 THE MODERNIST TRADITION

The process of modernity began in the European countries around the time of Renaissance. Its centre lay in the origins and growth of modern sciences which established a quest for certainty, truth, exactitude, general principles and universal laws. Its ultimate philosophical justification was achieved in the works of philosophers like Descartes, Enlightenment thinkers such as Voltaire, Montesquieu and Diderot, the German philosophers such as Kant and Hegel and many other philosophers and thinkers. Modernity was said to herald the end of the Middle Ages or Feudalism in Europe, and usher in an era where Reason reigned supreme. The philosophers of modernity from Descartes to the post-Enlightenment thinkers to Marx and Weber denounced the medieval values, faiths and beliefs. Although

some of them, like Marx, were critical of modernity, they upheld most of its values and norms. Alain Touraine, a French sociologist, has stated that the dominant conception of modernity was that of a sahrp break from the past:

> 'The most powerful Western conception of modernity, and the one which has had the most profound effects, asserted above all that rationalization required the destruction of so-called traditional social bonds, feelings, customs, and beliefs, and that the agent of modernization was neither a particular category or social class, but reason itself…. The West… lived and conceived modernity as a *revolution*.'

The social sciences, including history, were integrally related to the making of this modernity. Great thinkers like Hobbes, Montesquieu, Voltaire, Hume, Adam Smith, Bacon were both products and producers of this modernity. Their theories were used for legitimising and maintaining centralised, bureaucratic states, creating new institutions, and moulding society and economy in new ways.

Modernity may be said to consist of various values and beliefs which included :

i) faith in the usefulness and correctness of modern science and technology;

ii) belief in Enlightenment principles that the society should follow the path of Reason and that myth and religion should have no role in shaping social values;

iii) belief in a linear, progressive and transparent course of human history;

iv) more reliance on universal principles in comparison to particularity;

v) faith in the autonomous, self-conscious individual who is master of his destiny;

vi) belief that modern science and Reason would conquer nature and give rise to affluence, freedom and a life free from fear of mortality.

Apart from new philosophical principles, modernity also generated powerful material forces which gave rise to modern industries, capitalism, and an entirely new set of social relations in Europe by the nineteenth century. This new industrial society was marked by urbanisation, bureaucratisation, individualism, commodification, rationalisation and secularisation. By the mid-nineteenth century, the process of modernity had almost completely eliminated the economy, society and polity of the Middle Ages in Western Europe and North America. Instead, it had given rise to a completely new economic, social and political order.

As the modernity generated unprecedented progress, it also created enormous sufferings. The peasantry, workers and artisans were all forced to go through terrible misery in the process of being modernised. Even more sufferings were due for the colonial territories in Asia, Africa, Latin America and Australia where the colonising Europeans eliminated the local people, occupied their lands and drained the economy for their own benefits. This imperialist drive led to the death of millions in colonial territories, enormous distortion in their cultures and traditions, and terrible burden on their resources.

16.3 WHAT IS POSTMODERNISM?

Postmodernism and postmodernity are sometimes used interchangeably. In fact, both terms denote different, though related meanings. While postmodernity has been used to characterise the economic and social conditions of existence in contemporary developed societies, postmodernism denotes the philosophy which has now arisen after and in opposition to the philosophy of moderntiy. In the following sub-sections, we will discuss the concepts of postmodernity, the history of the term postmodernsim and finally the basic concepts relating to postmodernism.

16.3.1 Postmodernity

It has been a belief among some, particularly the postmodernists that we have passed beyond modernity and the age we are now living in is a postmodern one. Keith Jenkins, one of the postmodern theorists of history, declares that

> 'Today we live within the general condition of *postmodernity*. We do not have a choice about this. For postmodernity is not an "ideology" or a position we can choose to subscribe to or not; postmodernity is precisely our condition : it is our fate.'

Frederic Jameson, a benevolent critic of postmodernism, also thinks that postmodernism is a cultural process initiated by a radical change in the nature of capitalism. In a famous book, he has characterised postmodernism as the 'cultural logic of late capitalism'.

Basing in this belief about the emergence of a new society, several thinkers have argued that this has led to a change in our knowledge-system. Thus Jean-Francois Lyotard, a French thinker who popularised the term 'postmodernism', states that 'the status of knowledge is altered as societies enter what is known as the postindustrial age and cultures enter what is known as postmodern age'.

In using the term postmodernity, the emphasis is basically on the social and the economic. It implies the exhaustion of modernity and stresses the rise of new information and communication technologies leading to globalisation and the enormous growth of consumerism. The theorists of this transformation have claimed that just as in the past the agrarian societies based on land were replaced by industrial societies based on manufacturing, in the same way, the industrial societies are now being replaced by a post-industrial world in which the service sector is now the most prominent.

It was Daniel Bell who, in his book *The Coming of Postindustrial Society*, seriously wrote about the arrival of a new kind of society representing a break from the earlier industrial society. In his view, the old-style 'factory worker' is now replaced by the new service-sector professional. Simultaneously, the old-style machines are now replaced by new information and communication technologies. The Fordist assembly line is now a thing of the past and there is a decentralisation of production and manufacturing. Moreover, now there is a greater flexibility in management and employment.

16.3.2 History of the Term

The term 'postmodern' has a long past and it has been used in many contexts. But its use, as the term itself indicates, has mostly been in the sense of surpassing the modern. As early as 1870, an English painter, J.W.Chapman used the term 'postmodern' for the paintings which were supposedly more modern than the French impressionist paintings. Later, in 1917, Rudolf Pannwitz applied the term for the nihilistic tendencies in European culture. In the post-Second World War period, Arnold Toynbee (1889-1975), in his monumental book, *A Study of History* (1934-61), used the term to show a transformation in European society and culture from around 1875. He described this 'Postmodern Age' as a break from the earlier Modern Age which followed the Middle Ages. In his view, this phase of Western history could be characterised by revolutions, wars and socio-political upheavals. This Postmodern Age, in his opinion, was marked by collapse of rationalism, stability and Enlightenment values which had characterised the Modern Age until 1875.

In the United States, the idea of a postmodern era has been articulated since the 1950s. The historian Bernard Rosenberg, the economist Peter Drucker and the sociologist C. Wright Mills defined the idea of postmodern in their own ways. While Rosenberg linked it with the emergence of a mass society, Drucker identified it with the postindustrial society; according to Mills, the postmodern age is leading to restriction of freedom and a robot-like society.

From the 1970s onwards, however, the term has been in constant use to criticise and attack the legacy of modernity. The French theorists, followed by the American ones, have been on the forefront in this regard. They have formulated theories which have heralded the new postmodern philosophy that has spread to many parts of the world.

16.3.3 Main Concepts

Very much like the theories of modernity, there is no unified theory of postmodernism. If anything, the situation is even more diffuse and chaotic. The range is vast and it covers the whole spectrum from mild critique of modernity to total nihilism. But, although postmodernism derives its definitions from many sources, the one common thread running through them is the critique of modernity. The major ideologues whose works constitute the corpus from which postmodernism is formulated are Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard, Baudrillard, Deleuze, Guattari, White, and Rorty. Their works posed a major challenge to the narratives of modernity and their theories attacked the basic foundations of knowledge created by modernity with Reason at its centre. The targets of their criticism have been capitalism, historicism, humanism, scientism, and rationalism which constituted the modern world.

Postmodernism questioned the claims of the Enlightenment philosophers for universal knowledge. It also criticised the search for foundations of knowledge. Modernity gave rise to grand narratives, that is, overarching theories purporting to explain each and everything within its compass. Postmodernism rejects the very idea of such grand narratives and attacks the all-encompassing, overarching ideologies.

Secondly, postmodernism debunks the claims of the science to achieve truth. Postmodernism takes nothing as absolute and leans towards relativism, sometimes total relativism. It, moreover, rejects the claims of human and social sciences for representing the facts and the world. In the opinion of the postmodern theorists, there is no truth which is beyond or prior to linguistic intervention; it is language which constructs the reality and the world for the humans. It is, therefore, futile to search for truth beyond language which, in turn, is conditioned by the individual and local cultures.

Thirdly, postmodernism also attacks the modernist organisation of world and knowledge in binaries. According to the postmodernists, the modernist tradition tried to arrange knowledge around certain major binaries in which science was the core common element – science vs. rhetoric, science vs. literature, science vs. narrative. Here science represented the true knowledge while the other side of the binary belonged to imagination and false conciousness. It also generated other sets of binaries. Fact vs. fiction, truth vs. imagination, science vs. magic, masculine vs. feminine, etc. are the binary oppositions conventionalised by the theorists of modernity. In these binaries, the second term almost always occupies an inferior position. Postmodernism challenges this knowledge based on binaries and instead emphasises on multiplicities, varieties and differences. The western concept of postmodernity has been outlined by Steve Seidman as follows :

> 'As we move towards the end of the second millenium we in the west are entering a postmodern cultural terrain. This is a culture in which knowledge becomes knowledges, identities are understood as fractured, plural, and porous, and society and politics is without a fixed center.'

David Harvey, in his book *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989), summarises the various features of modernism and postmodernism which are opposed to each other. These are listed in the table below.

Features of Modernism and Postmodernism

Modernism	Postmodernism
Elitism, closure, authoritarianism and social engineering	Popular consumerism, flexibility, choice, openness, opportunity
High culture and tradition, profundity	Popular culture and the commodification of leisure and culture, "irreverent pastiche", "contrived depthlessness"
Austerity and discipline	Playfulness, "laid back" hedonism
Fixed meanings, centres, absolute laws and truths	Relativity, indeterminacy, contingency, fragments of being, decentring, life (or "petite") histories
Holism	Individualism
Planning	Experimentation, pragmatism
Homogeneity	Heterogeneity
Signified	Signifier
Certainty, unitary structures, e.g., class and systems, synthesis, externality (i.e., reality "out there")	Scepticism, deconstruction, discursive reality

16.4 IDEOLOGUES OF POSTMODERNISM

In this section we will discuss the philosophers and thinkers who gave shape to the idea of postmodernism. This will include the earlier philosophers, whose thoughts have influenced the more recent thinkers, as well as those whose works have grounded the idea of postmodernism since the 1960s.

16.4.1 Predecessors

The critique of modernity is almost as old as modernity itself. As modernity achieved its full philosophical expression in the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment philosophies, their challengers also came to the fore around the same time. When Voltaire was laying the foundations of the Enlightenment which stood against tradition, and was advocating the supremacy of Reason, Rousseau spoke for 'cultural primitivism' and the 'natural order'.

A little later the Romantics also stood against Enlightenment's emphasis on rationalism, scientism, universalism and totality. Instead, they defended the archaic, the traditional, the natural, the individual and the exotic. Their rebellion against modernity led the Romantics like Herder, the Grimm brothers, and many others to search for traditional folk cultures.

However, the single most important thinker who almost anticipated postmodernity was **Friedrich Nietzsche** (1844-1900), a German philosopher. Nietzsche agreed with the Romantics in their critique of modernity, but he differed with them so far as the solution was concerned. The Romantic search for peace in nature, tradition and religion did not appeal to Nietzsche. He said that the modern man had become too rooted in knowledge and freedom to return to nature and tradition. It was, therefore, futile to entertain a Romantic alternative of return to nature.

The main ideas of Nietzsche with which the postmodernists identify are related to his severe attack on principles of modernity – Reason, scientism, truth, meaning and universality.

Nietzsche severely criticised the tradition of western rationalism beginning with Plato and its claim to truth. In his opinion, this entire claim to possess truth is nothing but a desire for power and domination. He believed that human history is not, and should not be, meaningful, purposeful and predictable. He asserted that uncertainty was the hallmark of human condition. He also proclaimed the 'death of God' and demise of religion and said that morality and truth were impossible to achieve.

Another thinker in this tradition was **Martin Heidegger** (1889-1976), another German philosopher. He is considered to be one of the most important thinkers of the 20th century. He was an anti-historicist and denied the conception of history as science and rejected its view of progress. He was also hostile to reason, science and technology. He believed that modern technology has reduced the humans to absolute slavery. In his most important book, *Being and Time*, Heidegger undertook an enquiry into Being by combining the Existentialist and Phenomenological approaches. According to him, the crisis of modernity lies in the replacement of God by man as the centre of the universe. According to him, the entire western philosophical tradition since the time of Socrates was metaphysical. Here Heidegger inverts the usual meaning of 'metaphysics' (which normally is 'beyond the natural realm of senses'). In his opinion, the western rationalist tradition denies the possibility of a world beyond the concrete world perceived through senses. He believed that there was nihilism in the contemporary thought which originated in Socratic rationalism. It has been the generally accepted view that science and technology was opposed to metaphysics, in that while metaphysics dealt with the world beyond our natural senses, science and technology were concerned with things in the concrete world. But in Heidegger's unique definition, modern technology was considered as the highest manifestation of metaphysics because it can predict, manipulate and transform the world.

Both Nietzsche and Heidegger radically question the modernist tradition and prepare the ground for philosophical postmodernism. They criticise the unlimited competition and desire for dominance which modernity produced and show that there is a strong possibility that the relentless drive for modernity could be tyrannical, dehumanising and nihilistic.

However, what the postmodernists do not pay sufficient attention to or ignore are the hierarchical and elitist attitudes of both these thinkers. Along with other things, Nietzsche condemned the egalitarianism of Enlightenment thought and abhorred the mass-based democratic societies of his time. He believed that democratic Europe was the 'involuntary breeding ground for tyrants'. He hoped for a European aristocracy which would heed the advice of the philosophers. Similarly, Heidegger supported Hitler and the Nazis and was himself a member of the Nazi party.

16.4.2 Ideologues of Postmodernism

There are many thinkers associated with postmodernism. However, in this section, we will take up the ideas of only some of the most important thinkers for discussion.

Michel Foucault (1926-1984) : Foucault, a French philosopher, was a complex thinker whose thoughts encompass various themes and multiple ideas. Nevertheless, he is considered a postmodern thinker because of his trenchant criticism of the Enlightenment ideas and modernity. His writings had and have still continued to exert tremendous influence in humanities and social sciences. His work is frequently referred to in disciplines such as history, cultural studies, philosophy, sociology, literary theory and education. He is famous for his critiques of various social institutions which he consodered the products of European modernity. Institutions and disciplines such as psychiatry, medicine and prisons invited his trenchant criticism. Apart from his works on these, he is also renowned for his general theories concerning power and the relation between power

and knowledge, as well as his ideas concerning 'discourse' in relation to the history of Western thought. In later life he also worked on the history of sexuality. Foucault expressed his ideas through a series of important books – *Madness and Civilization* (1961), *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963), *The Order of Things* (1966), *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), *Discipline and Punish : The Birth of the Prison* (1975), and *The History of Sexuality* (1976-1986).

Foucault's writings are mostly set in historical contexts, but he discourages the notion of totality and continuity in history. Instead, he promotes the idea of discontinuity. Thus, for him, history is not continuous and unifocal, nor can there be any universalisation of history. Foucault's ideas about history and society progresses from the concept of archaeology to that of genealogy. But throughout his works, he stresses the idea of difference. Moreover, he rejects the Enlightenment idea that the rule of Reason can be equated with emancipation and progress. He says that instead of serving as an emancipatory force, the knowledge centres on power and helps in creating new forms of domination in modern times. He thus criticises the attempts to separate knowledge and power and emphasises that the pursuit of knowledge, particularly in modern times, is indissolubly associated with pursuit of power and quest for domination. In brief, his ideas can be stated as follows :

i) the history or the society is not unifocal but is decentred;

ii) the discourses constitute the subject; the subject is not the originator of discourses. The discourses instead originate from institutional practices;

iii) knowledge is not neutral but is intricately connected with modes of power and domination.

Jacques Derrida (1930-2004): Derrida, another French philosopher, has proved crucial to the development of the postmodern theory, particularly the 'linguistic turn'. The basic contribution of Derrida to the development of the poststructuralist and postmodernist theories is his theory of deconstruction. It views all written texts as product of complex cultural processes. Moreover, these texts can only be defined in relation to other texts and conventions of writing. According to Derrida, the human knowledge is limited to texts; there is nothing outside the texts. Reality is constituted by language. It does not, however, mean that there is no world outside of language. But it does mean that the world we know is accessible to us only through language. It is language which constitutes our world and, therefore, language precedes reality. The knowledge of reality is not beyond language and its rules of existence. Another point related to deconstruction is the idea of difference which states that the meaning of anything is ascertained only through difference from other things. Any text is conceivable only in relation of difference to other texts. In this sense, difference precedes the existence of things.

Another point is about the unity of opposites, because without unity, there are no opposites. Unity and opposition alternate with each other. Deconstruction emphasises on the instability and multiplicity of meanings. There is no fixed meaning of anything and no single reading of a text.

Jean-Francois Lyotard (1924-1998): Lyotard is the main thinker who made the word postmodern famous. His book, *The Postmodern Condition*, published in French in 1979 and in English in 1984, made the term popular. He defined the term in the following way : **'Simplifying to the extreme, I define *postmodern* as incredulity towards metanarratives'.** These metanarratives are grand narratives such as 'the dialectics of Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth'. Lyotard expresses doubt towards all these. In his opinion, theories and discourses of all kinds are 'concealed narratives', that is, near-fictional accounts, despite their claims for universal validity. He criticises the modrnist theories which tend to totalise and universalise ideas which are basically modern European products. He also

rejects the foundationalism which bases all knowledge on secure theoretical foundations. He attacks the metatheories, articulated through what he calls the masculinist metalanguage, which support the domination of various sorts – of one class over another, of men over women, of majority over minority. Instead, he advocates the ideas of difference and plurality, of radical uncertainty, and possibility of alternatives.

Jean Baudrillard (b. 1929): Baudrillard, another French thinker, is also closely identified with postmodernism and represents a particularly extreme form of it. His ideas have been highly influential in the world of media and arts. He stresses that we are now a part of the postmodern world. He distinguishes between modernity and postmodernity on several counts :

i) modern society was based on production while postmodern society is based on consumption;

ii) modern society was marked by exchange of commodities, whereas symbolic exchange is the hallmark of the postmodern society;

iii) in modern society representation was primary where ideas represent reality and truth, but in postmodern society, the simulation takes precedence where there is no reality and where the meanings dissolve.

The three phenomena which, in Baudrillard's opinion, create the postmodern condition are simulation, hyper-reality and implosion. In the new era of information and communication technologies, the media (or the television) images replace the real things. These simulations increasingly become so powerful that they set the ideal for the social life. The media simulations of reality, video games, Disneyland, etc, supply more intense experiences to the consumers than the mundane everyday life. This, therefore, becomes the universe of hyper-reality where the distinctions between the real and the unreal are eliminated. In fact, these media images become more real than reality itself. Thus, the whole situation becomes inverted.

Baudrillard also defines the postmodern world as one of implosion where the traditional boundaries of classes, groups and genders are collapsing. This postmodern world has no meaning, no rhyme and no reason. There is no anchor and no hope. It is a world of nihilism.

Hayden White (b.1928) : White, an American historian, is considered an important postmodern thinker, particularly, in the field of history. His book, *Metahistory : The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, published in 1973, has been hailed by many as signifying a break in the philosophy of history. It was supposed to herald a 'linguistic turn' in the writing of history. Now, it was said, instead of asking 'how does history resemble science?' one might ask 'how does history resemble fiction?'

White argues that the past is presented to us merely in the form of various disjointed chronicles. It is the historian who creates out of it a meaningful story. It is not possible to find in the historical events a coherent narrative. At the most, they offer elements of a story. It is now the historian who prepares a coherent narrative out of the available set of records by suppressing certain events, while highlighting some others. This process becomes manifest by the fact that the same set of events may be construed as tragic, ironic or comic depending upon the political or other predilections of the historians. It, therefore, becomes clear, according to White, that history is not a scientific exercise, but a literary one and the historical narratives are not scientific treatise but 'verbal fictions'.

White says that in writing of history all the techniques of novel-writing are employed. Selection of events, characterisation, change of tone and point of view are the techniques

common to both the writing of novels and history. In history-writing, as in the creation of novels, imagination plays a great role. It is only through imagination that the historian makes sense of the past events and weaves some of them into a credible story.

F.R.Ankersmit : Ankersmit is a philosopher of history in the Netherlands. His views on history is outlined in his books which include *Narrative Logic : A Semantic Analysis of the Historian's Language* (1983), *The Reality Effect in the Writing of History* (1990), and *History and Tropology : The Rise and Fall of Mataphor* (1994). He denies the possibility of any generalisation in history. According to him, the generalisations about the past do not refer to anything real, but are concepts constructed by historians for the purpose of writing history :

> 'For instance terms like "Renaissance", "Enlightenment", "early modern European capitalism" or the "decline of the Church" are in fact names given to the "images" or "pictures" of the past proposed by historians attempting to come to grips with the past.'

Similarly, he says, that 'concepts such as "intellectual movement" … "social group"… do not form part of the past itself and … do not even refer to actual historical phenomena or aspects of such phenomena'. He, therefore, asserts that 'generalizations do not express any truths on the nature of (socio-historical) *reality*; they only reflect regularities in how we have actually *decided* to conceptualize reality'.

He further argues that the historian's language creates an opacity which makes the knowledge of the past even more difficult :

> 'The historical narrative is a complex linguistic structure specially built for the purpose of showing part of the past. In other words, the historian's language is not a transparent, passive medium through which we can see the past as we do perceive what is written in a letter through the glass paperweight lying on top of it…. We do not see past through the historian's language, but from the vantage point suggested by it.'

Ankersmit, therefore, proposes that historical writing should be considered as representational painting, which is distinct from the thing it represents.

16.5 POSTMODERNISM AND HISTORY-WRITING

Postmodernism offers a fundamental critique of the conventional mode of history-writing. Sometimes the critique becomes so radical that it almost becomes anti-history. The main ingredient of history-writing, such as facts, sources, documents, archival records, etc., all come under severe scrutiny under the microscope of postmodernist vision. The certainty and continuity attached to historical writing are thoroughly debunked, the inner working of historiography is put under scanner and its proclaimed nearness to 'truth' is attacked. The history-writing itself is historicised, and its rootedness in the western culture is highlighted by the postmodern thinkers. Postmodernism rejects the 'objectivist' tradition of history-writing starting with Ranke which strove to recover the past 'as it actually was'. It has attacked history both in its grander versions as well as in its relatively modest versions. It challenges the proclaimed objectivity and neutrality of the historians and claims that the process of interpretation transforms the past in radically different ways.

Postmodernism questions the very basis of conventional historiography by locating its origins in the modern Europe's encounter with the other. It began with the European Renaissance which prompted the Europeans to 'discover' other lands and people. In this quest the 'history' served as a tool for posing the modern western self in opposition to the other whose history was supposed to be just beginning as a result of its encounter with Europe. Thus the practice of history was employed not just to study the past but to fashion it in terms of the criteria set by modern Europe. History, therefore, evolved a

western quest for power over the colonised territories and its desire to appropriate their pasts.

There are basically two types of history in conventional sense. One is the grand narrative of history which visualises that the human society is moving in a certain direction, towards an ultimate goal – global capitalist society or a global communist one. There is another, more modest version of history which claims to rely only on facts and to eschew any ideological orientation. It claims neutrality and objectivity for itself and is the most accepted version of history writing. This is also known as the 'lower case history' which is 'realist, objectivist, documentarist and liberal-pluralist'. At the centre of professional history writing is the notion of objectivity, of facts, of being able to represent reality, to recover the past. Historical facts are seen to exist independent of and prior to interpretation. Historian's job is thus said to be able to discover the truth, to be neutral and dispassionate.

Postmodernism rejects all these notions. It not only attacks the attribution of any essence to the past, but also criticises the attempts to study the past for 'its own sake'. Both versions of history writing are considered as ideological and situated in particular cultural formation. Both kinds of history is said to be 'just theories about the past', without any claim to represent the truth. Both are the products of western modernity and represent the ways in which it 'conceptualized the past'. According to postmodernism, there is no historical truth but what the historians make it out to be, no facts except what the historians interpret, no representable past except what the historians construct.

In postmodernist view, the history can be accepted as genuine knowledge only if it sheds its claims to truth and hence to power, and accepts its fragmentary character. The only history possible is microhistory. The ambiguities and gaps in historical narration are inherent and essential to it and should be retained. All quests for continuity, coherence and consistency should be dropped. It should be accepted that all documents and facts are nothing but texts and are ideologically constructed.

There are even more extreme views within postmodernism with regard to historiography. Keith Jenkins, therefore, declares that 'we are now at a postmodern moment when we can forget history completely.' Here he differs somewhat from his earlier position where he felt the need for anti-modernist 'reflexive histories'. Recently, however, he has taken the position that 'thanks to the "non-historical imaginaries" that can be gleaned from postmodernism we can now wave goodbye to history'. He justScepticism, deconstruction, discursive ifies his position on the ground that the history we know is entirely a modern western product which never earlier existed anywhere in the world:

> 'we have obviously never seen anything like nineteenth- and twentieth-century western upper- and lower-case genres… at any other time or place. That there have never existed, on any other part of the earth, at any other time, ways of historicizing time *like that*.'

This extreme position questions the very existence of any kind of professional history-writing.

16.6 CRITIQUE OF POSTMODERNISM

As postmodernist critique of modernity ranges from total rejection to partial acceptance, so does the criticism of postmodernism varies from virulent attack and complete rejection to some level of its acceptance. The critiques have pointed out that in some extreme form of postmodern relativism, the implication may be that 'anything goes'. However, such a stance may justify the status quo where 'everything stays'. Total relativism and nihilism denies the transformative praxis and does nothing to change the repressive

socio-economic and political order. By segmenting the knowledge and by demarcating the socio-cultural boundaries to extreme micro levels, it makes it impossible to create a broad solidarity of the oppressed. Moreover, the postmodern analysis of society and culture is lop-sided because it emphasises the tendencies towards fragmentation while completely ignoring the equally important movements towards synthesisation and broader organisation. At another level, by conceptualising power as distributed into countless small and big systems, practices and organisations at various levels of society, postmodernism obscures the selective concentration of power, the basic relations of domination and subordination, of repression and resistance. It also tends to ignore the roles of state and capital as much more potent tools of domination and repression.

Some critics also charge postmodernism with being historicist as it accepts the inevitability of the present and its supposedly postmodernist character. If the world is now postmodern, it is our fate to be living in it. But such postmodernity which the western world has created now is no more positive than the earlier social formation it is supposed to have superseded. Moreover, it is not very sure that whether the modernity has actually come to an end. In fact, large parts of the world in the erstwhile colonial and semi-colonial societies and East European countries are now busy modernising themselves. Even in the west, the chief characteristics of modernity are still there – industrial economy, political parties and factions, markets, unions, state regulations, discipline-based knowledge, etc. The concept of postmodernity, therefore, remains mostly at an academic and intellectual level.

Critics also argue that many postmodernists, deriving from poststructuralism, deny the possibility of knowing facts and reality. As a result, no event can be given any weightage over another. All happenings in the past are of the same value. Thus, theoretically, the Holocaust or any brutality of a similar nature can be equated with any other event, whether tragic or comic, because, in postmodernist view, it is the language which creates events and histories for us.

16.7 SUMMARY

The postmodern theories range from moderate to extreme criticism of modernity. While the extremist theorists desire a total break with modernity, the moderate ones endeavour to reconstruct modern theories so as to expunge totalising and repressive elements within them. While extremists abandon the progressive features of Enlightenment along with its repressive aspects, the moderates try to retain the liberating force of Enlightenment ideologies. Extreme positions are represented by Baudrillard, Lyotard and certain aspects of Foucault, whereas moderate positions are claimed by Frederic Jameson, Laclau and Mouffe.

The postmodern theorists question the very basics on which the discipline of history has been based. They do not believe in the disciplinary boundaries in academics, such as those between history and literature, or between economics and anthropology and so on. They also question the existence of facts and events apart from what the historians make them out to be. In their view, linguistic representation becomes the essence of the past and the core of history.

16.8 GLOSSARY

Enlightenment : It was a European intellectual movement of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which professed rationalism, secularism and humanism in opposition to religion and superstition. Locke and Bentham in England, Voltaire, Montesquieu and Diderot in France and Thomas Jefferson in America were its main exponents.

Humanism : Humanism is defined as the doctrine which considers the human being as the centre of the universe, in place of God or nature.

Rationalism : It is the doctrine which only accepts the beliefs based on experience and deductive and inductive reasoning. It is also against the belief in the supernatural.

Romanticism : At the end of the eighteenth century, mostly in opposition to the French Enlightenment and also as a feeder to the emerging nationalisms, Romanticism developed in western Europe and Russia. Its initial exponents were Rousseau in France and Herder, Kant, Fichte and Schelling in Germany. Its impact was felt roughly from the 1790s to the 1840s. It was a reaction to the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution in England which resulted in social and political dislocations. Crucial to the Romantic thought was an organic relation between man and nature.

Scientism : It is the belief that inductive methods of reasoning applied in the natural sciences are the only source of genuine factual knowledge and it is only through them that a true knowledge of man and society is possible.

16.9 EXERCISES

1) What is postmodernism? Discuss the views of some of the important thinkers identified with it.

2) Write a note on the modernist tradition. How is postmodernism different from it?

3) What is the difference between postmodernity and postmodernism?

4) Discuss the postmodernist views on history. On what grounds these have been criticised?

16.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

Keith Jenkins (ed.), *The Postmodern History Reader* (London and New York, Routledge, 1997)

Keith Jenkins, *On 'What is History?' : From Carr and Elton to Rorty and White* (London and New York, Routledge, 1995)

Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, *Postmodern Theory : Critical Interrogations* (London, MacMillan, 1991)

Brian Fay, Philip Pomper and Richard T. Vann (eds.), *History and Theory : Contemporary Readings* (Mass. and Oxford, Blackwell, 1998)

Steve Seidman (ed.), *The Postmodern Turn : New Perspectives on Social Theory* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994)

Georg G. Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century : From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (Hanover and London, Wesleyan University Press, 1997)

Geoffrey Roberts (ed.), *The History and Narrative Reader* (London and New York, Routledge, 2001)

Arthur Marwick, *The Nature of History* (Third Edition, New York, 1989)

C.Behan McCullagh, *The Truth of History* (London, New York, Routledge, 1998)

C.Behan McCullagh, *The Logic of History* (London, New York, Routledge, 2004)

UNIT 17 GENDER IN HISTORY

Structure

17.1 Introduction

17.2 History as the Narrative of Power

17.3 Absence of Women in Modern Historiography

17.4 Women's Movement and Gender Sensitive History

17.5 Features of Feminist Historiography

17.6 Summary

17.7 Exercises

17.8 Suggested Readings

17.1 INTRODUCTION

Women have a dual relationship with history in India as they are simultaneously present and absent in the historical accounts that have come down to us. The women are invisible especially from a feminist standpoint, and they are relatively visible from the point of view of the concerns of nationalist history, especially in the context of ancient India. Thus the task of the feminist historian today is doubly difficult. Unlike many other parts of the world where women have had to be inserted into history, here history has, in a sense, to be 're'written. Further, rewriting history from a woman inclusive standpoint requires historians to not only explore (and re-explore) sources and social processes, uncover evidence (which has been ignored or marginalised because of existing biases) and thereafter insert issues of gender into new historical writing, such writing has also to uncover the many histories of suppression, resulting in history having become a flattened, and one-dimensional account of a few men. Historians writing in the last twenty years or so in India have therefore necessarily had to shift the focus onto the neglected segments of our society, thereby broadening its ambit. Under this new focus, a gender sensitive history is now beginning to be possible, although we need to note that this new field was not an automatic consequence of a shift of focus but the conscious product of feminist interventions. What also needs to be noted is that among the first tasks to be addressed by feminist scholars, even before launching into the writing of a new kind of history was the attention that had to be paid to analysing what had gone before: a feminist historiography has therefore preceded a feminist rewriting of the past. And finally, when the new feminist history began to be written it had to go beyond the concerns of colonialists and nationalists to explore the structures and ideologies that have contributed to the particularities of south Asian patriarchies.

17.2 HISTORY AS THE NARRATIVE OF POWER

Despite the surfacing of new concerns and a new will amongst a section of historians, there are many inherent problems in writing a history that is genuinely inclusive of women. The sources of history, here as elsewhere, reflect the concerns of those who have wielded power. It is sometimes argued, with justification, that the notion of time, and therefore of history, in the dominant Indian tradition, which may also be called the Brahmanical tradition, has been cyclical and not linear, making for a crucial difference in the understanding of history. One implication of this view is that the contemporary discipline of history in India is a derivative of the western, linear, tradition and violates the spirit of the 'authentic' Indian tradition. The further implication is that, therefore, it

cannot be subjected to certain kinds of scrutiny. What is ignored in this argument is that the cyclical notion of history is as much the product of those who have wielded power as the linear view of history is. It might be useful to note that unlike archaeological evidence, which may be loosely described as the 'garbage' of history, as the incidental remnants of material culture, and therefore not associated with the conscious decision to leave something to posterity, written records are self conscious products and are closely tied to those who have exercised power. The *Rajatarangini*, the *Harshacharita* or the *Itihasa* portions of the *Puranas* are unambiguous narratives of power even if they may reflect a cyclical view of history.

It might also be argued that these sources constitute only a small fraction of the sources we have for ancient India and the bulk of the sources are not conventional historical sources at all but a variegated collection of myths, religious texts, and other types of literary productions. Nevertheless the textual sources that have come down to us, even when they are 'religious', 'cultural', 'social', or concerned with the political economy, are products of a knowledge system which was highly monopolistic and hierarchical and thus narrowly concentrated in the hands of a few men — a group that was even narrower here than elsewhere.

In this context it might be useful to explore the manner in which scholars have tried to break out of the limited concerns imposed by the 'recorders' of history who have, in a sense, refracted history for us. In contemporary times it is possible to use oral history as a way of countering the biases of 'official' history. But the relationship of orality to textuality is very complex in the case of our early history. In a sense, all 'texts' were orally transmitted and then 'written' up much later. Though these texts only ultimately became prescriptive, or were regarded as sacred, they were treated as authoritative and therefore worthy of formal handing down in the traditional way which was oral precisely because it could be carefully controlled. 'Oral' texts are not in and of themselves counter hegemonic. Further, certain oral traditions which had been brought into the ideological field of the religious literati but nevertheless circulated largely among the humbler folk, and were therefore more widely shared as they were narrated to a heterogeneous audience, such as the *Jatakas* or the *Panchatantra*, though significant in terms of yielding a different kind of evidence on women and the lower orders, are not necessarily the compositions of such sections, at least in the versions that have come down to us. The *Jatakas* for example, comprise a rich repertoire of narratives and often describe the experiences of ordinary women and men with great poignancy; they are, nevertheless, firmly located within a Buddhist world-view. As they stand, the *Jatakas* are the product of mediations between high culture and `low' culture; framed by the *bhikkhus* (the Buddhist monks) these narratives cannot be termed 'folk'. While they are an alternative to the Brahmanical texts they cannot be regarded as the dichotomised 'other' of elite texts. Similarly, the *Therigatha*, verses or songs of the *bhikkhunis* (the Buddhist nuns), a work that is probably one of the earliest compilations of women's poetry anywhere in the world, while very definitely the compositions of women, have not escaped the editorial hand of the Buddhist monastic compilers. These factors have complicated the use of oral sources and the writing of a gender sensitive history from below. There are further problems because of the difficulties of dating oral texts, which therefore cannot easily be collated with other evidence available for specific periods; while we gain from the point of view of the richness of the data we lose from the point of view of specificity of time and region. Nevertheless, despite the many problems inherent in the sources the newer generation of historians, writing from a 'history from below' standpoint including feminists, have begun to use these sources creatively. Using strategies such as reading against the grain and between the lines, especially in the case of prescriptive texts, or looking at the way myths and narratives change in a diachronic context they are raising new questions and bringing in fresh insights. We will further discuss these issues in later sections.

17.3 ABSENCE OF WOMEN IN MODERN HISTORIOGRAPHY

It might be useful at this point to examine the factors that led to a shift in the writing of history and thus acted as a catalyst for gender history. In the Indian context nationalist history dominated the scene until the late 1950s. Nationalist history was primarily focussed on political history (kings, conquests, invasions, as in the case of the earlier colonial history; liberal and imaginative administrators, political institutions and so on) and cultural history — mainly a detailing of achievements on the cultural front. Apart from an obsessive concern with locating and outlining idealised images and golden ages, there was almost a conscious steering away from examining internal contradictions, hierarchies along different axes, and oppressive structures. This point may be illustrated by seeing the numerous works of R.K.Mukherji, R.C.Majumdar and K.P.Jayaswal among others. This trend in the writing of Indian history found its most systematic formulation in the Indian History and Culture volumes edited by R.C. Majumdar and published by the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay between 1956 and 1963. This was part of a move to present the imperial government with a united front but also a product of middle class myopia obsessed with a single axis of deprivation, between the colonial power and the nation's *bhadralok* in relation to them. Tilak, the militant nationalist, for example, argued that the distinctions between labourers and masters was false; all Indians were labourers or rather *shudras* and slaves, and the British were the only masters

Meanwhile, going back to the late colonial period, social history made its appearance. Here as elsewhere, in the early stages, social history was a kind of residual history with politics and economics left out. Some of the issues explored under this rubric were the history of social reform, and religious and revivalist movements, mostly within the framework of biographical narratives of the men spearheading the movements. Finally in the decades after independence and under the influence of Marxist approaches, social history became the history of social formations. D.D. Kosambi pioneered this field with two brilliant and wide-ranging books and a series of imaginative papers published from the mid fifties onwards. His formulations were the basis for detailed analyses on various epochs of Indian history and the relationship between modes of production and other political and social institutions. By the late 1970s and 1980s there were raging debates on whether or not there was feudalism in India, and while the issues thrown up in the course of this debate were important, there was absolutely nothing on what happened to women in the feudal mode of production, or where they figured in the new relations of production. The underlying presumption was that history for women was the same as history for men. No attempt was made to move into the field of the modes of social reproduction while continuing to explore modes of production where class and gender could be combined making for a connection between gender structures, ideologies, and social and economic power structures. Similarly, although there was a welcome shift towards exploring the history of the lower orders, such as the *dasa-karmakaras*, *shudras*, and *chandalas*, bringing in issues of caste and class and unequal power relations, this did not include an examination of unequal gender relations. In any case a shortcoming, in my view, of the history of social formations is that human beings as individuals, whether men or women, and their experience of different social processes, seemed to be missing from it. Since it centred on modes of production the primary issues that were explored were the ways in which surplus was extracted, the particular forms of labour exploitation, and the role of technology in transforming relations of production, human experiences, mentalities, and emotions tended to be left unexplored. In some ways then, such a history was as distant as the earlier dynastic or administrative histories had been. This lacuna has to some extent been rectified by new trends in history writing under the label of 'subaltern' studies but these scholars too have neglected women as a category. While

they brought into the frame of history the lives and struggles of ordinary people such as peasants and tribals, they too focussed on peasant *men* and tribal *men* without even being conscious that there could be subalterns within subalterns. Their writing was as male centred as earlier nationalist or Marxist history had been. It is ironical that even as a certain space was opening up for a history of the 'powerless' the most powerless among the powerless remained outside the framework of new historical trends.

17.4 WOMEN'S MOVEMENT AND GENDER SENSITIVE HISTORY

How then did the shift occur in terms of the writing of women's history? We may attribute this to the women's movement of the 1970s which provided the context and the impetus for the emergence of women's studies in India. As Tanika Sarkar has recently pointed out, women's history as a sustained and self-conscious tradition developed from the 1970s since many feminist scholars were themselves involved in the vigorous and turbulent movements against rape, dowry and domestic violence. It was here that the contours of the multiple forms and structures of patriarchies, and the cultural practices associated with them began to be outlined through the experiences of women on the ground. These years, during the heyday of an explicitly political women's movement, and the insights derived therein, provided feminist scholars with the experiential material on the basis of which they formulated gender as a category of analysis. (The recent phenomena of mainstream scholars cashing in on the space created for women's history, without addressing the existence of patriarchies in their writing, is an explicitly anti-political and deflective agenda, marking a sharp break from *feminist* scholarship.) And since the 70s also witnessed other political movements of peasants, workers, and tribals turning our attention onto the marginalised and the oppressive conditions under which they lived and struggled, historians were *forced* to broaden the ambit of history; the content of history has thus been dramatically democratised and we are now happily moving in a direction which is making history the most dynamic discipline in the social sciences. But it is important to recognise that historians, and only some of them at that, respond to grass-roots assertions: they do not lead the new trends but merely follow the agendas set by our people, which is why a gender sensitive history had to wait for the women's movement and was not an automatic or logical trend following from Marxist history or subaltern history.

17.5 FEATURES OF FEMINIST HISTORIOGRAPHY

In a moment such as this, it is apt that a review of the main trends in women's history is undertaken. Beginning with tentative formulations and simple re-readings it is by now fairly evident that despite a weak institutional base women's history has taken off. During the last decade some very fine work has appeared in the field of women's history forcing mainstream historians to recognise and sometimes even cash in on the 'market' created by feminist scholarship. Among the first major moves made by feminist scholars was that of dismantling the dominant nationalist narrative of the glory of Hindu womanhood during the ancient past, specifically during the Vedic period. By breaking up the Hindu / Vedic woman into the 'Aryan' and the *dasi* woman attention was drawn to the differing histories of women according to respective social locations. This corrective was important because while it was necessary to insert gender as an axis of stratification it was equally necessary, perhaps more so, to outline the stratification that existed *within* women. The suppressions entailed in the homogenised product of the nationalists, the 'Hindu'/ Vedic or 'Aryan' woman, became evident. At the same time the need to outline the distinctive social histories of women was highlighted. Thus while the major tendency during these early years was to write a complementary, or supplementary, history of women, to accompany the narratives of mainstream history, by plotting the history of women in different arenas and in different

types of struggles the distinctive experiences of women in the context of class was built into the analysis of gender.

A second feature of the thrust in writing women's history was the painstaking uncovering and compiling of an archive of women's writing. Given the male biases of the sources normally relied upon by mainstream history, and the difficulties experienced by feminist historians in finding alternative sources, the putting together of this archive has been very significant. It has helped to break down the canonisation of certain sources which are no longer invariably regarded as more reliable but, more correctly, as having achieved authoritative status through their closeness to power. A parallel and no less significant development has been the appearance of some extremely rich and sensitive readings of women's writing.

An overview of women's history and the insights derived from the new writing lead directly to the recognition that gender as a tool of analysis has been very unevenly used to explore the three conventional chronological phases of ancient, medieval and modern India. The bulk of the new writing is being done for colonial and post-colonial India and there is very little of such writing for ancient and even less for medieval India. This is in part due to the need for a knowledge of the classical languages in which the sources are available for these phases but it is also partly attributable to the dominant contemporary theoretical concerns which are focussed solely on colonial and post colonial Indian society. In practice this has also meant the abandonment of these phases to the continuing domination of the Indological framework which is locked into a high classical and consensus approach, unwilling to recognise that there could be other histories.

However, there have been pioneering works heralding a breakthrough in more ways than one. A recent study by Kumkum Roy on the emergence of monarchy in early India is significant because it uses precisely those sources that the Indologists have always relied upon, the Brahmanical texts relevant for the period, but opened them up to a totally different line of inquiry. The study also links the inter-relatedness of the different axes of stratification to outline the processes by which hierarchies were established and legitimised through the use of Brahmanical rituals. Once the structure was in place the king was regarded as the legitimate controller of the productive and reproductive resources of the kingdom. At the same time the *yajamana*, on whose behalf rituals were performed, came to be regarded as the controller of the productive and reproductive resources of the household. The most significant aspect of Roy's work is that it breaks down the false, but perhaps for the moment operationally necessary, divide between gender history and mainstream history. It demonstrates how our understanding of the past is expanded and enriched when gender is included as a category of analysis.

Other issues that have been probed at the conceptual level include the relationship between caste, class, patriarchy and the state, and the dynamics of the household in early India. Apart from these studies which are attempts at exploring women's histories at the level of the relationship of gender to other institutions there are studies of the changing versions of myths and other narratives, prostitution, motherhood, labouring women, property relations, women as gift givers, and women as rulers. These accounts have helped to gradually build up a base for further conceptualisations and to break the hold of the Altekarian paradigm, which has dominated the field of women's history in the case of 'ancient' India. A major lacunae that continues to restrict our understanding is the way in which gender shapes, and is in turn shaped by, other structures within a given social formation.

While a beginning has been made from the point of view of using a gender-based framework in the case of early Indian history there is a singular paucity of works using gender as a category of analysis in medieval Indian history. Even a women's history

which complements or supplements mainstream history is far from being systematically written. Perhaps this is because there has been a slow response to engage with gender as a category of analysis from scholars with a mastery over Persian in a situation where Persian sources continue to dominate the field of medieval Indian history. A slow beginning has been made recently but the works tend to be episodic rather than conceptual. The most sustained output is coming from south Asia specialists from American academies but these are usually narrowly empirical and steer clear of making broader analytical points. The lack of a strong gender based standpoint is unfortunate because it is not as if the sources for medieval India are peculiarly disadvantaged; in fact the situation is quite the reverse. It is just that the sources have never been systematically explored from the point of view of gender. Kumkum Sangari's finely nuanced and elaborately analysed study of Bhakti poetry and within that of Mira's location is an example of historicising literature, and indivduals during the medieval period. Sangari's analysis of the family, kinship and the state is a pointer to the direction that a gender sensitive history could fruitfully take. Happily, studies are now underway on a range of themes such the genderedness of language, landownership, inheritance, the politics of the royal household, women against women in polygamous households, and the changing narratives that produced the model of the virtuous and chaste *virangana*. Perhaps these studies and others can be linked together, and others can be undertaken, leading to broader understanding of gender relations in medieval India.

An important lacuna in the gender history of both ancient and medieval India is the absence of region-based studies. With the exception of a few explorations of Tamil literature and inscriptions of early and medieval south India we have very little by which we can make connections between the social formations of different regions and the ways in which these would have shaped gender relations in their respective regions.

More wide-ranging explorations have been possible in the field of women's history during the colonial and post-colonial period. More accessible from the point of view of the languages in which the sources are available, these sources are also better preserved. Consequently, feminist scholars have been able to not only insert women into history but also examine the relationship between various social and economic processes and gender. They have also been able to explore certain themes in some depth and have made a dent in historical debates about nationalism, class formation and the operations of caste.

Among the more rigorous areas of research in women's history during this period has been the analysis of the way in which new colonial structures especially in the field of law shaped the lives of women. An impressive body of writing has examined the working of specific laws such as the Widow Remarriage Act, the impetus and the forces behind the creation and codification of laws, the contradictions between the applications of different sets of legal systems such as customary law and statutory law, statutory law and 'personal' law, and the general move towards homogenising the diversity of social customs and cultural practices. One of the most exhaustive and significant studies by Bina Agrawal has focussed on the way law shapes gender relations by denying women access to productive resources in the form of land. She has thus provided us with an understanding of the political economy of the vulnerarability of women. While some of these studies have been empirical others have examined the historical context, class dynamics and the relationship of law to colonialist and nationalist ideologies at given moments. These studies have also been able reveal the possibilities and limitations of a colonialist (and nationalist) hegemonic agendas.

The issue of women's education has been the subject of numerous writings. Initially scholars tended to plot the different stages by which opportunities for women's education were created and expanded in the context of the movement for social reform, taking for granted

its 'positive', liberatory and transformative potential. Men's spearheading of the campaign for women's education then appeared to be genuinely 'liberal'; perhaps it was paternalistic but it was presumed that it was a means by which women would be emancipated from an earlier deprivation. These studies have now been taken much further to examine the crucial role of education, or rather 'schooling', in the agendas of new patriarchies and the relationship of schooling for women to processes of class formation. Men's stake in women's education and power over them, women's agency and resistance in a conflict-ridden household in the process of many kinds of transition have also been outlined. Some of these analyses have been made possible through a close examination of women's writing. As women were drawn into literacy and education, mostly at the instance of their menfolk (to make them companionate wives and fitting mothers), but sometimes against their approval, they took to writing. Letters, memoirs, essays, biographies, poetry, stories, travelogues, and, on occasion, social critiques of patriarchy appeared by the end of the 19th century and continued into the 20th century. Feminist scholarship on this alternative archive has been significant in fine tuning our understanding of social reform, but also in revealing to us what was suppressed in the accounts of mainstream history. It is to be expected that the social critiques written by 19th century women would be regarded as significant markers in the history of women's resistance to the ideologies and practices of male domination; women like Pandita Ramabai and Tarabai Shinde have thus become known in the world of feminist scholarship. What is important is that through a sensitive reading of a seemingly conformist piece of writing, by Rashsundari Devi, too one can uncover an oblique but moving critique of upper caste cultural practices.

The history of labouring women too has been sought to be included in the rewriting of history. Accounts of their participation in agrarian struggles, issues that were raised and others that were suppressed and the perception of the women of those 'magic' days, as some of them put it, have been important not only to balance out the accounts of 'peasant' struggles but also in exploring the complicated relationship between issues of class and gender, and the strategies of left wing groups in highlighting class oppression and suppressing gender oppression. Feminist scholars discovered that in their recuperation of earlier histories of women's political activism, questions of sexual politics and its complicated relations with broader struggles were of central, absorbing importance: struggles that needed women, mobilised them, conferred a political and public identity upon them, and yet subtly contained them and displaced their work for their own rights.

Women's place in the organised labour force especially in the textile and jute industries have been the subject of monographs, and currently there are a number of studies underway on women in the unorganised sector, especially in the context of globalisation and the structural adjustment programme. These studies, being the first of their kind, have however retained a largely empirical approach. Perhaps with more studies documenting the daily lives of labouring women we might be able to write an account of the making of the working class from a woman centred point of view. However, history is changing so rapidly in the new era of globalisation that the working class may be transformed beyond recognition even before we can write their history!

Among the more significant researches in writing an account of women's labour within an historical frame is the issue of domestic labour. This has been a central issue in feminism resulting in a considerable body of scholarship, in the west as well as the third world. Its relationship to capitalism has been repeatedly stressed in western feminist scholarship. In India studies have analysed domestic labour in its relationship to caste, class, widowhood, hierarchies within the household, and the capacity of households to buy domestic services. At the conceptual level, the relationship of domestic labour to

the labour market and the proliferation of the sexual division of labour in waged work, even as it might appear to be outside the realm of market, has also been highlighted. The fact that 'domestic labour exists within a system of non-dissoluble, non-contractual marriage permeated by ideologies of service and nurture has meant that domestic labour and domestic ideologies not only co-exist but are also jointly reproduced even in a rapidly changing economic and social system' has also been pointed out by Sangari.

Earlier on in this paper it has been suggested that feminist scholarship has had to be innovative in its use of sources as well as in their reading of them. One of the recent works that has been extremely successful in such an approach has used a range of sources including conventional sources such as statistics and government reports, but has balanced these off by folk literature, proverbs and fieldwork to locate women's perception of their own lives. The framework of the political economy of gender used by Prem Chowdhry has yielded an important study of the everyday experiences of labouring women of a peasant caste over a hundred year period.

The use of oral history by feminist historians to explicitly critique the inadequacies and biases of official and mainstream/malestream and elitist histories has been extremely significant in the field of partition history. Here women have been the pioneers in writing an alternative history written from the point of view of the marginalised: women, children, and *dalits*. They have raised crucial questions about the ideologies of the state in the context of notions of community, and honour in the recovery and rehabilitation of 'abducted' women and the doubled dimensions of violence experienced by women first at the hands of men, and then at the hands of a patriarchal state which denied women agency as it sought to align boundaries with communities. It is significant that feminist scholarship has provided a systematic critique of nationalism at the very moment of the birth of a new nation. Far from a recognition of their pioneering work even their critique of nationalism and of the post-colonial Indian state is yet to be taken seriously by mainstream historians. This is perhaps an outcome of the territoriality of mainstream/malestream historians entrenched in the academy, with personal stakes in retaining their hold on historical writing. Further, in my view, these are part of an agenda of once more marginalising, or even erasing, women's pioneering of a new field, thereby claiming both originality and monopoly over theory. Given the backlash against feminist scholars in terms of appointments to Universities at the highest level, currently underway, the political dimensions of such marginalisations need to be seriously noted.

The issue of women's agency is part of a larger set of issues in feminist scholarship and it is at the moment often being simplified. The desire to write a different kind of history has led feminist scholars to explore the histories of resistance by women, individually and collectively, and also their use of strategies such as subversion and manipulation of men's power over women. While it is important to document acts of resistance, subversion and manipulation, it is somewhat simplistic to celebrate all instances of 'subversion' and 'manipulation'; these may certainly be examples of women's agency but particular instances of subversion such as the strategies used by the tawaifs of Lucknow cannot be regarded as subversive as they work within, and therefore reinforce, patriarchal ideologies. It is useful to bear in mind the political consequences of actions as well as of theoretical formulations especially in the context of feminist writing in India, which owes its originary impulse to a political agenda, as pointed out earlier. Recent writings have tried to provide a perspective for exploring women's agency. The dialectical relationship between structure and agency requires examining and it may be useful to look at structure and agency as processes that pre-suppose each other: there is also a need to bear in mind that social systems set limits and put pressures upon human action. Agency does not exist within a vacuum as women have come to understand.

17.6 SUMMARY

The preceding sections of this paper have tried to outline some of the issues in writing history from a gender sensitive standpoint and mark some of the major conceptual advances within the field of women's history. There are huge areas that still need to be explored such as the histories of *dalit* women and many issues are under theorised, an example being the relationship between caste and gender. There is an urgent need for a rigorous outlining of the structures in which women's oppression is located. In this context I consider it important for feminist scholars to be wide-ranging in their research and not restrict themselves to theoretical approaches that may dominate academies in particular locations. I would even argue that it is necessary for feminist scholars to resist the tendency to take over their agendas by currently fashionable theories such as post-modernism. Its use in the Indian context has tended to valorise pre-colonial society, as well as the 'community' and the 'family' as pre-modern indigenous institutions which have remained outside the realm of colonial power and are therefore 'authentic'. It may be noted that we have a long tradition of examining the community and family in women's scholarship. The direction of these early works has been overtaken by works that are restricted to the modern pre-modern paradigm. The new focus is also almost entirely on culture. Scholars using the post-modernist framework appear to be antagonistic to any project that is engaged in locating the structures that are the sources of the oppression of women. Perhaps the focus on 'women's culture' enables some of these scholars to highlight the happy spaces for women in the family and obliterate everything else. But for those who experience, or are sensitive to the workings of multiple forms of patriarchies it is crucial to understand social and economic processes and the hierarchical institutions that have put systems of oppression into place. For feminist scholars an unqualified or uncontextualised concentration on culture as an autonomous realm, or discussions of agency without a look at its relationship to structure, will be disastrous. It will push us back, not take us forward in theorising patriarchies and the complex ways in which they work in India.

17.7 EXERCISES

1) Discuss the various features of feminist historiography.

2) What is the relationship between women's movement and gender-sensitive history?

3) Why have women been generally absent in the traditional historiography?

17.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

Kumkum Sangari and Uma Chakravarti eds. *From Myths to Markets: Essays on Gender* (Shimla, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1999).

Uma Chakravarti, *Rewriting History: The Life and Times of Pandita Ramabai* (Delhi, Kali For Women, 1998).

Uma Chakravarti, 'Beyond the Altekarian Paradigm: Towards a New Understanding of Gender Relations in Early India', *Social Scientist*, 16(8), August, 1988.

Kumari Jayawardena and Malathi de Alwiss, *Embodied Violence: Communalising Women's Sexuality in South Asia* (Delhi, Kali for Women, 1996).

Aloka Parasher, 'Women in Nationalist Historiography: The Case of Altekar,' in Leela Kasturi and Vina Majumdar (ed.), *Women in Indian Nationalism* (Delhi, Vikas Publishing House, 1994).

Vijaya Ramaswamy, 'Aspects of Women and Work in Early South India,' *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, January-March, 1989;

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Janaki Nair, *Women and Law in Colonial India* (Delhi, Kali For Women,1996).

Rosalind O'Hanlon, *A Comparison Between Men and Women: Tarabai Shinde and the Critique of Gender Relations in Colonial India* (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1994).

Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (ed.), *Recasting Women : Essays in Colonial History* (Delhi, Kali for Women, 1989).

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UNIT 18 RACE IN HISTORY

Structure

18.1 Introduction

18.2 Race as Political and Social Construct

18.3 Race and Science

18.3.1 Concept of Evolution within Racial Science

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18.1 INTRODUCTION

One of the depressing predictions about the twentieth century was made by the black American scholar W.E.B. Du Bois back in 1903 when he asserted that 'the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colour line – the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and in the islands of the sea'. It is perhaps with these words in mind that another black scholar Stuart Hall, this time British, asserted a few years ago that 'the capacity to live with difference is, in my view, the coming question of the twenty first century'.

The abolition movement against slavery of the 18th and early 19th centuries had provided a context for the emergent science of human races in the twentieth century. It is important to remember here that while for scholars of Du Bois's generation the 'colour line' was an everyday reality based on institutional patterns of *racial domination*, in recent times questions about race and racism have been refashioned in ways that emphasise *cultural difference*. The shifts in conceptual language that have become evident in the past three decades are symptomatic of wider debates about the analytical status of race and racism, as well as related shifts in political and policy agendas.

18.1 RACE AS POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CONSTRUCT

Serious study of race and race relations as important social issues can be traced back to the early part of the twentieth century. The expansion of research and scholarship in this area, however, happened around the 1960s, in the aftermath of the social transformations around questions of race that took place during that decade. This was a time when social reforms implemented in the aftermath of the civil rights movement, urban unrest, and the development of black power ideas and forms of cultural nationalism. These helped enormously to reshape the politics of race not just in America, but in other parts of the world, as well.

It was also during the 1960s that the 'race relations problematic' as Michael Banton put it, became the dominant approach in this field. Seeing race as a fact which transforms social relations also grappled with ideas on 'ethnicity' and social boundaries between different groups in a given society. The idea of race has been utilised to comprehend processes of migration and settlement as well. They are sometimes posed as a minority, ethnic or an immigrant problem.

John Rex's analytical model in race relations asserts that reading social relations between persons as race relations is encouraged by the existence of certain structural conditions:

1) existence of unfree, indentured or slave labour

2) unusually harsh class exploitation

3) strict legal distinctions between groups and occupational segregation

4) differential access to power

5) migrant labour as an underclass fulfilling stigmatised roles in a metropolitan setting.

In this context, Rex, in studies conducted by him, explored the degree to which immigrant populations shared the class position of their white neighbours and white workers in general. His analysis outlined a class structure in which white workers won certain rights through the working class movement, through the trade unions and the Labour Party. The non-white workers, however, were found to be located outside the process of negotiation that has historically shaped the position of white workers. They experience discrimination in all the areas where the white workers had made significant gains, such as employment, education, and housing. Thus the position of migrant, non-white workers placed them outside the working class in the position of an 'underclass'.

Robert Miles has also looked at the condition of migrant communities, but he has done so within the context of 'real economic relationships'. Thus there is a contradiction between 'on the one hand the need of the capitalist world economy for the mobility of human beings, and on the other, the drawing of territorial boundaries for human mobility.'

His greatest contribution is the proposition that races are created within the context of political and social regulation, and thus race is above all is a 'political' construct.

The first proposition for our purposes is that idea of race is a human construct, an ideology with regulatory power within society. The use of 'race' and race relations, as analytical concepts, disguise the ***social*** construction of difference, presenting it as somehow inherent in the empirical reality of observable or imagined biological difference. Racialised groups are produced as a result of specific social processes, or specific social actions such as the defense of domination, subordination and privilege.

The terrain of anti-racist struggle today is no longer that of social equality but of cultural diversity. Equality has come to be redefined from 'the right to be equal' to mean 'the right to be different'. In the sixties and seventies, the struggle for equal rights meant campaigns against immigration laws or against segregation through which different races were treated differently. Today it means campaigns for separate schools, demands to use different languages, the insistence of maintaining particular cultural practices. The black rights activists have argued that in the past civil rights reforms reinforced the idea that black liberation should be defined by the degree to which black people gained equal access to material opportunities and privileges available to whites – jobs, housing, schooling etc. This strategy could never bring about liberation, because such ideas of equality were based on imitating the life styles, behavior are most importantly, the values and ethics of white colonizers.

To locate the concept of race, racism and racial relations in contemporary times, and be able to comprehend the twentieth century attempts to understand these terms, we will have to go back to the nineteenth century when Charles Darwin provided one of the first important frameworks for this task. His ideas are important as they immediately gave rise to self appointed Social Darwinists, who are largely responsible for both distorting the science component of Darwin's theory and for using it for justification of colonialism and imperialism.

18.3 RACE AND SCIENCE

As Nancy Stepan points out, it was the early travel literature on human groups by explorers which tended to get transformed into scientific texts on race. When it emerged on its own, racial science was 'scavenger science' which fed on whatever materials lay at hand. Such racial science had a national character as well (depending on the influence of religion, for instance.) To a large extent, history of racial sciences is a history of a series of accommodation of the sciences in general to the demands of deeply held convictions about 'naturalness' of the inequalities between human groups.

The racial science of the 1850s was less dependent on bible, more scientific, but also more racist. It drew upon physical types, on racial worth, permanence of racial types and the like. Skull became the arbiter of all things racial in most of 19th century, and early 20th century, because of alleged mental differences which different skull shapes or sizes supposedly indicated.

18.3.1 Concept of Evolution within Racial Science

Darwin was the originator of the evolutionary theory, and his main argument was for continuity between animals and humans, separated by not kind but degree. However, the distance between the technical, industrial, highly civilised Europeans and animals seemed too vast. So Darwin turned to 'lower' races or 'savages' to fill the gap between humans and animals. Later scientists used this argument to form an evolutionary scale of races. Racist science picked this point up and used it to show that racist hierarchy as well as other social hierarchies were real aspects of nature's order. In retrospect, Darwin did not conceive of races in new terms for his arguments on evolution of man, but old terms. In essence, thus, Darwin himself carried out the task of accommodating the new evolutionary science to the old racial science. Evolutionism was also compatible with the idea of fixity and antiquity of races.

However, it should be remembered that as far as a social position on slavery was concerned, Darwin was an abolitionist, not a racist. This ambivalence manifested itself with other thinkers as well. For instance, Prichard shared the racial prejudices of his time, but his ethnocentrisms were also tempered by moral disgust for slavery, his belief in the essential humanity of the African, his Christian faith in the psychic unity of all the peoples of the world.

Evolutionary thought was compatible with the hierarchy of human races, and rather than dislodging old racial ideas actually strengthened them, and provided them with a new scientific vocabulary of struggle and survival ('struggle for existence', 'survival of the fittest', two of the most well known Darwinian tenets).

Darwin applied natural selection to cultural, intellectual and moral development. Natural selection had brought certain races like the European race to the highest point of moral and cultural life. He agreed with Wallace that after the appearance of intelligence, struggle between races became primarily a moral and intellectual one. Morally and intellectually less able of the races were extinguished and the reverse rose to spread themselves

across the globe. It was natural struggle that had produced the "wonderful intellect of the Germanic races". Darwin took up the view that natural selection worked on individual and racial variations to select the fittest races and to raise them up in the scale of civilisation. To Darwin, then, it seemed reasonable to believe that just as natural selection produced Homo Sapiens from animal forbears, so natural selection was the primary agent for producing civilised races out of barbarity.

Incidentally, here it might be mentioned that the development of the field of medicine was seen as a great onslaught on natural selection, as it allowed the biologically unfit to survive and to pass on their unfitness to the next generations. At any rate, development of medicine made natural selection on physical bases redundant, and led to a situation where it was possible to propose natural selection on the basis of morality and intellect of human groups, instead.

The developing disciplines of comparative anatomy and animal biology gave validity to prevailing ideas about the hierarchy of human races. The challenge for an evolutionary anthropologist was to endorse a materialist, evolutionary view of man, based on continuity between man and animals, without relying on hierarchy of human races or retreating to theology. It was Wallace who first insisted on the gulf between animals and humans and was then able to see that human progress is not inevitable, but depended on favourable social and political conditions. He put forward the radical, original theory that the immense variety of racial civilizations were because of different experiences and history, not biological differences between different groups of people.

Darwin's ideas took root all over the world in some form or the other. The widely prevalent mid 19th century belief on the part of leading figures like Vogt in England and Topinard in France was also that racial traits emerged by selection in struggle for life. They further proposed that with time, traits became fixed by heredity, and became permanent. Thus the false idea of the fixity and unchangeability of races became a widespread belief. Even though no individual could be found who was not a mixture, faith in the 'type' remained. More and more precise instruments were invented to measure the differences between the 'types'. It was forgotten that essentially, the human species being a migratory and conquering species is bound to be a mixed one, and hence has to be a constantly changing one.

In spite of Wallace's important intervention, races came increasingly to be seen as natural, but static chains of excellence, formed on the basis of nervous organisation, skull shape or brain size. Colour was a traditional and convenient criterion of race, not the least because it did not require the permission of the individual for it to be assessed by the anthropologist, which head measurement, for instance, did! The smallness of differences separating the presumed types (as far as the head size or shape of the nose were concerned) led to the use of more and more precise instruments, and to the subdivision of types. The results were never in doubt, and a vigorous analysis of the racial types which made up a family always followed after varied results in terms of the shape of the head were found, for instance, and it was assumed that different racial types had got mixed, instead of doubting the veracity of the measurements themselves.

The science which involved measuring human measurements was called Anthropometry, though it never did rise above ideological considerations to prove a hierarchy of races, and hence became a pseudoscience for all practical purposes.

18.3.2 Eugenics and Racial Science

In order to be a purposeful discipline, science was expected to play a role in planning and managing human existence and human affairs, including cohabitation. The word eugenics

itself was introduced into science for the first time in 1883 by Charles Darwin's cousin, Francis Galton. He defined eugenics as the 'study of agencies under social control that may improve or impair the racial qualities of future generations either physically or mentally'.

In its essence, eugenics was a science and a social programme of racial improvement through selective breeding of the human species. Though slow to win approval in Britain, by the first years of the twentieth century, eugenics had established itself institutionally in England. By the 1920s, it had grown into a worldwide movement, with active eugenic or 'race hygiene' societies in Russia, Germany, Japan and the United States.

The initial German nazi plan was to improve the racial stock – weed out the mentally deficient, hereditary criminal, hereditary unfit. A new age of racial thinking, however, had come into being that was to last until the 1930s, when the horrors of compulsory sterilization and the mass murder of the Jews and Gypsies in Nazi Germany (at least partly in the name of eugenical science) caused worldwide revulsion.

Eugenics in Nazi Germany was uniquely barbaric. It is worth mentioning here that not just in Germany but all over the world, adherents to this repugnant social programme were drawn mainly form the progressive middle class: doctors, psychologists, biologists and social reformers, and *not* politicians or businessmen. In its heyday, eugenics succeeded in drawing into its fold directly or indirectly a surprising number of the leading scientists of the day, and provided one more channel for the transmission of the racialist tradition. For the student of race science and racism, eugenics is important because it linked race with hereditarianism, and the new science of genetics.

Socially and politically, several factors favoured eugenics by the beginning of the twentieth century. The social optimism of the mid nineteenth century had given way by the end of the century to a pessimism which Galton's eugenics perfectly expressed. The 1880s had been a particularly hard period, with economic depression, unemployment, strikes, and growing political radicalism. It was clear from political events and sociological studies that poverty, alcoholism and ill health had not disappeared in Britain, despite what seemed to many to be decades of social legislation. The early military setbacks of the British in the Boer War in South Africa in 1899-1900 raised the spectre of a physically degenerating British people, and increased concern that the imperial mission of Britain would be harmed unless the population could be unified and made fitter. Most importantly, the declining birth rate, and especially the differential in the birth rate between the middle class and the working class, raised the possibility in some people's minds that Britain was about to be swamped by the biologically 'less fit'.

Eugenics rested on the belief that the differences in mental, moral and physical traits between individuals and races were hereditary. Such a belief had of course been implicit in race biology since the early nineteenth century. What gave eugenics its force in the modern period was its association with Darwinian evolution. Eugenics thus obtained its scientific credential from the new science of heredity. It obtained its support and its notoriety as a social and political movement from the many new and often explosive subjects it introduced into the biological and social debate, such as the biological roots of 'degeneracy' in human society, or the sterilization of the 'unfit'. At a time of heightened nationalism, imperialistic competition, and social Darwinism, such ideas for a while proved dangerously attractive to those looking for social change.

Under the banner of eugenics, the science of human heredity received a clear programme – the goal was to explore the hereditary nature of traits in human populations that seemed desirable or undesirable, and to establish their variability in individuals or classes

of individuals, or 'races'. Mental ability, moral character, insanity, criminality and general physical degeneracy, were all studied diligently. On the social and political side, the task of the eugenists was to publicise the findings of science, to discuss schemes to encourage the fit, and to discourage the unfit, to breed, and to air generally the social and political significance of such a programme.

Eugenics was seen to be not merely a power that humans now had over future generations; it was seen to be a quasi-religious obligation because in the conditions of modern civilization, the biologically sick and unfit were not eliminated by natural selection but allowed to live and to breed. Man had, in consequence, to weed out where nature did not any more. The Eugenists' first legislative success occurred in 1913, when the Houses of Parliament passed the Mental Deficiency Bill, which the Eugenics Education Society had urged as a means of segregating mentally backward individuals from the rest of society so as to prevent their breeding.

Recent studies of eugenics in Britain have identified it primarily as 'class' rather than a 'race' phenomenon. The chief preoccupation of the eugenists was with the biological fitness of the working class. Most eugenists assumed that social class was a function of hereditary worth, and the social policies they contemplated were often directed against the 'unfit' lower classes, especially the social residuum or social problem group – the permanent alcoholics, paupers and persistent criminal offenders.

18.4 RACE IN RELATION TO COLONIALISM

Once human behaviour was seen as an outcome of structure of the mind fixed by heredity, it was not difficult to stretch it and see human groups differently endowed and so destined for different roles in the history of human society. The hierarchy of races was believed to correspond to and indeed to be the cause of what most people took to be the natural scale of human achievement. The general public agreed because it coincided with the Europeans' image of themselves in the world.

Around the mid-nineteenth century, in fact, there existed a number of schools of thought, occupying themselves with the fundamental question of proving the inherent superiority of one people over another. A possible reason for their coming into existence was search for some popular explanation to account for the fact of imperialism, and to rationalise it in the public mind.

The aptitude of a race to colonise and the tendency of another to be colonised was already reflected in a number of earlier philosophical thinkers' categories, devised mostly on racial lines. Gustav Klemm and A. Wuttke had designated the so-called civilised races as active, and all others as passive in 1843. Carus divided mankind into "peoples of the day, night and dawn" in 1849, depending on their place in the scale of civilisation, and implicitly marking out the ones who needed help to be pulled out of the continuing 'night'. Nott and Gliddon ascribed animal instincts only to the 'lower' races, and it was deduced from this by their supporters that conquest by the civilised races would slowly cure such instincts of the conquered. In all these categories, however, the supposed racial attributes, which made one race the perpetual conqueror and another doomed to conquest forever, had not been linked to any identifiable cause as yet.

Writings of the 1850s became more specific and pointed in their search. Why were a people 'active' (progressing, colonising) or 'passive' (stagnating, conquered)? Why would some *inevitably* belong to the day, others to the night? The first identifiable reasoning was in terms of alleged superior mental capacity of a people as compared to another: one would then naturally rule over another. These mental characteristics, moreover, seemed to clearly stem from some *fixed* attribute, which must be pinned down.

Climate was a part of the unchanging environment surrounding any given set of people, and provided, in a number of creative ways, a ready explanation for the lower races' possession of lower mental faculties. A.H.Keane, one of the vice presidents of the Anthropological Institute at Cambridge proposed that in excessively hot and moist intertropical regions, in the struggle for survival by the inhabitants, the animal side of a human being is improved at the expense of the mental side. (It was, predictably, the opposite in the temperate zones where the white population lived).

Another interesting point of view was that mental development suffered in regions where food was easily and abundantly available e.g. in the tropical regions. On the other hand, it was claimed that wherever men have been involved in a strenuous conflict with a cold climate, they have acquired heroic qualities of character: energy, courage, and integrity. It is important to note here that "struggle for existence" vis-à-vis the climate was held to have different consequences for the whites and the non-whites. In the former it developed virtues of character, in the latter animal like physical development at the cost of the mental.

A transition from 'mental qualities' to the category of 'racial qualities' was certainly an advance as far as popular rhetoric was concerned: new assertions could now be made without any reference to a constant factor like physical environment/climate as the earlier authors were impelled to do. One race, for instance, could be simply *asserted* to be more moral than another, a totally new input into the argument, requiring no evidence whatsoever. E.B.Tylor was the originator of this reasoning: "There is a plain difference between the low and high races of man, so that the dull minded barbarian has not the power of thought enough to come up to the civilised man's moral standard."

Soon the fact of colonisation will not need any explanation at all: "It is only necessary to look at the physique of the Hindoos in order to account for their subjection to alien races..." Weak physical bodily traits led to weak morality, and both the weaknesses (separately as well as together) adequately explained colonialism.

It is worth mentioning that E. B. Tylor, the supposed father of evolutionary anthropology, picked up for his academic researches the general trend of the above arguments. He could confidently assert that "it was reasonable to imagine as latest formed the white race of the temperate region, least able to bear extreme heat or live without the appliances of culture, but gifted with the powers of knowing and ruling". Clearly a particular race was constituted of mental qualities, via climate, which either condemned it to slavery, or the power of ruling. This strain of reasoning was sufficiently influential for Emerson to ask, "It is race, is it not, that puts the hundred millions of India under the dominion of a remote island in the north of Europe?"

At some point, however, the genetically determined physical traits (manifested in the physical appearance of the body) become more important than the physical environment/ climate as the determinant of mental capacities of the colonised races. All along, there was a parallel school of research working on the physical person of the colonised, attempting to reach the same conclusion, viz. the colonised needed to be colonised.

18.5 RACE AND THE DISCIPLINE OF ANTHROPOLOGY

Much debate took place in the late nineteenth century, around the theory of social Darwinism. There were, in principle, two ways found of locating a particular race on the scale of social evolution :

i) by examining the physical development of the race in question, and

ii) by analysing the social component of the society which that particular race had built for itself.

The second was mostly ignored, and the first became the scientific problem of the day. As far as the scientific community was concerned, the physical development of a race was not to be judged in terms of physical beauty — that was for the layperson. The scientist was interested in proving evolution of the 'internal' parts - the skull, the brain, the nasal bone, and so on. This strain of research had its own trajectory. In the initial phases of social evolutionism, it was attempted to relate the mental capacity of the race in question (the direct determinant of social achievement) to some *measurable* physical attribute. The concept of `cranial capacity' (related to the brain size) was an early and enduring one.

A clear formulation of the concept of cranial capacity is given by one of its proponents, Keane. This author asserted that 'mental gradations' – a scale of mental capacity — could be shown between various races, based on the principle of cranial capacity.

In fact, Darwin himself observed that there did exist a relation between the size of the brain and development of the intellectual faculties. It was with the intent of proving this point that he presented the following data: "The mean internal capacity of the skull in Europeans is 92.3 cubic inches, in Americans 87.5, and in Australians only 81.9 cubic inches". The fact that Franz Boas challenged this, and pointed out as late as 1922 that both Europeans and Mongols have the largest brains, and not Europeans alone, shows the currency of these ideas well into the twentieth century.

Later in the nineteenth century, another popular notion which gained influence was that "the black is a child and will long remain so". Investigations were done to show that this was because of the "sudden arrest of the intellectual faculties at the age of puberty (due) to premature closing of the (cranial) sutures". It was claimed that studies showed that upto the age of puberty, a negro child learnt remarkably well, but after that became `incurably stupid'. Moreover, there was no religious, intellectual, moral or industrial advancement in the negro who was also a political idiot. It is significant how explicitly the supposed lack of political acumen or industrial development is being attributed to a fixed incurable cause, i.e. the so-called cranial sutures!

The above details have been given to show a particular trend in supposed scientific research as far as determining the potential of a race was concerned. These 'researches' continued in many more directions than just on the skull of individuals. It will suffice here to record that **slowly, but relentlessly, the parameters of civilisation changed from the size of the skull to size of the jaws, to size and shape of the nose, to the length of the arms etc. reflecting the then current concerns of the sciences of anthropometry and anthropology of the period in relation to racial differences.**

With work going on in the opposite direction, however, it soon became clear that there was *no* relationship between low mental development and the size and shape of any part of the body. Franz Boas cited research done by Karl Pearson, Manouvrier and so on to contradict views of older authors like Gobineau, Klemm, Carus, Nott and Gliddon who assumed characteristic mental differences between races of humans. More importantly, he identified the reason for revival of these older views (now in the garb of science) to the growth of modern nationalism.

The professed relationship between the physical type and mental capacity had run into dangerous ground by the end of the century. By 1896, while still insisting that whites did

represent the highest type of mental development, it was admitted that "mental differences are independent of the general body structure". How else could one explain that intellects like Alexander Pope's "dwelt in a feeble frame, while the stupid Negroes of Senegambia are endowed with Herculean bodies?" As a result of researches done by the likes of Franz Boas, it got established by the early decades of the twentieth century **that mental activity followed the same laws in each individual of whatever 'race', and its manifestations depended almost entirely upon the character of individual social experience.**

There was another direct offshoot of rhetoric which derived from evolutionary ideology: there was frequently an attempt to compare, albeit favourably, the 'lower races' with animals, and not always with apes: the distance between the representatives of the two races was so much that one race was closer to animals than to humans. An author wrote of the Australians that

> "the difference between the brain of a Shakespeare and that of an Australian savage would doubtless be fifty times greater than the difference between the Australian's brain and that of an orang-utan. In mathematical capacity the Australian who cannot tell the number of fingers on his two hands is much nearer to a lion or a wolf than to Sir Rowan Hamilton, who invented the method of quarter ions. In moral development, this same Australian whose language contains no words for justice and benevolence is less remote from dogs and baboons than from Howard ...The Australian is more teachable than the ape, but his limit is nevertheless very quickly reached. All the distinctive attributes of man, in short, have been developed to an enormous extent through long ages of social evolution".

The imagery of animals to describe such people was a frequent occurrence in ethnology/ anthropology books. So, while in the Andaman Islander, the peculiar goat like exhalations of the Negro were absent, the Yahgan's intelligence is inferior to that of a dog's as "unlike a dog, they forget in which hole they hid their remaining food after a feast". Just like the wild animals of Australia were peculiar and always of a low type, so were its dark coloured natives with their coarse and repulsive features. Francis Galton's researches with South African communities became classics in anthropological literature and were universally quoted as exhibiting the great 'mental intervals' between the higher and the lower races. According to Galton, taking the dog and the Damara, the comparison reflected no great honour on the man.

By contrasting the most undeveloped individuals of one race with the most highly developed of another, and in fact, by relegating the former a category closer to animals, the (European) reader was made to identify with an idealised, unusual specimen of his/ her own race as the collective norm. Visually, too, the standards of European beauty were considered the norm, and to emphasise the difference, the most degraded specimens were chosen for taking photographs — "the ugliest and the weirdest looking" of an otherwise handsome race" for use in ethnology books.

This kind of research was supplemented if not started with accounts showing similarities between these communities and various species of animals, other than monkeys and apes: "among the rudest fragments of mankind are the isolated Andaman Islanders... the old Arab and European voyagers described them as dog-faced man-eaters. As mentioned earlier, Hunter described the "Non-aryans" of India as " the remains of extinct animals which palaeontologists find in hill caves..."

Something was being said, in the era of evolutionary anthropology, when the rung on the scale assigned to some communities was even lower than that of apes, which would evolve at some point of time into humans.

18.6 RACIAL 'RESEARCH' AND THE POLITICS OF DOMINATION

What was the impulse behind the researches that were done on certain groups of 'uncivilised' people? The ethnographic material of the period shows a marked tendency to represent the aborigines belonging to the lowest rung of the world evolutionary scale. There is a distinct tendency to overemphasise their barbaric practises. John Lubbock, an eminent anthropologist of his time, and one of the early Presidents of the Anthropological Institute published his popular "Prehistoric Times" in 1865. Here he studies 'modern savages' like the Andaman Islanders, Australians and Maoris with the message that they needed to be colonised. These statements were significant in a context where a section of European political and public opinion had begun to challenge the rightness of colonial presence all over the world. Racially motivated research provided ample data from this time onwards well into the twentieth century to show the barbarism of the subject races in general.

In retrospect, the people of the colonies were presented by the evolutionary theorists as curiosities and specimens of a bygone era. This emphasis on the Asians or Africans, Australians and Native Americans as relics of the *past* served an important purpose: to dull the reader's sensibilities as far as their *current* situation was concerned. Seeing them from the point of view of anthropological science detracted from the fact of them as politically active people. India, for instance, was posed as a great museum of races — this particular view denied the people concerned a legitimate place in the present. More important, it robbed them of any recognition as a society in a state of flux like any other by fixing them in a dead mould — the unchanging relics of the past. Remnants of earlier long dead generations, they were going to be studied, analysed, classified and exhibited.

It is not a coincidence that spectacles of these specimens were so popular in England and even in the colonies, in the form of great colonial exhibitions in the second half of the 19th century, with anthropological displays an important and popular part. What was propagated during such exhibitions was that "taking him all in all, the Australian aborigine represents better than any other living form the generalised features of primitive humanity".

While working on the issue of 'ancestorhood' represented by the current aborigines, another possible link was explored: that between scale of civilisation and moral/ethical progress. It was asserted here that European morality was more perfect and "the ancestors" were immoral in their disposition. Thus not only earlier societies were deemed to be less ethical, but also those supposedly the relics of earlier ones, existing in the form of African or Australian societies. This sort of reasoning served to justify the immense scale of massacres of aborigines and native American populations in order to colonise their land. In fact, it was explicitly said of the black republic of Hyati that in the absence of the coloniser's civilising influence, the free people of Hyati had reversed back to pagan rites, snake worship, cannibalism.

Once Darwin's *Descent of Man* appeared in 1858, it was not long before social Darwinism became a fashionable and influential school of thought in British society and politics. There were commonsensical reasons for this from a practical view-point: the doctrine of survival of the fittest justified political conquest of weaker 'races' and their elimination if necessary; there was also affinity between this doctrine and the economic policy of *laissez faire* at home. In addition, by implication, this doctrine provided scientific reasons for denying protective legislation for factory workers, the poor, the elderly and the weak in society in general: if they could not struggle sufficiently to survive, they deserved to perish. Herbert Spencer and Henry Maine advocated this doctrine as a key to social problems of welfare

and state's role at home; the imperialists grasped it as a useful theoretical guideline **in defence of expansionism and colonialism**.

However, "survival of the fittest", the basic tenet of the theory of evolutionism, seemed to come under challenge with events like the Boer war at the end of the 19th century. This doctrine had not prepared the imperial powers to be resisted so tenaciously by the supposedly less fit races, and survive a war! There were also other challenges emerging to the definitions of civilisation, morality and ethics. The essence of morality was claimed by some contemporary European thinkers to exist not in the forms of European social organisations, but the ones which aborigine societies had evolved for themselves, ensuring protection for its young or the aged, or giving rights to its individual members. The third quarter of the 19th century was also the time to begin to speak in terms of protection to the weak as the hallmark of an ethical society. Thus the theory of 'survival of the fittest' while dominating European politics and public opinion was also beginning to increasingly come under attack. Progress was being defined in terms which were now not so smug, and increasingly controversial. A few like Huxley directly challenged social Darwinism and pointed out that the mark of a really civilised society is one in which competition to survive is cut down to the minimum and one which is premised on protection of the weak, *not* survival of the fittest.

It is also an interesting fact that in principle, there was contradiction between the evolutionist's view of colonial societies and the fast delivering reforms of the imperial rule. So while the evolutionary ethnographers focussed on the essential unchangeability of societies like India – except very gradually, almost imperceptibly, over a period of a few thousand years – the administrators continued to emphasise the changes that had been brought about by the British in a relatively short time.

There was one more area of conflict: between the theory of racial evolutionism and the immediate interests of the British traders, in fact, a crucial political reason for ultimate decline of the evolutionary theory. The nineteenth century saw an interest in the aborigines from a new section apart from the missionaries and the colonial administrator - the merchants. Competition from Germany over colonial markets in particular provided the impetus for 'study' of such races from a political and commercial, apart from a scientific point of view. The science of the earlier decades, in the shape of Darwin's guidelines, however, had to be abandoned. If the people at the bottom of the evolutionary scale needed a long span of time to civilise, how could they be expected to use these goods?

18.7 POULARISING RACIAL CONCEPTS

It became then the duty of authors of ethnology books to inform the general public of the commercial interests of the Europeans in 'lower races'. The editor of the *Native Races of the British Empire* Series wrote that since Anthropology textbooks were too technical and bulky, the series in question were an attempt to supply in a readable form information about the uncivilised races of the empire, and the peoples of the lower stages of culture. This genre of literature became the staple of popular reading material on the question of 'races', and served to a very large extent the political-economic purposes for which it was written.

Ethnology books of the period borrowed from fiction, and managed to project quite effectively the image of an animal, and sometimes even a criminal native. This theme had several variations. Kipling's fantasy tale of a wolf-reared child inspired an ethnographer to find evidence of a supposedly real case of the same kind, which is quoted in the above book. He even published the article in the Journal of the

Anthropological Institute in a paper with a generalised title "jungle life in India" giving the impression that such half humans were an integral part of Indian wild life. This contribution was quoted by the author of *Living Races*, complete with references and page number of the concerned journal, giving the impression of scientific analysis. Moreover, the author of the article was mentioned to be an official of the Indian Geographical Survey, again adding to the authenticity of the report. All this served to confound fantasy with research.

In any case, the axis between travel books, popular ethnology works, anthropologists and fiction writers had an interlocking, mutually reinforcing impact on the readers' mind. One source made the other respectable and recycled the data in a selective and often exaggerated form. The scientific layout gave the impression of authenticity, validating the fiction of Kipling and others. While these fiction writers and cartoonists drew from anthropology, popular ethnology borrowed from fiction. The line between fact and fiction, as far as the 'races' of the world were concerned, gradually grew blurred by the circular nature of information.

18.8 INDIA AND THE IDEA OF RACE

During the last quarter of the 19th century, especially after the 1857 events, there was a great desire on the British administrator's part to 'understand India'. This was the era of classifications and categories like warrior or martial races; criminal tribes; cultivating or professional castes and so on. Thus while India found its due place in the scale of evolution in societal terms on a world basis, within India the evolutionary theory was applied to sort out the loyal from the disloyal, the respectable from the criminal, the malleable from the obstinate - the *dasyu* from the potential *dasa*.

W.W. Hunter seems to have contributed conceptually to the hierarchisation of the Indian people by proposing an evolutionary scale within India itself, which it was claimed was a "great museum of races in which we can study man from his lowest to his highest stages of culture...." The Aryans in India with whom the British felt political affinity by now were not only fair skinned, but of noble lineage, speaking a stately language, worshipping friendly and powerful gods. The others were the original inhabitants whom the lordly newcomers – the Aryans – had driven back into the mountains or reduced to servitude on the plains. "The victors called the non-Aryans, an obscure people, Dasyu (enemies) or Dasa (slaves)". These creatures were the subject matter of Edgar Thurston's studies twenty years later, with a similar evolutionary hierarchy in mind.

In the ethnographical writing of the period, there is a curious mix of the Hindu religious texts passing as history, and Darwin's scientific terminology. The reinforcing of the arguments from the Vedas with evidence from Darwin was an ingenious way of reading of Indian history by the British anthropologists. Some particularly daring samples are quoted here:

> "Speaking generally of the aborigines of India, we have sacred traditional accounts which represent them to have been savages allied to the apes. ...In the existing aborigines we find here and there marked peculiarities which point to a possible descent from some lower type of animal existence - the frequently recurring earpoint of Darwin, peculiar to certain apes, the opposable toe, characteristic of the same animal; the long stiff hair of bipeds or quadrupeds in unusual parts of the body; the keen sight, hearing and smell of some of the lower animals, coupled with mental qualities and habits...which can hardly be called human".
>
> Further, "A comparison of the accounts that are given of (dasyus) in the Vedas with the Indian aborigines of today shows conclusively that some of them must have been possessed of a very low bodily and mental organisation — indeed, that they were a more debased type of beings than what is now called mankind.

> "The Aryans called them Dasyus, or enemies....in fact, their description is almost identical with that of some of the Andaman Islanders of the present day. They called them eaters of raw flesh, without gods, without faith, lawless, cowardly, perfidious and dishonest...The Brahmins described the Dasyus or aborigines as Bushmen or monkeys...in Ramayana, the monkey general Hanuman...plays a prominent part." Hunter's classification of the 'non Aryans' into potential criminals was something Thurston borrowed later. The aboriginal races of the plains, according to him, had "supplied the hereditary criminal classes, alike under the Hindus, Mohammedans and the British. The non-aryan hill races also appeared from vedic times downwards as marauders".

There is a subtle shuttling between the past and the present by this writer, and the two merge imperceptibly fairly quickly: the aborigines of today are aborigines of yesterday; there seems to have been no evolution in this case. In fact, these who exist today have some of the characteristics of apes that Darwin described — not only the Brahmin would describe them as monkeys, Darwin would call them apes. Here it is interesting to find the convergence of the existing Andaman Islanders into monkey/ape/aborigine of yesterday at one level, and views of Aryans of yesterday (Brahmins)/Aryans of today (British) and Darwin on the other. It appeared that there had been identical reading of this section of the population all along from the time of the vedas upto Darwin. In other words, the theory of evolutionism was put to quite creative use by the British ethnographer/ administrator in that he completely brahminised a Darwinian concept!

In this framework for analysis of the aborigines of the late 19th century, the scientific component was an important link of the past to the present. The vedas helped to justify conquest of the aborigines in an earlier era, and Darwin was used to support their subsequent subjugation through the concept of the 'survival of the fittest'. This mode of analysis was given a coherent form for the first time by Hunter. He, through the indirect agency of Darwin, identified the convergence of the concepts of the Brahmin of the vedas and those of the British coloniser: both found the aborigines akin to either the Dasyu (enemy) or Dasa (slave).

Invocation of Darwin in description of an evolving section of mankind, thus invites the reader to consider the natural trajectory of the aborigines in general: like the Aryans did, they ought to be 'conquered' first. The British felt an affinity with the Aryan as both had a superior God, and a superior civilisation which could be rightfully imposed on the Godless inferior race of aborigines. Hunter could be writing of British imperialism in eulogistic terms when he wrote with admiration that "The stout Aryan spread...(They) had a great trust in themselves and their gods. Like other conquering races, they believed that both themselves and their deities were altogether superior to the people of the land and their poor, rude objects of worship. Indeed, this noble confidence is a great aid to the success of a nation.

The 'history' of the apish aborigines was, then, gleaned from the vedas and merged into the future that Darwin promised: they shall evolve into mankind at some point, albeit with help from the evolved.

There was a sound historical reason for the British regarding aborigines as Dasyus. Through the 19th century, expansionist desires now extended from the plains to the hills, as also need for land for plantations pressed on the administration. The hill tribes increasingly came to be seen as a political and administrative problem as they resisted the encroachment on their land by the planters, or recruitment as plantation workers, or interference by missionaries with their social institutions. There was trouble with the Nagas in 1878, the Santals in 1855 for several years. Earlier, in 1835, on the moral grounds of suppressing the custom of human sacrifice practised by the Kondhs, the

British army burned down their villages and had to remain deployed for long periods to check further resistance. A regular pacification programme to deal with the tribes had been launched by the British, and this made them see a parallel between their own situation and that faced by the Aryans centuries ago. Through these devices, the British hoped that incorrigible Dasyus could successfully be turned into the Dasa mould, either as workers or soldiers in British armies.

18.9 SUMMARY

Racism, then, is an ideological force which in conjunction with economic and political relations of domination locates certain populations in specific social/class positions and therefore structures the social relations in a particular ideological manner. As we did a historical survey of general ideas on race, it emerged that the word 'race' is used in a different way in different societies, and at different historical junctures. It is in this context important to remember that whatever the changing terms of language used to talk about race and ethnicity in the present day environment, we have in practice seen growing evidence of forms of racial and ethnic conflict in many parts of the globe.

The idea of race and racism today is alive and well in its myriad monstrous forms.

18.10 EXERCISES

1) What is the relationship between colonial domination and the idea of race?

2) Discuss the ways in which the sciences helped to promote the notion of racial difference.

3) How did the idea of race originate in India?

4) What is the role played by the discipline of anthropology in promoting racial theories?

18.11 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 17 GENDER IN HISTORY

Structure

17.1 Introduction

17.2 History as the Narrative of Power

17.3 Absence of Women in Modern Historiography

17.4 Women's Movement and Gender Sensitive History

17.5 Features of Feminist Historiography

17.6 Summary

17.7 Exercises

17.8 Suggested Readings

17.1 INTRODUCTION

Women have a dual relationship with history in India as they are simultaneously present and absent in the historical accounts that have come down to us. The women are invisible especially from a feminist standpoint, and they are relatively visible from the point of view of the concerns of nationalist history, especially in the context of ancient India. Thus the task of the feminist historian today is doubly difficult. Unlike many other parts of the world where women have had to be inserted into history, here history has, in a sense, to be 're'written. Further, rewriting history from a woman inclusive standpoint requires historians to not only explore (and re-explore) sources and social processes, uncover evidence (which has been ignored or marginalised because of existing biases) and thereafter insert issues of gender into new historical writing, such writing has also to uncover the many histories of suppression, resulting in history having become a flattened, and one-dimensional account of a few men. Historians writing in the last twenty years or so in India have therefore necessarily had to shift the focus onto the neglected segments of our society, thereby broadening its ambit. Under this new focus, a gender sensitive history is now beginning to be possible, although we need to note that this new field was not an automatic consequence of a shift of focus but the conscious product of feminist interventions. What also needs to be noted is that among the first tasks to be addressed by feminist scholars, even before launching into the writing of a new kind of history was the attention that had to be paid to analysing what had gone before: a feminist historiography has therefore preceded a feminist rewriting of the past. And finally, when the new feminist history began to be written it had to go beyond the concerns of colonialists and nationalists to explore the structures and ideologies that have contributed to the particularities of south Asian patriarchies.

17.2 HISTORY AS THE NARRATIVE OF POWER

Despite the surfacing of new concerns and a new will amongst a section of historians, there are many inherent problems in writing a history that is genuinely inclusive of women. The sources of history, here as elsewhere, reflect the concerns of those who have wielded power. It is sometimes argued, with justification, that the notion of time, and therefore of history, in the dominant Indian tradition, which may also be called the Brahmanical tradition, has been cyclical and not linear, making for a crucial difference in the understanding of history. One implication of this view is that the contemporary discipline of history in India is a derivative of the western, linear, tradition and violates the spirit of the 'authentic' Indian tradition. The further implication is that, therefore, it

cannot be subjected to certain kinds of scrutiny. What is ignored in this argument is that the cyclical notion of history is as much the product of those who have wielded power as the linear view of history is. It might be useful to note that unlike archaeological evidence, which may be loosely described as the 'garbage' of history, as the incidental remnants of material culture, and therefore not associated with the conscious decision to leave something to posterity, written records are self conscious products and are closely tied to those who have exercised power. The *Rajatarangini*, the *Harshacharita* or the *Itihasa* portions of the *Puranas* are unambiguous narratives of power even if they may reflect a cyclical view of history.

It might also be argued that these sources constitute only a small fraction of the sources we have for ancient India and the bulk of the sources are not conventional historical sources at all but a variegated collection of myths, religious texts, and other types of literary productions. Nevertheless the textual sources that have come down to us, even when they are 'religious', 'cultural', 'social', or concerned with the political economy, are products of a knowledge system which was highly monopolistic and hierarchical and thus narrowly concentrated in the hands of a few men — a group that was even narrower here than elsewhere.

In this context it might be useful to explore the manner in which scholars have tried to break out of the limited concerns imposed by the 'recorders' of history who have, in a sense, refracted history for us. In contemporary times it is possible to use oral history as a way of countering the biases of 'official' history. But the relationship of orality to textuality is very complex in the case of our early history. In a sense, all 'texts' were orally transmitted and then 'written' up much later. Though these texts only ultimately became prescriptive, or were regarded as sacred, they were treated as authoritative and therefore worthy of formal handing down in the traditional way which was oral precisely because it could be carefully controlled. 'Oral' texts are not in and of themselves counter hegemonic. Further, certain oral traditions which had been brought into the ideological field of the religious literati but nevertheless circulated largely among the humbler folk, and were therefore more widely shared as they were narrated to a heterogeneous audience, such as the *Jatakas* or the *Panchatantra*, though significant in terms of yielding a different kind of evidence on women and the lower orders, are not necessarily the compositions of such sections, at least in the versions that have come down to us. The *Jatakas* for example, comprise a rich repertoire of narratives and often describe the experiences of ordinary women and men with great poignancy; they are, nevertheless, firmly located within a Buddhist world-view. As they stand, the *Jatakas* are the product of mediations between high culture and `low' culture; framed by the *bhikkhus* (the Buddhist monks) these narratives cannot be termed 'folk'. While they are an alternative to the Brahmanical texts they cannot be regarded as the dichotomised 'other' of elite texts. Similarly, the *Therigatha*, verses or songs of the *bhikkhunis* (the Buddhist nuns), a work that is probably one of the earliest compilations of women's poetry anywhere in the world, while very definitely the compositions of women, have not escaped the editorial hand of the Buddhist monastic compilers. These factors have complicated the use of oral sources and the writing of a gender sensitive history from below. There are further problems because of the difficulties of dating oral texts, which therefore cannot easily be collated with other evidence available for specific periods; while we gain from the point of view of the richness of the data we lose from the point of view of specificity of time and region. Nevertheless, despite the many problems inherent in the sources the newer generation of historians, writing from a 'history from below' standpoint including feminists, have begun to use these sources creatively. Using strategies such as reading against the grain and between the lines, especially in the case of prescriptive texts, or looking at the way myths and narratives change in a diachronic context they are raising new questions and bringing in fresh insights. We will further discuss these issues in later sections.

17.3 ABSENCE OF WOMEN IN MODERN HISTORIOGRAPHY

It might be useful at this point to examine the factors that led to a shift in the writing of history and thus acted as a catalyst for gender history. In the Indian context nationalist history dominated the scene until the late 1950s. Nationalist history was primarily focussed on political history (kings, conquests, invasions, as in the case of the earlier colonial history; liberal and imaginative administrators, political institutions and so on) and cultural history — mainly a detailing of achievements on the cultural front. Apart from an obsessive concern with locating and outlining idealised images and golden ages, there was almost a conscious steering away from examining internal contradictions, hierarchies along different axes, and oppressive structures. This point may be illustrated by seeing the numerous works of R.K.Mukherji, R.C.Majumdar and K.P.Jayaswal among others. This trend in the writing of Indian history found its most systematic formulation in the Indian History and Culture volumes edited by R.C. Majumdar and published by the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay between 1956 and 1963. This was part of a move to present the imperial government with a united front but also a product of middle class myopia obsessed with a single axis of deprivation, between the colonial power and the nation's *bhadralok* in relation to them. Tilak, the militant nationalist, for example, argued that the distinctions between labourers and masters was false; all Indians were labourers or rather *shudras* and slaves, and the British were the only masters

Meanwhile, going back to the late colonial period, social history made its appearance. Here as elsewhere, in the early stages, social history was a kind of residual history with politics and economics left out. Some of the issues explored under this rubric were the history of social reform, and religious and revivalist movements, mostly within the framework of biographical narratives of the men spearheading the movements. Finally in the decades after independence and under the influence of Marxist approaches, social history became the history of social formations. D.D. Kosambi pioneered this field with two brilliant and wide-ranging books and a series of imaginative papers published from the mid fifties onwards. His formulations were the basis for detailed analyses on various epochs of Indian history and the relationship between modes of production and other political and social institutions. By the late 1970s and 1980s there were raging debates on whether or not there was feudalism in India, and while the issues thrown up in the course of this debate were important, there was absolutely nothing on what happened to women in the feudal mode of production, or where they figured in the new relations of production. The underlying presumption was that history for women was the same as history for men. No attempt was made to move into the field of the modes of social reproduction while continuing to explore modes of production where class and gender could be combined making for a connection between gender structures, ideologies, and social and economic power structures. Similarly, although there was a welcome shift towards exploring the history of the lower orders, such as the *dasa-karmakaras*, *shudras*, and *chandalas*, bringing in issues of caste and class and unequal power relations, this did not include an examination of unequal gender relations. In any case a shortcoming, in my view, of the history of social formations is that human beings as individuals, whether men or women, and their experience of different social processes, seemed to be missing from it. Since it centred on modes of production the primary issues that were explored were the ways in which surplus was extracted, the particular forms of labour exploitation, and the role of technology in transforming relations of production, human experiences, mentalities, and emotions tended to be left unexplored. In some ways then, such a history was as distant as the earlier dynastic or administrative histories had been. This lacuna has to some extent been rectified by new trends in history writing under the label of 'subaltern' studies but these scholars too have neglected women as a category. While

they brought into the frame of history the lives and struggles of ordinary people such as peasants and tribals, they too focussed on peasant *men* and tribal *men* without even being conscious that there could be subalterns within subalterns. Their writing was as male centred as earlier nationalist or Marxist history had been. It is ironical that even as a certain space was opening up for a history of the 'powerless' the most powerless among the powerless remained outside the framework of new historical trends.

17.4 WOMEN'S MOVEMENT AND GENDER SENSITIVE HISTORY

How then did the shift occur in terms of the writing of women's history? We may attribute this to the women's movement of the 1970s which provided the context and the impetus for the emergence of women's studies in India. As Tanika Sarkar has recently pointed out, women's history as a sustained and self-conscious tradition developed from the 1970s since many feminist scholars were themselves involved in the vigorous and turbulent movements against rape, dowry and domestic violence. It was here that the contours of the multiple forms and structures of patriarchies, and the cultural practices associated with them began to be outlined through the experiences of women on the ground. These years, during the heyday of an explicitly political women's movement, and the insights derived therein, provided feminist scholars with the experiential material on the basis of which they formulated gender as a category of analysis. (The recent phenomena of mainstream scholars cashing in on the space created for women's history, without addressing the existence of patriarchies in their writing, is an explicitly anti-political and deflective agenda, marking a sharp break from *feminist* scholarship.) And since the 70s also witnessed other political movements of peasants, workers, and tribals turning our attention onto the marginalised and the oppressive conditions under which they lived and struggled, historians were *forced* to broaden the ambit of history; the content of history has thus been dramatically democratised and we are now happily moving in a direction which is making history the most dynamic discipline in the social sciences. But it is important to recognise that historians, and only some of them at that, respond to grass-roots assertions: they do not lead the new trends but merely follow the agendas set by our people, which is why a gender sensitive history had to wait for the women's movement and was not an automatic or logical trend following from Marxist history or subaltern history.

17.5 FEATURES OF FEMINIST HISTORIOGRAPHY

In a moment such as this, it is apt that a review of the main trends in women's history is undertaken. Beginning with tentative formulations and simple re-readings it is by now fairly evident that despite a weak institutional base women's history has taken off. During the last decade some very fine work has appeared in the field of women's history forcing mainstream historians to recognise and sometimes even cash in on the 'market' created by feminist scholarship. Among the first major moves made by feminist scholars was that of dismantling the dominant nationalist narrative of the glory of Hindu womanhood during the ancient past, specifically during the Vedic period. By breaking up the Hindu / Vedic woman into the 'Aryan' and the *dasi* woman attention was drawn to the differing histories of women according to respective social locations. This corrective was important because while it was necessary to insert gender as an axis of stratification it was equally necessary, perhaps more so, to outline the stratification that existed *within* women. The suppressions entailed in the homogenised product of the nationalists, the 'Hindu'/ Vedic or 'Aryan' woman, became evident. At the same time the need to outline the distinctive social histories of women was highlighted. Thus while the major tendency during these early years was to write a complementary, or supplementary, history of women, to accompany the narratives of mainstream history, by plotting the history of women in different arenas and in different

types of struggles the distinctive experiences of women in the context of class was built into the analysis of gender.

A second feature of the thrust in writing women's history was the painstaking uncovering and compiling of an archive of women's writing. Given the male biases of the sources normally relied upon by mainstream history, and the difficulties experienced by feminist historians in finding alternative sources, the putting together of this archive has been very significant. It has helped to break down the canonisation of certain sources which are no longer invariably regarded as more reliable but, more correctly, as having achieved authoritative status through their closeness to power. A parallel and no less significant development has been the appearance of some extremely rich and sensitive readings of women's writing.

An overview of women's history and the insights derived from the new writing lead directly to the recognition that gender as a tool of analysis has been very unevenly used to explore the three conventional chronological phases of ancient, medieval and modern India. The bulk of the new writing is being done for colonial and post-colonial India and there is very little of such writing for ancient and even less for medieval India. This is in part due to the need for a knowledge of the classical languages in which the sources are available for these phases but it is also partly attributable to the dominant contemporary theoretical concerns which are focussed solely on colonial and post colonial Indian society. In practice this has also meant the abandonment of these phases to the continuing domination of the Indological framework which is locked into a high classical and consensus approach, unwilling to recognise that there could be other histories.

However, there have been pioneering works heralding a breakthrough in more ways than one. A recent study by Kumkum Roy on the emergence of monarchy in early India is significant because it uses precisely those sources that the Indologists have always relied upon, the Brahmanical texts relevant for the period, but opened them up to a totally different line of inquiry. The study also links the inter-relatedness of the different axes of stratification to outline the processes by which hierarchies were established and legitimised through the use of Brahmanical rituals. Once the structure was in place the king was regarded as the legitimate controller of the productive and reproductive resources of the kingdom. At the same time the *yajamana*, on whose behalf rituals were performed, came to be regarded as the controller of the productive and reproductive resources of the household. The most significant aspect of Roy's work is that it breaks down the false, but perhaps for the moment operationally necessary, divide between gender history and mainstream history. It demonstrates how our understanding of the past is expanded and enriched when gender is included as a category of analysis.

Other issues that have been probed at the conceptual level include the relationship between caste, class, patriarchy and the state, and the dynamics of the household in early India. Apart from these studies which are attempts at exploring women's histories at the level of the relationship of gender to other institutions there are studies of the changing versions of myths and other narratives, prostitution, motherhood, labouring women, property relations, women as gift givers, and women as rulers. These accounts have helped to gradually build up a base for further conceptualisations and to break the hold of the Altekarian paradigm, which has dominated the field of women's history in the case of 'ancient' India. A major lacunae that continues to restrict our understanding is the way in which gender shapes, and is in turn shaped by, other structures within a given social formation.

While a beginning has been made from the point of view of using a gender-based framework in the case of early Indian history there is a singular paucity of works using gender as a category of analysis in medieval Indian history. Even a women's history

which complements or supplements mainstream history is far from being systematically written. Perhaps this is because there has been a slow response to engage with gender as a category of analysis from scholars with a mastery over Persian in a situation where Persian sources continue to dominate the field of medieval Indian history. A slow beginning has been made recently but the works tend to be episodic rather than conceptual. The most sustained output is coming from south Asia specialists from American academies but these are usually narrowly empirical and steer clear of making broader analytical points. The lack of a strong gender based standpoint is unfortunate because it is not as if the sources for medieval India are peculiarly disadvantaged; in fact the situation is quite the reverse. It is just that the sources have never been systematically explored from the point of view of gender. Kumkum Sangari's finely nuanced and elaborately analysed study of Bhakti poetry and within that of Mira's location is an example of historicising literature, and indivduals during the medieval period. Sangari's analysis of the family, kinship and the state is a pointer to the direction that a gender sensitive history could fruitfully take. Happily, studies are now underway on a range of themes such the genderedness of language, landownership, inheritance, the politics of the royal household, women against women in polygamous households, and the changing narratives that produced the model of the virtuous and chaste *virangana*. Perhaps these studies and others can be linked together, and others can be undertaken, leading to broader understanding of gender relations in medieval India.

An important lacuna in the gender history of both ancient and medieval India is the absence of region-based studies. With the exception of a few explorations of Tamil literature and inscriptions of early and medieval south India we have very little by which we can make connections between the social formations of different regions and the ways in which these would have shaped gender relations in their respective regions.

More wide-ranging explorations have been possible in the field of women's history during the colonial and post-colonial period. More accessible from the point of view of the languages in which the sources are available, these sources are also better preserved. Consequently, feminist scholars have been able to not only insert women into history but also examine the relationship between various social and economic processes and gender. They have also been able to explore certain themes in some depth and have made a dent in historical debates about nationalism, class formation and the operations of caste.

Among the more rigorous areas of research in women's history during this period has been the analysis of the way in which new colonial structures especially in the field of law shaped the lives of women. An impressive body of writing has examined the working of specific laws such as the Widow Remarriage Act, the impetus and the forces behind the creation and codification of laws, the contradictions between the applications of different sets of legal systems such as customary law and statutory law, statutory law and 'personal' law, and the general move towards homogenising the diversity of social customs and cultural practices. One of the most exhaustive and significant studies by Bina Agrawal has focussed on the way law shapes gender relations by denying women access to productive resources in the form of land. She has thus provided us with an understanding of the political economy of the vulnerarability of women. While some of these studies have been empirical others have examined the historical context, class dynamics and the relationship of law to colonialist and nationalist ideologies at given moments. These studies have also been able reveal the possibilities and limitations of a colonialist (and nationalist) hegemonic agendas.

The issue of women's education has been the subject of numerous writings. Initially scholars tended to plot the different stages by which opportunities for women's education were created and expanded in the context of the movement for social reform, taking for granted

its 'positive', liberatory and transformative potential. Men's spearheading of the campaign for women's education then appeared to be genuinely 'liberal'; perhaps it was paternalistic but it was presumed that it was a means by which women would be emancipated from an earlier deprivation. These studies have now been taken much further to examine the crucial role of education, or rather 'schooling', in the agendas of new patriarchies and the relationship of schooling for women to processes of class formation. Men's stake in women's education and power over them, women's agency and resistance in a conflict-ridden household in the process of many kinds of transition have also been outlined. Some of these analyses have been made possible through a close examination of women's writing. As women were drawn into literacy and education, mostly at the instance of their menfolk (to make them companionate wives and fitting mothers), but sometimes against their approval, they took to writing. Letters, memoirs, essays, biographies, poetry, stories, travelogues, and, on occasion, social critiques of patriarchy appeared by the end of the 19th century and continued into the 20th century. Feminist scholarship on this alternative archive has been significant in fine tuning our understanding of social reform, but also in revealing to us what was suppressed in the accounts of mainstream history. It is to be expected that the social critiques written by 19th century women would be regarded as significant markers in the history of women's resistance to the ideologies and practices of male domination; women like Pandita Ramabai and Tarabai Shinde have thus become known in the world of feminist scholarship. What is important is that through a sensitive reading of a seemingly conformist piece of writing, by Rashsundari Devi, too one can uncover an oblique but moving critique of upper caste cultural practices.

The history of labouring women too has been sought to be included in the rewriting of history. Accounts of their participation in agrarian struggles, issues that were raised and others that were suppressed and the perception of the women of those 'magic' days, as some of them put it, have been important not only to balance out the accounts of 'peasant' struggles but also in exploring the complicated relationship between issues of class and gender, and the strategies of left wing groups in highlighting class oppression and suppressing gender oppression. Feminist scholars discovered that in their recuperation of earlier histories of women's political activism, questions of sexual politics and its complicated relations with broader struggles were of central, absorbing importance: struggles that needed women, mobilised them, conferred a political and public identity upon them, and yet subtly contained them and displaced their work for their own rights.

Women's place in the organised labour force especially in the textile and jute industries have been the subject of monographs, and currently there are a number of studies underway on women in the unorganised sector, especially in the context of globalisation and the structural adjustment programme. These studies, being the first of their kind, have however retained a largely empirical approach. Perhaps with more studies documenting the daily lives of labouring women we might be able to write an account of the making of the working class from a woman centred point of view. However, history is changing so rapidly in the new era of globalisation that the working class may be transformed beyond recognition even before we can write their history!

Among the more significant researches in writing an account of women's labour within an historical frame is the issue of domestic labour. This has been a central issue in feminism resulting in a considerable body of scholarship, in the west as well as the third world. Its relationship to capitalism has been repeatedly stressed in western feminist scholarship. In India studies have analysed domestic labour in its relationship to caste, class, widowhood, hierarchies within the household, and the capacity of households to buy domestic services. At the conceptual level, the relationship of domestic labour to

the labour market and the proliferation of the sexual division of labour in waged work, even as it might appear to be outside the realm of market, has also been highlighted. The fact that 'domestic labour exists within a system of non-dissoluble, non-contractual marriage permeated by ideologies of service and nurture has meant that domestic labour and domestic ideologies not only co-exist but are also jointly reproduced even in a rapidly changing economic and social system' has also been pointed out by Sangari.

Earlier on in this paper it has been suggested that feminist scholarship has had to be innovative in its use of sources as well as in their reading of them. One of the recent works that has been extremely successful in such an approach has used a range of sources including conventional sources such as statistics and government reports, but has balanced these off by folk literature, proverbs and fieldwork to locate women's perception of their own lives. The framework of the political economy of gender used by Prem Chowdhry has yielded an important study of the everyday experiences of labouring women of a peasant caste over a hundred year period.

The use of oral history by feminist historians to explicitly critique the inadequacies and biases of official and mainstream/malestream and elitist histories has been extremely significant in the field of partition history. Here women have been the pioneers in writing an alternative history written from the point of view of the marginalised: women, children, and *dalits*. They have raised crucial questions about the ideologies of the state in the context of notions of community, and honour in the recovery and rehabilitation of 'abducted' women and the doubled dimensions of violence experienced by women first at the hands of men, and then at the hands of a patriarchal state which denied women agency as it sought to align boundaries with communities. It is significant that feminist scholarship has provided a systematic critique of nationalism at the very moment of the birth of a new nation. Far from a recognition of their pioneering work even their critique of nationalism and of the post-colonial Indian state is yet to be taken seriously by mainstream historians. This is perhaps an outcome of the territoriality of mainstream/malestream historians entrenched in the academy, with personal stakes in retaining their hold on historical writing. Further, in my view, these are part of an agenda of once more marginalising, or even erasing, women's pioneering of a new field, thereby claiming both originality and monopoly over theory. Given the backlash against feminist scholars in terms of appointments to Universities at the highest level, currently underway, the political dimensions of such marginalisations need to be seriously noted.

The issue of women's agency is part of a larger set of issues in feminist scholarship and it is at the moment often being simplified. The desire to write a different kind of history has led feminist scholars to explore the histories of resistance by women, individually and collectively, and also their use of strategies such as subversion and manipulation of men's power over women. While it is important to document acts of resistance, subversion and manipulation, it is somewhat simplistic to celebrate all instances of 'subversion' and 'manipulation'; these may certainly be examples of women's agency but particular instances of subversion such as the strategies used by the tawaifs of Lucknow cannot be regarded as subversive as they work within, and therefore reinforce, patriarchal ideologies. It is useful to bear in mind the political consequences of actions as well as of theoretical formulations especially in the context of feminist writing in India, which owes its originary impulse to a political agenda, as pointed out earlier. Recent writings have tried to provide a perspective for exploring women's agency. The dialectical relationship between structure and agency requires examining and it may be useful to look at structure and agency as processes that pre-suppose each other: there is also a need to bear in mind that social systems set limits and put pressures upon human action. Agency does not exist within a vacuum as women have come to understand.

17.6 SUMMARY

The preceding sections of this paper have tried to outline some of the issues in writing history from a gender sensitive standpoint and mark some of the major conceptual advances within the field of women's history. There are huge areas that still need to be explored such as the histories of *dalit* women and many issues are under theorised, an example being the relationship between caste and gender. There is an urgent need for a rigorous outlining of the structures in which women's oppression is located. In this context I consider it important for feminist scholars to be wide-ranging in their research and not restrict themselves to theoretical approaches that may dominate academies in particular locations. I would even argue that it is necessary for feminist scholars to resist the tendency to take over their agendas by currently fashionable theories such as post-modernism. Its use in the Indian context has tended to valorise pre-colonial society, as well as the 'community' and the 'family' as pre-modern indigenous institutions which have remained outside the realm of colonial power and are therefore 'authentic'. It may be noted that we have a long tradition of examining the community and family in women's scholarship. The direction of these early works has been overtaken by works that are restricted to the modern pre-modern paradigm. The new focus is also almost entirely on culture. Scholars using the post-modernist framework appear to be antagonistic to any project that is engaged in locating the structures that are the sources of the oppression of women. Perhaps the focus on 'women's culture' enables some of these scholars to highlight the happy spaces for women in the family and obliterate everything else. But for those who experience, or are sensitive to the workings of multiple forms of patriarchies it is crucial to understand social and economic processes and the hierarchical institutions that have put systems of oppression into place. For feminist scholars an unqualified or uncontextualised concentration on culture as an autonomous realm, or discussions of agency without a look at its relationship to structure, will be disastrous. It will push us back, not take us forward in theorising patriarchies and the complex ways in which they work in India.

17.7 EXERCISES

1) Discuss the various features of feminist historiography.

2) What is the relationship between women's movement and gender-sensitive history?

3) Why have women been generally absent in the traditional historiography?

17.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 18 RACE IN HISTORY

Structure

18.1 Introduction

18.2 Race as Political and Social Construct

18.3 Race and Science

18.3.1 Concept of Evolution within Racial Science

18.3.2 Eugenics and Racial Science

18.4 Race in Relation to Colonialism

18.5 Race and the Discipline of Anthropology

18.6 Racial 'Research' and the Politics of Domination

18.7 Popularising Racial Concepts

18.8 India and the Idea of Race

18.9 Summary

18.10 Exercises

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18.1 INTRODUCTION

One of the depressing predictions about the twentieth century was made by the black American scholar W.E.B. Du Bois back in 1903 when he asserted that 'the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colour line – the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and in the islands of the sea'. It is perhaps with these words in mind that another black scholar Stuart Hall, this time British, asserted a few years ago that 'the capacity to live with difference is, in my view, the coming question of the twenty first century'.

The abolition movement against slavery of the 18th and early 19th centuries had provided a context for the emergent science of human races in the twentieth century. It is important to remember here that while for scholars of Du Bois's generation the 'colour line' was an everyday reality based on institutional patterns of *racial domination*, in recent times questions about race and racism have been refashioned in ways that emphasise *cultural difference*. The shifts in conceptual language that have become evident in the past three decades are symptomatic of wider debates about the analytical status of race and racism, as well as related shifts in political and policy agendas.

18.1 RACE AS POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CONSTRUCT

Serious study of race and race relations as important social issues can be traced back to the early part of the twentieth century. The expansion of research and scholarship in this area, however, happened around the 1960s, in the aftermath of the social transformations around questions of race that took place during that decade. This was a time when social reforms implemented in the aftermath of the civil rights movement, urban unrest, and the development of black power ideas and forms of cultural nationalism. These helped enormously to reshape the politics of race not just in America, but in other parts of the world, as well.

It was also during the 1960s that the 'race relations problematic' as Michael Banton put it, became the dominant approach in this field. Seeing race as a fact which transforms social relations also grappled with ideas on 'ethnicity' and social boundaries between different groups in a given society. The idea of race has been utilised to comprehend processes of migration and settlement as well. They are sometimes posed as a minority, ethnic or an immigrant problem.

John Rex's analytical model in race relations asserts that reading social relations between persons as race relations is encouraged by the existence of certain structural conditions:

1) existence of unfree, indentured or slave labour

2) unusually harsh class exploitation

3) strict legal distinctions between groups and occupational segregation

4) differential access to power

5) migrant labour as an underclass fulfilling stigmatised roles in a metropolitan setting.

In this context, Rex, in studies conducted by him, explored the degree to which immigrant populations shared the class position of their white neighbours and white workers in general. His analysis outlined a class structure in which white workers won certain rights through the working class movement, through the trade unions and the Labour Party. The non-white workers, however, were found to be located outside the process of negotiation that has historically shaped the position of white workers. They experience discrimination in all the areas where the white workers had made significant gains, such as employment, education, and housing. Thus the position of migrant, non-white workers placed them outside the working class in the position of an 'underclass'.

Robert Miles has also looked at the condition of migrant communities, but he has done so within the context of 'real economic relationships'. Thus there is a contradiction between 'on the one hand the need of the capitalist world economy for the mobility of human beings, and on the other, the drawing of territorial boundaries for human mobility.'

His greatest contribution is the proposition that races are created within the context of political and social regulation, and thus race is above all is a 'political' construct.

The first proposition for our purposes is that idea of race is a human construct, an ideology with regulatory power within society. The use of 'race' and race relations, as analytical concepts, disguise the ***social*** construction of difference, presenting it as somehow inherent in the empirical reality of observable or imagined biological difference. Racialised groups are produced as a result of specific social processes, or specific social actions such as the defense of domination, subordination and privilege.

The terrain of anti-racist struggle today is no longer that of social equality but of cultural diversity. Equality has come to be redefined from 'the right to be equal' to mean 'the right to be different'. In the sixties and seventies, the struggle for equal rights meant campaigns against immigration laws or against segregation through which different races were treated differently. Today it means campaigns for separate schools, demands to use different languages, the insistence of maintaining particular cultural practices. The black rights activists have argued that in the past civil rights reforms reinforced the idea that black liberation should be defined by the degree to which black people gained equal access to material opportunities and privileges available to whites – jobs, housing, schooling etc. This strategy could never bring about liberation, because such ideas of equality were based on imitating the life styles, behavior are most importantly, the values and ethics of white colonizers.

To locate the concept of race, racism and racial relations in contemporary times, and be able to comprehend the twentieth century attempts to understand these terms, we will have to go back to the nineteenth century when Charles Darwin provided one of the first important frameworks for this task. His ideas are important as they immediately gave rise to self appointed Social Darwinists, who are largely responsible for both distorting the science component of Darwin's theory and for using it for justification of colonialism and imperialism.

18.3 RACE AND SCIENCE

As Nancy Stepan points out, it was the early travel literature on human groups by explorers which tended to get transformed into scientific texts on race. When it emerged on its own, racial science was 'scavenger science' which fed on whatever materials lay at hand. Such racial science had a national character as well (depending on the influence of religion, for instance.) To a large extent, history of racial sciences is a history of a series of accommodation of the sciences in general to the demands of deeply held convictions about 'naturalness' of the inequalities between human groups.

The racial science of the 1850s was less dependent on bible, more scientific, but also more racist. It drew upon physical types, on racial worth, permanence of racial types and the like. Skull became the arbiter of all things racial in most of 19th century, and early 20th century, because of alleged mental differences which different skull shapes or sizes supposedly indicated.

18.3.1 Concept of Evolution within Racial Science

Darwin was the originator of the evolutionary theory, and his main argument was for continuity between animals and humans, separated by not kind but degree. However, the distance between the technical, industrial, highly civilised Europeans and animals seemed too vast. So Darwin turned to 'lower' races or 'savages' to fill the gap between humans and animals. Later scientists used this argument to form an evolutionary scale of races. Racist science picked this point up and used it to show that racist hierarchy as well as other social hierarchies were real aspects of nature's order. In retrospect, Darwin did not conceive of races in new terms for his arguments on evolution of man, but old terms. In essence, thus, Darwin himself carried out the task of accommodating the new evolutionary science to the old racial science. Evolutionism was also compatible with the idea of fixity and antiquity of races.

However, it should be remembered that as far as a social position on slavery was concerned, Darwin was an abolitionist, not a racist. This ambivalence manifested itself with other thinkers as well. For instance, Prichard shared the racial prejudices of his time, but his ethnocentrisms were also tempered by moral disgust for slavery, his belief in the essential humanity of the African, his Christian faith in the psychic unity of all the peoples of the world.

Evolutionary thought was compatible with the hierarchy of human races, and rather than dislodging old racial ideas actually strengthened them, and provided them with a new scientific vocabulary of struggle and survival ('struggle for existence', 'survival of the fittest', two of the most well known Darwinian tenets).

Darwin applied natural selection to cultural, intellectual and moral development. Natural selection had brought certain races like the European race to the highest point of moral and cultural life. He agreed with Wallace that after the appearance of intelligence, struggle between races became primarily a moral and intellectual one. Morally and intellectually less able of the races were extinguished and the reverse rose to spread themselves

across the globe. It was natural struggle that had produced the "wonderful intellect of the Germanic races". Darwin took up the view that natural selection worked on individual and racial variations to select the fittest races and to raise them up in the scale of civilisation. To Darwin, then, it seemed reasonable to believe that just as natural selection produced Homo Sapiens from animal forbears, so natural selection was the primary agent for producing civilised races out of barbarity.

Incidentally, here it might be mentioned that the development of the field of medicine was seen as a great onslaught on natural selection, as it allowed the biologically unfit to survive and to pass on their unfitness to the next generations. At any rate, development of medicine made natural selection on physical bases redundant, and led to a situation where it was possible to propose natural selection on the basis of morality and intellect of human groups, instead.

The developing disciplines of comparative anatomy and animal biology gave validity to prevailing ideas about the hierarchy of human races. The challenge for an evolutionary anthropologist was to endorse a materialist, evolutionary view of man, based on continuity between man and animals, without relying on hierarchy of human races or retreating to theology. It was Wallace who first insisted on the gulf between animals and humans and was then able to see that human progress is not inevitable, but depended on favourable social and political conditions. He put forward the radical, original theory that the immense variety of racial civilizations were because of different experiences and history, not biological differences between different groups of people.

Darwin's ideas took root all over the world in some form or the other. The widely prevalent mid 19th century belief on the part of leading figures like Vogt in England and Topinard in France was also that racial traits emerged by selection in struggle for life. They further proposed that with time, traits became fixed by heredity, and became permanent. Thus the false idea of the fixity and unchangeability of races became a widespread belief. Even though no individual could be found who was not a mixture, faith in the 'type' remained. More and more precise instruments were invented to measure the differences between the 'types'. It was forgotten that essentially, the human species being a migratory and conquering species is bound to be a mixed one, and hence has to be a constantly changing one.

In spite of Wallace's important intervention, races came increasingly to be seen as natural, but static chains of excellence, formed on the basis of nervous organisation, skull shape or brain size. Colour was a traditional and convenient criterion of race, not the least because it did not require the permission of the individual for it to be assessed by the anthropologist, which head measurement, for instance, did! The smallness of differences separating the presumed types (as far as the head size or shape of the nose were concerned) led to the use of more and more precise instruments, and to the subdivision of types. The results were never in doubt, and a vigorous analysis of the racial types which made up a family always followed after varied results in terms of the shape of the head were found, for instance, and it was assumed that different racial types had got mixed, instead of doubting the veracity of the measurements themselves.

The science which involved measuring human measurements was called Anthropometry, though it never did rise above ideological considerations to prove a hierarchy of races, and hence became a pseudoscience for all practical purposes.

18.3.2 Eugenics and Racial Science

In order to be a purposeful discipline, science was expected to play a role in planning and managing human existence and human affairs, including cohabitation. The word eugenics

itself was introduced into science for the first time in 1883 by Charles Darwin's cousin, Francis Galton. He defined eugenics as the 'study of agencies under social control that may improve or impair the racial qualities of future generations either physically or mentally'.

In its essence, eugenics was a science and a social programme of racial improvement through selective breeding of the human species. Though slow to win approval in Britain, by the first years of the twentieth century, eugenics had established itself institutionally in England. By the 1920s, it had grown into a worldwide movement, with active eugenic or 'race hygiene' societies in Russia, Germany, Japan and the United States.

The initial German nazi plan was to improve the racial stock – weed out the mentally deficient, hereditary criminal, hereditary unfit. A new age of racial thinking, however, had come into being that was to last until the 1930s, when the horrors of compulsory sterilization and the mass murder of the Jews and Gypsies in Nazi Germany (at least partly in the name of eugenical science) caused worldwide revulsion.

Eugenics in Nazi Germany was uniquely barbaric. It is worth mentioning here that not just in Germany but all over the world, adherents to this repugnant social programme were drawn mainly form the progressive middle class: doctors, psychologists, biologists and social reformers, and *not* politicians or businessmen. In its heyday, eugenics succeeded in drawing into its fold directly or indirectly a surprising number of the leading scientists of the day, and provided one more channel for the transmission of the racialist tradition. For the student of race science and racism, eugenics is important because it linked race with hereditarianism, and the new science of genetics.

Socially and politically, several factors favoured eugenics by the beginning of the twentieth century. The social optimism of the mid nineteenth century had given way by the end of the century to a pessimism which Galton's eugenics perfectly expressed. The 1880s had been a particularly hard period, with economic depression, unemployment, strikes, and growing political radicalism. It was clear from political events and sociological studies that poverty, alcoholism and ill health had not disappeared in Britain, despite what seemed to many to be decades of social legislation. The early military setbacks of the British in the Boer War in South Africa in 1899-1900 raised the spectre of a physically degenerating British people, and increased concern that the imperial mission of Britain would be harmed unless the population could be unified and made fitter. Most importantly, the declining birth rate, and especially the differential in the birth rate between the middle class and the working class, raised the possibility in some people's minds that Britain was about to be swamped by the biologically 'less fit'.

Eugenics rested on the belief that the differences in mental, moral and physical traits between individuals and races were hereditary. Such a belief had of course been implicit in race biology since the early nineteenth century. What gave eugenics its force in the modern period was its association with Darwinian evolution. Eugenics thus obtained its scientific credential from the new science of heredity. It obtained its support and its notoriety as a social and political movement from the many new and often explosive subjects it introduced into the biological and social debate, such as the biological roots of 'degeneracy' in human society, or the sterilization of the 'unfit'. At a time of heightened nationalism, imperialistic competition, and social Darwinism, such ideas for a while proved dangerously attractive to those looking for social change.

Under the banner of eugenics, the science of human heredity received a clear programme – the goal was to explore the hereditary nature of traits in human populations that seemed desirable or undesirable, and to establish their variability in individuals or classes

of individuals, or 'races'. Mental ability, moral character, insanity, criminality and general physical degeneracy, were all studied diligently. On the social and political side, the task of the eugenists was to publicise the findings of science, to discuss schemes to encourage the fit, and to discourage the unfit, to breed, and to air generally the social and political significance of such a programme.

Eugenics was seen to be not merely a power that humans now had over future generations; it was seen to be a quasi-religious obligation because in the conditions of modern civilization, the biologically sick and unfit were not eliminated by natural selection but allowed to live and to breed. Man had, in consequence, to weed out where nature did not any more. The Eugenists' first legislative success occurred in 1913, when the Houses of Parliament passed the Mental Deficiency Bill, which the Eugenics Education Society had urged as a means of segregating mentally backward individuals from the rest of society so as to prevent their breeding.

Recent studies of eugenics in Britain have identified it primarily as 'class' rather than a 'race' phenomenon. The chief preoccupation of the eugenists was with the biological fitness of the working class. Most eugenists assumed that social class was a function of hereditary worth, and the social policies they contemplated were often directed against the 'unfit' lower classes, especially the social residuum or social problem group – the permanent alcoholics, paupers and persistent criminal offenders.

18.4 RACE IN RELATION TO COLONIALISM

Once human behaviour was seen as an outcome of structure of the mind fixed by heredity, it was not difficult to stretch it and see human groups differently endowed and so destined for different roles in the history of human society. The hierarchy of races was believed to correspond to and indeed to be the cause of what most people took to be the natural scale of human achievement. The general public agreed because it coincided with the Europeans' image of themselves in the world.

Around the mid-nineteenth century, in fact, there existed a number of schools of thought, occupying themselves with the fundamental question of proving the inherent superiority of one people over another. A possible reason for their coming into existence was search for some popular explanation to account for the fact of imperialism, and to rationalise it in the public mind.

The aptitude of a race to colonise and the tendency of another to be colonised was already reflected in a number of earlier philosophical thinkers' categories, devised mostly on racial lines. Gustav Klemm and A. Wuttke had designated the so-called civilised races as active, and all others as passive in 1843. Carus divided mankind into "peoples of the day, night and dawn" in 1849, depending on their place in the scale of civilisation, and implicitly marking out the ones who needed help to be pulled out of the continuing 'night'. Nott and Gliddon ascribed animal instincts only to the 'lower' races, and it was deduced from this by their supporters that conquest by the civilised races would slowly cure such instincts of the conquered. In all these categories, however, the supposed racial attributes, which made one race the perpetual conqueror and another doomed to conquest forever, had not been linked to any identifiable cause as yet.

Writings of the 1850s became more specific and pointed in their search. Why were a people 'active' (progressing, colonising) or 'passive' (stagnating, conquered)? Why would some *inevitably* belong to the day, others to the night? The first identifiable reasoning was in terms of alleged superior mental capacity of a people as compared to another: one would then naturally rule over another. These mental characteristics, moreover, seemed to clearly stem from some *fixed* attribute, which must be pinned down.

Climate was a part of the unchanging environment surrounding any given set of people, and provided, in a number of creative ways, a ready explanation for the lower races' possession of lower mental faculties. A.H.Keane, one of the vice presidents of the Anthropological Institute at Cambridge proposed that in excessively hot and moist intertropical regions, in the struggle for survival by the inhabitants, the animal side of a human being is improved at the expense of the mental side. (It was, predictably, the opposite in the temperate zones where the white population lived).

Another interesting point of view was that mental development suffered in regions where food was easily and abundantly available e.g. in the tropical regions. On the other hand, it was claimed that wherever men have been involved in a strenuous conflict with a cold climate, they have acquired heroic qualities of character: energy, courage, and integrity. It is important to note here that "struggle for existence" vis-à-vis the climate was held to have different consequences for the whites and the non-whites. In the former it developed virtues of character, in the latter animal like physical development at the cost of the mental.

A transition from 'mental qualities' to the category of 'racial qualities' was certainly an advance as far as popular rhetoric was concerned: new assertions could now be made without any reference to a constant factor like physical environment/climate as the earlier authors were impelled to do. One race, for instance, could be simply *asserted* to be more moral than another, a totally new input into the argument, requiring no evidence whatsoever. E.B.Tylor was the originator of this reasoning: "There is a plain difference between the low and high races of man, so that the dull minded barbarian has not the power of thought enough to come up to the civilised man's moral standard."

Soon the fact of colonisation will not need any explanation at all: "It is only necessary to look at the physique of the Hindoos in order to account for their subjection to alien races..." Weak physical bodily traits led to weak morality, and both the weaknesses (separately as well as together) adequately explained colonialism.

It is worth mentioning that E. B. Tylor, the supposed father of evolutionary anthropology, picked up for his academic researches the general trend of the above arguments. He could confidently assert that "it was reasonable to imagine as latest formed the white race of the temperate region, least able to bear extreme heat or live without the appliances of culture, but gifted with the powers of knowing and ruling". Clearly a particular race was constituted of mental qualities, via climate, which either condemned it to slavery, or the power of ruling. This strain of reasoning was sufficiently influential for Emerson to ask, "It is race, is it not, that puts the hundred millions of India under the dominion of a remote island in the north of Europe?"

At some point, however, the genetically determined physical traits (manifested in the physical appearance of the body) become more important than the physical environment/ climate as the determinant of mental capacities of the colonised races. All along, there was a parallel school of research working on the physical person of the colonised, attempting to reach the same conclusion, viz. the colonised needed to be colonised.

18.5 RACE AND THE DISCIPLINE OF ANTHROPOLOGY

Much debate took place in the late nineteenth century, around the theory of social Darwinism. There were, in principle, two ways found of locating a particular race on the scale of social evolution :

i) by examining the physical development of the race in question, and

ii) by analysing the social component of the society which that particular race had built for itself.

The second was mostly ignored, and the first became the scientific problem of the day. As far as the scientific community was concerned, the physical development of a race was not to be judged in terms of physical beauty — that was for the layperson. The scientist was interested in proving evolution of the 'internal' parts - the skull, the brain, the nasal bone, and so on. This strain of research had its own trajectory. In the initial phases of social evolutionism, it was attempted to relate the mental capacity of the race in question (the direct determinant of social achievement) to some *measurable* physical attribute. The concept of `cranial capacity' (related to the brain size) was an early and enduring one.

A clear formulation of the concept of cranial capacity is given by one of its proponents, Keane. This author asserted that 'mental gradations' – a scale of mental capacity — could be shown between various races, based on the principle of cranial capacity.

In fact, Darwin himself observed that there did exist a relation between the size of the brain and development of the intellectual faculties. It was with the intent of proving this point that he presented the following data: "The mean internal capacity of the skull in Europeans is 92.3 cubic inches, in Americans 87.5, and in Australians only 81.9 cubic inches". The fact that Franz Boas challenged this, and pointed out as late as 1922 that both Europeans and Mongols have the largest brains, and not Europeans alone, shows the currency of these ideas well into the twentieth century.

Later in the nineteenth century, another popular notion which gained influence was that "the black is a child and will long remain so". Investigations were done to show that this was because of the "sudden arrest of the intellectual faculties at the age of puberty (due) to premature closing of the (cranial) sutures". It was claimed that studies showed that upto the age of puberty, a negro child learnt remarkably well, but after that became `incurably stupid'. Moreover, there was no religious, intellectual, moral or industrial advancement in the negro who was also a political idiot. It is significant how explicitly the supposed lack of political acumen or industrial development is being attributed to a fixed incurable cause, i.e. the so-called cranial sutures!

The above details have been given to show a particular trend in supposed scientific research as far as determining the potential of a race was concerned. These 'researches' continued in many more directions than just on the skull of individuals. It will suffice here to record that **slowly, but relentlessly, the parameters of civilisation changed from the size of the skull to size of the jaws, to size and shape of the nose, to the length of the arms etc. reflecting the then current concerns of the sciences of anthropometry and anthropology of the period in relation to racial differences.**

With work going on in the opposite direction, however, it soon became clear that there was *no* relationship between low mental development and the size and shape of any part of the body. Franz Boas cited research done by Karl Pearson, Manouvrier and so on to contradict views of older authors like Gobineau, Klemm, Carus, Nott and Gliddon who assumed characteristic mental differences between races of humans. More importantly, he identified the reason for revival of these older views (now in the garb of science) to the growth of modern nationalism.

The professed relationship between the physical type and mental capacity had run into dangerous ground by the end of the century. By 1896, while still insisting that whites did

represent the highest type of mental development, it was admitted that "mental differences are independent of the general body structure". How else could one explain that intellects like Alexander Pope's "dwelt in a feeble frame, while the stupid Negroes of Senegambia are endowed with Herculean bodies?" As a result of researches done by the likes of Franz Boas, it got established by the early decades of the twentieth century **that mental activity followed the same laws in each individual of whatever 'race', and its manifestations depended almost entirely upon the character of individual social experience.**

There was another direct offshoot of rhetoric which derived from evolutionary ideology: there was frequently an attempt to compare, albeit favourably, the 'lower races' with animals, and not always with apes: the distance between the representatives of the two races was so much that one race was closer to animals than to humans. An author wrote of the Australians that

> "the difference between the brain of a Shakespeare and that of an Australian savage would doubtless be fifty times greater than the difference between the Australian's brain and that of an orang-utan. In mathematical capacity the Australian who cannot tell the number of fingers on his two hands is much nearer to a lion or a wolf than to Sir Rowan Hamilton, who invented the method of quarter ions. In moral development, this same Australian whose language contains no words for justice and benevolence is less remote from dogs and baboons than from Howard ...The Australian is more teachable than the ape, but his limit is nevertheless very quickly reached. All the distinctive attributes of man, in short, have been developed to an enormous extent through long ages of social evolution".

The imagery of animals to describe such people was a frequent occurrence in ethnology/ anthropology books. So, while in the Andaman Islander, the peculiar goat like exhalations of the Negro were absent, the Yahgan's intelligence is inferior to that of a dog's as "unlike a dog, they forget in which hole they hid their remaining food after a feast". Just like the wild animals of Australia were peculiar and always of a low type, so were its dark coloured natives with their coarse and repulsive features. Francis Galton's researches with South African communities became classics in anthropological literature and were universally quoted as exhibiting the great 'mental intervals' between the higher and the lower races. According to Galton, taking the dog and the Damara, the comparison reflected no great honour on the man.

By contrasting the most undeveloped individuals of one race with the most highly developed of another, and in fact, by relegating the former a category closer to animals, the (European) reader was made to identify with an idealised, unusual specimen of his/ her own race as the collective norm. Visually, too, the standards of European beauty were considered the norm, and to emphasise the difference, the most degraded specimens were chosen for taking photographs — "the ugliest and the weirdest looking" of an otherwise handsome race" for use in ethnology books.

This kind of research was supplemented if not started with accounts showing similarities between these communities and various species of animals, other than monkeys and apes: "among the rudest fragments of mankind are the isolated Andaman Islanders... the old Arab and European voyagers described them as dog-faced man-eaters. As mentioned earlier, Hunter described the "Non-aryans" of India as " the remains of extinct animals which palaeontologists find in hill caves..."

Something was being said, in the era of evolutionary anthropology, when the rung on the scale assigned to some communities was even lower than that of apes, which would evolve at some point of time into humans.

18.6 RACIAL 'RESEARCH' AND THE POLITICS OF DOMINATION

What was the impulse behind the researches that were done on certain groups of 'uncivilised' people? The ethnographic material of the period shows a marked tendency to represent the aborigines belonging to the lowest rung of the world evolutionary scale. There is a distinct tendency to overemphasise their barbaric practises. John Lubbock, an eminent anthropologist of his time, and one of the early Presidents of the Anthropological Institute published his popular "Prehistoric Times" in 1865. Here he studies 'modern savages' like the Andaman Islanders, Australians and Maoris with the message that they needed to be colonised. These statements were significant in a context where a section of European political and public opinion had begun to challenge the rightness of colonial presence all over the world. Racially motivated research provided ample data from this time onwards well into the twentieth century to show the barbarism of the subject races in general.

In retrospect, the people of the colonies were presented by the evolutionary theorists as curiosities and specimens of a bygone era. This emphasis on the Asians or Africans, Australians and Native Americans as relics of the *past* served an important purpose: to dull the reader's sensibilities as far as their *current* situation was concerned. Seeing them from the point of view of anthropological science detracted from the fact of them as politically active people. India, for instance, was posed as a great museum of races — this particular view denied the people concerned a legitimate place in the present. More important, it robbed them of any recognition as a society in a state of flux like any other by fixing them in a dead mould — the unchanging relics of the past. Remnants of earlier long dead generations, they were going to be studied, analysed, classified and exhibited.

It is not a coincidence that spectacles of these specimens were so popular in England and even in the colonies, in the form of great colonial exhibitions in the second half of the 19th century, with anthropological displays an important and popular part. What was propagated during such exhibitions was that "taking him all in all, the Australian aborigine represents better than any other living form the generalised features of primitive humanity".

While working on the issue of 'ancestorhood' represented by the current aborigines, another possible link was explored: that between scale of civilisation and moral/ethical progress. It was asserted here that European morality was more perfect and "the ancestors" were immoral in their disposition. Thus not only earlier societies were deemed to be less ethical, but also those supposedly the relics of earlier ones, existing in the form of African or Australian societies. This sort of reasoning served to justify the immense scale of massacres of aborigines and native American populations in order to colonise their land. In fact, it was explicitly said of the black republic of Hyati that in the absence of the coloniser's civilising influence, the free people of Hyati had reversed back to pagan rites, snake worship, cannibalism.

Once Darwin's *Descent of Man* appeared in 1858, it was not long before social Darwinism became a fashionable and influential school of thought in British society and politics. There were commonsensical reasons for this from a practical view-point: the doctrine of survival of the fittest justified political conquest of weaker 'races' and their elimination if necessary; there was also affinity between this doctrine and the economic policy of *laissez faire* at home. In addition, by implication, this doctrine provided scientific reasons for denying protective legislation for factory workers, the poor, the elderly and the weak in society in general: if they could not struggle sufficiently to survive, they deserved to perish. Herbert Spencer and Henry Maine advocated this doctrine as a key to social problems of welfare

and state's role at home; the imperialists grasped it as a useful theoretical guideline **in defence of expansionism and colonialism**.

However, "survival of the fittest", the basic tenet of the theory of evolutionism, seemed to come under challenge with events like the Boer war at the end of the 19th century. This doctrine had not prepared the imperial powers to be resisted so tenaciously by the supposedly less fit races, and survive a war! There were also other challenges emerging to the definitions of civilisation, morality and ethics. The essence of morality was claimed by some contemporary European thinkers to exist not in the forms of European social organisations, but the ones which aborigine societies had evolved for themselves, ensuring protection for its young or the aged, or giving rights to its individual members. The third quarter of the 19th century was also the time to begin to speak in terms of protection to the weak as the hallmark of an ethical society. Thus the theory of 'survival of the fittest' while dominating European politics and public opinion was also beginning to increasingly come under attack. Progress was being defined in terms which were now not so smug, and increasingly controversial. A few like Huxley directly challenged social Darwinism and pointed out that the mark of a really civilised society is one in which competition to survive is cut down to the minimum and one which is premised on protection of the weak, *not* survival of the fittest.

It is also an interesting fact that in principle, there was contradiction between the evolutionist's view of colonial societies and the fast delivering reforms of the imperial rule. So while the evolutionary ethnographers focussed on the essential unchangeability of societies like India – except very gradually, almost imperceptibly, over a period of a few thousand years – the administrators continued to emphasise the changes that had been brought about by the British in a relatively short time.

There was one more area of conflict: between the theory of racial evolutionism and the immediate interests of the British traders, in fact, a crucial political reason for ultimate decline of the evolutionary theory. The nineteenth century saw an interest in the aborigines from a new section apart from the missionaries and the colonial administrator - the merchants. Competition from Germany over colonial markets in particular provided the impetus for 'study' of such races from a political and commercial, apart from a scientific point of view. The science of the earlier decades, in the shape of Darwin's guidelines, however, had to be abandoned. If the people at the bottom of the evolutionary scale needed a long span of time to civilise, how could they be expected to use these goods?

18.7 POULARISING RACIAL CONCEPTS

It became then the duty of authors of ethnology books to inform the general public of the commercial interests of the Europeans in 'lower races'. The editor of the *Native Races of the British Empire* Series wrote that since Anthropology textbooks were too technical and bulky, the series in question were an attempt to supply in a readable form information about the uncivilised races of the empire, and the peoples of the lower stages of culture. This genre of literature became the staple of popular reading material on the question of 'races', and served to a very large extent the political-economic purposes for which it was written.

Ethnology books of the period borrowed from fiction, and managed to project quite effectively the image of an animal, and sometimes even a criminal native. This theme had several variations. Kipling's fantasy tale of a wolf-reared child inspired an ethnographer to find evidence of a supposedly real case of the same kind, which is quoted in the above book. He even published the article in the Journal of the

Anthropological Institute in a paper with a generalised title "jungle life in India" giving the impression that such half humans were an integral part of Indian wild life. This contribution was quoted by the author of *Living Races*, complete with references and page number of the concerned journal, giving the impression of scientific analysis. Moreover, the author of the article was mentioned to be an official of the Indian Geographical Survey, again adding to the authenticity of the report. All this served to confound fantasy with research.

In any case, the axis between travel books, popular ethnology works, anthropologists and fiction writers had an interlocking, mutually reinforcing impact on the readers' mind. One source made the other respectable and recycled the data in a selective and often exaggerated form. The scientific layout gave the impression of authenticity, validating the fiction of Kipling and others. While these fiction writers and cartoonists drew from anthropology, popular ethnology borrowed from fiction. The line between fact and fiction, as far as the 'races' of the world were concerned, gradually grew blurred by the circular nature of information.

18.8 INDIA AND THE IDEA OF RACE

During the last quarter of the 19th century, especially after the 1857 events, there was a great desire on the British administrator's part to 'understand India'. This was the era of classifications and categories like warrior or martial races; criminal tribes; cultivating or professional castes and so on. Thus while India found its due place in the scale of evolution in societal terms on a world basis, within India the evolutionary theory was applied to sort out the loyal from the disloyal, the respectable from the criminal, the malleable from the obstinate - the *dasyu* from the potential *dasa*.

W.W. Hunter seems to have contributed conceptually to the hierarchisation of the Indian people by proposing an evolutionary scale within India itself, which it was claimed was a "great museum of races in which we can study man from his lowest to his highest stages of culture...." The Aryans in India with whom the British felt political affinity by now were not only fair skinned, but of noble lineage, speaking a stately language, worshipping friendly and powerful gods. The others were the original inhabitants whom the lordly newcomers – the Aryans – had driven back into the mountains or reduced to servitude on the plains. "The victors called the non-Aryans, an obscure people, Dasyu (enemies) or Dasa (slaves)". These creatures were the subject matter of Edgar Thurston's studies twenty years later, with a similar evolutionary hierarchy in mind.

In the ethnographical writing of the period, there is a curious mix of the Hindu religious texts passing as history, and Darwin's scientific terminology. The reinforcing of the arguments from the Vedas with evidence from Darwin was an ingenious way of reading of Indian history by the British anthropologists. Some particularly daring samples are quoted here:

> "Speaking generally of the aborigines of India, we have sacred traditional accounts which represent them to have been savages allied to the apes. ...In the existing aborigines we find here and there marked peculiarities which point to a possible descent from some lower type of animal existence - the frequently recurring earpoint of Darwin, peculiar to certain apes, the opposable toe, characteristic of the same animal; the long stiff hair of bipeds or quadrupeds in unusual parts of the body; the keen sight, hearing and smell of some of the lower animals, coupled with mental qualities and habits...which can hardly be called human".
>
> Further, "A comparison of the accounts that are given of (dasyus) in the Vedas with the Indian aborigines of today shows conclusively that some of them must have been possessed of a very low bodily and mental organisation — indeed, that they were a more debased type of beings than what is now called mankind.

> "The Aryans called them Dasyus, or enemies....in fact, their description is almost identical with that of some of the Andaman Islanders of the present day. They called them eaters of raw flesh, without gods, without faith, lawless, cowardly, perfidious and dishonest...The Brahmins described the Dasyus or aborigines as Bushmen or monkeys...in Ramayana, the monkey general Hanuman...plays a prominent part." Hunter's classification of the 'non Aryans' into potential criminals was something Thurston borrowed later. The aboriginal races of the plains, according to him, had "supplied the hereditary criminal classes, alike under the Hindus, Mohammedans and the British. The non-aryan hill races also appeared from vedic times downwards as marauders".

There is a subtle shuttling between the past and the present by this writer, and the two merge imperceptibly fairly quickly: the aborigines of today are aborigines of yesterday; there seems to have been no evolution in this case. In fact, these who exist today have some of the characteristics of apes that Darwin described — not only the Brahmin would describe them as monkeys, Darwin would call them apes. Here it is interesting to find the convergence of the existing Andaman Islanders into monkey/ape/aborigine of yesterday at one level, and views of Aryans of yesterday (Brahmins)/Aryans of today (British) and Darwin on the other. It appeared that there had been identical reading of this section of the population all along from the time of the vedas upto Darwin. In other words, the theory of evolutionism was put to quite creative use by the British ethnographer/ administrator in that he completely brahminised a Darwinian concept!

In this framework for analysis of the aborigines of the late 19th century, the scientific component was an important link of the past to the present. The vedas helped to justify conquest of the aborigines in an earlier era, and Darwin was used to support their subsequent subjugation through the concept of the 'survival of the fittest'. This mode of analysis was given a coherent form for the first time by Hunter. He, through the indirect agency of Darwin, identified the convergence of the concepts of the Brahmin of the vedas and those of the British coloniser: both found the aborigines akin to either the Dasyu (enemy) or Dasa (slave).

Invocation of Darwin in description of an evolving section of mankind, thus invites the reader to consider the natural trajectory of the aborigines in general: like the Aryans did, they ought to be 'conquered' first. The British felt an affinity with the Aryan as both had a superior God, and a superior civilisation which could be rightfully imposed on the Godless inferior race of aborigines. Hunter could be writing of British imperialism in eulogistic terms when he wrote with admiration that "The stout Aryan spread...(They) had a great trust in themselves and their gods. Like other conquering races, they believed that both themselves and their deities were altogether superior to the people of the land and their poor, rude objects of worship. Indeed, this noble confidence is a great aid to the success of a nation.

The 'history' of the apish aborigines was, then, gleaned from the vedas and merged into the future that Darwin promised: they shall evolve into mankind at some point, albeit with help from the evolved.

There was a sound historical reason for the British regarding aborigines as Dasyus. Through the 19th century, expansionist desires now extended from the plains to the hills, as also need for land for plantations pressed on the administration. The hill tribes increasingly came to be seen as a political and administrative problem as they resisted the encroachment on their land by the planters, or recruitment as plantation workers, or interference by missionaries with their social institutions. There was trouble with the Nagas in 1878, the Santals in 1855 for several years. Earlier, in 1835, on the moral grounds of suppressing the custom of human sacrifice practised by the Kondhs, the

British army burned down their villages and had to remain deployed for long periods to check further resistance. A regular pacification programme to deal with the tribes had been launched by the British, and this made them see a parallel between their own situation and that faced by the Aryans centuries ago. Through these devices, the British hoped that incorrigible Dasyus could successfully be turned into the Dasa mould, either as workers or soldiers in British armies.

18.9 SUMMARY

Racism, then, is an ideological force which in conjunction with economic and political relations of domination locates certain populations in specific social/class positions and therefore structures the social relations in a particular ideological manner. As we did a historical survey of general ideas on race, it emerged that the word 'race' is used in a different way in different societies, and at different historical junctures. It is in this context important to remember that whatever the changing terms of language used to talk about race and ethnicity in the present day environment, we have in practice seen growing evidence of forms of racial and ethnic conflict in many parts of the globe.

The idea of race and racism today is alive and well in its myriad monstrous forms.

18.10 EXERCISES

1) What is the relationship between colonial domination and the idea of race?

2) Discuss the ways in which the sciences helped to promote the notion of racial difference.

3) How did the idea of race originate in India?

4) What is the role played by the discipline of anthropology in promoting racial theories?

18.11 SUGGESTED READINGS

Les Back and John Solomon (eds.), *Theories of Race and Racism: A Reader* (London and New York, Routledge, 2000).

Franz Boas, *The Mind of Primitive Man*, (New York, The Macmillan C Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man* (London, John Murray, 1890, second edition published in 1874).

A.H. Keane, *The World's Peoples: A Popular Account of Their Bodily and Mental Characters, Beliefs, Traditions, Political and Social Institutions* (London, Hutchinson and Co., 1908).

Kenan Malik, *The Meaning of Race: Race, History and Culture in Western Society* (London, Macmillan, 1996).

Meena Radhakrishna, 'Colonialism, Evolutionism and Anthropology – A Critique of the History of Ideas 1850-1930', Research in progress papers, *History and Society*, Third series Number XIX, NMML, New Delhi, June, 1997.

Nancy Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science* (London, Macmillan, 1982).

UNIT 19 COLONIAL HISTORIOGRAPHY

Structure

19.1 Introduction

19.2 Influential Works of History in Colonial India

19.3 Some Other Historiographic Developments

19.4 Colonial Ideology in Historiography

19.5 Impact of Historical Writings in Colonial India

19.6 Summary

19.7 Exercises

19.1 INTRODUCTION

When we talk of Colonial Historiography the first task is to remove a possible source of confusion. The term 'colonial historiography' applies to (a) the histories of the countries colonised during their period of colonial rule, and (b) to the ideas and approaches commonly associated with historians who were or are characterised by a colonialist ideology. In British India the term was used in the first sense and only since independence the second meaning of the term has come into prominence. Many of the front rank historians were British colonial officials, and the term colonial history, when it was used at all, was meant to refer to the *subject* rather than to the *ideology* embedded in that history. Today the ideology is the subject of criticism and hence the term 'colonial historiography' has acquired a pejorative sense. In this Unit we shall use the term 'colonial historiography' in both of these senses mentioned above.

In a sense colonial history as a subject of study and colonial approach as an ideology are interconnected. The theme of empire building in the historical works of the British naturally gave rise to a set of ideas justifying British rule in India. This justification included, in different degrees in different individual historian, a highly critical attitude towards Indian society and culture at times amounting to contempt, a laudatory attitude to the soldiers and administrators who conquered and ruled India, and a proneness to laud the benefits India received from Pax Britannica, i.e. British Peace. We shall study this ideology in detail later but it is important to note here that lack of consciousness of the ideological dimension was a characteristic of colonial history writing. The influence of Leopold von Ranke and the positivist school of history had, for the major part of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, created a belief in the 'objectivity of the historian' and this made it difficult to perceive the possibility of ideological leanings in historians' discourse. The ideological dimension of colonial historiography was brought to the surface only in the post-independence critique of earlier historiography. This critique was launched mainly in India while, as late as 1961, C H Philips of the School of Oriental and African Studies of London, in *The Historians of India, Pakistan and Ceylon*, did not raise the issue at all in a comprehensive survey of historiography.

19.2 INFLUENTIAL WORKS OF HISTORY IN COLONIAL INDIA

Before we take up the question of the colonial ideology in historiography, let us try and get a clear idea of the historians we are talking about. In the eighteenth century there

were very few genuinely historical works. The British were perhaps too busy fighting their way to the top pf the political pyramid in India to devote much attention to history. One of the notable writers in the historical vein in the eighteenth century was **Charles Grant**, who wrote *Observations on the State of Society among the Asiatic Subjects of India* in 1792. He belonged to the 'evangelical school', i.e. the group pf British observers who believed that it was the divine destiny of the British rulers of India to bring the light of Christianity to India which was sunk in the darkness of primitive religious faiths and superstitions. However, this kind of reflective writing on Indian society and history was rather rare in till the early decades of the nineteenth century. By the second decade of the nineteenth century British rule in India had stabilised considerably and was about to enter a new period of expansion. By 1815 in Europe Britain was not only established as a first class power after Britain's victory over Napoleon and France, but Britain had also undergone the first Industrial Revolution and had emerged as the most industrialised country in the world. Britain's confidence in being at the top pf the world was nowhere better displayed than in British writings on India, a country she dominated and regarded as backward. This attitude is reflected in the historical writings of the British from the second decade of the nineteenth century.

Just about this time, between 1806 and 1818, **James Mill** wrote a series of volumes on the history of India and this work had a formative influence on British imagination about India. The book was entitled *History of British India*, but the first three volumes included a survey of ancient and medieval India while the last three volumes were specifically about British rule in India. This book became a great success, it was reprinted in 1820, 1826 and 1840 and it became a basic textbook for the British Indian Civil Service officrs undergoing training at the East India's college at Haileybury. By the 1840s the book was out of date and in his comments its editor H.H. Wilson pointed that out in 1844 (Wilson also pointed out many factual errors in the book); but the book continued to be considered a classic.

Mill had never been to India and the entire work was written on the basis of his limited readings in books by English authors on India. It contained a collection of the prejudices about India and the natives of India which many British officers acquired in course of their stay in India. However, despite shortcomings from the point of view of authenticity and veracity and objectivity, the book was very influential for two reasons. One of these reasons is often recognised: James Mill belonged to an influential school of political and economic thought, the Utilitarians inspired by the philosopher Jeremy Bentham. As an Utilitarian exposition of history Mill's history of India was also at the same time implicitly an Utilitarian agenda for British administration in India. The other reason for the immense influence the book exercised has not been recognised as much as one might have expected. This book perfectly reflected the cast of mind at the beginning of the nineteenth century which we have noticed earlier, a cast of mind which developed in the wake of Britain's victory in the Anglo-French wars for hegemony in Europe, and Britain's growing industrial prosperity. James Mill broadcast a message of confident imperialism which was exactly what the readers in England wanted to hear.

While James Mill had produced an Utilitarian interpretation of history, a rival work of history produced by **Mountstuart Elphistone** is more difficult to categorise in terms of philosophical affiliation. Elphinstone was a civil servant in India for the greater part of his working life and he was far better equipped and better informed than Mill to write a history of India. His work *History of Hindu and Muhammedan India* (1841) became a standard text in Indian universities (founded from 1857 onwards) and was reprinted up to the early years of the next century. Elphinstone followed this up with *History of British Power in the East*, a book that traced fairly systematically the expansion and consolidation of British rule till Hastings' administration. The periodisation of Indian

history into ancient and medieval period corresponding to 'Hindu' period and 'Muslim' period was established as a convention in Indian historiography as a result of the lasting influence of Elphinstone's approach to the issue. While Elphinstone's works continued to be influential as a textbook, specially in India, a more professionally proficient history was produced in the 1860s by J. Talboys Wheeler. The latter wrote a comprehensive *History of India* in five volumes published between 1867 and 1876, and followed it up with a survey of *India Under British Rule* (1886).

If one were to look for the successor to Elphinstone's work as an influential text book, one would probably turn to the *History of India* by **Vincent Smith** who stands nearly at the end of a long series of British Indian civil servant historians. In 1911 the last edition of Elphinstone's history of 'Hindu and Muhammedan India' was published and in the same year Vincent Smith's comprehensive history, building upon his own earlier research in ancient Indian history and the knowledge accumulated by British researchers in the decades since Elphinstone, saw the light of day. From 1911 till about the middle of the twentieth century Vincent Smith's was the authoritative textbook on the syllabi of almost all Indian universities. While Vincent Smith's book approximated to the professional historians' writings in form and was unrivalled as a text book in summing up the then state of knowledge, in some respects his approach to Indian history seems to have been coloured by his experience as a British civil servant in India. The rise of the nationalist movement since 1885 and the intensification of political agitation since the Partition of Bengal in 1905 may have influenced his judgements about the course of history in India. For instance, time and again he referred to the fragility of India's unity and the outbreak of chaos and the onset of general decline in the absence of a strong imperial authority. The disintegration and decline experienced in ancient and medieval times at the end of great empires suggested an obvious lesson to the Indian reader, viz. it was only the iron hand of imperial Britain which kept India on the path of stability with progress, and if the British Indian empire ceased to be there would be the deluge which will reverse all progress attained under British rule. As regards the potentials of the nationalist movement and the fitness of the Indian subjects to decide their own destiny, Vincent Smith did not pay much attention to that 'political' question.

The political question, however, was assuming increasing importance in the last years of British rule and a historical work more accommodative to the political outlook of the Indian nationalist movement appeared in 1934. This work, *Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India* was different from all the previously mentioned books in that it was written from a liberal point of view, sympathetic to Indian national aspirations to a great extent. The authors were **Edward Thompson** who was a Missionary who taught for many years in a college in Bengal and became a good friend of Rabindranath Tagore, and **G.T. Garratt**, a civil servant in India for eleven years and thereafter a Labour Party politician in England. Given their background, both were disinclined to toe the line laid down by the civil servant historians of earlier days. Thompson and Garratt faced very adverse criticism from conservative British opinion leaders. On the other hand, many Indians found this work far more acceptable than the officially prescribed textbooks. This book, published less than fifteen years before India attained independence, is a landmark indicating the reorientation in thinking in the more progressive and liberal circles among the British; it was in accord with the mindset which made the transition of 1947 acceptable to the erstwhile imperial power. From James Mill to Thompson and Garratt historiography had traveled forward a great distance. This period, spanning the beginning of the 19th century to the last years of British rule in India, saw the evolution from a Euro-centric and disparaging approach to India towards a more liberal and less ethno-centric approach.

19.3 SOME OTHER HISTORIOGRAPHIC DEVELOPMENTS

Till now we have focused attention on histories which were most widely read and attained the status of text books, and hence influenced historical imagination and understanding. There were other historical works not of that kind but nevertheless of historiographic importance.

In the middle decades of the nineteenth century two great authors wrote on India, though India was really not in the centre of their interest. One was Lord **Macaulay** whose essays on some great British Indian personalities like Robert Clive were published in *Edinburgh Review.* Macaulay's literary style made Indian history readable, though his essays were flawed by poor information and poorer judgement about the 'native' part of British India. It was a great change from the uncommonly dull and censorious James Mill's writings. Macaulay's lasting influence was the establishment of a tradition of writing history in the biographical mode; this was widely imitated later and hence volume after volume of biographies of Viceroys and the like and histories of their administration.

Sir Henry Maine's contribution was of another kind. A great juridical historian, Maine applied himself to the study of ancient Indian institutions while he was for a short period the Law Member of the Governor-General's Council in India. His *Ancient Law* (1861) and his work on Indian village communities were path-breaking works in history. Maine changed the course of European thinking on the development of law by looking at laws and institutions beyond the domain of Roman law. There were, however, few mentionable contributions by British Indian scholars to follow up Maine's tradition in legal and institutional history. His impact was limited to European scholarly work in the late nineteenth century and perhaps even beyond in the development of sociology in the hands of Max Weber and others.

In the area of legal history the works which British Indian authors produced were of a level different to, indeed inferior to Maine's. Thus for instance **Sir James Fitzjames Stephen**, also a Law Member of the Viceroy's Council, wrote a defence of British administration under Warren Hastings. Edmund Burke, he argued, was wrong in thinking that the punishment awarded to Nanda Kumar by Justice Elijah Impey was a case of miscarriage of justice. This was the subject of Stephen's *Story of Nuncoomar and the Impeachment of Sir Elijah Impey* (1885). In reaction to this an I.C.S. officer, **Henry Beveridge**, wrote in support of the impeachment and in condemnation of the trial and punishment of Nanda Kumar: *Nanda Kumar: a narrative of a judicial murder* (1886). Similarly, again in defence of previous British administration, **Sir John Strachey** of the I.C.S., wrote *Hastings and the Rohilla War* (1892*).* Thus there were legal historical debates about a thing in the past, Warren Hastings and his impeachment and Edmund Burke's criticism of British administration. The site of this kind of debate was history, but the hidden agenda was contemporary – to present British conquest and administration of India as an unsullied record which must not be questioned.

In the high noon of the Empire two very contrary tendencies of historical writing were displayed by two prominent authors. One was **Sir William W. Hunter**, the editor of a good series of Gazetteers and the author of a pedestrian work on the history of British India. From 1899 he began to edit a series of historical books called *The Rulers of India.* The series lauded the makers of empires in India – mainly the makers of the British Indian empire, though one or two token Indians, like Asoka and Akbar, were included. The series was endowed with government sponsorship and the volumes found place in official libraries and syllabi. The object was to present history in a popular form

and very often included not only solemn moments of resolve to do good on the part of an empire builder, but also cute stories of incidents in their childhood back home. The 'hard-boiled types' of empire builders were chosen for immortality in a biographical form – British civil servants who sympathised with India were excluded — and it was a caricature of the eighteenth century English tradition of writing history as biography.

Sir Alfred Lyall's work, *Rise and Expansion of British Dominion in India* (1894), offers a contrast because he showed great originality in his methodology and interpretation, although one may disagree very fundamentally with the trend of his interpretation. In methodology his originality consisted of the use, in the manner of ethnographers, of his own observation and knowledge of contemporary Indian society, customs, institutions, etc. in order to understand the past events and processes. Thus he went beyond the textual evidence which most historians at that timer depended upon. In his interpretation of Indian history Lyall projected the story on a very wide canvas, looking at the incursion of the British into India in the light of the entire history of the relationship between the East and the West from the days of the Greeks and the Romans. This wide sweep of history, resembling in some ways Arnold Toynbee's wide-angled global vision of relationship between civilisations, was different from that of most British Indian historians of the nineteenth century. The third element of originality in Lyall was his theoretical position that India and Europe were on the same track of development, but India's development was arrested at a certain point. This was also the view of Sir Henry Maine who wrote that Indian society had a 'great part of our own civilization with its elements…not yet unfolded." India as an 'arrested civilization' was an influential idea in Europe but in India it had few takers. The nationalistically inclined intelligentsia rejected the view that India was just a backward version of Europe; they believed that India was radically different from Europe in the organisation of her society and state systems, and that India must be allowed to work out a different historical destiny rather than try to imitate Europe. At any rate, while in some matters Lyall's interpretative framework may be questioned, his attempt to look at India as a civilisation merits recognition.

Finally, a noteworthy historiographic development that occurred in the first two or three decades of the twentieth century was the beginning of explorations in economic history. A basis for that had already been laid in the work of many British civil servants who examined economic records and formed broad conclusions about the course of agrarian relations and agricultural history. This they did as district collectors or magistrates responsible for 'land revenue settlement', i.e. fixation of tax on agricultural income in order that Land Revenue may be collected by the government. Among such civil servants an outstanding historian emerged: this was **W. H. Moreland** who examined the economic condition of *India at the Death of Akbar*, published in 1920. This work was followed up with another work of economic history on the period *From Akbar to Aurangzeb* (1923) and finally a history of *The Agrarian System of Mughal India* (1929). To some extent Moreland's approach was flawed by a preconceived notion that the economic condition of India was better under British rule than what it was in medieval times. He tried to prove this preconception by various means in his works, including his writings on Indian economics in the twentieth century. Moreover, his response to the Indian economic nationalists' critique of British economic impact was far from being adequate. One of his junior contemporaries was **Vera Anstey** who wrote on similar lines; she taught at the University of London and wrote a standard textbook on *The Economic Development of India* (1929). However, her work lacked the historical depth which Moreland attained. Moreland's outstanding contribution was to lay the basis of a new discipline of economic history. However, economic and social history remained marginal to the concerns of the typical colonial historians. This is evident from the classic summation of all the British historians' work on British India in the volume in the *Cambridge History of India* (1929) edited by David Dodwell as well as P E Roberts' textbook, *History of British India* (reprinted often since 1907). Neither

Indian economic and social conditions nor indeed the people of India were in focus in such works, their history was all about what the British soldiers and civil servants did in India.

19.4 COLONIAL IDEOLOGY IN HISTORIOGRAPHY

It will be an error to homogenise all of British historical writings as uniformly colonial, since different approaches and interpretative frameworks developed within the colonial school in course of the 19th and early 20th centuries. However, there were certain characteristics common to most of the works we have surveyed till now. However simplistic it may be, it may be useful to sum up these characteristics:

- An 'Orientalist' representation of India was common, promoting the idea of the superiority of modern Western civilisation; this is a theme recently brought into prominence by Edward Said and others, but the Indian nationalist intelligentsias had identified and criticised this trend in British writings from James Mill onwards.

- The idea that India had no unity until the British unified the country was commonly given prominence in historical narratives; along with this thesis there was a representation of the eighteenth century India as a 'dark century' full of chaos and barbarity until the British came to the rescue.

- Many late nineteenth century British historians adopted Social Darwinist notions about India; this implied that if history is a struggle between various peoples and cultures, akin to the struggle among the species, Britain having come to the top could be *ipso facto* legitimately considered to be superior and as the fittest to rule.

- India was, in the opinion of many British observers, a stagnant society, arrested at a stage of development; it followed that British rule would show the path of progress to a higher level; hence the idea that India needed Pax Britannica.

- The mythification of heroic empire builders and 'Rulers of India' in historical narratives was a part of the rhetoric of imperialism; as Eric Stokes has remarked, in British writings on India the focus was on the British protagonists and the entire country and its people were just a shadowy background.

- As we would expect, colonial historiography displayed initially a critical stance towards the Indian nationalist movement since it was perceived as a threat to the good work done by the British in India; at a later stage when the movement intensified the attitude became more complex, since some historians showed plain hostility while others were more sophisticated in their denigration of Indian nationalism. In general, while some of these characteristics and paradigms are commonly to be found in the colonial historians' discourse, it will be unjust to ignore the fact that in course of the first half of the twentieth century historiography out-grew them or, at least, presented more sophisticated versions of them.

In essence colonial historiography was part of an ideological effort to appropriate history as a means of establishing cultural hegemony and legitimising British rule over India.

The basic idea embedded in the tradition of Colonial Historiography was the paradigm of a backward society's progression towards the pattern of modern European civil and political society under the tutelage of imperial power. The guiding hand of the British administrators, education combined with 'filtration' to the lower orders of society,

implantation of such institutions and laws as the British thought Indians were fir for, and protection of Pax Britannica from the threat of disorder nationalism posed among the subject people – these were the ingredients needed for a slow progress India must make. Sometimes this agenda was presented as 'the civilizing mission of Britain'.

What were the intellectual lineages of the colonial ideology as reflected in historiography? Benthamite or Utilitarian political philosophy represented Britain's role to be that of a guardian with a backward pupil as his ward. It may be said that Jeremy Bentham looked upon all people in that light, European or otherwise. That is partly true. But this attitude could find clearer expression and execution in action in a colony like India. Another source of inspiration for the colonialist historian was Social Darwinism, as has been mentioned earlier. This gave an appearance of scientific respectability to the notion that many native Indians were below par; it was possible to say that here there were victims of an arrested civilisation and leave it at that as an inevitable outcome of a Darwinian determinism. A third major influence was Herbert Spencer. He put forward an evolutionary scheme for the explication of Europe's ascendancy and his comparative method addressed the differences among countries and cultures in terms of progression towards the higher European form It was an assumption common among Europeans, that non-European societies would follow that evolutionary pattern, with a bit of assistance from the European imperial powers. This mindset was not peculiar to the British Indian historians. In the heydays of mid-Victorian imperialism the British gave free expression to these ideas while in later times such statements became more circumspect. In the 1870s Fitzjames Stephen talked of "heathenism and barbarism" versus the British as representatives of a "belligerent civilization". In 1920s David Dodwell's rhetoric is milder, indeed almost in a dejected tone: the Sisyphian task of the British was to raise to a higher level the "great mass of humanity" in India and that mass "always tended to relapse into its old posture …like a rock you try to lift with levers." (Dodwell, *A Sketch of the History of India, 1858-1918*).

19.5 IMPACT OF HISTORICAL WRITINGS IN COLONIAL INDIA

The above ideological characterisation applies to the dominant trend in historical thinking in the colonial school. But it will be inaccurate to apply this without discrimination. It is well known that among the British officers of the government of British India, as we all know, there were some like Thomas Munro or Charles Trevelyan who were widely regarded as persons sympathetic to the subject people although as officers they served an alien and exploitative regime; there were British officers and British Missionaries (e.g. C F Andrews, author of *Renaissance in India*, 1925) who sympathised with the National Congress; and there were also those, like say Garratt of the Indian Civil Service and later of the Labour Party in England, or George Orwell of the Indian Police Service who were inveterate critics of the empire. It was the same case with the historians. But the inclinations of lone individuals were insignificant in the face of the dominant tradition among the servants of the British Raj. Official encouragement and sponsorship of a way of representing the past which would uphold and promote imperial might, and the organised or informal peer opinion the dissident individual had to contend with. Our characterisation of the ideology at the root of colonial historiography addresses the dominant trend and may not apply in every respect to every individual historian. Such a qualification is important in a course on Historiography in particular because this is an instance where students of history must exercise their judgement about the range and the limits of generalisation.

It must be noted that despite the colonial ideology embedded in historiography in British India, the early British historians of India made some positive contributions. Apart from

the obvious fact that the colonial historians laid the foundations of historiography according to methodology developed in modern Europe, their contribution was also substantial in providing in institutions like the Asiatic Society and Archaeological Survey of India opportunity for Indian historians to obtain entry into the profession and into academic research. Further, despite an ethnocentric and statist bias, the data collected by the British colonial historians as well as the practice of archiving documents was and remains an important resource. Most important of all, the teaching of history began from the very inception of the first three universities in India at Calcutta, Bombay and Madras (1857-1858). This had several unintended consequences.

The history that was taught under colonial auspices was highly biased in favour of the imperial point of view. The textbooks were those produced by the school of colonial historiography. Nevertheless, there was a positive outcome. First, along with the history of India by James Mill or Elphinstone, Indian students also read histories of England and of Europe and thus were implanted in the minds of the educated Indians the ideas of Liberty and Freedom and Democracy and Equity, as exemplified in European history, the lessons of the Magna Carta, the Glorious Revolution, the American War of Independence, the struggles of Mazzini and Garibaldi in Italy, etc. Any one familiar with the early Moderate phase of the development of nationalism in India will see the relevance these ideas acquired through reading history. Secondly, professionally trained Indian historians began to engage in writing history. Writing history on modern lines with documentary research and the usual apparatus of scholarly work was no longer a monopoly of the amateur historians of British origin. Indians professionally trained began to engage in research, first in learned associations like the Asiatic Society, then in the colleges and universities, and in the government's educational services, particularly the Indian Education Service.

Thirdly, and this is the important part, the history which the Indian students were made to read, the books by British civil servant historians of the nineteenth century, created a critical reaction against that historiography. The first graduate of an Indian University, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, repeatedly reviled the British interpretation and raised the question, When shall we write our own history? Rabindranath Tagore put it most eloquently: in other countries, he wrote, history *reveals* the country to the people of the country, while the history of India the British have gifted us *obscures* our vision of India, we are unable to see our motherland in this history. This reaction was typical of the intelligentsia in India and it led some of the best nationalist minds to search for a new construal of history. Thus there developed a Nationalist interpretation of Indian history, putting to an end the hegemony of British colonial historiography. Writing history became a major means of building the consciousness of a national identity. In the next Unit in this collection the Nationalist School of historiography has been surveyed.

19.6 SUMMARY

The term 'colonial historiography' has been used in two senses. One relates to the history of the colonial countries, while the other refers to the works which were influenced by colonial ideology of domination. It is in the second sense that most historians today write about the colonial historiography. In fact, the practice of writing about the colonial countries by the colonial officials was related to the desire for domination and justification of the colonial rule. Therefore, in most such historical works there was criticism of Indian society and culture. At the same time, there was praise for the western culture and values and glorification of the individuals who established the empire in India. The histories of India written by James Mill, Mountstuart Elphinstone, Vincent Smith and many others are pertinent examples of this trend. They established the colonial school of historiography which denigrated the subject people while praising the imperial country.

In such accounts, India was depicted as a stagnant society, as a backward civilisation and as culturally inferior while Britain was praised as a dynamic country possessing superior civilisation and advanced in science and technology.

19.7 EXERCISES

1) What is colonial historiography? Discuss some of the important works of historians who are generally associated with colonial historiography.

2) Do you think that all the works written by colonial or the British historians on India belong to the colonial school of history-writing? Answer with examples.

3) Discuss the basic elements of colonialist ideology contained in colonial historiography.

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UNIT 20 NATIONALIST APPROACH

Structure

20.1 Introduction

20.2 Colonial vs. Nationalist Historiography

20.3 Nationalist History of Ancient and Medieval Periods

20.4 Nationalist History of Modern Period

20.5 Summary

20.6 Exercises

20.1 INTRODUCTION

This is a simple presentation of a very complex problem, especially because historiography is an aspect both of history and persons, and events and intellectual history. It should also be kept in view that when discussing historical approach of a historian, his or her sincerity and honesty is seldom in question. A historian worth discussing does not write to order or to deliberately serve specific interests. Though it is true that a historian's work may reflect the thinking of a class, caste or a social or political group, he basically writes through intellectual conviction or under the impact of ideas and ideologies. This is why often a historian may transcend the class, caste, race, community or nation in which he is born.

Thus concrete relationship of a historian to a particular approach to Indian history – for example, colonial, nationalist, or communal approach is evolved not by analyzing or 'discovering his motives but by seeing the correspondence between his intellectual product and the concrete practice of the colonialists, nationalists or communalists. Quite often a historian – or any intellectual – is affected by contemporary politics and ideologies.

Of course, it is an important aspect of intellectual history to study how and why certain ideas, approaches and ideologies are picked up, popularised, debated – supported and opposed—become dominant or lose dominance, or the ideas arising in one milieu are picked up in another milieu.

20.2 COLONIAL VERSUS NATIONALIST HISTORIOGRAPHY

Nationalist approach to Indian history may be described as one which tends to contribute to the growth of nationalist feeling and to unify people in the face of religious, caste, or linguistic differences or class differentiation. This may, as pointed out earlier, sometimes be irrespective of the intentions of the author.

Initially, in the 19th century, Indian historians followed in the footsteps of colonial historiography, considering history as scientific based on fact-finding, with emphasis on political history and that too of ruling dynasties. Colonial writers and historians, who began to write the history of India from late 18th and early 19th century, in a way created all India history, just as they were creating an all-India empire. Simultaneously, just as the colonial rulers followed a political policy of divide and rule on the basis of region and religion, so did colonial historians stress division of Indians on the basis of region and religion throughout much of Indian history. Nationalist historians too wrote history as either of India as a whole or of rulers, who ruled different parts of India, with

emphasis on their religion or caste or linguistic affiliation. But as colonial historical narrative became negative or took a negative view of India's political and social development, and, in contrast, a justificatory view of colonialism, a nationalist reaction by Indian historians came. Colonial historians now increasingly, day by day, threw colonial stereotypes at Indians. Basic texts in this respect were James Mill's work on Ancient India and Elliot and Dawson's work on Medieval India. Indian nationalist historians set out to create counter-stereotypes, often explicitly designed to oppose colonial stereotypes thrown at them day after day. Just as the Indian nationalist movement developed to oppose colonialism, so did nationalist historiography develop as a response to and in confrontation with colonial historiography and as an effort to build national self-respect in the face of colonial denigration of Indian people and their historical record. Both sides appealed to history in their every day speech and writing. Even when dealing with most obtuse or obscure historical subjects, Indians often relied in their reply on earlier European interpretations.

For example, many colonial writers and administrators asserted that historical experience of Indian people made them unfit for self-government and democracy, or national unity and nation-formation or modern economic development, or even defence against invasion by outsiders. Colonial rule would gradually prepare them – and was doing so – far all these tasks. Moreover, in the second half ot he 19th century, the need for permanent presence of colonial rulers and colonial administration for the development of India on modern lines was sometimes implied and sometimes explicitly asserted. While the utilitarians and missionaries condemned Indian culture, the Orientalists emphasised the character of India as a nation of philosophers and spiritual people. While this characterisation bore the marks of praise, the accompanying corollary was that Indians had historically lacked political, administrative and economic acumen or capacity. Indians should, therefore, have full freedom to develop and practice their spiritualism and influence the world in that respect, the British should manage the political, administrative, and economic affairs and territorial defence of India against foreign aggression, which had succeeded whenever India had an Indian ruler. In fact, in the absence of foreign rule, India had tended to suffer from political and administrative anarchy. For example, it was the British who saved India from anarchy during the 18th and 19th centuries. The colonial writers and administrators also maintained that, because of their religious and social organisation, Indians also lacked moral character. (This view was often the result of the fact that British administration came into social contact only with their cooks, syces and other servants or with compradors who were out to make money through their relations with the Sahibs). Also, some of the European writers praised Indian spiritualism, because of their own reaction against the evils of the emerging industrialism and commercialism in their own countries.

Many colonial historians also held that it was in the very nature of India, like other countries of the East, to be ruled by despots or at least by autocratic rulers. This was the reason why British rule in India was and had to be autocratic. This view came to be widely known as the theory of Oriental Despotism. Furthermore, these writers argued that the notion that the aim of any ruler being the welfare of the ruled was absent in India. In fact, the traditional political regimes in India were 'monstrously cruel' by nature. In contrast, the British, even through autocratic, were just and benevolent and worked for the welfare of the people. In contrast with the cruel Oriental Despotism of the past, British rule was benevolent though autocratic.

The colonial writers also held that Indians had, in contrast to Europeans, always lacked a feeling of nationality and therefore of national unity, – Indians had always been divided. Indians, they said, had also lacked a democratic tradition. While Europeans had enjoyed the democratic heritage of ancient Greece and Rome, the heritage of Indians – in fact of all people of the Orient or East – was that of despotism.

Indians also lacked the quality of innovation and creativity. Consequently most good things—institutions, customs, arts and crafts, etc. – had come from outside. For example, it was colonial rule which had brought to India law and order, equality before law, economic development, and modernization of society based on the ideas of social equality.

All these colonial notions not only hurt the pride of Indian historians and other intellectuals but also implied that the growing demand of the Indian intellectuals for self-government, democracy, legislative reform, etc., was unrealistic precisely because of Indians' past history. After all, democracy was alien to their historical character and therefore not suitable to them.

20.3 NATIONALIST HISTORY OF ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL PERIODS

Many Indians, affected by nationalism, and some Europeans, took up an examination of colonial stereotypes virtually as a challenge from the second half of the 19th century. They did so on the basis of detailed and meticulous research, which has created excellent traditions of devotion to facts and details and of reliance on primary sources in Indian historical discipline.

Indian historians tried to prove the falsity of colonial historical narrative on the basis of analysis of existing historical sources, as also the hunt for fresh sources. Of course, they also were moved by a feeling of hurt national pride. For decades, their work was confined to ancient and medieval periods. The professional historians did not take up the modern period though, as we shall see, the economists did, basically because of two reasons: (a) most of them were working in government or government-controlled schools and colleges, there was fear that any critique of colonialism would affect their careers; (b) they accepted the contemporary British historical view that scientific history must not deal with recent or contemporary period.

The Indian historians proclaimed the colonial notion of India's tradition of spirituality as a mark of distinction and of India's greatness and superiority over the West, especially in terms of 'moral values' as compared to the essentially 'materialistic' character of Western civilisation. (Paradoxically, this formulation made an appeal to the Indians of middle classes who belonged to moneylending and trading families who daily struggled for acquisition of material goods). At the same time, they denied the Indians' exclusive devotion to spirituality and stressed their prowess in administration and statecraft, empire building, diplomacy, taxation structure, and military organisation, warfare, agrarian, industrial and commercial development. Many historians discovered in India's past diplomatic and political institutions analogous to those of contemporary Europe. They vehemently denied the notion of ancient Indian being inefficient in running a state. They hailed the discovery in the beginning of the 20th century of *Arthashastra* by Kautilya and said that it proved that Indians were equally interested and proficient in administration, diplomacy and economic management by the state. Many glorified Kautilya and compared him with Machiavelli and Bismarck. Many also denied the dominant influence of religion on the state and asserted the latter's secular character. They also contradicted the view that ancient Indian state was autocratic and despotic. The Kings in ancient India dispensed justice to all, they said. Others refuted the view that Indian rulers did not keep in mind the aim of the welfare of the people. Some even asserted the strong presence of the popular element in the state and went even so far as to say that in many cases the political structure approached that of modern democracies. In any case, all of them argued that government was not irresponsible and capricious. There were many limits on autocracy or the power of the rulers. There were many channels through

which public opinion became effective. Some even argued that Indian monarchies were limited and often approached constitutional monarchy. For example, the Mantri Parishad described by Kautilya was compared with the Privy Council of Britain. Above all, very often the existence of local self-governments was asserted and the example of democratically elected village panchayats was cited. A few writers went so fare as to talk of the existence of assemblies and parliaments and of the cabinet system, as under Chandra Gupta, Akbar and Shivaji. Quite often, the wide observance by the rulers of international law, especially in the case of war, was also pointed out. They denied the charge that Indian rulers took recourse to arbitrary taxation and argued that a taxation system virtually analogous to that of a modern system of taxation prevailed. K.P. Jayaswal, a celebrated historian of the first quarter of the 20th century, took this entire approach to the extreme. In his *Hindu Polity,* published in 1915, he argued that the ancient Indian political system was either republican or that of constitutional monarchy. He concluded: 'The constitutional progress made by the Hindus has probably not been equalled, much less surpassed, by any polity of antiquity.' (This was to counter the European view that Greece was the home of democracy).

Basically, the nationalist approach was to assert that anything that was politically positive in the West had already existed in India. Thus R. C. Majumdar wrote in his *Corporate Life in Ancient India* that institutions 'which we are accustomed to look upon as of western growth had also flourished in India long ago.' Thus, interestingly, the value structure of the west was accepted. It is not ancient Indian political institutions which were declared to be, on the whole, greater, but western institutions which were accepted as greater and then found to have existed in ancient India.

Colonial historians stressed that Indians were always divided by religion, region, language, and caste, that it was colonialism alone which unified them, and that their unity would disappear if colonial rule disappeared. This also meant that Indians lacked a sense of patriotism and national unity. Nationalist historians countered the colonial view by claiming that cultural, economic and political unity and a sense of Indian nationhood had prevailed in pre-colonial India. Kautilya, for example, they said, had advocated in the *Arthashastra* the need for a national king. This need to assert the unity of India in the past explains, in part, why Indian historians tended to see Indian history as a history of Indian empires and their break up and why they treated the period of empires as period of national greatness. In their view Chandragupta Maurya, Asoka, Chandragupta Vikramditya and Akbar were great because they built great empires. Interestingly, this led to a contradiction in the nationalist approach during the Gandhian era. On the one hand India was praised as the land of non-violence and, on the other hand, the military power of the empire-builders was praised. One curious result was that Asoka was praised for his commitment to non-violence by some historians, others condemned him for the same as it weakened the empire against foreign invaders.

The nationalists wrote approvingly of India's culture and social structure. In the bargain they underplayed caste oppression, social and economic denigration of the lower castes, and male domination. Moreover, while rightly emphasising India's contribution to the development of civilisation in the world, they tended to underplay the impact of other cultures and civilisations on India's development. Furthermore, as in the case of political institutions, often the worth of social values and institutions was accepted and then found to have existed in ancient India.

Apart from its historical veracity, which cannot be discussed here, the nationalist historians' approach towards ancient India had a few highly negative consequences. (i) Nearly all achievements of the Indian people in different areas of human endeavour were associated with the ancient period, (ii) It was Hindu culture and social structure in its Sanskritic and

Brahmanical form that was emphasised. (iii) Glorification of the past tended to merge with communalism and, later, with regionalism.

In any case the high water-mark of the Indian historical writing on the ancient period of Indian history was reached around early 1930s. Later, it became more and more a caricature of the writings of the earlier period.

Nationalist historiography of medieval India developed mostly during the 1920s and after, often to dispute the colonial and communal approaches. Nationalists historians of medieval India repeated more or less the entire nationalist approach towards ancient Indian history. In particular, they emphasised the development of a composite culture in Northern India as a result of interaction among Hindus and Muslims both at the level of the common people and the elite. They also denied the colonial-communal assertion that Muslim rulers remained foreigners even after settling down in the country or that they were inherently oppressive or more so than their predecessors or counterparts in the rest of the world. Above all, they denied that Hindus and Muslims lived in a conflictual situation, ever at each other's throats.

Despite their tendency to glorify India's past and to defend Indian culture against colonial denigeration, many of the nationalists historians also looked for an answer to the question: how could a small trading company, backed by a small country thousands of miles away, conquer such a large country as India with its hoary past and great civilisations. This indicated the beginnings of a critique of Indian culture and social structure, which, in turn, led to initial steps being taken towards the study of social history, especially pertaining to the caste system and the position of women.

The contemporary nationalist critique of colonialism also led to first steps being taken towards the economic history of pre-colonial India. Also as the national movement developed as a mass movement, attention turned in the 1930s towards a study of the role of the common people in history. This trend fructified, however, only after the 1950s.

It may also be kept in view that the historians we are discussing were handicapped by the limitation of their sources. They had to rely mostly on written sources, though epigraphy and numismatics were beginning to make a major contribution. Archaeology was still in its infancy, while the use of anthropology and sociology was negligible. Economics too was seen as a preserve only of the economists.

20.4 NATIONALIST HISTORY OF MODERN PERIOD

Nationalist historiography flourished mainly in dealing with the ancient and medieval periods. It hardly existed for the modern period and came into being mainly after 1947, no school of nationalist historians of modern India having existed before 1947. This was in part because, in the era of nationalism, to be a nationalist was also to be anti-imperialist, which meant confrontation with the ruling, colonial authorities. And that was not possible for academics because of colonial control over the educational system. It became safe to be anti-imperialist only after 1947. Consequently, a history of the national movement or of colonial economy did not exist. This is, of course, not a complete explanation of the absence of nationalist historiography before 1947. After all, Indian economists did develop a sharp and brilliant critique of the colonial economy of India and its impact on the people.

A detailed and scientific critique of colonialism was developed in the last quarter of the 19th century by non-academic, nationalist economists such as Dadabhai Naoroji, Justice Ranade, G. V. Joshi, R. C. Dutt, K. T. Telang, G. K. Gokhale and D. E. Wacha. Several academic economists such as K. T. Shah, V. C. Kale, C. N. Vakil, D. R.

Gadgil, Gyan Chand, V.K.R.V. Rao and Wadia and Merchant followed in their footsteps in the first half of the 20th century. Their critique did not find any reflection in history books of the period. That was to happen only after 1947, and that too in the 1960s and after. This critique, however, formed the core of nationalist agitation in the era of mass movements after 1920. Tilak, Gandhiji, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel and Subhash Bose, for example, relied heavily upon it. A few historians who referred in passing to the national movement and nationalist historians after 1947 did not see it as an anti-imperialist movement. Similarly, the only history of the national movement that was written was by nationalist leaders such as R.G. Pradhan, A.C. Mazumdar, Jawaharlal Nehru and Pattabhi Sitaramayya. Post-1947 historians accepted the legitimacy of nationalism and the Indian national movement but seldom dealt with its foundation in the economic critique of the colonialism. They also tended to underplay, when not ignoring completely, other streams of the nationalist struggle.

Modern historians have also been divided between those, such as Tara Chand, who held that India has been a nation-in-the-making since the 19th century and those who argue that India has been a nation since the ancient times. At the same time, to their credit, all of them accept India's diversity, i.e., its multi-lingual, multi-religious, multi-ethnic, and therefore multi-cultural character. Nationalist historians also have ignored or severely underplayed inner contradictions of Indian society based on class and caste or the oppression of and discrimination against women and tribes. They have also ignored the movements against class and caste oppressions. They have seldom made an in-depth analysis of the national movement, and often indulged in its blind glorification. While adopting a secular position and condemning communalism, they do not make a serious analysis of its character or elements, causation, and development. Quite often, it is seen merely as an outcome of the British policy of 'divide and rule'. They give due space to the social reform movements but do not take a critical look at them, and often ignore the movements of the tribal people and the lower castes for their emancipation. As a whole, historians neglected economic, social and cultural history and at the most attached a chapter or two on these without integrating them into the main narrative.

We may make a few additional remarks regarding nationalist historians as a whole. They tended to ignore inner contradictions within Indian society. They suffered from an upper caste and male chauvinist cultural and social bias. Above all they tended to accept the theory of Indian exceptionalism that Indian historical development was entirely different from that of the rest of the world. They missed a historical evaluation of Indian social institutions in an effort to prove India's superiority in historical development. Especially negative and harmful both to the study of India's history and the political development of modern India was their acceptance of James Mill's periodisation of Indian history into Hindu and Muslim periods.

20.5 SUMMARY

Nationalist historians did, however, set up high tradition of scholarship. They based their writings on hard research and commitment to truth as they saw it. They carefully and meticulously footnoted all their statements. Consequently, their writing was very often empirically sound. Their research advanced our understanding and interpretation of the past. They also contributed to the cultural defence against colonisation of our culture. Simultaneously, most of them contributed to the positive aspects of the modernisation of our society. Many of them also uncovered new sources and developed new frameworks for the interpretation of existing sources. They raised many new questions, produced controversies and initiated active debates. They also inculcated the notion that historical research and writing should have relevance for the present. Even when not going far in their own research, they accepted and promoted the notion that the role that the common people play in history should be a major component of history writing.

Above all, nationalist historical writing contributed to the self-confidence, self-assertion and a certain national pride which enabled Indian people to struggle against colonialism especially in the face of denigration of India's past and the consequent inferiority complex promoted by colonial writers. Nilkanth Shastri and other historians also helped overcome the regional bias – the bias of treating India as coterminous with the Indo-Gangetic plane. In this respect, as in many others, nationalist historical writing in India became a major unifying factor so far as the literate Indians were concerned.

20.6 EXERCISES

1) Discuss the differences between the colonial and nationalist historiography.

2) What are the specific features of nationalist historiography concerning ancient India?

3) Write a note on the issues discussed by nationalist historians writing on the modern period.

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UNIT 21 COMMUNALIST TRENDS

Structure

21.1 Introduction

21.2 Dependence on Colonialist Historiography

21.3 Basic Constituents of Communal View of Indian History

21.3.1 Conception of Hindus and Muslims as Antagonistic Communities

21.3.2 View of Muslims as Rulers in Medieval India

21.4 Differences between Nationalist and Communalist Historiography

21.5 Critique of Communalist Historiography

21.6 Summary

21.7 Exercises

21.1 INTRODUCTION

A communal interpretation of Indian history has formed the core of communal ideology as a major instrument for the spread of communal consciousness. In fact, it would not be wrong to say that the communal interpretation of history has been the main constituent of communal ideology in India. This has been particularly true of Hindu communalism. Muslim communalism too has used 'history', but it has depended more on religion and minority feeling, which have been used to create a fear psychosis. To create a similar fear psychosis, Hindu communalists have tried to use an appeal to the medieval period of Indian history.

In particular, history teaching in schools played an important role in the spread of communalism. Gandhiji, for example, pointed this out: 'Communal harmony could not be permanently established in our country so long as highly distorted versions of history were being taught in her schools and colleges, through her textbooks.' Similarly the "Foreword" to the *Report of the Kanpur Riots Enquiry Committee,* appointed by the National Congress, pointed out in 1932 that the communal view of medieval history found in school and other history books 'is playing a considerable part in estranging the two communities' and that 'an attempt to remove historical misconceptions is the first and the most indispensable step in the real solution of the Hindu-Muslim problem.'

The communal view of history has been, and is, spread through poetry, drama, historical novels, popular articles in newspapers and magazines, children's magazines, pamphlets and public speeches. The historical veracity of such popularly disseminated view of history was virtually nil, but it passed as history in popular mind. We may also note that an integrated and conscious communal view of history at the level of research or scholarship was rarely found among Indian historians before 1947 mainly because of secular nationalist influence among the intelligentsia. Communal forces gained significant intellectual adherents in India and Pakistan only after 1947. However, communal approach to history was openly preached by communal political leaders and found reflection in school textbooks and popular writing, etc., as we have pointed out earlier. Moreover, although the proponents of the Hindu and Muslim communal views of history take up diametrically opposite and hostile positions, they adopt basically the same historiographic framework, premises and assumptions. Often the only difference in their approach is that the opposite religious community is treated as the villain.

21.2 DEPENDENCE ON COLONIALIST HISTORIOGRAPHY

Unlike nationalist historians who countered colonial stereotypes, communal historians based themselves almost entirely on colonial historiography of medieval India and colonial era textbooks. Most of the generalisations made by Indian communal historians can be traced to the writings of British historians and administrators. Nor were British motives innocent. From the late 1820s, the British rulers clearly realised that India was too large to be ruled by force by the British and, therefore, they had to follow the policy of Divide and Rule. They sought to divide Indians or grounds of region, language and caste, but above all they took recourse to religious divide. Secondly, aware of their own foreign status, they wanted to show that Indians had always been ruled by foreigners. Muslim rule was foreign rule, therefore, there was nothing wrong about British being foreigners. The British had only replaced one foreign rule by another foreign rule, which was benevolent and humane compared with the previous despotic and inhuman rule. Thirdly, they tried to show that Muslim rulers had subjugated, oppressed and maltreated Hindus and that the British had virtually liberated them. Hindus were, therefore, better off under British rule and should, therefore, support and not oppose it. Fourthly, they asserted that Hindus and Muslims had always been divided and had fought each other and could, therefore, never live peacefully together unless a third party – the British were present as rulers. Thus, the leading British historian of medieval India, H.M. Elliot, wrote in 1849 in his original preface to his *History of India As Told by Its Own Historians* that of 'the few glimpses we have, even among the short extracts in this single volume, of Hindus slain for disputing with Mohammedans, of general prohibitions against processions, worship, and ablutions, and of other intolerant measures of idols mutilated, of temples razed, of forcible conversions and marriages, of proscriptions and confiscations, of murders and massacres, and of the sensuality and drunkenness of the tyrants who enjoined them .' He also frankly confessed his motive in publishing his history. It was to make 'our native subjects more sensible of the immense advantages accruing to them under the mildness and equity of our rule' and to make the emerging nationalist intellectuals – 'the bombastic Babus' as he called them – see the reality of pre-British India and thus stop their incipient critique of British colonialism. In this respect, it is important to keep in view that it was not M.A. Jinnah or V. D. Savarkar who first put forward in 1937 the two-nation theory that led to the partition of the country. Much before them the British writers had created the view that Indian nation meant Hindu nation, that rule by Turkish, Afghan and Mughal rulers was 'foreign' rule, while rule by Rajput Rajas or Maratha Sardars was Indian or Hindu rule. But how could Mughal rule be foreign? Because they were Muslim. Thus, to sum up, this aspect, communal interpretation of history, was a part of the British policy of 'Divide and Rule'.

One reason why the British writers and later Indian historians took such a communal view was their reliance on medieval chronicles for reconstruction of medieval history. Firstly, many of the writers of the chronicles and histories in medieval (as also, in fact, ancient society) were from the priestly classes who primarily constituted the educated at the time. Their religious outlook and interests seriously distorted and limited their writings. They often saw secular political events in religious terms. They tended to depict rulers and chiefs as Divine agents. Moreover, the priestly as well as other chroniclers lived on the patronage of the Kings, nobles, rajas and zamindars. Therefore, they tended to show religious virtue in their most selfish actions. Brutal wars, court intrigues, everyday politics and administrative policies were shown as religiously motivated. Their efforts to conquer others, or expand their domains, or to

fight for their own zamindaris and kingdoms were seen as acts of religious zeal, earning religious merits for them. Thus, for example, the administrative or political actions of Asoka, Chandra Gupta, the Sultans, the Mughals, the Maratha Chiefs, or the Rajput Rajas were often portrayed by contemporary writers in religious terms.

This is, of course, true, not only of India. It is equally true of the medieval historians of Europe. But European historians of the 19th and 20th centuries gradually discounted this religious bias for example in the study of the Crusades or of the medieval Popes and kings. Similarly, Portuguese and Spanish expansion in the 16th and 17th centuries was portrayed at the time as motivated by the desire to spread Christianity. Today, no European historian will accept this as the main factor in considering whether to praise or to criticize the Portuguese or the Spanish regimes.

Unfortunately, the colonial and some modern Indian historians incorporated the religious outlook of the ancient and medieval chroniclers in their own writings and thus contributed to a communal interpretation of Indian history. For example, till this day, the communal historians, whether Hindu or Muslim, go on portraying Mahmud Ghazni's invasions as religiously motivated and as throwing light on the character of Islam. Similarly, they portray the political struggle of medieval India, for example between Rana Pratap and Akbar or Shivaji and Aurangzeb as struggles based on or motivated by religion. Moreover, invariably the literary sources of the ancient and medieval periods deal primarily with the doings of the kings, princely courts and upper classes and not with the society as a whole. In the military and diplomatic affairs of the ruling groups religious considerations do appear important. When wars are waged and alliances are made, many factors are balanced and appealed to. Real issues are often kept disguised. Appeals are made to marriage ties, kinship, language, caste, region, as well as religion. But the main factor is consideration of interest, economic or political. It was very much the same in the past as today. Today, every nation clothes even the most marked of its aggressions with some decent motive. The difference is that a historian who accepts the official explanations of today would be laughed at by fellow historians. But many historians have accepted official explanations of the past rulers and of the official chroniclers.

It may also be pointed out that, just as in the case of colonial writing, contemporary communal politics were, and are, projected into the past and the happenings of the past so described and historical myths created as to serve contemporary communal politics. Thus both communalists, Hindu as well as Muslims, adopted, and continue to adopt, an interpretation of the past through which feelings of fear, insecurity and schism could be aroused among their contemporary followers. In this sense, if communal history produced and propagated communalism, in its turn communal politics gave, and gives, a fillip to communal history writing and propagation. Another way of saying the same thing is to stress that it was not **medieval history as lived by the medieval people** or the medieval historical processes that generated communalism, it was the communal interpretation of history that produced communalism as well as got produced by communalism – that is, this interpretation was itself communal ideology.

Lastly, it may be noted that because of being subjected to communal view of history from very childhood, elements of this view came to prevail even among many nationalists and other secular persons, who were unaware of their communal implications. For example, many talked of India having undergone a thousand years' of foreign rule or having suffered social and cultural decline during the medieval period or having been ruled by Muslims or Muslim rule. Similarly, elements and themes of the communal view of history are found in nationalist historical works.

21.3 BASIC CONSTITUENTS OF COMMUNAL VIEW OF INDIAN HISTORY

In the following account, we will discuss some of the important aspects of the communalist interpretation of Indian history.

21.3.1 Conception of Hindus and Muslims as Antagonistic Communities

In communal view, India's medieval history was one long story of Hindu-Muslim conflict. Hindus and Muslims were permanently divided into hostile camps whose mutual relations were bitter, distrustful, antagonistic and hostile. There existed distinct and separate Hindu and Muslim cultures. Because of their belonging to different religions, Hindus and Muslims formed distinct and exclusive and mutually hostile cultural and political communities. Thus, for example, R.C. Mazumdar wrote in 1957 that medieval India remained 'permanently divided into two powerful units, each with marked individuality of its own, which did not prove amenable to a fusion or even any close permanent coordination.' Similarly, Ishtiaq Ahmad Qureshi wrote in the 1950s that 'at all times the Muslims of the sub-continent were resolute in refusing to be assimilated to the local population and made conscious efforts to maintain their distinctive character.'

This view found a more virulent form in the hands of the communal political leaders. Thus, in his presidential address at the Lahore session of the Muslim League in March 1940, M.A. Jinnah said: 'The history of the last 12 hundred years had failed to achieve unity and had witnessed, during the ages, India always divided into Hindu India and Muslim India.' V.D. Savarkar wrote in 1923 in his *Hindutva* that 'the day when Mohammad Gazani crossed the Indus…. that day the conflict of life and death began' which 'ended shall we say with Abdali. In this conflict, all Hindus, belonging to different sects, regions and castes, suffered as Hindus and triumphed as Hindus.' This struggle between Hindus and Muslims was then carried over to the 19th and 20th centuries. This view was to form the basis of the communal view that Hindus and Muslims have always lived in mutual antagonism. M.S. Golwalkar, for example, condemned the nationalists for spreading the view by which Hindus 'began to class ourselves with our old invaders and foes under the outlandish name – Indian.' And he added: 'That is the real danger of the day, our self-forgetfulness, our believing our old and bitter enemies to be our friends.' The Muslim communalists readily accepted and propagated this view and based their two-nation theory on it.

As a corollary of this view, the communal historians denied or underplayed any other social tension or conflict in medieval society. For example, any caste or class tensions were ignored and other political conflicts such as between Rajput and Maratha chieftains or between Afghans and Turks were underplayed. The Hindu communalists described the rule by medieval Muslim rulers as foreign rule because they were Muslim. Muslims were, thus, not seen as integral parts of Indian society. Instead they were seen as permanent foreigners in India. This was because they practised Islam. In other words, any Indian, as soon as he changed his religion from Hinduism, became, because of that act, a foreigner in the land. Because Islam had been founded outside India, it was a foreign religion and anyone who practised it became a foreigner.

The communalists bracketed rule by Muslim rulers and British rule as foreign. As was pointed out earlier, they talked of 'a thousand years of slavery.' Golwalkar, for example, repeatedly referred to Muslisms as foreigners who treated India not as a home but as a *sarai*. He also warned Muslims and Christians: 'There are only two courses open to the foreign elements, either to merge themselves in the national race and adopt its culture,

or to live at the sweet will of the national race.' The view that Muslim were permanent foreigners in India was accepted by the Muslim communalists, though in an altered form. In their hands, the 'foreigner' view took the form of emphasising the complete separateness of Muslims from Hindus. The Muslims, they said, could not be Indians in the same way as Hindus. M.A. Jinnah, for example, asserted in 1941 that 'a Muslim when he converted, granted that he was converted more than a thousand years ago,.. belongs to a different order, not only religious but social, and he has lived in that distinctly separate and antagonistic social order, religiously, socially and culturally. It is now more than a thousand years that the bulk of the Muslims have lived in a different world, in a different society, in a different philosophy and a different faith.' Similarly, Nawab of Mamdot, a Muslim League leader, said in 1941 that 'Pakistan had existed in India for nearly twelve centuries.'

The theory of 'historical antagonism' led both Hindus and Muslim communalists to claim that Hindus and Muslims formed two different nations. The Muslim communalists demanded after 1937 that, since the 'two nations' could not live together, Muslims should be given a separate state – Pakistan – after independence. The Hindu communalists, on the other hand, argued after 1937 for the creation of a Hindu state in which Muslims would live in a subordinate position.

21.3.2 View of Muslims as Rulers in Medieval India

One of the basic constituents of communal ideology was the view that in medieval India Muslims constituted the ruling class and the Hindus were the ruled, the dominated or 'the subject race.' Thus, **all** Muslims, including the overwhelming majority among them of rural and urban poor, the peasants and artisans and the lowly administrative employees and soldiers were portrayed as rulers, and all Hindus, including the rajas, chiefs, nobles, zamindars and higher officials as the ruled. Thus, addressing Lahore students in 1941, M.A. Jinnah said: 'Our demand is not from Hindus because Hindus never took the whole of India. It was the Muslims who took India and ruled for 700 years. It was the British who took India from the Mussalmans.' The Hindu communalists too readily accepted that Hindus were 'slaves' under 'Muslim rule'. For example, in 1937, V.D. Savarkar described the rule of Muslim rulers as a 'veritable death-warrant to the Hindu nation.'

As a corollary of this view, it was then argued that the 19th and 20th century Muslims had the 'happy' and 'proud' ever present memory of having been the ruling class, while Hindus had the 'sad' and 'humiliating' memory of having been the 'subject race'. Another corollary was the notion that politics and political power in India had always been based on religion and religious differences and that too of and among the rulers; thus, the character of the Indian state was determined by religion and that too of the rulers. Furthermore, the basic objective of the medieval state was the propagation and glorification of Islam, and that this was so because of the inherent character of a state whose rulers were Muslims. As the Report of the *Kanpur Riots Enquiry Committee* pointed out that the communalists regarded the Muslims rulers 'as zealous crusaders whose dominant motive was the spread of Islam and whose method for achieving this object was the destruction of temples and forcible conversions… The Muslim writers deplore the want of true religious feeling in Muslim kings in permitting idolatry to persist in their dominion and the unbelievers to prosper, while the Hindu writers bewail the weakness of the religious sentiment in Hindu rulers and their want of patriotism in not combining effectively against a foreigner in defence of their religion and their country.'

For the same reason, the autonomous states ruled by Hindu rajas and chiefs, such as the Maratha empire and the states ruled by Maratha chieftains, Rajput rajas and Jat zamindars were declared to be Hindu states whose rulers were the defenders of the Hindu religion. At the same time, the communalists branded those rulers who did not conform to the communal stereotypes as 'bad' Hindus or 'bad' Muslims who were some sort of 'traitors'

to their faith and their communities. Real or fictitious incidents were narrated to prove this point. As pointed out earlier, such incidents could be often dug up from the writings of the medieval chroniclers, court poets, etc., who earned their livelihood by justifying, on religious grounds, the deeds or misdeeds of their patrons.

Communalists also adopted a purely religion-based definition of cultures and that too based solely on the religions of the upper classes. Hence, since Hinduism and Islam were by definition different, there could be, and was, no common cultural ground or even mutual interaction between the two. The Hindu communalists also readily adopted and propagated the colonial view that Muslim rulers, and therefore Muslims, had tyrannised Hindus during the medieval period. They depicted the history of the medieval Indian society as one long tale of murder, rapine and oppression, hostility to Hinduism and Hindus and the forcible spread of Islam through temple destruction and forcible conversion by the Muslim rulers and their officials.. The examples of this view were, as in other aspects, found in non-academic writing. M.S. Golwalkar, for example, in his booklet *We or Our Nationhood Defined*, published in 1939, usually referred to Muslims as 'murderous hoards', 'murderous bands', 'despoilers', 'the enemy', 'forces of destruction,' 'old invaders and foes', and 'our old enemies'. The 'Muslim tyranny' was moreover portrayed as being a result not of the character of the rulers or the ruling classes but of the basic character of Islamic religion itself. Indra Prakash, a Hindu Mahasabha leader, for example, wrote in *Where We Differ* in 1942 :

> 'The Muslim religion exalts and heroworships an assassin. This religion encourages its followers to kill men of other religions. According to the tenets of Islam the killing of a Kafir or a man belonging to the fold of any other religion raises the murderer or assassin in the estimation of his fellow-men or community; nay, it makes him a *shahid* and facilitates his transport to heaven.'

The wide prevalence of the theory of 'Muslim tyranny' and its roots in Islam is very well brought out in the following two passages from the Report of the Kanpur Riots Enquiry Committee:

> 'These stories of idol-breaking and forcible conversions give colour to the view generally canvassed in our histories which represents the whole movement as if it was a continued religious war between Hinduism and Islam extending over eight centuries. Even those writers who seem to understand its political nature by their general treatment of the subject, invariably leave upon the mind the same impression.
>
> 'Of the many wrong impressions prevailing at present one which is the most fruitful source of bitterness and ill-will is the impression that Islam is inherently bigoted and intolerant…. The theory that Islam has spread by the sword has been canvassed so widely and so persistently that for the average Indian mind this proposition has become almost an axiom…. (It) gives its edge to the Hindu-Muslim problem….'

Similarly, a note regarding the Punjab University examination question paper said:

> 'Those who have examined university papers in history will know how Muslim rulers and administrators are depicted as blood-sucking vampires and fiends of cruelty. The general impression which they give is that the Muslim rulers came to India simply to destroy the Hindus and their culture and to convert the people to Islam at the point of the sword.'

Muslim communalists reacted to these views by defending the record of the medieval Muslim rulers and chieftains, including that of a ruler like Aurangzeb, including his

religious bigotry, imposition of Jaziya and the destruction of temples. Many of them hailed Aurangzeb as the builder of *Dar-al-Islam* in India. On the other hand, they condemned Akbar for weakening Islam. To counter the theory of 'Islamic destruction' in India, they stressed the beneficial impact of 'egalitarian' Islam on the Hindu society, "ridden with superstition, caste, untouchability, and inequality."

Above all, the Hindu communal view of Indian history relied on the myth that Indian society and culture-Indian civilisation-which had reached great, ideal heights in the ancient period fell into decay and decline during the medieval period as a result of "Muslim intrusion and domination." Consequently, to prove its great height, the ancient period was viewed totally uncritically and was treated as sacrosanct; no critical evaluation of any of its aspects was to be tolerated. Even its most negative features were denied or defended. Moreover, Indian culture was identified with ancient culture, which was, in turn, identified with Hinduism in its Sanskritic and Brahmanical form. Thus, it was the Gupta Age which was declared to be India's Golden Age. Also 'greatness' of a civilisation was often defined by military conquests, strong monarchies, and the size of the empires. Furthermore, antiquity or 'ancientness' of a civilisation was seen as one sign of its greatness. Consequently, the communalists proclaimed Aryan civilisation to be the oldest in the world. Sometimes, to prove this, they dated back the Vedic period by several centuries, sometimes by thousands of years.

A basic component of the 'rise and fall' view of Indian history was the declaration that the culture and civilisation of India underwent a 'terrible fall' during the medieval period. Most of the social, cultural and economic ills of Indian society – indeed all of its backwardness – were ascribed to the medieval period, 'Muslim rule' and the impact of Islam. The entire medieval period was characterized as a dark age. Another Hindu communal theme was that of the 'Hindu revival' in the late 17th and early 18th century. The Maratha revolt under Shivaji, the establishment of Maratha empire under the Peshwas, the rebellions by several Rajput rajas against Aurangzeb and the struggle of Sikh gurus, against Mughal domination were described as 'Hindu revolts' against Muslim 'domination' and Hindu struggle to regain Hindu 'honour' and 'glory'. The communalists described the rebellions, revolts and struggles for territory and political power by petty zamindars, rajas and Maratha chieftains as Hindu struggle and the states they founded as Hindu Kingdoms. This entire approach was summed up by V.D. Savarkar in 1923 when he described the 18th century Maratha struggle as "the Great Movement of National Liberation" and wrote:

> 'In this prolonged furious conflict our people became intensely conscious of ourselves as Hindus and were welded into a nation to an extent unknown in our history….Sanatanists, Satnamis, Sikhs, Aryas, Anaryas, Marathas and Madrasis, Brahmins and Panchmas - all suffered as Hindus and triumphed as Hindus… The enemies hated us as Hindus and the whole family of peoples and races, of sects and creeds that flourished from Atak to Cuttack was suddenly individualized into a single Being.'

Muslim communalists created their own Golden Age. But feeling that it was not so easy to glorify India's medieval past and unwilling to praise the 'Hindu', i.e., ancient period, they harkened back to the 'Golden Age of Islam' or to Arabic and Turkish achievements of the middle ages. Thus the heroic myths, the great figures and cultural achievements they appealed to belonged to medieval West Asian history. They thus tended to put greater emphasis on their 'Muslimness' than their Indianness. The Muslim communalists also developed their own version of 'the decline and fall' of the Muslims. While Hindus were going up during British rule, they said, Muslims were 'falling' and getting 'ruined' not as a part of the Indian people but as a community because they had lost their political power. Their social condition, it was said, was becoming pitiable; their culture, religion and economic interests were threatened with ruin. They were increasingly becoming weak and helpless.

This theme of 'Muslim melancholy', as Altaf Hussain Hali put it, was picked up and used politically in support of the demand for Pakistan by Muslim League leaders. One of the League's major ideologues, Z.A. Suleri, wrote in the 1940s that Muslims were facing the danger of being 'drowned' or 'blotted out'. By the end of the 19th century, 'the century – long prosperity and patronage of the new power had made the Hindus solid, strong, educated.…on the other hand, while the century-long suppression had thrown the Muslims into the very mire of misery.'

21.4 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN NATIONALIST AND COMMUNALIST HISTORIOGRAPHY

The professional nationalist historians and many early nationalists contributed unconsciously to communal historiography. They looked for heroes to inspire the Indian people and found them in those medieval figures who had fought against oppression and in defence of their own states and territories. This was because, on the one hand, they wanted to express their nationalism and, on the other, academics and early nationalists did not want to antagonize the British rulers who frowned upon any effort to treat as heroes those who had fought against the British. For example, the British immediately put a ban on any favourable writing on Siraj-ud-daulah, Tipu Sultan, Tantia Tope or Rani of Jhansi. I have, in another place, described this as 'vicarious' nationalism. Unfortunately, the communalists used this vicarious nationalism to propagate their view of Indian history. Instead of treating Rana Pratap, or Shivaji, or Guru Gobind Singh as fighters against oppression and for defence of their people or territory or as local patriots, they were declared to be national heroes because they fought against 'foreigners'. But how were the Mughals Foreigners? The latter could not described as foreigners by no other definition except that they were Muslims. It is also important to note that the nationalists not only declared Rana Pratap, Shivaji, and Guru Gobind Singh as national heroes but also Asoka, Akbar, Tipu Sultan, Rani of Jhansi and all others, Hindu or Muslim, who had fought against the British in 1857. Later, Khudi Ram Bose, Lokamanya Tilak, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Mahatama Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhash Bose, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Bhagat Singh and Chandra Shekhar Azad became heroes of the nationalists.

There was another aspect in which nationalists differed from the communalists in their treatment of the past. They too made a positive appraisal of ancient Indian society, polity, economy and culture. But they also presented a positive picture of the medieval period, while making a critique of the negative features of both ancient and medieval periods. The nationalist glorification of the past was part of the effort to bolster national self-confidence and pride, especially in the face of the colonial ideological effort to undermine them and create a psychology of inferiority and dependence. The Hindu communalists praised or idealised the ancient period in order to contrast it with the fall and decline during the medieval period and thus create anti-Muslim feelings. The nationalists went to the past looking for positive features in order to prove India's fitness for modern parliamentary democracy, modern civic and political rights, popular representation through elections and self-government. Nationalist historians like K.P. Jayaswal, P.N. Banerjee, B.K. Sarkar, U.N. Ghosal, D.R. Bhandarkar and even the early R.C. Mazumdar emphasized the democratic, constitutional, non-despotic and even republican, non-religious and secular, and rational elements of the ancient Indian polity and social life. Thus, in nationalist hands, the glorification of ancient Indian society was a weapon in the anti-imperialist struggle. Despite its unscientific features and the potential for mischief in a multi-lingual, multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-caste country, it had a certain historically progressive content. Moreover, the nationalists readily adopted and accepted scientific criteria for the evaluation and the further

development of their views. The communalists, on the other hand, used the ancient past to create and consolidate communal feelings. They also held up for praise some of the most negative features of ancient Indian society and polity. They would also not tolerate the scientific treatment or criticism of any of its aspects.

The communalists tended to underplay the role of colonialism and put greater emphasis on the adversarial relationship with the other religious community. They were, in general, critical of the actual national movement and its secularism. While the Hindu communalists declared it to be pro-Muslim, or at least indulging in 'Muslim appeasement', the Muslim communalists accused it of being anti-Muslim or at least of being Hindu controlled and therefore of being an instrument of Hindu domination. The Hindu communalists were in particular critical of the Moderate nationalists of late 19th century who had initiated the economic critique of colonialism and laid the basis of modern secularism. The only major critique of colonialism that both communalists made was that it had introduced modernity or modern thought based on rationality and science and scientific outlook.

The communalists also defined nationalism not in economic or political terms, as the national movement did, but in cultural terms or as cultural nationalism based on Hindu or Muslim culture. Consequently, they traced modern nationalism to Bankim Chandra or Swami Dayanand or Sayed Ahmed Khan rather than to early national leaders, such as Dadabhai Naoroji, Justice Ranade and Surendranath Banerjea.

21.5 CRITIQUE OF COMMUNALIST HISTORIOGRAPHY

The communal view of history is virtually dissolved if history is studied in its wider sense. For example, economic history reveals class interests, class solidarity, and class antagonisms which cut across religious frontiers. A Hindu peasant had much more in common with a Muslim peasant than he had with a Hindu zamindar or moneylender. A Muslim weaver of Agra had far more in common with a Hindu weaver than with a Muslim noble or king. In other words, division of society between those who produced economic surplus and those who appropriate it would form multi-religious groups on both sides of the economic line.

Social and economic history reveals that basically there was no Muslim rule under the Sultans or Mughals. All the Muslims did not form the ruling class, nor all the Hindus the ruled classes. The Muslim masses were as poor and as oppressed as the Hindu masses. Moreover, both of them were looked down upon as low creatures by the rulers, nobles, chiefs, and zamindars, whether Hindu or Muslim. Social history would show that if Hindus were divided by caste, among Muslims the Sharif Muslims behaved as a superior caste over the Ajlaf or lower class Muslims. History of administration would reveal continuity in the administrative structures of the Mughals and Marathas, and so on. It would show how wrong it is to talk of Hindu or Muslim character of ancient or medieval states. Social and cultural history would bring out the forces of cultural cooperation and integration and the evolution of a composite culture in medieval India as also in ancient India. They would also show that in medieval as also modern times an upper class Muslim had far more in common culturally with an upper class Hindu than he had with a lower class Muslim. Or that a Punjabi Hindu stood closer culturally to a Punjabi Muslim than to a Bengali Hindu. Social and cultural history would also reveal social divisions and diversities other than those based on religion. For example, those based on sect or caste. There was the fierce struggle between the Right-hand castes and the Left-hand castes in 18th century South India. Would one be justified in describing this conflict in terms of a two-nation theory? Even a careful study of political history would bring out that the politics of Indian states, as politics the world over, were moved mainly by considerations of economic and political interests and not by considerations of religion.

Then, as today, rulers as well as rebels, used religious appeal as an outer colouring to disguise the hard facts of material interests and ambitions.

Moreover, political events and movements should be placed in their basic social and economic setting. We should ask such questions as who decides, who dominates, who benefits from a political system? How does a system operate? Why are one set of policies followed and not others? One should, for example, compare Aurangzeb's and Shivaji's policies towards the peasants or merchants and bankers. Or what political, social and economic relationships did the state systems of ancient or medieval India support? How were economic gains, social prestige, and political power distributed among different social classes and groups in ancient or medieval period or, say, in Rana Pratap's state. To what extent did the Turks or later Mughal rulers disturb the existing patterns of political, social, and economic power? Even such a simple demographic fact as that the population of the Rajputs in Rajputana was only 6.4% in 1901 reveals many things. Similarly, social analysis of modern political movements would show that the social base of the Hindu and Muslim communalists was the same. Also they shared a common, basically pro-imperialist political approach.

21.6 SUMMARY

To sum up, a scientific study of history would clearly show not only that communal approach to history is factually and analytically wrong, but also that this communal approach was and is the product of unscientific politics and was generated by the foreign rulers and later used by the communalists for their own political purposes. It is based on certain stereotypes which were created about the Indians by the colonialist historians and commentators. It divided the Indian history along religious lines, the ancient period supposedly belonging to the Hindus whereas the medieval period to be considered as property of the Muslims. The communalist historians and politicians – both Hindus and Muslims – accepted this interpretation of Indian past and filled it with more stereotypes portraying the two antagonistic communities facing each other for centuries. Such a view of history was responsible for creating social tension and disharmony among the Indian people.

21.7 EXERCISES

1) Discuss the important features of communalist historiography.

2) What are the differences between nationalist and communalist historiography?

3) Discuss the relationship between communalist and colonialist views of history.

UNIT 22 MARXIST APPROACH

Structure

22.1 Introduction

22.2 Beginnings

22.3 D.D. Kosambi and Paradigm Shift

22.4 The Feudalism Debate

22.5 Indian Nationalism

22.6 Intellectual History : Debate on Indian Renaissance

22.7 Other Trends and Historians within Marxist Historiography

22.8 Summary

22.9 Exercises

22.10 Suggested Readings

22.1 INTRODUCTION

Marxism is a dominant presence in the field of Indian historiography in the post-independence period. A lot of historians either come directly within its fold or have been influenced by it in certain degrees. It has also influenced most of the trends of Indian historiography in some way or the other. It is, therefore, not possible to give a comprehensive account of all the trends in it and the historians associated with this stream of historiography. However, in this Unit, we will try to cover some of the important trends and provide information about some important historians within Marxist tradition in Indian historiography.

22.2 BEGINNINGS

The two books which heralded the beginning of Marxist historiography in India were *India Today* by R. Palme Dutt and *Social Background of Indian Nationalism* by A.R. Desai. *India Today* was originally written for the famous Left Book Club in England and was published by Victor Gollancz in 1940. Its Indian edition was published in 1947. In the preface to a new edition of the book in 1970, the author was aware of its limitations and realised that it 'can now only be regarded as a historical work of its period, constituting a survey from a Marxist standpoint of the record of British rule in India and of the development of the Indian people's struggle, both the national movement and the working class movement, up to the eve of independence, as seen at that time'. Despite its limitations, however, its position as a foundational text of Marxist thinking on Indian history has not diminished over time. It comprehensively covers most aspects of Indian society, economy and politics under colonial rule. It applies Marxist analysis to various developments in the colonial economy, to the problems of peasantry, to the national movement and to the communal problems.

It, at many levels, reinforces the nationalist criticism of the economic impact of colonial rule in India. Although strident in its criticism of the colonial rule, it looks at colonialism as both a 'destructive' and a 'regenerative' force, following Marx's own comments on this issue. However, Dutt is quite categorical that this 'regenerating' role of colonialism was rather limited and the situation has been reversed in his own times :

> 'Today imperialist rule in India, like capitalism all over the world, has long outlived its objectively progressive or regenerative role, corresponding to the period of free trade capitalism, and has become the most powerful reactionary force in India, buttressing all the other forms of Indian reaction.'

Dutt squarely holds colonialism and capitalism responsible for the poverty of the country. The process of plundering the resources of the country started quite early and was responsible for funding the capitalist development in Britain and other countries of Europe:

> 'The conquest of India by Western civilisation has constituted one of the main pillars of capitalist development in Europe, of British world supremacy, and of the whole structure of modern imperialism. For two centuries the history of Europe has been built up to a greater extent than is always recognised on the basis of the domination of India.'

Dutt divides the entire period of imperialist rule in India into three phases, a periodisation which, with certain modifications, has now become conventional, particularly among the Marxist historians. The first phase belonged to the merchant capital 'represented by the East India Company, and extending in the general character of its system to the end of the eighteenth century.' Then came the domination by industrial capitalism 'which established a new basis of exploitation of India in the nineteenth century'. The third phase is that of financial capitalism which started in the last years of the 19th century and flourished in the 20th century.

The phase of merchant capitalism was characterised by the monopolistic hold of the East India Company over the Indian trade. This was facilitated by its increasing territorial control from the second half of 18th century. Apart from this monopolistic control, Indian wealth was also plundered directly by the colonial state and privately by the servants of the Company. The massive wealth transferred through this plunder made the Industrial Revolution possible in England. This started the search for a free market for the products of English industries. Thus India had to be transformed 'from an exporter of cotton goods to the whole world into an importer of cotton goods'. The monopoly of the East India Company had to be abolished now and this was achieved in phases and after 1858, the rule of India was transferred to the British Crown. This started the process of turning India into an uninhibited market for the British goods.

After the First World War (1914-1918), a new stage of imperialism was inaugurated in India. Although the older forms of getting 'tribute' and seeking India as a market British goods still continued, there was now an emphasis on capital investment in India. According to Dutt, it was clear that 'by 1914 the interest and profits on invested capital and direct tribute considerably exceeded the total of trading, manufacturing and shipping profits out of India. *The finance-capitalist exploitation of India had become the dominant character in the twentieth century*'. He further talks about the 'stranglehold of finance-capital' and its rising volume and concludes :

> 'Modern imperialism … no longer performs the objectively revolutionising role of the earlier capitalist domination of India, clearing the way, by its destructive effects, for the new advance and laying down the initial material conditions for its realisation. On the contrary, modern imperialism in India stands out as the main obstacle to advance of the productive forces, thwarting and retarding their development by all the weapons of its financial and political domination. It is no longer possible to speak of the objectively revolutionising role of capitalist rule in India. The role of modern imperialism in India is fully and completely reactionary.'

Another area of Dutt's concern was Indian nationalism. On the revolt of 1857 his view is that it 'was in its essential character and dominant leadership the revolt of the old conservative and feudal forces and dethroned potentates'. This is a view which is supported even today by several Marxist historians. Thus it is only from the last quarter of the 19th century that Dutt traces the beginning of the Indian national movement.

The premier organisation of this movement was the Indian National Congress which was established in 1885. According to Dutt, although the Congress arose from the 'preceding development and beginnings of activity of the Indian middle class', it was brought into existence through British official initiative as a safety-valve. In detail Dutt writes about the role of Hume and his alarm at the impending rebellion. Hume then contacted the officials of the colonial government and pleaded with them to help establish the Congress to stall the insurgency against the British rule. Dutt is, therefore, sure that :

> 'the National Congress was in fact brought into being through the initiative and under the guidance of direct British governmental policy, on a plan secretly pre-arranged with the Viceroy as an intended weapon for safeguarding British rule against the rising forces of popular unrest and anti-British feeling.'

However, it soon grew out of its original subservient nature due to pressure of populist nationalist feelings. Thus, from 'its early years, even if at first in very limited and cautious forms, the national character began to overshadow the loyalist character'. It gradually became a strong anti-colonial force and started leading people's movement against colonial rule. Dutt based his analysis of nationalism on its varying class base over the years. Thus 'in its earliest phase Indian nationalism … reflected only big bourgeoisie – the progressive elements among the landowners, the new industrial bourgeoisie and the well-to-do intellectual elements'. Then rose the class of the urban petty bourgeois who made its aspirations felt in the years preceding the First World War. It was only after the War that the Indian masses – peasantry and the industrial working class – made their presence felt.

However, the leadership remained in the hands of the propertied classes who were quite influential in the Congress. These elements were against any radicalisation of the movement and, therefore, tried to scuttle it before it could become dangerous to their own interests. He is particularly harsh on Gandhi whom he castigates as the 'Jonah of revolution, the general of unbroken disasters … the mascot of the bourgeoisie' for trying 'to find the means in the midst of a formidable revolutionary wave to maintain leadership of the mass movement'. Thus the Non-cooperation Movement was called off because the masses were becoming too militant and a threat to the propertied classes within and outside the Congress :

> 'The dominant leadership of the Congress associated with Gandhi called off the movement because they were afraid of the awakening mass activity; and they were afraid of the mass activity because it was beginning to threaten those propertied class interests with which they themselves were still in fact closely linked.'

A similar fate befell the Civil Disobedience Movement which was 'suddenly and mysteriously called off at the moment when it was reaching its height' in 1932. Dutt thinks that this dual nature of the Congress could be traced to its orgins :

> 'This twofold character of the National Congress in its origin is very important for all its subsequent history. This double strand in its role and being runs right through its history : on the one hand, the strand of co-operation with imperialism against the "menace" of the mass movement; on the other hand,

> the strand of leadership of the masses in the national struggle. This twofold character, which can be traced through all the contradictions of its leadership, from Gokhale in the old stage to his disciple, Gandhi, in the new … is the reflection of the twofold or vacillating role of the Indian bourgeoisie, at once in conflict with the British bourgeoisie and desiring to lead the Indian people, yet fearing that "too rapid" advance may end in destroying its privileges along with those of the imperialists.'

This was the foundational statement of Marxist historiography on Indian National Congress, the leading organisation of the Indian national movement, for quite some time to come. Most of the subsequent works of the Marxist historians on nationalism were in some measures influenced by it.

A.R. Desai's book, *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*, has been a very popular book and several editions and reprints of this book have been published since its first publication on 1948. It has also been translated into many Indian languages. It is another thoroughgoing account of the colonial period and the rise of nationalism from a Marxist perspective. As Sumit Sarkar writes in the 'Foreword' to a new edition in 2000 :

> 'For fifty years, it has served generations of students all over the country as an introduction to modern Indian history, and one which for many also provided a highly accessible illustration of Marxist historical method'.

In a single volume this book provides us a synoptic account of the various aspects of economy, society and politics of colonial India. It particularly focuses on the rise of nationalism in India. Desai traces the growth of the national movement in five phases, each phase based on particular social classes which supported and sustained it. Thus, in the first phase, 'Indian nationalism had a very narrow social basis'. It was pioneered by the intelligentsia who were the product of the modern system of education. Desai considers Raja Rammohan Roy and his followers as the 'pioneers of Indian nationalism'. This phase continued till 1885 when the Indian National Congress was founded. It heralded a new phase which extended till 1905. The national movement now represented 'the interests of the development of the new bourgeois society in India'. The development in the modern education had created an educated middle class and the development of the Indian and international trade had given rise to a merchant class. The modern industries had created a class of industrialists. In its new phase, Indian national movement 'voiced the demands of the educated classes and the trading bourgeoisie such as the Indianization of Services, the association of the Indians with the administrative machinery of the state, the stoppage of economic drain, and others formulated in the resolutions of the Indian National Congress'.

The third phase of the national movement covered the period from 1905 to 1918. During this phase 'the Indian national movement became militant and challenging and acquired a wider social basis by the inclusion of sections of the lower-middle class'. In the fourth phase, which began from 1918 and continued till the end of the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1934, the social base of the national movement was enormously enlarged. The movement 'which was hitherto restricted mainly to upper and middle classes, further extended … to sections of the Indian masses.' However, according to Desai, the leadership of the Congress remained in the hands of those who were under the strong influence of the Indian capitalist class :

> 'It was from 1918 that the Indian industrial bourgeoisie began to exert a powerful influence in determining the programme, policies, strategies, tactics and forms of struggle of the Indian national movement led by the Congress of which Gandhi was the leader.'

Two other significant developments during this period were the rise of the socialist and communist groups since the late 1920s, which tried to introduce pro-people agenda in the national movement, and the consolidation of communalist forces which sought to divide the society.

The fifth phase (1934-39) was characterised by growing disenchantment with the Gandhian ideology within the Congress and further rise of the Socialists who represented the petty bourgeois elements. Outside the Congress various movements were taking place. The peasants, the workers, the depressed classes and various linguistic nationalities started agitations for their demands. Moreover, there was further growth of communalism. However, according to Desai, all these stirrings were not of much consequence and the mainstream was still solidly occupied by the Gandhian Congress which represented the interests of the dominant classes.

These two books, particularly the one by R. Palme Dutt, laid the foundations of the Marxist historiography on modern Indian history. The next break came with the writings of D.D. Kosambi that we will discuss in the next section.

22.3 D.D. KOSAMBI AND PARADIGM SHIFT

Romila Thapar credits D.D. Kosambi (1907-66) for effecting a 'paradigm shift' in Indian studies. According to her, such paradigmatic changes had occurred only twice before in Indian historiography. These were done by James Mill and Vincent Smith. James Mill, whose book *History of India* (1818-23) set the parameters for history-writing on India, was contemptuous towards the Indian society. He considered the pre-colonial Indian civilisation as backward, superstitious, stagnant and lacking in most respects as a civilisation. He was an unabashed admirer of the British achievements in India and relentless critic of pre-British Indian society and polity. He divided the Indian history into three parts – the Hindu, the Muslim and the British. This division, according to him, was essential to demarcate three different civilisations.

Vincent Smith's *The Oxford History of India* (1919) provided another break in Indian historiography as it avoided the sharp value judgments and contemptuous references to the pre-British period of Indian history contained in Mill's book. He instead tried to present a chronological account of Indian history and focused on the rise and fall of dynasties.

Kosambi viewed history completely differently. For him, Mill's religious periodisation and Smith's chronological accounts of dynasties were of no value. He believed that the 'Society is held together by bonds of production'. Thus he defines history '*as the presentation, in chronological order, of successive developments in the means and relations of production*'. This, according to him, is 'the only definition known which allow a reasonable treatment of pre-literate history, generally termed "pre-history"' He further argues that history should be viewed in terms of conflict between classes :

> 'The proper study of history in a class society means analysis of the differences between the interests of the classes on top and of the rest of the people; it means consideration of the extent to which an emergent class had something new to contribute during its rise to power, and of the stage where it turned (or will turn) to reaction in order to preserve its vested interests.'

He describes his approach to history as 'dialectical materialism, also called Marxism after its founder'. However, Kosambi was flexible in his application of Marxism. He argued that 'Marxism is far from the economic determinism which its opponents so

often take it to be'. He further asserts that the 'adoption of Marx's thesis does not mean blind repetition of all his conclusions (and even less, those of the official, party-line Marxists) at all times'. He, instead, considered Marxism as a method which could be usefully applied for the study of Indian society and history.

The paucity of relevant data for the early period of Indian history was one factor which prompted him to analyse the broad social formations rather than small-scale events. He thought that the use of comparative method would balance out the absence of reliable historical sources. He, therefore, adopted an inter-disciplinary approach in his studies of Indian society. This enabled him to view the reality from various angles in order to get a full picture of it. These ideas are evident in his four major books : *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History* (1956), *Exasperating Essays : Exercises in the Dialectical Method* (1957), *Myth and Reality : Studies in the Formation of Indian Culture* (1962) and *The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India in Historical Outline* (1965).

Kosambi's non-dogmatic approach to history is clear when he rejected two key Marxist concepts – the Asiatic Mode of Production and Slavery – as inapplicable to ancient Indian society. Although he accepted the concept of feudalism in Indian context, he denied the existence of serfdom. According to him, it would be more rewarding to view the early Indian society in terms of the transition from tribe to caste. He argues that the 'pre-class society was organised … into tribes'. The tribes were small, localised communities and 'for the tribesman, society as such began and ended with his tribe'. The beginning and development of plough agriculture brought about a radical change in the system of production. This destabilised the tribes and the clans and gave rise to castes as new form of social organisation. This was an extremely crucial development. Kosambi writes :

> 'THE ENTIRE COURSE OF INDIAN HISTORY SHOWS TRIBAL ELEMENTS BEING FUSED INTO A GENERAL SOCIETY. This phenomenon, which lies at the very foundation of the most striking Indian social feature, namely caste, is also the great basic fact of ancient history.'

Kosambi tried to relate the intellectual and cultural production with the prevailing social and economic situation. Thus, according to him, the teachings of *Bhagavad Gita* can be understood only with reference to the feudal society in which it originated. It, therefore, preaches the ideology of the ruling class which emphasised 'the chain of personal loyalty which binds retainer to chief, tenant to lord, and baron to king or emperor'. Similarly, he considers the Bhakti movement as preaching a sense of loyalty to the lord which, in the earthly sense, translates into loyalty and devotion to the rulers. His detailed study of the poetry of Bhartrihari, the 7th-century poet, reflects a similar approach. He describes Bhartrihari as 'unmistakably the Indian intellectual of his period, limited by caste and tradition in fields of activity and therefore limited in his real grip on life'. In his study of the myths, he contended that they reflected the transition of society from matriarchy to patriarchy.

22.4 THE FEUDALISM DEBATE

As we have seen in the previous section, D.D. Kosambi argued that, contrary to Marx's own statements and to those of several Marxists, the Indian society did not witness a similar progression of various modes of production as happened in Europe. He said that the slave mode of production was not to be found in India. He also rejected Marx's own schema of the Asiatic Mode of Production as inapplicable to India. He, however, thought that there was the existence of feudalism in India, even though he conceived it differently. He was aware that the medieval Indian society was quite different from that of Europe. One of the important characteristics of European feudalism, i.e., manorial system, demesne-farming and serfdom, were not to be found in India. But he explained it as a result of the

non-existence of the slave mode of production in the preceding period. He further differentiated between two types of feudalism in India – 'feudalism from above' and 'feudalism from below' :

> 'Feudalism from above means a state wherein an emperor or powerful king levied tribute from subordinates who still ruled in their own right and did what they liked within their own territories – as long as they paid the paramount ruler…. By feudalism from below is meant the next stage where a class of land-owners developed within the village, between the state and the peasantry, gradually to wield armed power over the local population. This class was subject to service, hence claimed a direct relationship with the state power, without the intervention of any other stratum.'

Kosambi's lead on this issue was followed by R.S. Sharma who made a comprehensive study of feudalism in India in his book entitled *Indian Feudalism* (1965) and in various articles. According to him, there were a decline in trade and increasing numbers of land grants to the state officials in lieu of salary and to the Brahmans as charity or ritual offering in the post-Gupta period. This process led to the subjection of peasantry and made them dependent on the landlords. Almost all features of west European feudalism, such as serfdom, manor, self-sufficient economic units, feudalisation of crafts and commerce, decline of long-distance trade and decline of towns, were said to be found in India. According to R.S Sharma, the most crucial aspects of Indian feudalism was the increasing dependence of the peasantry on the intermediaries who received grants of land from the state and enjoyed juridical rights over them. This development restricted the peasants' mobility and made them subject to increasingly intensive forced labour. The decline of feudalism also took the same course as in west Europe. Revival of long-distance trade, rise of towns, flight of peasants and development of monetary economy were considered to be the main processes responsible for the decline of feudalism in India. In this schema, the process of feudalisation started sometimes in the 4th century and declined in the 12th century.

This view of the medieval Indian society and economy has been questioned by several historians who argue that the development of the Indian society did not follow the western model. They further argue that such a model of development cannot be universally applied to all societies. Harbans Mukhia, in a thought-provoking article 'Was There Feudalism in Indian History?' (1981), questions these arguments at several levels. He begins by arguing that there is no single, universally accepted definition of feudalism. It is because feudalism was not a world-system. In fact, capitalism was the first world-system and, therefore, all societies before that had their own peculiarities and profound differences from each other. Thus feudalism 'was, throughout its history, a non-universal specific form of socio-economic organization – specific to time and region, where specific methods and organization of production obtained'. Mukhia defines feudalism as 'the structured dependence of the entire peasantry on the lords'. Such a system was specific 'to Western Europe between the fifth or the sixth century and the fifteenth. Feudalism also developed in its classic form in eastern Europe between the sixteenth and the eighteenth century and possibly in Japan during the Togukawa regime in particular'. He considers feudalism as a 'transitional system' which :

> 'stood mid-way in the transition of the West European economy from a primarily slave-based system of agricultural production to one dominated by the complementary classes of the capitalist farmers and the landless agricultural wage-earner, but in which the free peasantry also formed a significant element.'

On the basis of this definition of feudalism, Mukhia now argues against the concept of feudalism in India. He says that even in Europe the relationship between long-distance

trade and the growth or decline of feudalism is not clear. In fact, the trade had differential impact on various European societies. While at some places, as in west Europe, it led to the dissolution of feudal bonds, in east Europe it provided the lords with the power to reinforce and revitalise the feudal ties. In any case, Mukhia argues, it is not sure that there was a very significant decline of trade and towns in early medieval India. Secondly, while in Europe feudalism developed and declined due to changes at the base of society, in Indian case the reason for the emergence of feudalism is seen as the land grants from above. According to Mukhia, it is difficult to accept that 'such complex social structures can be established through administrative and legal procedures'. About the most crucial aspect of feudalism – the dependence of peasantry on the landlords – Mukhia thinks that there is no evidence to prove it in Indian case. He argues that even though the exploitation of the peasantry might have increased, there is no evidence to prove that there was any 'extraneous control over the peasant's process of production'. He thinks that 'forced labour in India remained, by and large, an incidental manifestation of the ruling class' political and administrative power rather than a part of the process of production'. He concludes that the 'primarily free peasant form of agricultural production gradually evolving from post-Maurya times, thus characterized the agrarian economy of ancient and medieval India'. In such a scenario there was no possibility of a feudal system of production in India.

Several of Mukhia's arguments were criticised by Marxist and non-Marxist scholars in this field. Although there was an acknowledgement of the significance of the questions he raised, criticism related to his concept of feudalism, his understanding of the west European experience, his interpretation of Indian history and, particularly, his notion of a free peasant production in India.

R.S. Sharma, in his response, wrote an essay entitled 'How Feudal Was Indian Feudalism?' (1985). While accepting the fact that feudalism was not a universal phenomenon, he argues that this was not true of all the pre-capitalist formations. Thus 'tribalism, the stone age, the metal age, and the advent of a food-producing economy are universal phenomena. They do indicate some laws conditioning the process and pattern of change'. He, therefore, thinks that there was feudalism in India, even though its nature was significantly different. According to him, 'Just as there could be enormous variations in tribal society so also there could be enormous variations in the nature of feudal societies'. He questions the very notion of peasant's control over means of production, particularly land. He maintains that there were multiple and hierarchical rights in the land with the peasant almost always possessing the inferior right. In the areas where land grants were given the grantees enjoyed much superior rights :

> 'On the basis of the land charters we can say that in the donated areas the landed beneficiaries enjoyed general control over production resources. Of course they did not enjoy specific control over every plot of land that the peasant cultivated. But there is nothing to question their control over the plots of lands that were directly donated to them by the king, sometimes along with the sharecroppers and weavers and sometimes along with the cultivators.'

He further argues that, contrary to Mukhia's arguments, forced labour was also prevalent in many parts of the country. On the basis of various evidences, he asserts that there was feudalism during the early medieval period in India which 'was characterized by a class of landlords and by a class of subject peasantry, the two living in a predominantly agrarian economy marked by decline of trade and urbanism and by drastic reduction in metal currency'.

Irfan Habib introduces another significant element for identifying the predominant mode of production in any social formation. He argues that although the social form of labour defines a particular mode of production, it cannot be considered as the sole determinant.

Thus although 'Wage-labour remains the basic form of labour in socialism, but this does entitle us to identify the capitalist and socialist modes'. Similarly, petty peasant production may be found in several social formations. Therefore, another crucial element should be taken into account and that is 'the form in which the surplus extracted from the producer is distributed'. Although Habib is doubtful about the existence of feudalism in pre-colonial India, he considers Mukhia's arguments a little far-fetched. He thinks that Mukhia's points about the existence of a 'free peasantry' and 'relative stability in India's social and economic history' are untenable. Such conclusions, according to him, 'presume a rather idyllic picture of pre-colonial India … for which there is little justification'. In his opinion, 'there were just as intense contradictions here as anywhere else; but that these were different in nature and consequence from the contradictions leading to capitalism in Europe'. Moreover, he rejects the idea of 'exceptionalism' in Indian context. It was also a society with deep internal contradictions, a stratified peasantry and class exploitation.

Burton Stein praises Mukhia for raising an important question, but he points out several inadequacies in Mukhia's arguments. According to him, only the absence of serfdom may not determine the absence of feudalism in India because several other characteristics existed. With focus on south India, he argues that these characteristics were local control and private legal jurisdiction of various powerful men, the existence of independent warrior groups which claimed tributes and weak state forms. Secondly, he also questions Mukhia's proposition about the 'relative stability' of pre-colonial Indian society and economy. Such a notion about stability assumes that for two thousand years there was no change in the means and relations of production. This worries Stein : 'This is indeed stability, not "relative", but quite absolute, a position which ought to trouble him as an historian; it troubles me!' On the role of the state, he rejects the notion of a centralised and bureaucratic state. Instead, he forwards the concept of 'segmentary state', a state whose power was limited. So far as the 'free peasantry' is concerned, he puts more emphasis on peasant collectivities having a mastery over productive forces. He questions the notion of free 'individual peasants as productive agents'. In this sense of collective peasant production and the segmentary, Stein thinks that the period from the 10th to the 17th centuries may be said to be a single social formation in south India.

In his response to these criticisms, Mukhia sticks to his point that capitalism was the first world-system and all the earlier systems were specific to regions and 'did not possess the internal dynamism that would give them the hegemony' over the world. Only most general features such as agrarian economy and surplus appropriation through non-economic coercion could be common about various pre-industrial societies. But it does not take the specificities, such as production process and social organisation of labour, into account. He reemphasises his concept of a 'free peasantry' in pre-colonial India 'whose process of production was free of extraneous control'.

We, therefore, encounter a wide variety of interpretations of the medieval Indian society by the Marxist historians who differ quite significantly from each other. In the course of this debate we also come across the rich variety of Marxist interpretations relating to medieval Indian history.

22.5 INDIAN NATIONALISM

In the earlier section (22.2) we discussed the views of R.P. Dutt and A.R. Desai on Indian nationalism. They analysed it as a movement which was mostly dominated by the bourgeoisie. Although various classes, including the peasantry and the working classes, participated in it, its basic character remained bourgeois. This view of national movement remained quite common among the Marxist historians for quite some time. However, over the years, several Marxist historians began to disagree with this paradigm

for understanding Indian nationalism. Bipan Chandra mounted a major critique of this view and this criticism became more comprehensive over the years. In his very first book, *The Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism in India* (1966), he pleaded for according certain autonomy to the ideas as significant vehicle of action and change. Even though he accepts that 'social relations exist independently of the ideas men form of them', he feels that 'men's understanding of these relations is crucial to their social and political action'. Moreover, he argues that the intellectuals in any society stand above the narrow interests of the class in which they are born. It is 'sheer crude mechanical materialism' to sort out the intellectuals only on the basis of their class of origins. It is because the intellectuals are guided 'at the level of consciousness, by thought and not by interests'. Thus the Indian nationalist leaders were also, as intellectuals, above the interests of the narrow class or group they were born in. This does not mean, however, that they did not represent any class. They did represent class interests, but this was done ideologically and not for personal gain. As Bipan Chandra puts it :

> 'Like the best and genuine intellectuals the world over and in all history, the Indian thinkers and intellectuals of the 19th century too were philosophers and not hacks of a party or a class. It is true that they were not above class or group and did in practice represent concrete class or group interests. But when they reflected the interests of a class or a group, they did so through the prism of ideology and not directly as members, or the obedient servants, of that class or group.'

On the basis of his analysis of the economic thinking of the early nationalist leaders, both the so-called moderates and the extremists, Bipan Chandra concludes that their overall economic outlook was 'basically capitalist'. By this he means that 'In nearly every aspect of economic life they championed capitalist growth in general and the interests of the industrial capitalists in particular'. This does not mean that they were working for the individual interests of the capitalists. In fact, the capitalist support for the Congress in the early phase was negligible. Nationalist support for industrial capitalism derived from the belief of the nationalists that 'industrial development along capitalist lines was the only way to regenerate the country in the economic field, or that, in other words, the interests of the industrial capitalist class objectively coincided with the chief national interest of the moment'. Thus, Bipan Chandra abandons the instrumentalist approach espoused by Dutt and Desai. This was a major change in perspective in the historiography of the Indian national movement.

However, despite this change in perspective, Bipan Chandra remained anchored to several points within the paradigm developed by R.P. Dutt. In an essay presented at a symposium at the Indian History Congress in 1972 and published in his book *Nationalism and Colonialism in Modern India* (1979), his arguments come remarkably close to the traditional Marxist perspective developed by R.P. Dutt on Indian nationalism. In this article entitled 'Elements of Continuity and Change in the Early Nationalist Activity', he still criticises the narrow perspective which dubs the nationalist leaders as bourgeois in an instrumentalist sense that they were following the commands of the capitalists. In his opinion, the early nationalist leaders were trying to unify the Indian people into a nation. Their basic objective was 'to generate, form and crystallize an anti-imperialist ideology, to promote the growth of modern capitalist economy, and in the end to create a broad all India national movement'. This view corresponded with the perspective developed in his earlier book on economic nationalism.

But there were other points where his arguments resembled those of Dutt and Desai. Firstly, he interprets the 'peaceful and bloodless' approach of struggle adopted by the nationalist leadership as 'a basic guarantee to the propertied classes that they would at no time be faced with a situation in which their interests might be put in jeopardy even temporarily'. This understanding of non-violence was the same as that of Dutt and Desai.

Secondly, the relationship between the Indian masses and the nationalists always remained problematic. For the moderate leaders, the masses had no role to play. Even the extremists, despite their rhetoric, failed to mobilise the masses. Although the masses came into nationalist fold during the Gandhian period, they were not politicised and the lower classes of agricultural workers and poor peasants in most parts of country were never politically mobilised, 'so that the social base of the national movement was still not very strong in 1947'. And even when they were mobilised, the masses remained outside the decision-making process and the gulf between them and the leaders was 'unbridged'. According to Bipan Chandra :

> 'Above all, the political activity of the masses was rigidly controlled from the top. The masses never became an independent political force. The question of their participation in the decision-making process was never even raised. The masses were always to remain … "passive actors" or "extras" whose political activity remained under the rigid control of middle class leaders and within the confines of the needs of bourgeois social development. Herein also lay the crucial role of the way non-violence was defined and practised by Gandhi.'

Thirdly, the nationalist leaders in all phases of the movement stressed that the process of achievement of national freedom would be evolutionary, and not revolutionary. The basic strategy to attain this goal would be pressure-compromise-pressure. In this strategy, pressure would be brought upon the colonial rulers through agitations, political work and mobilisation of the people. When the authorities were willing to offer concessions, the pressure would be withdrawn and a compromise would be reached. The political concessions given by the colonial rulers would be accepted and worked. After this, the Congress should prepare for another agitation to gain new concessions. It is in this phased, non-violent manner that several political concessions would be taken from the British and this process would ultimately lead to the liberation of the country. On the basis of his analysis of the social base, the ideology, and the strategy of political struggle, Bipan Chandra concluded that the nationalist movement as represented by the Congress was 'a bourgeois democratic movement, that is, it represented the interests of all classes and segments of Indian society vis-à-vis imperialism but under the hegemony of the industrial bourgeoisie'. This character remained constant throughout its entire history from inception to 1947. Even during the Gandhian phase, there was no change. In fact, according to Bipan Chandra, 'the hegemony of the bourgeoisie over the national movement was, if anything, even more firmly clamped down in the Gandhian era than before'.

In a later book, *India's Struggle for Independence, 1857-1947* (1988), Bipan Chandra has decisively moved away from the views of Dutt and Desai on Indian national movement. In this book, co-authored with some other like-minded scholars, he applies the Gramscian perspective to study the national movement. Most of the propositions regarding the Indian National Congress developed in the earlier quoted article are now dropped or revised. The Congress strategy is no longer seen in terms of pressure-compromise-pressure. It is now viewed in terms of Gramscian 'war of position' whereby a prolonged struggle is waged for the attainment of goal. As Bipan Chandra puts it :

> 'The Indian national movement … is the only movement where the broadly Gramscian theoretical perspective of a war of position was successfully practised; where state power was not seized in a single historical moment of revolution, but through prolonged popular struggle on a moral, political and ideological level; where reserves of counter-hegemony were built up over the years through progressive stages; where the phases of struggle alternated with "passive" phases.'

This struggle was not overtly violent because the nationalist leaders were seized of the twin agenda of forging the Indian people into a nation and to undermine the colonial hegemony. Through their prolonged struggle they wanted to expose the two important myths about the British colonial rule that it was beneficial to the Indians and that it was invincible. The Gandhian non-violence is also to be considered in this light. According to Bipan Chandra,

> 'It was not … a mere dogma of Gandhiji nor was it dictated by the interests of the propertied classes. It was an essential part of a movement whose strategy involved the waging of a hegemonic struggle based on a mass movement which mobilized the people to the widest possible extent.'

The national movement was now conceived as an all-class movement which provided space and opportunity for any class to build its hegemony. Moreover, the main party, the Congress, which led 'this struggle from 1885 to 1947 was not then a party but a movement'. He criticises the various schools of historiography on India for their failure to address the central contradiction in colonial India which was between the Indian people and the British colonialism. Although he still considers that 'the dominant vision within the Congress did not transcend the parameters of a capitalist conception of society', he has made a clear break from the conventional Marxist interpretation of the Indian national movement and it appears that any study of Indian nationalism has to take his views into account.

Sumit Sarkar is another Marxist historian who is critical of Dutt's paradigm. In his first book, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903-1908* (1973), he terms it as a 'simplistic version of the Marxian class-approach'. Contrary to the assertion by Dutt that the moderate phase was dominated by the 'big bourgeoisie' while the extremist phase by the 'urban petty bourgeoisie', he thinks that 'a clear class-differential between moderate and extremist would still be very difficult to establish, and was obviously nonexistent at the leadership level'. According to him, this version of Marxist interpretation suffers from the 'defect of assuming too direct or crude an economic motivation for political action and ideals'. He instead prefers to analyse the actions of the nationalist leaders by using Trotsky's concept of 'substitutism' whereby the intelligentsia acts 'repeatedly as a kind of proxy for as-yet passive social forces with which it had little organic connection'. He also uses Gramscian categories of 'traditional' and 'organic' intellectuals. According to Antonio Gramsci, the famous Italian Marxist activist and thinker, the 'organic' intellectuals participate directly in the production-process and have direct links with the people whom they lead. The 'traditional' intellectuals, on the other hand, are not directly connected with either the production-process or the people. However, they become leaders of particular classes by ideologically resuming the responsibility of those classes. According to Sarkar, the leaders of the Swadeshi movement in Bengal 'recruited overwhelmingly from the traditional learned castes, and virtually unconnected after the 1850s with commerce or industry … may be regarded perhaps as a "traditional" intelligentsia in Gramsci's sense'. This view is quite close to that of Bipan Chandra in which he emphasises the role of ideology in the formation of the early nationalist leaders. Sumit Sarkar, however, considers that even though the nationalist leaders were not directly linked with the bourgeoisie, they 'objectively did help to at least partially clear the way for the independent capitalist development of our country'. He emphasises this point further in his article 'The Logic of Gandhian Nationalism' (1985). Here the objective stance of the Swadeshi Movement in favour of the bourgeoisie gets transformed into direct intervention by the bourgeoisie and the subjective position in the interests of the capitalists by the leaders of the Civil Disobedience Movement. By studying the social forces involved in the Civil Disobedience Movement and the developments leading to the Gandhi-Irwin pact, he concludes that there was 'the vastly enhanced role of distinctively bourgeois groups, both in contributing heavily to the initial striking power of Civil Disobedience and ultimately in its calling off'. He qualifies his

statement by saying that Gandhi was 'no mere bourgeois tool in any simplistic or mechanical sense' and that he can hardly be considered as 'a puppet' in the hands of the capitalists. He, however, insists that the Gandhian leadership had 'a certain coincidence of aims with Indian business interests at specific points' and 'an occasional significant coincidence of subjective attitudes and inhibitions with bourgeois interests'.

22.6 INTELLECTUAL HISTORY: DEBATE ON INDIAN RENAISSANCE

The role of the intellectuals in shaping the public opinion and leading the people is beyond doubt. What is more contentious is the extent of their influence and the reasons for this limitation. One such phenomenon which attracted wide interests among both the Marxist and non-Marxist scholars was the 'Bengal Renaissance' which is sometimes equated with the 'Indian Renaissance'. It is because a cluster of contemporary intellectuals became associated with various movements of ideas mostly derived from western sources. Since the colonial presence in Bengal had been the longest, we find there the earliest manifestations of such interests among the local intelligentsia and their thoughts had countrywide influence over the years. The point which is under debate is the nature of this intellectual movement which is named after the Italian intellectual experience of the 15th and 16th centuries as the 'Renaissance'.

Among the Marxist historians Susobhan Sarkar was the first to analyse 'this flowering of social, religious, literary and political activities in Bengal'. In his essay, 'Notes on the Bengal Renaissance', first published in 1946, he declared that the 'role played by Bengal in the modern awakening of India is thus comparable to the position occupied by Italy in the story of the European Renaissance'. This 'modern' movement arose because the 'impact of British rule, bourgeois economy and modern Western culture was first felt in Bengal'. Thus the modernity brought into India by the British 'produced an awakening known usually as the Bengal Renaissance'. It generated such intellectual force that 'For about a century, Bengal's conscious awareness of the changing modern world was more developed than and ahead of that of the rest of India'.

Such a rosy picture of the 19th-century intellectual activities has now been seriously questioned. The concept of Bengal, or Indian, Renaissance has come under criticism. The critics point out that, unlike the European Renaissance, the range of the 19th-century intellectual ferment was rather limited and its character was rather less modernist than was earlier assumed. The 'traditionalist' and 'modernist' dichotomy cannot be applied as the so-called 'Renaissance' intellectual was a deeply divided personality. The break with the past was severely limited in nature and remained mainly at the intellectual level. Most of the intellectuals did not have the courage to implement even at their own individual levels the principles they preached. And those, like Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, who publicly campaigned for their ideals faced continuous failures. In most cases, the same traditional scriptural authority was sought to derive sanction for their policies and practices against which the intellectuals launched their ideological struggle. Moreover, this intellectual movement remained confined within an elitist Hindu framework which did not include the problems and realities of the lower castes and Muslims. The social forces, which could have given the ideas a solid base and moved them in the modernist direction, were not present. The colonial power remained the ultimate guarantee for the implementation of the reforms proposed by the thinkers. However, the colonial state was not much interested in taking radical measures for the fear of alienating the traditionalists who formed the great majority. This led to frustration among the enthusiasts for the reforms and the movement in general retreated and declined by the late 19th century. Some of the Marxist historians who have criticised the concept of the 'Renaissance' in Indian context are : Barun De in the articles 'The

Colonial Context of Bengal Renaissance' (1976) and 'A Historiographic Critique of Renaissance Analogues for Nineteenth Century India'; Asok Sen in his book *Iswarchandra Vidyasagar and His Elusive Milestones* (1977), Sumit Sarkar in his articles 'Rammohun Roy and the Break with the Past' (1975), 'The Complexities of Young Bengal (1973), and 'The Radicalism of Intellectuals' (1977), all the three articles now collected in a book *A Critique of Colonial India* (1985); and K.N. Panikkar whose various essays on this theme from 1977 to 1992 have been collected in the book *Culture, Ideology, Hegemony* (1995).

22.7 OTHER TRENDS AND HISTORIANS WITHIN MARXIST HISTORIOGRAPHY

As we have pointed out earlier in the 'Introduction' it is impossible to deal with the Marxist historiography on India in full detail within the space of this Unit. We have so far covered a few trends and the ideas and historians associated with them. Now in this section we will briefly discuss some other trends and historians.

In the study of early India, there are several historians working with Marxian methods. R.S. Sharma, Romila Thapar, D.N. Jha, B.D. Chattopadhyay and Kumkum Roy are some of them. Their researches have enriched our understanding of ancient India. We have already discussed Sharma's book on *Indian Feudalism*. Apart from this, his study of the lower castes of ancient India, *Sudras in Ancient India* (1958), his work on various topics such as marriage, caste, land grants, slavery, usury, and women contained in his *Light on Early Indian Society and Economy* (1966), his *Material Culture and Social Formation in Ancient India* (1983) and *Urban Decay in India* (1987) are the books which enormously enrich our understanding of ancient and early medieval periods.

Similarly, Romila Thapar's works on early India have expanded the scope of historical research related to the period. She has approached the ancient period from several angles and debunked several myths and stereotypes associated with it. Some of these myths related to Oriental Despotism, the Aryan race, and Ashoka's non-violence. Her several books, like *Asoka and the Decline of the Mauryas* (1963), *Ancient Indian Social History* (1978), *From Lineage to State* (1984) and *Interpreting Early India* (1992), have increased our knowledge of early Indian history in a refreshing manner.

The history of medieval India has also attracted a fair number of Marxist historians. Nurul Hasan, Satish Chandra, Irfan Habib and Athar Ali are some among them. They have studied the medieval Indian society, polity and economy in detail. Among them, the works by Irfan Habib are particularly remarkable in the range of scholarship and imagination. His study of the Mughal economy, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India* (1963), has acquired the status of a classic. In this book, he argues that the basic contradiction in the late medieval period was between 'the centralized ruling class (state) and the peasantry'. But there were other contradictions also between the state and the zamindars, between the untouchables and the rest of the society and between the tribes and the encroaching caste peasantry. Among all these, Habib argues, the 'drive for tax-revenue may be regarded as the basic motive force. Land revenue sustained the large urban sector; but the pressure for higher collection devastated the country, antagonized zamindars whose own shares of surplus was thereby affected, and drove the peasants to rebellion'. This book on medieval Indian history was followed by other important contributions in the form of *An Atlas of the Mughal Empire* (1982) and his edited book, *The Cambridge Economic History of India, Vol. I* (1982). Apart from these, his several books and articles, including *Caste and Money in Indian History* (1987), *Interpreting Indian History* (1988), and *Essays in Indian History : Towards a Marxist Perception* (1995), explore and comment on various periods of Indian history.

The Marxist historians have written on several aspects of modern Indian history and the colonial economy. Apart from these, we can find a significant number of the Marxist historians in the fields of peasant history, labour history and social history.

22.8 SUMMARY

The Marxist historians have contributed enormously to Indian historiography. In all field of Indian history, whether we divide it by periods or by topics, the Marxist historians have made significant contributions. In several areas, their works have changed the course of historiography. The Marxist historians do not form a monolithic bloc. As we have seen in our discussion of several trends, there are wide divergences of views among the Marxist historians. However, there are certain common elements among them.

The history of the dynasties was replaced by the history of the common people. More emphasis was now given to the study of economy and society in preference to the political history. The study of broad social and economic systems such as feudalism and colonialism were undertaken and the social, economic and political changes were considered not in the light of the actions of individual statesmen, but in terms of the working out of economy and conflicts between classes. At the level of methodology, Kosambi's works introduced an interdisciplinary approach to history which encompassed literature, archaeology, linguistics, anthropology, numismatics and statistics. Moreover, the Marxist historiography has made interpretation and explanation more important than narration or description.

22.9 EXERCISES

1) Write a note on the Marxist historiography of Indian nationalism. Discuss the differences between various Marxist historians on this issue.

2) What is the role of D.D. Kosambi in the development of Marxist historiography in India?

3) Write a note on the conflicting views on 'Indian Renaissance'.

22.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

D.D. Kosambi, *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History* (Bombay, Popular Prakashan, 1956, 1985).

Romila Thapar, 'The Contribution of D.D. Kosambi to Indology', in Romila Thapar, *Cultural Pasts : Essays in Early Indian History* (New Delhi, OUP, 2000).

R. Palme Dutt, *India Today* (Calcutta, Manisha, 1940, 1979).

A.R. Desai, *Social Background of Indian Nationalism* (Bombay, 1948, 2000).

Harbans Mukhia (ed.), *The Feudalism Debate* (New Delhi, Manohar, 2000).

Bipan Chandra, *The Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism in India* (New Delhi, People's Publishing House, 1966, 1991).

Bipan Chandra, *Nationalism and Colonialism in Modern India* (New Delhi, Orient Longman, 1979, 1984).

Bipan Chandra, et al, *India's Struggle for Independence, 1857-1947* (New Delhi, Penguin Books, 1988)

Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903-1908* (New Delhi, People's Publishing House, 1973, 1977).

Sumit Sarkar, *A Critique of Colonial India* (Calcutta, Papyrus, 1985).

Susobhan Sarkar, *On the Bengal Renaissance* (Calcutta, Papyrus, 1979, 1985).

K.N. Panikkar, *Culture, Ideology, Hegemony : Intellectuals and Social Consciousness in Colonial India* (New Delhi, Tulika, 1995).

Ramesh Chandra Sharma, et al, *Historiography and Historians in India since Independence* (Agra, M G Publishers, 1991).

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UNIT 23 THE CAMBRIDGE SCHOOL

Structure

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23.1 INTRODUCTION

The 'Cambridge School' is the name given to a group of historians in Cambridge who reinterpreted Indian politics in the age of nationalism. They did not think that there was any fundamental contradiction between imperialism and nationalism. In their opinion, local interests and factional rivalries were prominent features of the history of Indian nationalism. If Indian nationalism emerged despite such localised rivalries, this happened because the British authorities simultaneously centralised the government and introduced representation in the course of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Government intrusion in local concerns forced local politicians to turn to the centre. Paradoxically, Indian nationalism was the product of the government impulse. Central to this interpretation of Indian nationalism was the centrality of power. The thesis was set out in a collection of essays by Cambridge historians which was entitled *Locality, Province and Nation: Essays on Indian Politics, 1870 to 1940*. The collection was edited by John Gallagher, Gordon Johnson and Anil Seal, and was published by the Cambridge University Press in 1973 both as an issue of the Cambridge journal entitled *Modern Asian Studies* and as an independent publication. Critics accused the authors of debunking Indian nationalism and the group was dubbed 'The Cambridge School', or simply referred to as 'Cambridge'. A hot controversy followed in the wake of the publication, and Marxist and liberal historians in India sharply criticised the thesis. However, 'The Cambridge School' undoubtedly made an impact on Indian historiography.

23.2 THE BACKGROUND

Earlier, two historiographical schools had emerged in course of the 1960s. One favoured the Marxist view and the other advanced the elite theory of the West. It was out of the latter camp that the Cambridge School emerged in 1973. To understand the tenets of Cambridge requires knowledge of the earlier debates in the 1960s. The debate involved the Cambridge School in due course.

Briefly, the debate centred around three questions. First of all, what is the innermost spring of the mechanics of modern politics in British India in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries? Was it economics that drove politics or was it the institutional

opportunity offered by English education, political representation, and other institutional innovations of the British? The Marxists inclined towards the first answer, the elite theorists preferred the second answer. The second question concerns the most decisive territorial unit in which political change in the subcontinent was to be studied – was it the nation as a whole, or was it the region? The Marxists analysed the problem against the national canvas, but the elite theorists claimed that the region was the true locus of political change in British India. Thirdly, the debaters differed about the nature of the social group on which they should focus. Should they focus upon class and class conflict, or upon the English-educated elite and the conflict between various castes and communities competing for the rewards of English education and political representation? Predictably, the Marxist historians looked at class, and the elite theorists concentrated on caste, community and the western-educated elite.

Since the Cambridge School emerged out of the elite theory and branched off from it, the interpretation offered by the elite theorists is relevant in this context. Historians from a number of Western universities, especially from Canberra, Sussex and Cambridge, offered this interpretation in reaction to Marxist historiography in India and the Soviet Union. Three influential works emphasizing the role of the English-educated elite in Indian politics came out in quick succession: D. A. Low (ed.), *Soundings in Modern South Asian History* (London, 1968); J.H. Broomfield, *Elite conflict in a Plural Society. Twentieth Century Bengal* (Berkeley and Los Angles, 1968); and Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism* : *Competition and Collaboration in the Later Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1968). The interpretation had three points to make against the Marxists. First of all, the main motive force behind modern politics, including nationalist politics, was not economic change, but on the contrary the institutional innovations introduced by the British. Anil Seal emphasised the institutional opportunities offered by English education, especially the new jobs available in the subordinate civil service and the modern professions of law, western medicine, journalism and teaching. John Broomfield for his part dwelt on the institutional opportunities offered to a growing band of politicians by the new constitutional structure of elections and representatives in the changing system of government. Secondly, the interpretation focused upon the region, as against the nation, and upon the traditional cultures in each region; it was against the backdrop of the region that the elite theorists traced the course of political change set off by the institutional changes. Thirdly, the interpretation focused, not upon class and class conflict, but upon the formation of an English-educated elite, and upon the rivalries within each region between contending castes and communities for securing the opportunities offered by English education and legislative representation.

23.3 THE EMERGENCE OF THE CAMBRIDGE SCHOOL

Anil Seal, whose thesis at Cambridge was supervised by John Gallagher and which was subsequently published under the title *Emergence of Indian Nationalism* (1968), subscribed to these views in his thesis. So did the first generation of Anil Seal's students, especially Judith Brown, the author of *Gandhi's Rise to Power* (Cambridge, 1972). In their view, the English-educated nationalist elite was originally the high caste minority of Bengal, Bombay and Madras, and the politics of the backward castes and regions was also a minority's protest against this English-educated nationalism. Subsequently, however, John Gallagher, Anil Seal and yet another batch of their students radically modified their stand, and the Cambridge School was the product of the modified standpoint.

John Gallagher, together with Ronald Robinson, had earlier written a book entitled *Africa and the Victorians* (1961), which had made a critical impact on imperial studies in the early 1960s. Briefly, Gallagher and Robinson had argued that imperialism was not the

product of the new economic forces in Europe, but was induced by the political collapse caused by indigenous processes in Africa and Asia. Imperialism was compelled to move into the political vacuum created by the internal conflicts in native societies. Anil Seal, as a brilliant young pupil of Gallagher, had also dwelt on the political rivalries within Indian society in his explanation of the emergence of modern politics in India, focusing especially upon caste and the competition for English education among various regions, communities and castes. In the early 1970s, a new batch of research students gathered around John Gallagher, Anil Seal and Gordon Johnson (the editor of *Modern Asian Studies* and an earlier student of Anil Seal with a thesis on Maharasthra politics to his credit, a thesis very similar to those of Anil Seal and Judith Brown). This was the Cambridge School, and it distinguished itself from the earlier elite theory version by formulating new answers to the questions posed in the ongoing debate. However, they still subscribed to the view that nationalism was basically a play for power.

In the new version, the dynamic factor behind modern politics was no longer English education and its opportunities, nor of course any broad economic change under colonial rule. On the contrary, the dynamic factor was the increasing centralisation of government in the subcontinent and the growing element of representation within its structure. This implied the increasingly great presence of government in the countryside and the integration of the periphery to the centre through the new mechanism of legislative representation. Government impulse fostered modern politics in British India, and created the space for national politics in the country. Secondly, the locality was now projected as the real base of politics instead of the region or the nation. The 'real' interests involved in politics were local interests, not a mythical national interest, or even a regional-cultural interest. Local interests sought to pass themselves off as the cultural interest of the region or the national interest of the whole country. Thirdly, the operating unit in politics was identified, not as caste or community, not to speak of class, but as the faction based on the patron-client linkage in the locality. The patron-client network was a pragmatic alliance cutting across classes, castes and communities. The patrons in whose interest the networks were formed were local magnates, either town notables or rural-local bosses, depending upon the locality. The local notables were now projected as more influential than the English-educated professional men who constituted the educated elite. The dynamic factor that pulled the local networks of patronage into national politics was the increased presence of government in the locality and the increasing presence of the representative element in the government.

23.4 THE MAJOR WORKS OF THE CAMBRIDGE SCHOOL

The origins of the Cambridge School may be traced back to Robinson and Gallagher's *Africa and the Victorians* and Seal's *Emergence of Indian Nationalism* in the 1960s, but the Cambridge School announced itself only in the 1970s with *Locality, Province and Nation*. The tenets of the Cambridge School were set forth in a number of works, among which may be mentioned John Gallagher, Gordon Johnson and Anil Seal (eds.), *Locality, Province and Nation* (1973); Gordon Johnson, *Provincial Politics and Indian Nationalism: Bombay and the Indian National Congress 1890 to 1905* (1973); C.A. Bayly, *The Local Roots of Indian Politics: Allahabad 1880 –1920* (1975); D.A.Washbrook, *The Emergence of Provincial Politics: Madras Presidency 1870 –1920* (1976); C.J. Baker, *The Politics of South India 1920 –1937*(1976); B..R. Tomlinson, *The Indian National Congress and the Raj 1929* – 1942 (1976); and C. J. Baker, Gordon Johnson and Anil Seal (eds.), *Power, Profit and Politics* (1981). The first and the last were collections of essays by members of the Cambridge School; the rest were Cambridge and Oxford Theses supervised by Anil Seal and John Gallagher.

These books may have differed in their tone and emphasis to some extent, but they shared a number of common features. Collectively, they constituted the Cambridge School. Some Cambridge theses, which Anil Seal supervised at around the same time, did not share the same features. For instance, Mushirul Husan's *Nationalism and Communal Politics in India 1916-1928* (1979), and Rajat Kanta Ray's *Social Conflict and Political Unrest in Bengal 1875-1927* (1984), did not share the emphasis on power play, but on the contrary dwelt on ideological and economic factors. Despite guidance by Anil Seal, they did not belong to the Cambridge School. What distinguished the historians of the Cambridge School was their focus upon the search for power by individuals and factions. They pushed their inquiries down from the nation (viewed as a whole by the Marxists) and the region (regarded separately by the elite theorists) to the locality; and in the locality, their attention focused, not upon social groups such as classes or castes, but on 'connexions' straddling these social categories. Their analysis concentrated on the slow bonding together of these local factions and connections into an all-India political structure by the increasing intrusion of the power at the centre into the affairs of the periphery.

The gradual centralisation of the government, matched as it was by the growth of a representative element within the centralised structure, pulled local politics outwards, into politics with a national focus. Nationalism, in this view, was disguised collaboration with imperialism.

23.5 FEATURES OF THE CAMBRIDGE INTERPRETATION

The Cambridge interpretation began with the locality, and with the 'connexions' in each locality. In C.A. Bayly's analysis of mid-nineteenth century politics in Allahabad town, local politics consisted of 'a series of loose consortia of patrons each with their clientelia to satisfy'. The town was dominated by commercial magnates who locally enjoyed the status of *rais* or notable. He found it useful 'to describe the various groups in clientage to the commercial *raises* as connexions'. A bunching of economic functions around the magnates gave the connexions a cross-caste, cross-community aspect. Later the same 'connexions' became the operative units in nationalist politics in Allahabad.

In his study of Bombay politics, Gordon Johnson concurred with this. The most obvious characteristic of every Indian politician was that each politician acted for many diverse interests at all levels of Indian society, 'and in doing so cut across horizontal ties of class, caste, region and religion.'

Anil Seal put the same point forcefully in the introductory article on 'Imperialism and nationalism in India' in *Locality, Province and Nation*. Politics was originally a local affair and there it was a race for influence, status and resources. In this race, patrons would regiment their clients 'into factions which jockeyed for position.' So these were not partnerships between the same sorts of fellows. They were rather associations of big-wigs and their followers. In other words, the factions were 'vertical alliances, not horizontal alliances.' The local rivalries were seldom marked by the alliance of landlord with landlord, educated with educated, Muslim with Muslim, and Brahman with Brahman. More frequently, Hindus worked with Muslims, Brahmans were hand-in-glove with non-Brahmans.

According to the Cambridge interpretation, the roots of politics lay in the localities – the district, the municipality, the village. There the town notables and the rural-local bosses enjoyed the power to distribute resources without any interference by the seemingly impotent imperial government. But things began to change in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Motivated, according to David Washbrook, by 'the need to improve, to gather more wealth, to do more good', the imperial authorities carried out bureaucratic and

constitutional reforms which forced more and more local politicians to turn their attention from the local centres of power to the government at the centre. This was John Gallagher's 'Government impulse' and it altered the working of Indian politics. 'That is not to say', he cautioned, 'that Indian politics had been tidied up into parties with programmes, tailored to fit the needs of coherent social groups. The main elements were still the links between patrons and clients, the connections in localities and the shifting alliances between factions; these continued to cut across the spurious unities which now seemed to have emerged. Nevertheless, there had been an important change; more localities had to be bonded together, and they had to be related to the politics of larger arenas. The lessons of these electoral systems followed the logic of administrative change' (John Gallagher, 'Congress in Decline: Bengal 1930 to 1939', in *Locality, Province and Nation*).

Anil Seal, in his introduction to *Locality, Province and Nation,* had the same thing to say. As a centralised and increasingly representative government emerged, 'it was no longer enough for Indians to secure political benefits in the localities alone.' The increasing power to be bargained for at the centres for government necessitated the creation of provincial and then all India politics. Village, district and small town politics 'continued unabated in the undergrowth', but political associations, such as the Madras Native Association or the Indian National Congress, deployed a different grammar of politics in the provinces and at the centre. 'For the formal structure of government provided the framework of politics, and it was only by operating within it that Indians could share and determine the distribution of power and patronage' (Anil Seal, 'Imperialism and Nationalism', in *Locality, Province and Nation*).

According to C. J. Baker, local bosses, so long left on their own to strike local bargains of power, found it necessary to match the new administrative and representative structure of the British Raj with a national political structure built upon organisations with broader constituencies, such as the Justice Party in Madras, the Hindu Mahasabha, The All India Muslim League and the Indian National Congress. Ascribing 'spurious political change' to administrative logic, the Cambridge School denies any sudden transformation of elite clubs into mass movements on the advent of Gandhi. In their view, successive doses of constitutional reform were the medicine which revitalized the otherwise languishing all India politics in each phase: the Montford reforms precipitated the Non-Cooperation movement, the Simon Commission provoked the Civil Disobedience Movement, and the Cripps Mission brought on the Quit India Movement. Whenever government proposed any reform at the centre which would affect the distribution of patronage in the locality, the politicians found it necessary to be active in the new national arena of politics. As Gordon Johnson puts it, 'There is no simple chronological growth of nationalism in India: nationalist activity booms and slumps in phase with the national activity of the government.'

23.6 THE SCEPTICISM OF THE CAMBRIDGE SCHOOL

What *The Oxford History of the British Empire, Volume V, Historiography* (1999) has identified as the 'Cambridge School' questioning 'the nationalist pretensions of the Congress movement' is marked above all by its sceptical tone towards Indian Nationalism. Behind the scepticism lay an assumption about politics in general. Politics is about the individual's search for power, patronage and resources. It is not a reflection of social sentiment or economic position, but a separate arena of activity which possesses its own laws. Disputing the assumption that class, communities or castes supplied the basis for political organisation, D.A. Washbrook claimed that in the pursuit of power some men would do anything to obtain their goal. Power is wanted for its own sake. The basic concern of the politicians is power, office and place rather than a wish to

transform society, particularly in a society like that of the Madras Presidency where wealth was concentrated in a few hands and where no important person wanted to change this scheme of things. In order to establish power, politicians needed the support of various interests, classes and communities. Merchants, landlords, lawyers, Brahmans, untouchables, Hindus, Muslims, in fact all kinds of people were perfectly prepared to work with one another to obtain the common goal – power. The pure scepticism of this view allows little room for any fundamental social and economic conflicts of a general character. Above all, the Cambridge School denies any deep-seated contradiction between imperial rule and its native subjects.

Imperialism did not really control the vast and diverse subcontinent, and its subjects, who were concerned for the most part with local issues, did not really oppose it. As Anil Seal had earlier pronounced in *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism,* Indians competed with one another, and collaborated with their British rulers. He now went further and observed in the introduction to *Locality, Province and Nation* that it was no longer credible to write about a nationalist movement grounded in common aims, led by men with similar backgrounds, and recruited from widening groups with compatible interests. That movement seemed to him a ramshackle coalition throughout its long career. 'Its unity seems a figment. Its power appears as hollow as that of the imperial authority it was supposedly challenging. Its history was the rivalry between Indian and Indian, its relationship with imperialism that of the mutual clinging of two unsteady men of straw. Consequently, it now seems impossible to organize modern Indian history around the old notions of imperialism and nationalism' (Anil Seal, 'Imperialism and Nationalism', *Locality, Province and Nation*).

This is a sceptical view of Indian nationalism in particular and of politics in general. The Cambridge School follows a purely political approach to the study of Indian politics, setting aside the inputs of economics or sociology. In this approach, the individual behaves in politics, as does the man in the market. One seeks power, the other seeks profit and both are guided by self-interest.

23.7 THE END OF THE CAMBRIDGE SCHOOL

John Gallagher, Vere Harmsworth Professor of Imperial and Naval History in Cambridge University, died, in 1980. In his memory the Cambridge group brought out a collection of essays: Christopher Baker, Gordon Johnson and Anil Seal (eds.), *Power, Profit and Politics: Essays on Imperialism, Nationalism and Change in Twentieth Century Politics* (Cambridge 1981). Among other essays it included a joint article by Ayesha Jalal and Anil Seal entitled 'Alternative to Partition: Muslim Politics between the Wars', which stimulated rethinking about partition, and later led to a path breaking book by Ayesha Jalal entitled *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim league and the Demand for Pakistan* (Cambridge, 1985), wherein she showed that a confederation with Muslim consent had been a very real possibility and an alternative to Partition. But *Power, Profit and Politics* was the last collective statement of the Cambridge School. After that the group ceased to exist and the individual authors went their individual ways. Under Anil Seal's supervision, Ayesha Jalal wrote *The Sole Spokesman,* and Joya Chatterji wrote *Bengal Divided; Hindu Communalism and Partition 1932-47* (Cambridge, 1994), but these were individuals works and not part of a collective.

Another collective, *Subaltern Studies,* claimed public attention in 1982. It was critical of the Cambridge School, but in some respects there was a similarity. The Subalternists, too, denied the importance of class division in politics, and they gave primacy to power relations rather than class relations. From the angle of power, they set apart the elite from the

subalterns, and accused the nationalist elite of collaboration with imperialism. They, too, went back to the locality in their search for the roots of subaltern politics. There was an echo of Cambridge here. All in all, the Cambridge School left a visible trail in Indian historiography.

23.8 EVALUATION

Historians in India, Marxist, liberal and subalternist, sharply criticised the Cambridge School's sceptical views. They accused the Cambridge historians of 'Namierism', recalling that the Oxford historian Lewis Namier, too, had reduced Parliamentary politics in Englnd to pure self interest and power play. The various critical reviews in journals included a trenchant attack by Tapan Raychaudhuri in the *Historical Journal*, Vol. XXII, 1979, entitled 'Indian Nationalism as Animal Politics'. Summing up the criticism in *The Oxford History of the British Empire, Historiography* later on, Raychaudhuri conceded that it would not be quite fair to dismiss the Cambridge School as a sophisticated restatement of the old colonial view which saw Indian nationalism as nothing but a masquerade concealing a cynical quest for material gain. Since British rule in India undoubtedly rested on the collaboration of some and the indifference of many, the exploration of this side of Indian politics by the Cambridge School 'has certainly enriched understanding by the entire process.' Raychaudhuri, however, is still critical of the view that genuine opposition to imperialism was 'no more than collaboration by other means' or that nationalism was 'a mere make-believe in the Indian case.' In his view, the Cambridge interpretation takes no account of a pervasive feeling of humiliation, and the need for cultural self-assertion.

Looking back, it is possible to see that the Cambridge School provided historians of India with two useful insights, which they could not afford to ignore even if they were opposed to the over-all tone of the interpretation. In the first place, much politics was, and still is, by its nature local, and there, patron-client linkages cutting across caste, class and community were and still are an everyday truth. Secondly, in a diverse subcontinent where life was lived in so many localities, the tightening administrative-constitutional structure of the Raj did undoubtedly create a political space for central and national concerns which allowed the nationalist movement, psychical and ideological in its origin, to gain momentum. Needless to say, nationalism cannot exist without a national arena of politics, and one consequence of British imperialism in India was the creation of an all-India level in politics over and above the local and regional levels. Acute and sophisticated as the Cambridge interpretation of Indian nationalism is, it still, however, lacks the analytical framework for capturing the fleeting psychical dimension of community and nation.

23.9 SUMMARY

The Cambridge School of Historians believed that the Indian society during the colonial era was basically marked by horizontal and vertical divisions and that the Indian politics was characterised by factional rivalries among the local and regional bosses. Thus the fundamental contradiction under the colonial rule was not between imperialism and the Indian people, but between the Indians themselves. Moreover, according to these historians, the Indian nationalism was not the product of the struggle of the Indian people against colonial exploitation, but between the Indians for getting the benefits given to them by the British rulers. The leaders of the national movement were not inspired by great ideals but were after power and material benefits. Many historians have criticised this school of historiography on the grounds that it takes mind out of human behaviour and reduces nationalism to 'animal politics'.

23.10 EXERCISES

1) What do you understand by the 'Cambridge School'? Which historians are generally associated with it?

2) How did the Cambridge School emerge? Discuss the basic constituents of its interpretation of Indian history.

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UNIT 24 HISTORY FROM BELOW

Structure

24.1 Introduction

24.2 Beginning and Growth

24.3 Main Trends

24.4 Problems of Writing History from Below

24.5 Indian Context

- 24.5.1 History of Peasant Movements
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- 24.5.3 History of Tribal Movements

24.6 Summary

24.7 Exercises

24.8 Suggested Readings

24.1 INTRODUCTION

History from Below began as a reaction against the traditional histories which concerned themselves almost exclusively with the political, social and religious elites. It has been variously termed as 'grassroots history, history seen from below or the history of the common people', 'people's history', and even, 'history of everyday life'. The conventional history about the great deeds of the ruling classes received further boost from the great tradition of political and administrative historiography developed by Ranke and his followers. In opposition to this 'History from Above', the History from Below was an attempt to write the history of the common people. It is a history concerned with the activities and thoughts of those people and regions that were neglected by the earlier historians. Peasants and working classes, women and minority groups, unknown 'faces in the crowd', and the people lost in the past became the central concern of this historiographical tradition. History from Below is an attempt to make history-writing broad-based, to look into the lives of the marginalised groups and individuals, and to explore new sources and to reinterpret the old ones.

24.2 BEGINNING AND GROWTH

The beginning of the History from Below may be traced to the late 18th century. In the classical western tradition, history-writing involved the narration of the deeds of great men. The common people were considered to be beyond the boundaries of history and it was beneath the dignity of the historian to write about them. In any case, as Peter Burke points out, 'until the middle of the eighteenth century, the word "society" in its modern sense did not exist in any European language, and without the word it is very difficult to have any conception of that network of relationships we call "society" or "the social structure".

According to Eric Hobsbawm, such an approach to history became possible 'only from the moment when the ordinary people become a constant factor in the making of such decisions and events. Not only at times of exceptional popular mobilization, such as revolutions, but at all or most times. By and large this did not happen until the era of the great revolutions at the end of the eighteenth century.' In particular, he traces the

origin of this trend in the French Revolution which provided the impetus and opportunity for writing such history by drawing the common people in the public sphere and by creating documents related to their actions. He states:

> 'One of the reasons why so much modern grassroots history emerged from the study of the French Revolution is that this great event in history combines two characteristics which rarely occur together before that date. In the first place, being a major revolution, it suddenly brought into activity and public notice enormous numbers of the sort of people who previously attracted very little attention outside their family and neighbours. And in the second place, it documented them by means of a vast and laborious bureaucracy, classifying and filing them for the benefit of the historian in the national and departmental archives of France.'

The process basically started with the 'discovery of people' by the Romantics in late-18th century Europe. They used the popular cultural resources like ballads, folk songs and stories, myths and legends to reconstruct the past. Their emphasis on passion as against reason, on imagination as against mechanical science formed the basis for recovering the popular history. In Germany J.G.Herder coined the term 'popular culture'. The two early-19th century histories which used the word 'people' in their titles were the *History of the Swedish People* by E.G.Geijer and the *History of the Czech People* by Palacky. In Germany, Zimmermann wrote about the German peasant war. In France, it was Jules Michelet (1798-1874) who, in his voluminous writing on French Revolution, brought common people into the orbit of history-writing. His *History of France* (1833-67), *History of the French Revolution* (1846-53) and *The People* (1846) are notable for taking the masses into account. In England, the History from Below may be traced to the writings of J.R.Green, Goldwin Smith and Thorold Rogers in the 1860s and 1870s. Green, in the Preface to his book *Short History of the English People* (1877) criticised the tendency to write the 'drum and trumpet' history, i.e., the history of wars and conquests. He wrote:

> 'The aim of the following work is defined by its title; it is a history not of English kings or English conquests, but of the English People …. I have preferred to pass lightly and briefly over the details of foreign wars and diplomacies, the personal adventures of kings and nobles, the pomp of courts, or the intrigues of favourites….'

Similarly, Thorold Rogers's huge, seven-volume study, *History of Agriculture and Prices* (1864-1902), was a major work on the social and economic history.

In the 20th century, the historian whose works inspired the left tradition of History from Below was Georges Lefebvre. He empirically grounded the study of peasantry in the context of the French Revolution. In his *The Peasants of Northern France during the French Revolution* (1924), he made a detailed statistical examination of the peasant life on the eve of the Revolution. He differentiated between various groups of peasants and outlined their differential responses to the Revolution. He further sought to comprehend the motives behind their actions. It was, however, his other book, *The Great Fear of 1789* (1932), which comprehensively described the peasant mentality during the Revolution. It is considered among the first texts of the new history from below which is basically concerned about delineating the thoughts and actions of the common people. Eric Hobsbawm, writing in 1985, feels that 'If there is a single historian who anticipates most of the themes of contemporary work, it is Georges Lefebvre, whose *Great Fear* … is still remarkably up to date.' Thus it may be said that the History from Below, as we know it today, began with Lefebvre.

Building on his work, his pupil and friend, George Rude, advanced this tradition which had moved away for the 'uncritically sentimental tradition' of Michelet and the Romantics. Rude was basically concerned with the study of 'the lives and actions of the common people… the very stuff of history'. In his many books, including *The Crowd in the French Revolution* (1959), *The Crowd in History* (1964), and *Ideology and Popular Protest* (1980), Rude discussed the participation of ordinary people in the epoch-making event. He was not interested in the actions and behaviour of the dominant classes. Rather, in the words of Frederick Krantz, 'He sought … to understand the crowd action of craftsmen, small shopkeepers, journeymen, labourers and peasants not as "disembodied abstraction and personification of good and evil", but as meaningful historical activity susceptible, through meticulous and innovative research, to concrete re-creation'. The questions he asked about the masses set the precedent for the later work on grassroots history : 'how it behaved, how it was composed, how it was drawn into its activities, what it set out to achieve and how far its aims were realized.' He sought to understand the crowd as a 'thing of flesh and blood' having its own 'distinct identity, interests, and aspirations'.

In Britain, during the 1920s and 1930s, there were many popular history books published by the leftist Book Club. In the 1940s, the Communist Party Historians' Group carried forward this tradition. Many of the figures identified with History from Below, such as George Rude, E.P.Thompson, Eric Hobsbawm, Christopher Hill, and John Saville were members of this group. This group was instrumental in bringing out the famous journal *Past and Present* in 1952 and later on the *Labour History Review*. Later on this tradition was carried forward by the *History Workshop Journal*, founded in 1976, which remained devoted to publishing people's history.

E.P.Thompson, in his essay 'History from Below', published in 1966, first provided the theoretical basis to this tradition of history-writing. After that, according to Jim Sharpe, 'the concept of history from below entered the common parlance of historians'. Thompson had already written his classic book, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), in which he had explored the perspective of the working classes in the context of the Industrial Revolution in England. In a famous statement he stressed that his aim was to understand the views and actions of those people who had been termed as backward-looking and had, therefore, been relegated to the margins of history. He wrote :

> 'I am seeking to rescue the poor stockinger, the Luddite cropper, the 'obsolete' hand-loom weaver, the 'utopian' artisan, and even the deluded follower of Joanna Southcott, from the enormous condescension of posterity. Their crafts and traditions may have been backward-looking. Their communitarian ideals may have been fantasies. Their insurrectionary conspiracies may have been foolhardy. But they lived through these times of acute social disturbance, and we did not. Their aspirations were valid in terms of their own experience; and if they were casualties of history, they remain, condemned in their own lives, as casualties.'

In one of his famous essays, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century' (1971), Thompson studied the crowd behaviour involved in food riots. According to him, the food riots were 'a highly complex form of direct popular action' where the people involved had rational and clear objectives.

Similarly, Cristopher Hill and Eric Hobsbawm sought to emphasise the importance of the thoughts and actions of the lower classes in the making of history. Hill studied the radical and democratic ideologies in the course of the 17th-century English Revolution.

In his book, *The World Turned Upside Down* (1972), Hill argued that the radical movements of the ordinary people, such as the Levellers, the Diggers, the Ranters, had great revolutionary potential and was capable of subverting the 'existing society and its values'. It is a history written from the point of view of the radical religious groups involving ordinary people. Similarly, Hobsbawm wrote extensively on the thoughts and actions of the modern workers and pre-industrial peasants in books like *Labouring Men* (1964), *Worlds of Labour* (1984), *Primitive Rebels* (1959) and *Bandits* (1969). John Foster's *Class Struggle and Industrial Revolution* (1974) and Raphael Samuel's *Theatres of Memory* (1994) carries forward this tradition. In the USA, the works on the slaves by Eugene Genovese and Herbert Gutman belong to the same tradition.

Although the Marxist historians have mostly influenced the writing of History from Below in the 20th century, there are others also whose writings can be said to constitute this trend. Prominent among them are some of the historians of the *Annales* School. Both the founders of the *Annales*, Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre, had interests in popular mentalities. Bloch's classic book, *The Royal Touch* (1924), shows his interest in collective psychology and in people's mentalities, ideas and beliefs. Bloch explores the popular belief in the healing powers of the French and the English kings and their capacity to cure the skin disease scrofula just by touching the patient. This belief became a fundamental element in construction of royalty and maintenance of its strength. Similarly Febvre's *Martin Luther* (1928) and *The Problems of Unbelief in the 16th Century* (1942) were studies of mentalities. These works stimulated the later generations of historians to explore the history of mentalities.

It was, however, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's *Montaillou : Cathars and Catholics in a French Village, 1294-1324* (1975) that became one of the classic texts of this genre. It is a study of the ideas and beliefs of a medieval Pyrenean peasant community and offers valuable insights into the lives and activities of common people. Ladurie used as his basic source material the inquisitorial records of the Catholic church to explore the thoughts and beliefs of a small community.

Another classic work in the same tradition, though not of the *Annales* lineage, is Carlo Ginzburg's *The Cheese and the Worms* (1976). Here the author looks into the intellectual and spiritual world of one individual, an Italian miller named Domenico Scandella (also known as Menocchio). He was tried by the church authorities for his heretic beliefs and was executed in 1600. The copious documentation dealing with his case provided the basic source material to Ginzburg who is aware of the conceptual and methodological problems involved in recreating the world of subordinate groups and individuals in the pre-modern period. However, he thinks that 'the fact that a source is not "objective" (for that matter, neither is an inventory) does not mean that it is useless…. In short, even meagre, scattered and obscure documentation can be put to good use.' Ginzburg's other works, such as *The Night Battles : Witchcraft and Agrarian Cults in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (1966) and *Ecstasies : Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath* (1989), also strengthened the tradition of History from Below. His works, along with those of Giovanni Levi, also created a new trend in history-writing known as 'microhistory' which we have discussed in detail in **Unit 11**. Peter Burke's *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (1978), Robert Darton's *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (1984) and Natalie Zemon Davis's *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (1975) and *The Return of Martin Guerre* (1983) are some other works which explore the popular mentalities and belong to this kind of historiography.

24.3 MAIN TRENDS

According to Raphael Samuel, the 'term "people's history" has had a long career, and covers and ensemble of different writings. Some of them have been informed by the idea of progress, some by cultural pessimism, some by technological humanism'. There is a variety in the subject matter also. 'In some cases the focus is on tools and technology, on others on social movements, on yet others on family life.' This kind of history has also 'gone under a variety of different names – "industrial history" in the 1900s .., "natural history" in those comparative ethnologies which arose in the wake of Darwin… "Kulturgeschichte" (cultural history) in those late-nineteenth-century studies of folkways to whose themes the "new" social history has recently been returning'.

It is, however, clear that this version of historiography has been dominated by the Marxist historians. From Georges Lefebvre in France to Eric Hobsbawm and E.P.Thompson in England to Eugene Genovese and Herbert Gutman in the United States, the nature and method of History from Below in the West have been defined by Marxist social historians. They have first used this term and delineated its features in relation to the conventional historiography. Thompson, Hobsbawm and Raphael Samuel have written about its concepts and contents and most of them have practiced this kind of history-writing. In this version, politics of class struggle has been an important presence. Whether it is the study of the 18th-century French peasantry by Lefebvre, or the medieval English peasantry by Christopher Hill, or the working classes of the 19th and 20th centuries by Thompson, Hobsbawm and John Foster, the existence of classes and the class struggle is always noticeable. These historians insist on the agency of the people and their own role in shaping their lives and history. Some of them, particularly Thompson and Genovese also emphasise on the lived 'experiences' of the people instead of abstract notions of class for understanding their behaviour.

But the Marxist historians are not the only ones in this field. The historians belonging to the *Annales* School such as Marc Bloch, Lucien Febvre and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie have also studied the life and thoughts of the subordinate classes. However, with them, it goes under the name of 'history of mentalities'. Closely allied to this is the new cultural history. Developed in the 1960s by Le Roy Ladurie, Robert Mandrou and Jacques Le Goff who were part of the later *Annales* School in France, this version of historiography had a more populist conception of history and was critical of the 'religious psychology' approach of Febvre. These historians stressed that the people were not passive recipient of the ideas imposed from above or outside, but were creators of their own culture. Some other historians, such as Carlo Ginzburg, Robert Darnton and Natalie Zemon Davis, who are not allied with the *Annales*, may also be classified as cultural historians. This kind of cultural history is the history of popular ideas. It differs from the approach of the Marxist historians in that it does not stress on classes or economic or political groups. Instead, they focus on small communities or individuals, on everyday life, on routine work practices, and on ceremonies and rituals. It is, therefore, a version of History from Below in which the politics, though not absent, clearly plays a much less important role than in the Marxist version.

These two trends, one associated with Marxism and the other with the 'history of mentalities' and cultural history, have been the most important versions of History from Below in the 20th century. However, there are other versions of this kind of historiography. In the right-wing version of such history there is no place for politics. It is a history of people in which there is no class struggle, no conflict of ideas and there is a strong sense of religious and moral values. The institution of family is idealised and there is a tendency 'to interpret the social relationships as reciprocal rather than exploitative'. Raphael

Samuel states that the 'characterstic location of right-wing people's history is in the "organic" community of the past…. The ideology is determinedly anti-modern, with urban life and capitalism as alien intrusions on the body politic, splintering the age-old solidarities of "traditional" life'. G.M. Trevelyan's *English Social History* (1944) and Peter Laslett's *World We Have Lost* (1965) are examples of this trend.

In the liberal version, the History from Below celebrates the spirit of modernity and benefits of capitalism and material progress. It is optimistic in tone and is future-oriented. It is critical of the pre-modern period which it considers synonymous with superstition and warfare. Guizot, Mignet, Thierry and later Michelet were some of the historians who represent this trend.

24.4 PROBLEMS OF WRITING HISTORY FROM BELOW

Both the exponents and critics have pointed towards several problems involved in the practice of History from Below. The most important problem relates to the nature and availability of sources. Most of the records left by the past describe the lives and deeds of the ruling and dominant groups. Even those records which relate to the lives and activities of ordinary people were created by the dominating classes or by those who were associated with them. This was done mostly for administrative purposes. The records about the subordinate groups are more numerous for the periods when they were resisting or rebelling against the authorities. Before the late 18th century in Europe access to such sources is restricted. For other parts of the world, particularly the Third World countries, the availability of such records is even more difficult. Moreover, as most of these records were created by and for the members of the dominant groups, they suffer from hyperbole, neglect and misrepresentation. For example, the police records revealing the subversive activities among the masses are often exaggerated. Similarly, they completely ignore those areas in the life of people which were not in administrative interest.

The problem is compounded because the masses have generally not left much records of their own. Popular culture is generally preserved through the oral medium and not through written medium. The oral tradition, as Hobsbawm remarks, 'is a remarkably slippery medium for preserving facts. The point is that memory is not so much a recording as a selective mechanism, and the selection is, within limits, constantly changing'. The paucity of written sources left by the ordinary people is a great hindrance in writing about their feelings and ideas.

At another level, there are problems related to conceptualisation also. Although all practitioners of History from Below claim to write about people, the term 'people' itself is used with different, sometimes conflicting, meanings. Raphael Samuel states that 'In one version of people's history – radical-democratic or Marxist – the people are constituted by relations of exploitation, in another (that of the folklorists) by cultural antinomies, in a third by political rule'. The problem is further complicated by excluding certain groups from the category of people, while considering some as more people than others. In one version it is the proletariat which constitute the real people, in another it is peasantry. Herder, the German Romantic scholar, did not include the urban masses in the category of 'people'. For him and his followers, the 'people' were the peasants who lived close to nature and were innocent. The term sometimes also adopts racist connotations in which people speaking other languages or following different faiths are not counted among the real people. At the left radical level, the exclusion takes another form. Peter Burke, while praising the histories written by British Marxist historians, points out :

> 'Edward Thompson's *Making of the English Working Class* comes quite close to excluding working-class Tories from the people. As for *The World Turned Upside Down* [by Christopher Hill], it deals alternately with radical ideas and with the ideas of ordinary people, so that an incautious reader may very well be led to equate the two. However, in seventeenth-century England, not all ordinary people were radicals and not all radicals were ordinary people.'

The History from Below has also been criticised for not taking theoretical issues into account and for romanticising and idealising the people. Its rank and file approach ignores the fact of institutional influence on industrial relations. Moreover, its neglect of quantitative analysis and overemphasis on narrative has also been criticised.

24.5 INDIAN CONTEXT

The main problem in writing the History from Below in India, apart from the conceptual problems discussed above, is the absence of relevant sources. The records pertaining to the lower classes were almost exclusively produced by those not belonging to that stratum of society. The relevant sources are a big problem even in advanced countries where the working-class literacy was much higher. Even there the sources related to the peasants and other pre-industrial groups come to us through those in authority. In India, most of the members of the subordinate classes, including the industrial working classes, are not literate. Therefore, direct sources coming from them are extremely rare, if not completely absent. Given this scenario, the historians trying to write history from below have to rely on indirect sources. As Sabyasachi Bhattacharya points out, 'Given the low level of literacy we have to depend on inferences from behaviour pattern, reports on opinions and sentiments (often involving a distorting refraction in the medium), on oral testimonies (best when exactly recorded as in trial proceedings) etc.' Oral traditions also have their problems. They cannot be stretched back too far and one has to work within living memory. These problems are outlined by one of the great practitioners of History from Below, Ranajit Guha, the founder of the *Subaltern Studies* about which we will read more in the next Unit. Guha, in his book, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (1983), talks about the elitist origins of most of the evidences which the historians use for understanding the mentalities behind the peasant rebellions :

> 'Most, though not all, of this evidence is elitist in origin. This has come down to us in the form of official records of one kind or another – police reports, army despatches, administrative accounts, minutes and resolutions of governmental departments, and so on. Non-official sources of our information on the subject, such as newspapers or the private correspondence between persons of authority, too, speak in the same elitist voice, even if it is that of the indigenous elite or of non-Indians outside officialdom.'

To overcome these elitist biases, it is often supposed, folk traditions may be used. But, according to Guha, 'there is not enough to serve for this purpose either in quantity or quality in spite of populist beliefs to the contrary'. Firstly, there are not much of such evidences available. Moreover, 'An equally disappointing aspect of the folklore relating to peasant militancy is that it can be elitist too.' Guha's suggestion for capturing the insurgent's consciousness is to read between the lines, 'to read the presence of a rebel consciousness as a necessary and pervasive element within that body of evidence'.

However, Sumit Sarkar finds a much deeper problem which may be the cause of this non-availability of evidences. It is the continued subalternity of the lower classes :

> 'Above all, "history from below" has to face the problem of the ultimate relative *failure* of mass initiative in colonial India, if the justly abandoned stereotype of the eternally passive Indian peasant is not to be replaced by an opposite romantic stereotype of perennial rural rebelliousness. For an essential fact surely is that the "subaltern" classes have remained subaltern, often surprisingly dormant despite abject misery and ample provocation, and subordinate in the end to their social "betters" even when they do become politically active.'

It is with these constraints that the historians have worked on Indian people's histories.

24.5.1 History of Peasant Movements

A general history of peasant movements by Barrington Moore Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (1967), puts the Indian peasant movements in a comparative perspective. In Moore's account, the Indian peasantry lacked revolutionary potential and were comparatively docile and passive in the face of poverty and oppression. Thus peasant rebellions in India were 'relatively rare and completely ineffective and where modernization impoverished the peasants as least as much as in China and over as long a period of time'. This view of the Indian peasant was challenged by many historians. Kathleen Gough, in her article on 'Indian Peasant Uprising' (1974), counted 77 peasant revolts during the colonial period. Her conclusion is that 'the smallest of which probably engaged several thousand peasants in active support or combat'. And the largest of these 'is the "Indian Mutiny" of 1857-58, in which vast bodies of peasants fought or otherwise worked to destroy British rule over an area of more than 500,000 square miles'. Ranajit Guha, in his book, states that 'there are no fewer than 110 known instances of these even for the somewhat shorter period of 117 years – from the Rangpur *dhing* to the Birsaite *ulgulan'*. A.R.Desai is also against this view of the docility of the Indian peasantry and asserts that 'the Indian rural scene during the entire British period and thereafter has been bristling with protests, revolts and even large scale militant struggles involving hundreds of villages and lasting for years'. It is, therefore, clear that, at least during the British period, the quiescence of the Indian peasantry is a myth and a large number of works explode this myth.

There are many studies undertaken on Indian peasant movements. Apart from Kathleen Gough's work, A.R.Desai's (ed.) *Peasant Struggles in India* (1979) and *Agrarian Struggles in India after Independence* (1986), Sunil Sen's *Peasant Movements in India – Mid-Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (1982), Ranajit Guha's *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (1983), Eric Stokes's *The Peasants and the Raj : Studies in Agrarian Society and Peasant Rebellion in Colonial India* (1978), and D.N.Dhanagare's *Peasant Movements in India, 1920-1950* (1983) are some of the all-India studies.

On Bengal, Suprakash Roy's pioneering work in Bengali published in 1966, and translated into English as *Peasant Revolts and Democratic Struggles in India* (1999), looks at these revolts basically in terms of class struggles of peasants against the imperialist and landlords' exploitation and oppression. He also linked these rebellions to the fight for a democratic polity in India. Muinuddin Ahmed Khan's *History of the Faraidi Movement in Bengal* (1965) sought to interpret this peasant movement basically as a religious movement against the non-Muslim gentry. However, Narhari Kabiraj, in his *A Peasant Uprising in Bengal* (1972) and *Wahabi and Farazi Rebels of Bengal* (1982) refuted this thesis and emphasised on economic factors as the cause of the rebellion. His conclusion was that during this movement the 'agrarian aspect took precedence

over the communal one'. Blair King's study of the indigo rebellion in Bengal (*The Blue Mutiny : The Indigo Disturbances in Bengal 1859-1962* (1966)) also reaches the conclusion that it was a secular movement which combined all sections on Indian society. However, Ranajit Guha views the Indigo rebellion differently and argues that there were contradictions between various sections of the peasantry.

Some of the other important regional studies on peasant movements are : Girish Mishra's study on Champaran movement, *Agrarian Problems of Permanent Settlement : A Case Study of Champaran* (1979), and Stephen Henningham's *Peasant Movements in Colonial India, North Bihar, 1917-1942* (1982); Majid H. Siddiqi's *Agrarian Unrest in North India : The United Provinces, 1918-32* (1978), and Kapil Kumar's *Peasants in Revolt : Tenants, Lanlords, Congress and the Raj in Oudh* (1984) on U.P.; works by Stephen Dale, Robert Hardgrave, Sukhbir Chaudhary and Conrad Wood on the Moplah rebellion in Malabar, Kerala. Apart from these there are also several works on peasant movements in other parts of India.

24.5.2 History of Working-class Movements

Until about twenty-five years ago, the history of Indian labour was almost synonymous with the history of trade unions. Writing in 1982, Sabyasachi Bhattacharya commented that 'Till now in our labour history the Trade Union movement has been the subject of the largest number of published work'. Besides this, the focus was on the worker as an economic being, which did not take into account his/her social and cultural existence. Since the 1980s, however, this situation began to change. Several studies have appeared which view the working class history from a broader perspective. For one thing, the trade unions are no longer considered as synonymous with the working class. It is true that the trade unions represent a highly organised form of working class activities. However, trade unions are only one of the forms in which the workers organise themselves. Working class movement, on the other hand, is a much broader phenomenon and covers various mobilisations of all kinds of workers. Secondly, the recent studies have pointed out that economic motivation is not the sole determinant of working class action. The making of the working class and its movement derives from various sources in which the cultural, the social and the political are as important as the economic. Thirdly, it is indicated that the industrial workers, whom the trade union studies take as their basic staple, form a rather small part the entire working class which includes within its ambit the rural workers, urban workers in informal sectors, and service sector workers. Moreover, gender questions are also coming to the fore for an understanding of the attitude and behaviour of the workers, the employers, the public activists and government officials.

The studies which take into account these aspects of the changing scenario include E.D.Murphy's 'Class and Community in India : The Madras Labour Union, 1918-21' (*IESHR*, IV, 3, 1977) and *Unions in Conflict : A Comparative Study of Four South Indian Textile Centres, 1918-1939* (1981), R.K.Newman's *Wokers and Unions in Bombay, 1918-29 : A Study of Organization in the Cotton Mills* (1981), S.Bhattacharya's 'Capital and Labour in Bombay City, 1928-29' (*EPW*, XVI, 1981), Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Rethinking Working-Class History : Bengal, 1890-1940* (1989), Rajnarayan Chandavarkar's *The Origins of Industrial Capitalism in India : Business Strategies and Working Classes in Bombay, 1900-40* (1994), Janaki Nair's *Miners and Millhands : Work, Culture and Politics in Princely Mysore* (1998), Samita Sen, *Women and Labour in Late Colonial India : The Bengal Jute Industry* (1999), and Nandini Gooptu's *The Politics of the Urban Poor in the early Twentieth-Century India* (2001).

24.5.3 History of Tribal Movements

Several scholars treat tribal movements as part of the peasant movements. It is because over the years the tribal society and economy have started resembling those of the peasants and the agrarian problems of the tribals are same as those of the peasants. Kathleen Gough, A.R.Desai and Ranajit Guha have dealt with the tribal movements as such. Moreover, many scholars like Ghanshyam Shah, Ashok Upadhyay and Jaganath Pathy have shown the changes in the tribal society and economy which have pushed them in the direction of the non-tribal peasants. However, K.S. Singh, one of the authorities in the field, is of the opinion that such an approach is not justified because it 'tends to gloss over the diversities of tribal social formations of which tribal movements are a part, both being structurally related'. Singh puts more emphasis on social organisation of the tribals than on their economic grievances. He argues that :

> 'while the peasant movements tend to remain purely agrarian as peasants lived off land, the tribal movements were both agrarian and forest based, because the tribals' dependence on forests was as crucial as their dependence on land. There was also the ethnic factor. The tribal revolts were directed against zamindars, moneylenders and petty government officials not because they exploited them but also because they were aliens.'

In contrast to this view, some scholars have questioned the very category of the tribe itself. For example, Susana Devalle, in *Discourses of Ethnicity : Culture and Protest in Jharkhand* (1992), argues that the category 'tribe' was constructed by the European scholars in India and the colonial officials in their effort to understand the Indian reality. Andre Beteille also thinks that there are a lot of similarities between the tribals and the peasants and, therefore, it would be a mistake to consider them as two distinct structural types.

However, the fact remains that a large part of the tribal societies, particularly until the 20th century, possessed several specific features which put them apart from the mainstream peasant societies. For one, social and economic differentiation within the tribal society was much less than among the peasantry. Secondly, the great dependence of the tribes on the forests also separates them from the peasants whose main source of survival was land. Thirdly, tribal social organisation and the spatial concentration of the tribes in certain areas kept them relatively isolated. These factors made them particularly sensitive to the changes brought about by the colonial rule and imparted more militancy to their rebellion.

The colonial administrators were the first to write about the tribals. This attention was due to the recurring tribal revolts as a result of colonial intervention. The earliest writings were an attempt to understand the tribal societies for better administration. W.W. Hunter's *Annals of Rural Bengal* (1868), E.T. Dalton's *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* (1872), and H.H. Risley's *Tribes and Castes of Bengal* (1891) were some of these early works which described the tribal society. One of the earliest works by an Indian is Kali Kinkar Datta's *Santal Insurrection* (1940). According to Datta, the main reason for the rebellion was the oppression and exploitation by the outsiders. Three of his students also focused on Chotanagpur region for their initial studies on the tribes. J.C. Jha's *The Kol Insurrection of Chotanagpur* (1964), S.P. Sinha's *Life and Times of Birsa Bhagwan* (1964) and K.S. Singh's *The Dust Storm and the Hanging Mist : A Study of Birsa Munda and his movement in Chota Nagpur, 1874-1901* (1966) were pioneering efforts on these themes. The three volumes edited by K.S. Singh on *Tribal Movements of India* (1982, 1983 and 1998) are a big contribution to deal with the subject at the all-India level. John MacDougall's *Land or*

Religion ? The Sardar and Kherwar Movements in Bihar, 1858-95 (1985), D.M. Praharaj's *Tribal Movement and Political History in India : A Case Study from Orissa, 1803-1949* (1988), David Hardiman's *The Coming of the Devi : Adivasi Assertion in Western India* (1987), David Arnold's article on Gudem-Rampa uprisings in Andhra Pradesh (in *Subaltern Studies*, vol. I, 1982), S.R. Bhattarcharjee's *Tribal Insurgency in Tripura : A Study in Exploration of Causes* (1989) are some of the regional studies.

24.6 SUMMARY

History from Below, as we have discussed in this Unit, is to introduce the perspective of the common people in the process of history-writing. It is against that concept of historiography which believes in Disraeli's dictum that history is the biography of great men. Instead, the History from Below endeavours to take into account the lives and activities of masses who are otherwise ignored by the conventional historians. Moreover, it attempts to take their point of view into account as far as possible. It this venture, the historians face a lot of problems because the sources are biased in favour of the rulers, administrators and the dominant classes in general. In countries like India, this problem becomes even more acute due to low level of literacy among the masses. Despite these constraints, however, the social historians have tried their best to bring the people from the margins to the centre.

24.7 EXERCISES

1) What is History from Below? Discuss its beginning and growth.

2) Write a note on the History from Below in the context of history-writing on India.

3) Discuss the important trends in the writings of People's history.

4) What are the main problems associated with writing History from Below?

24.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

Raphael Samuel, 'People's History', in Raphael Samuel (ed.), *People's History and Socialist Theory* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981).

Jim Sharpe, 'History from Below', in Peter Burke (ed.), *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (Polity Press, Cambridge, 1991, 2001).

Eric Hobsbawm, 'On History from Below', in Eric Hobsbawm, *On History* (London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1997).

Matt Perry, 'History from Below', in Kelly Boyd (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Historians and Historical Writing*, 2 vols. (Chicago, Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1999).

Peter Burke, 'People's History or Total History', in Raphael Samuel (ed.), *People's History and Socialist Theory* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981).

Frederick Krantz, *History from Below : Studies in Popular Protest and Popular Ideology* (Oxford, New York, Basil Blackwell, 1985, 1988).

Georg G. Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century : From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (Hanover and London, Wesleyan University Press, 1997).

Jeremy Black and Donald M. MacRaild, *Studying History* (London, MacMillan, 1997, 2000).

Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, 'Presidential Address', Indian History Congress, 1982.

Ghanshyam Shah, *Social Movements in India : A Review of Literature* (New Delhi, Sage, 2004).

Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Delhi, OUP, 1983).

Sumit Sarkar, *'Popular' Movements & 'Middle Class' Leadership in Late Colonial Indi: Perspectives & Problems of a "History from Below"* (Calcutta, K.P. Bagchi & Company, 1983, 1985).

Sanjukta Das Gupta, 'Peasant and Tribal Movements in Colonial Bengal : A Historiographic Overview", in Sekhar Bandyopadhyay (ed.), *Bengal : Rethinking History* (Delhi, Manohar, 2001).

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UNIT 25 *SUBALTERN STUDIES*

Structure

25.1 Introduction

25.2 Beginning of the Idea

25.3 Development of the Project

25.3.1 First Phase : Elite vs. Subaltern

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25.1 INTRODUCTION

The *Subaltern Studies* is the title given to a series of volumes initially published under the editorship of Ranajit Guha, the prime mover and the ideologue of the project. He edited the first six volumes of the *Subaltern Studies*. The next five volumes are edited by other scholars associated with the project. Right from the beginning the *Subaltern Studies* took the position that the entire tradition of Indian historiography before it have had elitist bias. The historians associated with the *Subaltern Studies* declared that they would set the position right by writing the history from the point of view of the common people. In this Unit we will discuss the various positions taken by the writers associated with the *Subaltern Studies* as well as the criticism of the project by historians and others working in the area of Indian studies.

25.2 BEGINNING OF THE IDEA

The *Subaltern Studies* was proclaimed by its adherents as a new school in the field of Indian history-writing. Some of the historians associated with it declared it to be a sharp break in the tradition of Indian historiography. A group of writers dissatisfied with the convention of Indian history-writing became part of the collective and contributed for the volumes. It, however, also involved historians and other social scientists not formally associated with the subaltern collective. Besides the articles published in the volumes of *Subaltern Studies*, these writers also wrote for many other journals and edited volumes as well as published monographs which are today associated with subaltern themes and methodology. Starting the venture with the help of those whom Ranajit Guha termed as 'marginalised academics', the *Subaltern Studies* soon acquired vast reputation both inside and outside India for the views they professed as well as for intensive research on subaltern themes. Initially planned as a series of three volumes, it has now become an ongoing project with eleven volumes in print till date. Apart from these volumes, Ranajit Guha has also edited one volume of essays taken from the various earlier volumes for the international audiences. In some of the recent volumes the *Subaltern Studies* has included themes from non-Indian Third World countries also.

The term 'subaltern' has a rather long history. It was initially applied to the serfs and peasants in England during the Middle Ages. Later, by 1700, it was used for the subordinate ranks in the military. It, however, gained wide currency in scholarly circles after the works of Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), an Italian Marxist and Communist Party leader. Gramsci generally used the term in a broader connotation of 'class' to avoid the censorship of the prison authorities as he was in jail and his writings were scanned. Gramsci had adopted the term to refer to the subordinate groups in the society. In his opinion, the history of the subaltern groups is almost always related to that of the ruling groups. In addition, this history is generally 'fragmentary and episodic'.

Ranajit Guha, however, in the Preface to *Subaltern Studies* I, did not mention Gramsci's use of the term, even though he referred to Gramsci as an inspiration. Instead, he defined it as given in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*:

> 'The word "subaltern" in the title stands for the meaning as given in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, that is, "of inferior rank". It will be used in these pages as a name for the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way.'

A little later, at the end of his opening essay in the volume, he further clarified this term:

> 'The terms "people" and "subaltern classes" have been used synonymously throughout this note. The social groups and elements included in this category represent the demographic difference between the total Indian population and all those whom we have described as the "elite".'

The Subaltern historians made a radical departure in the use of the term from that of Gramsci. Even while accepting the subordinated nature of the subaltern groups, they argued the their history was autonomous from that of the dominant classes.

25.3 DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROJECT

Now there is a general and clear acknowledgement of basically two phases in the career of the Subaltern Studies. Phase I consists of :

a) concern with the subaltern, i.e., lower, exploited classes;

b) criticism of the elite, i.e., exploiting classes; and

c) influence of Gramscian thought and Marxist social history and an attempt to work within broader Marxist theory.

In the second phase, there is a clear shift from these concerns. Now :

a) there is an increasing engagement with textual analysis, a shift away from exploring the history of the exploited people, and more engagement, even though critical, with elite discourses; and

b) Marx and Gramsci are jettisoned in favour of Michel Foucault, Edward Said, and other postmodernists and postcolonialists.

25.3.1 First Phase : Elite vs. Subaltern

The Subaltern Studies asserted itself as a radically new form of history-writing in the context of Indian history. It was initially conceived as a series of three volumes to be edited by its eldest protagonist and the prime mover of the idea, Ranajit Guha. The idea

was seemingly informed by Gramscian thought. A deliberate attempt was made to break from both the economic determinism of a variety of Marxist theory as well as the elitism of bourgeois-nationalist and colonialist interpretations. A group of writers similarly dissatisfied with the convention of Indian historiography joined the collective and contributed essays for the volumes. It, however, also involved historians and other social scientists not formally associated with the subaltern collective.

Although basically concerned about India, the *Subaltern Studies* project was first conceived in England by some Indian academics, Ranajit Guha being the principal motive force behind it. Right from the beginning it was set against almost all existing traditions of Indian historiography. In what can be called as the manifesto of the project, Ranajit Guha, in a vein reminiscent of the opening line of *The Communist Manifesto* ('The history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggle'), declared in the very first volume of the *Subaltern Studies*, that 'The historiography of Indian nationalism has for a long time been dominated by elitism – colonialist elitism and bourgeois-nationalist elitism.' Both types of historiography was said to derive from the ideological discourse of the British rule in India. Despite their differences, both shared certain things in common and the most important of these was the absence of the politics of the people from their accounts. In his view, there was now an urgent requirement for setting the record straight by viewing the history from the point-of-view of the subaltern classes. This standpoint as well as the politics of the people was crucial because it constituted an autonomous domain which 'neither originated from elite politics nor did its existence depend on the latter'. The people's politics differed from the elite politics in several crucial aspects. For one, its roots lay in the traditional organisations of the people such as caste and kinship networks, tribal solidarity, territoriality, etc. Secondly, while elite mobilisations were vertical in nature, people's mobilisations were horizontal. Thirdly, whereas the elite mobilisation was legalistic and pacific, the subaltern mobilisation was relatively violent. Fourthly, the elite mobilisation was more cautious and controlled while the subaltern mobilisation was more spontaneous.

The *Subaltern Studies* soon became the new 'history from below' which did not try to fuse the people's history with official nationalism. It, therefore, attracted the attention of the scholars who had become disenchanted with the nationalistic claims as embodied in the post-colonial state. Largely influenced by Gramsci in its initial phase in trying to discover the radical consciousness of the dominated groups, it was pitted against the three main trends in Indian historiography – colonialist, which saw the colonial rule as the fulfillment of a mission to enlighten the ignorant people; nationalist, which visualised all the protest activities as parts of the making of the nation-state; and Marxist, which subsumed the people's struggles under the progression towards revolution and a socialist state.

The aim of the project was manifold :

a) To show the bourgeois and elite character of Congress nationalism which was said to restrain popular radicalism;

b) To counter the attempts by many historians to incorporate the people's struggles in the grand narrative of Indian / Congress nationalism; and

c) To reconstruct the subaltern consciousness and stress its autonomy. Considering the non-availability of evidences from subaltern sources, it was a difficult task. To overcome this, the subaltern historians endeavoured to extract their material from the official sources by reading them 'against the grain'.

Subaltern Studies was conceived in an atmosphere where Gramsci's ideas were making significant impact. Eric Hobsbawm, Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall were incorporating Gramsci's ideas into their works. Perry Anderson and Tom Nairn, on the other hand, were developing a favourable critique of Gramsci. Other influences were that of the new social history, written by Western Marxist historians such as Henri Lefebvre, Christopher Hill, E.P.Thompson, Eugene Genovese and others, who emphasised the necessity for considering people's point of view. Thus the objective of the *Subaltern Studies* was proclaimed to 'promote a systematic and informed discussion of subaltern themes in the field of South Asian studies and thus help to rectify the elitist bias characteristic of much research and academic work in this particular area'. (Ranajit Guha, 'Preface' to *Subaltern Studies I*.) Guha, in the Preface to vol. III, stated that what brought the subaltern historians together was 'a critical idiom common to them all – an idiom self-consciously and systematically critical of elitism in the field of South Asian studies'. He further asserted that it was in the opposition to this elitism that the unity of the subaltern project lay:

> 'We are indeed opposed to much of the prevailing academic practice in historiography and the social sciences for its failure to acknowledge the subaltern as the maker of his own destiny. This critique lies at the very heart of our project. There is no way in which it can express itself other than as an adversary of that elitist paradigm which is so well entrenched in South Asian studies. Negativity is therefore the very raison d'etre as well as the constitutive principle of our project.'

On the political side, the international and national scenes of the late 1960s and early 1970s had become radicalised and questions were being raised on the established and conventional ideas. The conventional political parties, from the Right to the Left, came for criticism and much emphasis was placed on the non-conventional political formations and activities.

The Subaltern historians, disenchanted with the Congress nationalism and its embodiment in the Indian state, rejected the thesis that popular mobilisation was the result of either economic conditions or initiatives from the top. They claimed to have discovered a popular domain which was autonomous. Its autonomy was rooted in conditions of exploitation and its politics was opposed to the elites. This domain of the subaltern was defined by perpetual resistance and rebellion against the elite. The subaltern historians also attributed a general unity to this domain clubbing together a variety of heterogeneous groups such as tribals, peasants, proletariat and, occasionally, the middle classes as well. Moreover, this domain was said to be almost completely uninfluenced by the elite politics and to posses an independent, self-generating dynamics. The charismatic leadership was no longer viewed as the chief force behind a movement. It was instead the people's interpretation of such charisma which acquired prominence in analysis of a movement or rebellion.

Shahid Amin's study of the popular perception of Mahatma Gandhi is a revealing example. In his article, 'Gandhi as Mahatma', deriving evidences from Gorakhpur district in eastern UP, he shows that the popular perception and actions were completely at variance with the Congress leaders' perception of Mahatma. Although the mechanism of spread of the Mahatma's message was 'rumours', there was an entire philosophy of economy and politics behind it – the need to become a good human being, to give up drinking, gambling and violence, to take up spinning and to maintain communal harmony. The stories which circulated also emphasised the magical powers of Mahatma and his capacity to reward or punish those who obeyed or disobeyed him. On the other hand, the Mahatma's name and his supposed magical powers were also used to reinforce as

well as establish caste hierarchies, to make the debtors pay and to boost the cow-protection movement. All these popular interpretations of the Mahatma's messages reached their climax during the Chauri Chaura incidents in 1922 when his name was invoked to burn the police post, to kill the policemen and to loot the market.

Earlier historians were criticised not only for ignoring the popular initiative but, equally seriously, accepting the official characterisation of the rebel and the rebellion. Ranajit Guha, in his article 'The Prose of Counter-Insurgency', launched a scathing attack on the existing peasant and tribal histories in India for considering the peasant rebellions as 'purely spontaneous and unpremediated affairs' and for ignoring consciousness of the rebels themselves. In his opinion,

> 'Historiography has been content to deal with the peasant rebel merely as an empirical person or member of a class, but not as an entity whose will and reason constituted the praxis called rebellion. The omission is indeed dyed into most narratives by metaphors assimilating peasant revolts to natural phenomena : they break out like thunder storms, heave like earthquakes, spread like wildfires, infect like epidemics.'

He accused all the accounts of rebellions, starting with the immediate official reports to the histories written by the left radicals, of writing the texts of counter-insurgency which refused 'to acknowledge the insurgent as the subject of his own history'.

Gyan Pandey, in 'Peasant Revolt and Indian Nationalism, 1919-1922', argued that peasant movement in Awadh arose before and independently of the Non-cooperation movement and the peasants' understanding of the local power structure and its alliance with colonial power was more advanced than that of the urban leaders, including the Congress. Moreover, the peasant militancy was reduced wherever the Congress organisation was stronger.

In Stephen Henningham's account of the 'Quit India in Bihar and the Eastern United Provinces', the elite and the subaltern domains were clearly defined and distinct from each other. Thus, 'the great revolt of 1942 consisted of an elite nationalist uprising combined with a subaltern rebellion'. Their motives and demands were also different :

> 'Those engaged in the elite nationalist uprising sought to protest against government repression of Congress and to demand the granting of independence to India. In contrast, those involved in the subaltern rebellion acted in pursuit of relief from privation and in protest against the misery in which they found themselves.'

He further contends that it was this dual character of the revolt which led to its suppression.

David Hardiman, in his numerous articles, focused on subaltern themes and argued that whether it was the tribal assertion in South Gujarat, or the Bhil movement in Eastern Gujarat, or the radicalism of the agricultural workers during the Civil Disobedience Movement, there was an independent politics of the subaltern classes against the elites.

Similarly, Sumit Sarkar, in 'The Conditions and Nature of Subaltern Militancy', argued the Non-cooperation movement in Bengal 'revealed a picture of masses outstripping leaders'. He stated that the term 'subaltern' could refer to basically three social groups: 'tribal and low-caste agricultural lablurers and share-croppers; landholding peasants, generally of intermediate caste-status in Bengal (together with their Muslim counterparts); and labour in plantations, mines and industries (along with urban casual labour).' These

groups might have divisions among themselves and include both the exploiters and exploited in their ranks. However, he argued that :

> 'the subaltern groups so defined formed a relatively autonomous political domain with specific features and collective mentalities which need to be explored, and that this was a world distinct from the domain of the elite politicians who in early twentieth century Bengal came overwhelmingly from high-caste educated professional groups connected with zamindari or intermediate tenure-holding'.

Thus we see that in these and in many other essays in the earlier volumes, an attempt was made to separate the elite and the subaltern domains and to establish the autonomy of subaltern consciousness and action. Although there were some notable exceptions, such as the writings of Partha Chatterjee, this phase was generally characterised by emphasis on subaltern themes and autonomous subaltern consciousness.

25.3.2 Second Phase : Discourse Analysis

Over the years, there began a shift in the approach of the Subaltern Studies. The influence of the postmodernist and postcolonialist ideologies became more marked. While the emphasis on the subalterns may be associated with Guha, Pandey, Amin, Hardiman, Henningham, Sarkar and some others, the postcolonialist influences were revealed in the works of Partha Chatterjee right from the beginning. His influential book, *Nationalist Thought and Colonial World* (1986), applied the postcolonial framework of Edward Said which viewed the colonial power-knowledge as overwhelming and irresistible. Such themes were also evident in Chatterjee's articles in the volumes of the Subaltern Studies even earlier. His later book, *The Nation and its Fragments* (1995), carries this analysis further. Many other writers in the Subaltern Studies slowly abandoned the earlier adherence to Marxism. There was a bifurcation of intellectual concerns in their ranks. While some of the Subaltern historians still stuck to the subaltern themes, a larger number began to write in postcolonialist modes. Now there was a clear move from the research on economic and social issues to cultural matters, particularly the analysis of colonialist discourse.

Subalternity as a concept was also redefined. Earlier, it stood for the oppressed classes in opposition to the dominant classes both inside and outside. Later, it was conceptualised in opposition to colonialism, modernity and Enlightenment. The researched articles on themes concerned with subaltern groups decreased in number in later volumes. So, while in the first four volumes there were 20 essays on the subaltern classes like peasants and workers, in the nest six volumes there were only five such essays. There was now an increasing stress on textual analysis of colonial discourse. Consequently, the discourse analysis acquired precedence over research on subaltern themes. The earlier emphasis on the 'subaltern' now gave way to a focus on 'community'. Earlier the elite nationalism was stated to hijack the people's initiatives for its own project; now the entire project of nationalism was declared to be only a version of colonial discourse with its emphasis on centralisation of movement, and later of the state. The ideas of secularism and enlightenment rationalism were attacked and there began an emphasis on the 'fragments' and 'episodes'.

There is also an attempt to justify this shift and link it to the initial project. Thus the editors of Vol. X of *Subaltern Studies* (Gautam Bhadra, Gyan Prakash and Susie Tharu) proclaim that 'Nothing – not elite practices, state policies, academic disciplines, literary texts, archival sources, language – was exempt from the effects of subalternity'. Therefore, all the elite domains need to be explored as the legitimate subjects of Subaltern Studies.

Gyan Prakash has argued that since the Indian subalterns did not leave their own records, the 'history from below' approach in imitation of the Western model was not possible. Therefore, the *Subaltern Studies* 'had to conceive the subaltern differently and write different histories'. According to him, it is important to see the 'subalternity as a discursive effect' which warrants 'the reformulation of the notion of the subaltern'. Thus,

> 'Such reexaminations of South Asian history do not invoke "real" subalterns, prior to discourse, in framing their critique. Placing subalterns in the labyrinth of discourse, they cannot claim an unmediated access to their reality. The actual subalterns and subalternity emerge between the folds of the discourse, in its silences and blindness, and in its overdetermined pronouncements.'

The subalterns, therefore, cannot be represented as subjects as they are entangled in and created by the working of power. Dipesh Chakrabarty goes even further in denying a separate domain not only for the subaltern history, but the history of the Third World as a whole :

> 'It is that insofar as the academic discourse of history – that is, "history" as a discourse produced at the institutional site of the university – is concerned, "Europe" remains the sovereign, theoretical subject of all histories, including the ones we call "Indian", Chinese", "Kenyan", and so on. There is a peculiar way in which all these other histories tend to become variations on a master narrative that could be called "the history of Europe". In this sense, "Indian" history itself is in a position of subalternity : one can only articulate subaltern subject positions in the name of this history.'

The second phase of the *Subaltern Studies*, therefore, not only moves away from the earlier emphasis on the exploration of the subaltern consciousness, it also questions the very ground of historical works as such, in line with the postmodernist thinking in the West.

25.4 CRITIQUE

There has been wide-ranging criticism of the *Subaltern Studies* from many quarters. Right from the beginning the project has been critiqued by the Marxist, Nationalist and Cambridge School historians, besides those who were not affiliated to any position. Almost all positions it took, ranging from a search for autonomous subaltern domain to the later shift to discourse analysis, came under scrutiny and criticism.

Some of the earlier critiques were published in the *Social Scientist*. In one of them, Javeed Alam criticised *Subaltern Studies* for its insistence on an autonomous domain of the subaltern. According to Alam, the autonomy of the subaltern politics is predicated on perpetuity of rebellious action, on 'a consistent tendency towards resistance and a propensity to rebellion on the part of the peasant masses'. Whether this autonomous action is positive or negative in its consequences is of not much concern to the subalternists :

> 'The historical direction of militancy is … of secondary consideration. What is primary is the spontaneity and an internally located self-generating momentum. Extending the implications of the inherent logic of such a theoretical construction, it is a matter of indifference if it leads to communal rioting or united anti-feudal actions that overcome the initial limitations.'

In another essay, a review essay by Sangeeta Singh and others, Ranajit Guha was criticised for presenting a caricature of the spontaneous action by peasant rebels. In

Guha's understanding, it was alleged, 'spontaneity is synonymous with reflexive action'. Since 'Spontaneity is action on the basis of traditional consciousness', Guha's whole effort is said to 'rehabilitate spontaneity as a political method'. Moreover, Guha, in his assertion about the centrality of religion in rebel's consciousness, approves the British official view which emphasises the irrationality of the rebellion and absolves colonialism of playing any disruptive role in the rural and tribal social and economic structures.

Ranjit Das Gupta points out that there is no precise definition of the subaltern domain. Moreover, the subaltern historians 'have tended to concentrate on moments of conflict and protest, and in their writings the dialectics of collaboration and acquiescence on the part of the subalterns … have by and large been underplayed'. The rigid distinction between the elite and the subaltern, ignoring all other hierarchical formations, was criticised by others as well. David Ludden, in the Introduction to an edited volume (2001), writes that :

> 'Even readers who applauded Subaltern Studies found two features troubling. First and foremost, the new substance of subalternity emerged only on the underside of a rigid theoretical barrier between "elite" and "subaltern", which resembles a concrete slab separating upper and lower space in a two-storey building. This hard dichotomy alienated subalternity from social histories that include more than two storeys or which move among them;… Second, because subaltern politics was confined theoretically to the lower storey, it could not threaten a political structure. This alienated subalternity from political histories of popular movements and alienated subaltern groups from organised, transformative politcs….'

Rosalind O'Hanlon offers a comprehensive critique of earlier volumes of *Subaltern Studies* in her article 'Recovering the Subject'. She argues that, despite their claims of surpassing the earlier brands of history-writing, 'the manner in which the subaltern makes his appearance through the work of the contributors is in the form of the classic unitary self-constituting subject-agent of liberal humanism'. Among the Subaltern historians, particularly in the writings of Ranajit Guha, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Stephen Henningham and Sumit Sarkar, there is 'the tendency to attribute timeless primordiality' to the 'collective traditions and culture of subordinated groups'. She finds an essentialism at the core of the project 'arising from an assertion of an irreducibility and autonomy of experience, and a simple-minded voluntarism deriving from the insistence upon a capacity for self-determination'. This leads to an idealism, particularly 'in Guha's drive to posit an originary autonomy in the traditions of peasant insurgency. He does at times appear to be approaching a pure Hegelianism'.

Christopher Bayly, in 'Rallying around the Subaltern', questions the project's claim to originality. According to him, the Subaltern historians have not made use of 'new statistical material and indigenous records' which could substantiate their claim of writing a new history. Their main contribution seems to be re-reading the official records and 'mounting an internal critique'. Thus, the only distinguishing mark which separates the Subaltern Studies from the earlier and contemporary 'history from below' is 'a rhetorical device, the term 'subaltern' itself, and a populist idiom'. Bayly thinks that 'the greatest weakness of the Subaltern orientation' is that 'it tends to frustrate the writing of rounded history as effectively as did "elitism"'.

Sumit Sakar, who was earlier associated with the project, later on criticised it for moving towards postcolonialism. In his two essays, 'The Decline of the Subaltern in Subaltern Studies' and 'Orientalism Revisited', he argues that this shift may have been occasioned due to various reasons, but, intellectually, there is an 'attempt to have the best of both

worlds : critiquing others for essentialism, teleology and related sins, while claiming a special immunity from doing the same oneself.' Moreover, such works in Indian history have not produced any spectacular results. In fact, 'the critique of colonial discourse, despite vast claims to total originality, quite often is no more than a restatement in new language of old nationalist positions – and fairly crude restatements, at that.' The later subaltern project became some sort of 'Third World nationalism, followed by post-modernistic valorisations of "fragments"'. In fact, the later *Subaltern Studies* 'comes close to positions of neo-traditionalist anti-modernism, 0notably advocated … by Ashish Nandy'. Even earlier, according to Sarkar, there was a tendency 'towards essentialising the categories of 'subaltern' and 'autonomy', in the sense of assigning to them more or less absolute, fixed, decontextualised meanings and qualities'. Sarkar argues that there are many problems with the histories produced by the subaltern writers and these arise due to their 'restrictive analytical frameworks, as Subaltern Studies swings from a rather simple emphasis on subaltern autonomy to an even more simplistic thesis of Western colonial cultural domination'.

Such criticism of the *Subaltern Studies* is still continuing and the Subaltern historians have responded to it with their own justification of the project and counter-attacks on critics.

25.5 REJOINDER

The subalternists took some time before reacting to the critiques. In vol. IV, Dipesh Chakrabarty's reply to some of the critiques was published. But before that, in the Preface of the same volume, Ranajit Guha railed against the criticism by those whom he called 'the vendors of readymade answers' and academic 'old rods' who supposedly posed as the 'custodians of official truth entrenched within their liberal and leftist stockades'. He peremptorily dismissed the criticism by those scholars 'who have lived too long with well-rehearsed ideas and methodologies'. He also derisively referred to what he termed as 'the manic reaction' of a 'Delhi critic who, on the publication of each volume, has gone round the block waving his review copy and shouting, like the mad watchman in Tagore's story, "sab jhuta hai! Sab jhuta hai!"'

Chakrabarty's reply was more detailed and well-argued. He questioned the intentions of some reviewers. For example, the charge of both Hegelianism and positivism against Guha seemed contradictory. It was because, he says, ' "Idealism", "positivism", etc. are not used in the essay as simple, descriptive terms; they are terms of condemnation as well'. In reply to the charge of ignoring the colonial contexts or any outside influences on the politics and consciousness of the subalterns, he said that 'this alleged "failure" is actually our conscious refusal to subordinate the internal logic of a "consciousness" to the logic of so-called "objective" or 'material" conditions'. He further asserted that :

> 'The central aim of the Subaltern Studies project is to understand the consciousness that informed and still informs political actions taken by the subaltern classes on their own, independently of any elite initiative.'

It was because, as shown by subaltern historians, 'in the course of nationalist struggles involving popular mobilization the masses often put their own interpretations on the aims of these movements and proceeded to act them out'.

Besides Dipesh Chakrabarty, Gyan Prakash has been a most vocal defender of the project. He praises the project as part of the 'post-foundational' and 'post-Orientalist' historiography of India. He argues that the Subaltern historians have been able to rescue their writings from the clutches of elite historiography :

> 'the significance of their project lies in the writing of histories freed from the will of the colonial and nationalist elites. It is this project of resisting colonial and nationalist discursive hegemonies, through histories of the subaltern whose identity resides in difference, which makes the work of these scholars a significant intervention in third-world historiography'.

In another article, Gyan Prakash outlines the reason for a shift in the position as the *Subaltern Studies* project developed and he defends this chnage. He supports the later developments as it 'has turned into a sharp critique of the discipline of history'.

Gyan Pandey, writing 'In Defense of the Fragment', argues against most of the writings on communal riots in India. He states that in these versions, 'The "fragments of Indian society – the smaller religious and caste communities, tribal sections, industrial workers, and activist women's groups, all of which might be said to represent "minority" cultures and practices – have been expected to fall in line with the "mainstream" … national culture'. It is because since the nineteenth century the state and the nation have been the 'central organizing principles of human society'. Similarly, Ranajit Guha, in 'The Small Voice of History', accused the modern historiographical tradition of being statist. He argues that,

> 'the common sense of history may be said generally to be guided by a sort of statism which thematizes and evaluates the past for it . This is a tradition which goes back to the beginnings of modern historical thinking in the Italian Renaissance.'

Dipesh Chakrabarty, in his 'Radical Histories and Question of Enlightenment Rationalsim', criticises the Marxist historiography for being influenced by 'a certain form of hyper-rationalism characteristic of colonial modernity'. He further argues that now 'post-structuralist and deconstructionist philosophies are useful in developing approaches suited to studying subaltern histories under conditions of colonial modernities'. The fact that there was a shift in the position is also sometimes denied. Dipesh Chakrabarty argues that from the very beginning, the *Subaltern Studies* was different and 'raised questions about history writing that made a radical departure from English Marxist historiographical tradition inescapable'. He says that right since its inception the *Subaltern Studie*s followed the postcolonial agenda and was not in tune with the 'history from below' approach :

> 'With hindsight it could be said that there were broadly three areas in which Subaltern Studies differed from the "history from below" approach of Hobsbawm or Thompson…. Subaltern historiography necessarily entailed (a) a relative separation of the history of power from any universalist histories of capital, (b) a critique of the nation-form, and (c) an interrogation of the relationship between power and knowledge…. In these differences … lay the beginnings of a new way of theorizing the intellectual agenda for postcolonial histories.'

Thus, in their responses to the critics, the writers associated with the Subaltern project sought to defend their works as part of the post-Marxist, post-colonial and post-structuralist streams of historical thinking.

25.6 SUMMARY

The *Subaltern Studies* began in the early 1980s as a critique of the existing historiography which was accused by its initiators for ignoring the voice of the people. The writers associated with the project promised to offer a completely new kind of history in the

field of Indian studies. Judging from the reactions from the scholars and students in the early years, it seemed to have fulfilled this promise to some extent. It soon received international recognition. In the early years, encompassing six volumes, edited by Ranajit Guha, the *Subaltern Studies* made efforts to explore the consciousness and actions of the oppressed groups in the Indian society. However, there was another trend discernible in some of the essays published in it. This trend was influenced by the increasingly important postmodernist and postcolonialist writings in the Western academic circles. In the later years, this trend came to dominate the works of the writers associated with the *Subaltern Studies*. This trend was marked by a shift from the earlier emphasis on the subaltern themes. Sometimes the scepticism became so extreme that it questioned the need for the writing of history itself.

25.7 EXERCISES

1) What do you understand by the term 'subaltern'? How did the *Subaltern Studies* begin in India?

2) Discuss the two phases in the development of the project of the *Subaltern Studies*. Do you think the differences between the two phases are fundamental in nature? Answer with examples.

3) What are the basic points of criticism directed towards the *Subaltern Studies*? What is the response of the Subalternist historians?

25.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

Subaltern Studies, 11 volumes (1982-2000).

David Ludden (ed.), *Reading Subaltern Studies : Critical History, Contested Meaning, and the Globalisation of South Asia* (Delhi, Permanent Black, 2001).

Vinayak Chaturvedi (ed.), *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial* (London and New York, Verso, 2000).

Vinay Lal, 'Walking with the Subalterns, Riding with the Academy : The Curious Ascendancy of Indian History', *Studies in History*, 17, 1 (2001).

Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History', in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *A Subaltern Studies Reader, 1986-1995* (Delhi, OUP, 1998).

Dipesh Chakrabarty, '*Subaltern Studies* and Postcolonial Historiography', *Nepantla : Views from South*, 1:1, 2000.

Gyanendra Pandey, 'In Defense of the Fragment', in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *A Subaltern Studies Reader*, 1986-1995 (Delhi, OUP, 1998).

Gyan Prakash, 'Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism', *The American Historical Review*, December, 1994 (99, 5).

UNIT 26 ECONOMIC HISTORY

Structure

26.1 Introduction

26.2 Colonial and Nationalistic Writings

26.3 Pre-colonial Economy and Colonial Trends

26.4 Statistical Inquiries

26.5 Town and Country

26.6 Industrialisation

26.7 Summary

26.8 Exercises

26.1 INTRODUCTION

The emergence of economics as a discipline in the eighteenth century led in due course to the development of a new branch in history called economic history. The progenitors of economics were Adam Smith and other classical economists. India was very much in the vision of the classical economists, a group of thinkers in England during the Industrial Revolution. They advocated *laissez faire* and minimising of state intervention in the economy. Adam Smith, the foremost classical economist, condemned the East India Company in its new role as the ruling power in India. In his view, the Company's trading monopoly ran counter to the principle of the freedom of the market. In the classic work entitled *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), he said, 'The government of an exclusive company of merchants is perhaps the worst of all governments for any country whatever.'

Economics underwent a theoretical transformation in the early twentieth century under the influence of John Maynard Keynes, who advocated strategic economic intervention by the government for promoting welfare and employment. Keynes, too, thought deeply about India while developing his new economic theories, and his earliest major work, *Indian Currency and Finance* (London 1913), illustrated his notions of good monetary management of the economy. It is also noteworthy that the early classical economists, such as Ricardo, influenced the thinking of a group of Utilitarian administrators who set about reforming the administration of India in the nineteenth century. Above all, the influence of Adam Smith is noticeable in the end of the Company's monopoly by the Charter Acts of 1813 and 1833.

Not surprisingly, therefore, historians have paid close attention to the connection between the evolution of economic thought in England and the question of reform of the colonial administration in India. This is evident in such works as Eric Stokes, The *English Utilitarians and India* (Oxford 1959); S. Ambirajan, *Classical Political Economy and British Policy in India*; and A. Chandavarkar *Keynes and India: a Study in Economics and Biography* (London 1989). Classical political economy in England laid the foundations for the *laissez faire* economics of the Raj in the nineteenth century. Keynesian economics, on the other hand, contained the germs of the development economics of the mid-twentieth century. Both types of economics affected the state and the economy in India, and stimulated debates in the economic history of India.

26.2 COLONIAL AND NATIONALISTIC WRITINGS

Early colonial writers about the economy of India did not have to reckon with a critical Indian public and nationalistic opinion. Some of them were free and frank in their criticisms of the effect of the British rule upon the indigenous economy and they were sometimes critical of what they admitted to be a drain of wealth from India to Britain. They did not deny what a contemporary Persian chronicler named Saiyid Ghulam Hussain Khan observed in *The Seir Mutaqherin* (1789) with regard to the English habit of 'scraping together as much money' in this country as they can, and carrying it 'in immense sums to the kingdom of England'. A manuscript official report, entitled 'Historical Review of the External Commerce of Calcutta from 1750 until 1830', commented freely on 'the plunder of the country'. After conquering Bengal, the East India Company ceased to import silver for their purchases of Indian goods for export to Europe, and deployed the revenues of Bengal for the purpose. According to the report, the unrequited exports became the vehicle for the remittance of the fortunes made by individual Englishmen in the country.

As critical Indian opinion emerged in the later nineteenth century, the colonial administration became more concerned to show that economic progress was happening in the country. The Madras administration commissioned a voluminous statistical work by S. Srinivasa Raghavaiangar, entitled *Memorandum on the Progress of the Madras Presidency during the last forty years of the British Administration* (Madras, Govt. Press, 1893), which constituted a well-documented apology for foreign rule in the country. The second century of British rule in India was marked by an ongoing controversy between the critics and apologists of empire. Indian nationalists, sympathetic Britishers and, at a later state, Marxists intellectuals blamed the drain for the impoverishment of India. Colonial officials, at the instance of Lord Curzon, contended that there was no impoverishment at all, and rival estimates of national income were produced on both sides. Among the works of the period may be mentioned, on the one side, Dadabhai Naoroji, *Poverty and Un–British Rule in India* (London, 1901), an earlier version 1873), and William Digby, *"Prosperous" British India: a Revelation from the Official Records* (1901); and on the opposite side, F.T. Atkinson, 'A Statistical Review of the Income and wealth of British India', *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, June 1902. Atkinson, an official under Lord Curzon, sought to show that the national income of India was rising over the years, though somewhat slowly. Naoroji who entertained contrary views, computed the annual drain from India at around £30,000,000 in his own day, and estimated that earlier, around 1800, the figure had stood at about £5,000,000.

The debate generated the first general work on the economic history of India. To Curzon's annoyance, a retired ICS officer who became President of the Indian National Congress, Romesh Chunder Dutt, drew up a formidable critique of the economic effect of British rule upon India in *The Economic History of India under Early British Rule (1757–1837)* (London, 1902) and *The Economic History of India under the Victorian Age* (London, 1904). Dutt dwelt on the heavy land tax upon the peasants, the destruction of the handicrafts, the recurrence of famines, and the annual drain to Britain in his economic critique of British rule. The British, he said, had given India peace, but not prosperity. Colonial administration did not accept his nationalist contentions, but one claim he made is indisputable: 'No study is more interesting and instructive in the history of nations than the study of the material condition of the people from age to age.' Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, before he became the Mahatma, wept as he read Dutt's *Economic History* and, in the next generation, the doctrine that the most fundamental impact of British rule upon India was a destructive economic impact, became

axiomatic with Marxist intellectuals, such as R.P. Dutt. A member of the Communist Party of Great Britain, he wrote a radical critique of colonial rule entitled *India Today*. Published by the Left Book Club from London in 1940, it was promptly banned in India. In this book, R.P. Dutt sought to show that the industrial imperialism which R.C. Dutt had criticised in his day had since then made a transition to financial imperialism, and that the drain had become more enervating for the economy in the latest phase of imperialism in India.

26.3 PRE-COLONIAL ECONOMY AND COLONIAL TRENDS

The debate on the colonial impact on the economy and the question of impoverishment under British rule brought forth a new issue : what was the state of the economy before British rule? Was India more prosperous then, and had she already embarked on an endogenous path of development that was cut off by the British ascendancy? Was national income higher at the time? Valuable official reports on the state and structure of the indigenous economy had been written in early colonial times, the most notable among these being the reports on eastern and southern India by Francis Buchanan-Hamilton. His voluminous and statistical surveys of agriculture, manufactures and inland trade were partially printed in Francis Buchanan, A *Journey from Madras though the Countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar 1801* (2n^{d} ed. Madras 1870); and Francis Buchanan, *An Account of the Districts of Bihar and Patna in 1811 – 1812*, 2 vols. (Bihar and Orissa Research Society, n.d.). Later on, historians directed their curiosity to the economic conditions in Mughal Times, some early studies being Edward Thomas, *The Revenue Resources of the Mughal Empire in India* (1871) and Jadunath Sarkar, *The India of Aurengzeb: Topography, Statistics and Roads* (1901). It was, however, a British revenue official of UP, W.H. Moreland, who first ventured into a general economic history of pre-colonial India in *India at the Death of Akbar* (1920), *From Akbar to Aurangzeb* (1922), and the *Agrarian System of Moslem India* (1929). In Moreland's estimate the national income of India at the time of Todar Mal's survey in Akbar's reign was not perceptibly higher than what it was at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Moreland concluded that a parasitic agrarian despotism had driven India to an economic dead end, despite the considerable expansion of foreign trade that the Dutch and English East India Companies brought about in the seventeenth century. The conclusion that the foreign companies operating in Mughal India brought in a lot of silver and stimulated textile exports was later confirmed by K.N. Chaudhuri's econometric study, *The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company 1660-1760* (Cambridge, 1978). A soviet author named A. I. Chicherov presented an argument in *Indian Economic Development in the Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries* (Moscow, 1971) which Moreland would not have supported: that Mughal India was undergoing an endogenous capitalist development which was cut off by the ascendancy of foreign monopoly capital under the English East India Company. That this is unlikely to have been the case is shown by the reputed Marxist historian Irfan Habib in 'The Potentialities of Capitalist Development in the Economy of Mughal India', *Journal of Economic History*, vol. XXIX, 1969. Habib demonstrated the sophistication of the Mughal urban economy, but like Moreland he emphasized its parasitic relationship with the heavily taxed rural economy.

For the colonial period, R.C. Dutt's *Economic History* was followed by a series of works: D.R. Gadgil, *The Industrial Evolution of India in Recent Times* (1924); Vera Anstey, *The Economic Development of India* (1929); and D.H. Buchanan, *The*

Development of Capitalistic Enterprise in India (New York 1934). More recently, there has been a collective two-volume survey; Tapan Raychaudhuri and Irfan Habib (eds.), *The Cambridge Economic History of India, Vol 1, C.1200 – C.1750* (Cambridge 1982); and Dharma Kumar (ed), *The Cambridge Economic History of India, vol. 2 C.1757 – C.1970* (Cambridge, 1983). Daniel Houston Buchanan, an American author, was of the opinion that other–worldly values and the caste system inhibited economic development in India. D.R. Gadgil, who updated his near classic work several times, emphasised, on the contrary, more strictly economic factors: the difficulties of capital mobilisation on account of the absolute smallness of capital resources in respect to the size of the population, the late development of organised banking, and the seasonal fluctuations of a monsoon economy. A dispassionate economist, he did not blame either foreign rule or the Indian social structure for the absence of an industrial revolution in India; some of the Western contributors to the second volume of *The Cambridge Economic History*, on the other hand, showed a disposition to challenge R.C. Dutt's vision of the negative impact of colonialism, and they dwelt instead on the technological backwardness of the Indian economy. This, in their view, inhibited industrial development and capitalist enterprise during the colonial period.

26.4 STATISTICAL INQUIRIES

The colonial administration had produced vast body of annual official statistics. After independence, economic historians utilized these statistics to interpret long-term trends in national income and agricultural and industrial production. The two seminal works in this respect were by George Blyn on agricultural production and by S. Sivasubramonian on national income. Both authors based their conclusions on detailed statistical information set out in tabular form, so that other historians might draw their own conclusions from the tables. George Blyn's work was entitled *Agricultural Trends in India 1891-1947: Output, Availability and Productivity* (Philadelphia, 1966). S. Sivasubramonian's thesis at the Delhi School of Economics. 'National Income of India 1900-01 to 1946-47, (1965) was later published in expanded form, including the post-independence period, as *The National Income of India in the Twentieth Century*, (New Delhi, 2000).

Blyn discovered that agricultural production in India showed adverse trends after 1920. The negative trends were especially pronounced in what he called the Greater Bengal region, which included Bihar and Orissa. There was declining per capita food availability in the late colonial period. S. Sivasubramonian demonstrated that the national income of India grew slowly in the period between 1900-1947, since agriculture, which was the principal sector in the economy, did not perform well. Industrial production expanded more perceptibility, especially because of the rapid growth of factory industry. On S. Sivasubramonian's evidence, there is no question of any 'deindustrialisation' having occurred in India between 1900-1947.

There is no comparable statistical series for the nineteenth century. The issue of deindustrialisation is therefore very much alive as regards the nineteenth century. Since factory industry did not account for an appreciable part of industrial production at the time, the issue boils down to the question whether cottage industries declined in that century. In a well-publicized controversy during the 1960's, Morris David Morris argued, against his opponents, that the cotton weavers benefited from the cheaper threads from Britain, but since neither side could produce any statistical series, the controversy, embodied in M.D. Morris et al, *Indian Economy in the Nineteenth Century: a Symposium* (Delhi, 1969), produced more heat than light. In yet another controversy, later on, Amiya Kumar Bagchi, in an article entitled 'Deindustrialization in Gangetic Bihar 1809 – 1901', produced statistical evidence from Buchanan Hamilton's

survey that the proportion of people employed in cottage industries went down drastically in the nineteenth century. The article, published in Barun De (ed.), *Essays in Honour of Professor Susobhan Chandra Sarkar* (New Delhi, 1976), provoked a critique by Marika Vicziany, who doubted the reliability of the statistical data from Buchanan Hamilton. Her critique, entitled 'The Deindustrialization of India in Nineteenth Century: A Methodological critique of Amiya Kumar Bagchi', along with 'A Reply' by Amiya Kumar Bachi, came out in *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol 16,1979. Subsequently, J. Krishnamurty, in 'Deindustrialization in Gangetic Bihar during the nineteenth Century: Another Look at the Evidence', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 22, 1985, argued that the qualitative evidence was in favour of Bagchi's decline thesis. More recently, Tirthankar Roy, in *Traditional Industry in the Economy of Colonial India* (Cambridge, 1999), has once again argued against any decline in the nineteenth century, but except for Bagchi, nobody else in this controversy has been able to adduce any statistical data from contemporary sources. As regards the eighteenth century, when the East India Company imposed a monopoly on textile exports, the Bangladeshi scholar Hameeda Hossein has produced evidence of terrible coercion upon the weavers in *The Company Weavers of Bengal: The East India Company an and the Organisation of Textile Production in Bengal 1750 – 1813* (Delhi, 1988).

26.5 TOWN AND COUNTRY

The beginnings of modern Indian business enterprise in the early 19th century have been traced by Blair B. Kling in *Partnership in Empire: Dwarkanath Tagore and the Age of Enterprise in Eastern India* (Berkeley, 1976), and by Asiya Siddiqui in 'The Business World of Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy'(*Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol 21, 1982). Private European enterprise in the colonial port cities of the nineteenth century has been sketched in Amales Tripahi, *Trade and Finance in the Bengal Presidency 1793-1833* (Calcutta, 1979) and, for the subsequent period, when managing agency houses became dominant, in Radhe Shyam Rungta, *The Rise of Business Corporations in India 1851-1900* (Cambridge, 1970). Big Indian enterprise on the model of Dwarkantah Tagore and Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy suffered a setback in the colonial port cities as European capital became gradually monopolistic, but as C.A. Bayly has shown in an influential work entitled *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion 1770 – 1870* (Cambridge, 1983), Indian traders fared better in the inland markets by adjusting to colonial rule

Essays by several historians regarding the colonial impact upon the Indian economy are collected together in K.N. Chaudhuri and C.J. Dewey (eds.), *Economy ;and Society* (New Delhi, 1979), and C.J. Dewey and A.G. Hopkins (eds.) *The Imperial Impact: Studies in the Economic History of India and Africa* (London, 1978). Some of these essays presented new conclusions, especially on markets, industrial policy, and agrarian society. Many regional economic histories have appeared over time, two well-known works being N.K. Sinha, *The Economic History of Bengal*, 3 vols. (Calcutta, 1965, 1970) and C.J. Baker, *An Indian Rural Economy: the Tamil Nad Countryside 1880 – 1950* (New Delhi, 1984). There is also one micro–history of economic and social change in a single Punjab Village over time by Tom Kessinger, entitled *Vilayatpur 1848 – 1968: Social and Economic Change in a North Indian Village* (Berkeley, 1974).

The biggest British investments in the Indian economy, designed for imperial rather than national benefit, were in railways and canals. These investments did not bring about the sort of industrial growth witnessed in Germany, Russia and Japan in the nineteenth

century, and hardly improved per acre agricultural productivity over the land as a whole. There were harmful ecological side effects, and famines continued to visit the rural population time and again. These themes are explored in Danial Thorner, *Investment in Empire* (Philadelphia, 1950); Daniel Thorner. 'Great Britain and the Economic Development of India's Railways', *Journal of Economic History*, vol XI, 1951; Elizabeth Whitcombe, *Agrarian Conditions in Northern India: the United Provinces under British Rule, 1660 – 1900* (Berkeley, 1972); and Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines: an Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* (International Labour Organisation, 1981), a brilliant essay by the Nobel Laureate economist showing that famines could occur because of adverse movements in prices and wages even when the food stocks were available.

26.6 INDUSTRIALISATION

The twentieth century in its first half witnessed a certain degree of industrialisation, but there was no industrial revolution, nor any economic break-through despite an appreciable growth of large-scale industry before 1947. Historians have differed on why there was no 'take-off. The Marxist economist Amiya Kumar Baagchi, in *Private Investment in India 1900 – 1939* (Cambridge, 1972), and the non-Marxist historian, Rajat K. Ray, in *Industrialization in India: Growth and Conflict in the Private Corporate Sector 1914 – 1947* (New Delhi, 1979) both argued that colonial policies were responsible for this. Morris D. Morris, an American economic historian of note, argues, on the contrary, in his contribution to the second volume of the *Cambridge Economic History of India* (1983), that the technological backwardness of the Indian economic structure blocked the sustained growth of investment in large-scale industry. Subsequently B.R. Tomlinson, a historian who hardly took a side in the dispute, nevertheless observed, in his *The Economy of Modern India 1860 – 1970* (*New Cambridge History of India*, Vol III, Cambridge, 1993), that 'a ruthless insistence by government on strategic priorities limited the expansion' of Indian industry during the Second World War, when there were new opportunities. By then, there was a large Indian capitalist class locked in a struggle with European capital in India. Its growth, and internal tensions, is studied in Claude Markovitz, *Indian Business and Nationalist Politics 1931-1939. The Indigenous Capitalist Class and the Rise of the Congress Party* (Cambridge, 1985). By common consent, the explanation of backwardness is no longer sought in social values and customs. The political factor in economic backwardness or growth is still, however, a matter of dispute.

26.7 SUMMARY

The economic policies of the colonial rulers were at the centre of a controversy in the late 19th century India. Whereas the colonial administration sought to project its policies as beneficial to the country, the nationalist writers and sympathetic British commentators attacked these policies as exploitative and oppressive. Dadabhai Naoroji, R.C. Dutt and William Digby were some of the famous critics of government policies. The economic history of India, as we know it, may be said to have begun during this period. D.R. Gadgil, Vera Anstey and D.H. Buchanan followed in their footsteps in taking up the economic history of the colonial period. Jaduanth Sarkar and W.H. Moreland wrote about the Mughal economy. In the post-independence period, economic history became an established field of study and several studies were undertaken on various periods of Indian history covering several aspects of economy.

26.8 EXERCISES

1) Discuss the views of various authors on the economic history of pre-colonial India.

2) What are the differences between colonialist and nationalist works on Indian economic history? Answer with examples.

3) Write short notes on the following with reference to the economic history of India :

   a) Industrialisation

   b) Town and country.

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UNIT 27 PEASANTRY AND WORKING CLASSES

Structure

27.1 Introduction

27.2 Historiography before 1947

27.3 The Left Paradigm and its Critics

27.4 The Longer Term Perspective

27.5 Peasant Movements

27.6 Labour History

27.7 Summary

27.8 Exercises

27.1 INTRODUCTION

The Leftist movement in twentieth century Indian politics bought the focus to bear upon peasants, workers and their movements during the freedom struggle. Attempts to write the histories of these movements involved a closer study of class relations in Indian society, especially peasant-landlord relations and worker-capitalist relations. There had been earlier studies of related aspects, especially a voluminous historical literature on industry. The aim of radical historiography, however, was to treat the peasants and workers as historical subjects in their own right. Soon, it became evident that the history of workers and peasants might not be grasped fully without taking their evolving relationship with the superior classes into account. As these realisations dawned, the new labour historians emphasised the importance of treating labour and capital together. By the very nature of the subject, moreover, the older colonial historiography had tended to treat agrarian relations as a whole, keeping in view the mutual relations of tenants and landlords in any investigation of the condition of peasants.

The terms 'peasant' and 'worker, it may be noted in this context, were somewhat novel terms in Indian history. Colonial historiography had usually used the terms 'tenant' and 'ryot' rather than the 'peasant'. The term 'ryot' was a distortion of the Persian term *'raiyat'*, which meant, literally, 'subject'. In Mughal times, all subordinate classes of villagers, including the tillers of the land who were liable to pay the land tax, were referred to as 'ri'aya' (plural of *raiyat*) or subjects. While the peasants were very much there in the pre-colonial period, the class of industrial workers did not exist then. The people who did exist were the artisans, farms servants, field labourers, tanners, distillers, and the miscellaneous class of the labouring poor including sweepers, scavengers, palanquin bearers and so on. The industrial proletariat was a new class that emerged along with the rise of large-scale industry in the later nineteenth century. Worker's history, in the stricter sense of the term, could not have existed before then. **The conceptualisation of the peasant as a separate class and the emergence of the workers as a distinct new class led to the emergence of peasants' and workers' history in the course of the twentieth century.** The Marxist concept of the class and the spread of the communist ideology in India constituted a factor in the emergence of the radical historiography relating to workers and peasants.

The leftist historiography of workers and peasants grew especially in the period after independence. A. R. Desai, a Marxist intellectual, edited *Peasant Struggles in India* (Bombay, 1979). Sunil Kumar Sen, a CPI historian and himself an active participant in the Tebhaga or Sharecropper Movement in late colonial Bengal, wrote an eye-witness historical account entitled *Agrarian Struggle in Bengal 1946-47* (Calcutta, 1972), and later produced *Working Class Movements in India 1885-1975* (Delhi, 1994). Another straightforward Marxist account was by Sukomal Sen, *Working Class of India: History of Emergence and Movement 1830-1970* (Calcutta, 1977).

27.2 HISTORIOGRAPHY BEFORE 1947

It would be a mistake to think that peasant and workers constituted an entirely new subject, nor would it be right to say that there was no interest in the subject before the emergence of socialism. That there was an early interest in the conditions of the poor is shown by Revered Lal Behari Day's English language fictional work, *Govinda Samanta* (2 vols., 1874). It was brought out in a new edition entitled *Bengal Peasant Life* (1878), which contained important material on the peasantry of the nineteenth century. Furthermore, the Brahmo social reformer, Sasipapda Banerjee, launched the Bengali magazine *Bharat Sharmajibi* (The Indian Worker) as early as 1874, and this magazine contained important historical material.

One may, indeed, go back to the eighteenth century, and find English and Persian accounts of agriculture and the agriculturist. H.T. Colebrooke, a senior East India Company servant, wrote his *Remarks on the Husbandry and Internal Commerce of Bengal in 1794* (new ed. Calcutta 1804). Recently, historians have traced an important Persian manuscript entitled *Risala-i Zirat* (Treatise on Agriculture), written by a late Mughal official of Bengal for a company servant in 1785, in which he set out four distinct categories of cultivators; (1) *muqarrari* cultivator, a tenant with a permanent deed (2) *khudkasht* cultivator, a tenant with understood rights in his own village, (3) *paikasht* cultivator, a tenant residing in a village other than the one in which is field was located, and (4) *kaljanah*, or 'one who tilled land as the subordinate of another cultivator', (see Harbans Mukhia, 'The *Risala-i Zirat* [a Treatise on Agriculture]', included in Harbanbs Mukhia, *Perspectives on Medieval History* (New Delhi, 1993). From later records, it becomes clear that the fourth type of agriculturist might be an under-tenant, a sharecropper or a plain farm servant. The distinction between the resident (*khudkasht*) peasant and the migrant (*Paikasht*) peasant slowly disappeared during the colonial period due to increasing population pressure, but the same factor kept alive the more fundamental distinction between the peasant and the agricultural servant. The latter was entered in the censuses of colonial India as farm servant or field labourer, and he was a man even below the sharecropper, who still had the status of a peasant.

Because of the British authorities' dependence on the land revenue, the colonial administration kept the ryot constantly in its view and therefore in its records. The same cannot be said of the agricultural labourer, for he was not a tenant and was not liable to pay land revenue from any tenancy. Only the ryot, therefore, is treated along with the zamindar in B. H. Barden-Powell's *Manual of Land Revenue System and Land Tenures of India* (Calcutta, 1882), later republished in the well-known three-volume *Land Systems of British India* (Oxford, 1892). Another official, W.H. Moreland, drew up the *Notes on the Agricultural Conditions and Problems of the United Provinces, Revised up to 1911* (Allahabad, 1913), and later on he produced the classic *Agrarian System of Moslem India* (Cambridge, 1929).

From the works of Baden Powell and W.H. Moreland, it emerged clearly that the land revenue of the state and the rent of the landlord had been the traditional mechanisms of

the appropriation of the peasant surplus, not only in the colonial period but also in pre-colonial times. Yet another traditional mechanism of surplus appropriation, indebtedness and the charges upon it, assumed a novel importance in the colonial period, and drew the attention of the British officials in due course. As the ryot began to lose land, and riots broke out against the money-lender, two Punjab officers wrote important works on the ryot's indebtedness, and on the social tensions generated by money lending operations: S.S. Thorburn, *Musalmans and Money-lenders in the Punjab* (1866) and Malcom Darling, *The Punjab Peasant in Prosperity and Debt* (London, 1932).

The colonial administration also generated works on labour employed in cottage and small-scale industries. Two important official works relating to Uttar Pradesh were William Hoey, *A Monograph on Trade and Manufactures in Northern India* (Lucknow, 1880), and A.C. Chatterjee, *Notes on the Industries of the United Provinces* (Allahabad, 1908). Logically, a mid-day point in the transition from the cottage to the factory was the workshop employing several artisans, and this important development was touched on in an unofficial work: N.M. Joshi, *Urban Handicrafts of the Bombay Deccan* (Poona, 1936).

The emergence of large-scale industry produced two new social forces: labour and capital. Among the works of the colonial period relating to these new developments may be mentioned S.M. Rutnagar, *Bombay Industries: the Cotton Mills* (Bombay, 1927); D.H. Buchanan, *The Development of Capitalistic Enterprise in India* (New York, 1934); and Radhakamal Mukherjee, *The Indian Working Class* (Bombay, 1945). It will be evident that by the late colonial period the worker had found his place beside the peasant as a force to reckon with in the economic life of the country. The involvement of these types of people in the growing political unrest included the UK Government to dispatch two royal commissions that generated important reports on their conditions: *The Royal Commission on Agriculture in India, Report* (1928) and *The Royal Commission on Labour in India, Report* (1931). The colonial period generated great body of evidence on the peasant and the worker for research after independence.

27.3 THE LEFT PARADIGM AND ITS CRITICS

The left identified the working class as the vanguard of the class struggle and the most progressive political force in Indian society. The overwhelming mass of the population still lived off agriculture, and the leftist historians were therefore induced to pay some attention to the peasantry. They came up with a paradigm, or framework of understanding, in order to make sense of change in agrarian society during the colonial period. The paradigm was worked out soon after independence in such works as S.J. Patel, *Agricultural Workers in Modern India and Pakistan* (Bombay, 1952) and Ramkrishna Mukherjee, *The Dynamics of a Rural Society* (Berlin, 1957). On this view of the matter, colonial rule in India produced a series of related changes in agrarian society: the creation of landed property by law; forced commercialisation of crops; land brought to the market as a commodity; the spread of peasant indebtedness and land alienation; the disintegration of the peasantry into rich peasants and poor peasants; depeasantisation, landlessness and the emergence of a pauperised class of landless labourers; the collapse of the village community of self-sufficient peasants and a far reaching process of social stratification in the countryside

Subsequent research revealed that these notions were misinformed, and based on an inadequate acquaintance with the vast documentation in the colonial archives. The

work of serious historical investigation and revision began with Dharma Kumar's pioneering work, *Land and Caste in South India, Agricultural Labour in Madras Presidency during the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1965). She proved with rich documentation that pre-colonial and early-colonial India already possessed a vast agrarian under-class of bonded labourers who traditionally belonged to the untouchable castes. Landlessness here was function of caste and not of the market. Rajat and Ratna Ray followed with an article in *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* (vol. 10, 1973), entitled 'The Dynamics of Continuity in Rural Bengal under the British Imperium: a study of Quasi-Stable Subsistence Equilibrium in Underdeveloped Societies in a Changing World', in which they contended that a group of rich peasants who had their lands cultivated by sharecroppers and bonded labourers existed even at the beginning of colonial rule, and were beneficiaries of economic change in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Yet another attack on the Marxist paradigm of polarisation between rich and poor peasants during the colonial period came from a contrary direction. There had earlier been a debate in Russia between V.I. Lenin and A.V. Chayanov on stratification with the peasantry. As against Lenin's thesis that growth of agrarian capitalism and the emergence of a class of *kulaks* (rich peasants) had permanently stratified the Russian peasantry into rich and poor, Chayanov contended that the Russian peasantry remained a homogeneous and subsistence-oriented community of small-holders among whom differences of farm size were cyclical and not consolidated into permanent distinctions. Eric Strokes, in his contribution to *The Cambridge Economic History of India, vol.2, C.1757-c.1970*, edited by Dharma Kumar (Cambridge, 1983), expressed the opinion that there was no agrarian polarisation. If divisions did occur in the countryside, it was 'more because of the slow impoverishment of the mass than the enrichment of the few' (contribution entitled 'Agrarian Relations: Northern and Central India'). Opinion on this complex issue has remained divided. Did the peasants remain an undifferentiated class of poor small holders? Neil Chalesworth, in *Peasants and Imperial Rule: Agriculture and Agrarian Society in the Bombay Presidency, 1850 – 1935* (Cambridge, 1985) contended that a certain degree of commercialisation of agriculture in colonial India had the effect of pushing up a number of peasants. Sugata Bose, on the other hand, maintained, in *Agrarian Bengal: Economy, Social Structure and Politics 1919-1947* (Cambridge, 1986), that rich farmers were to be seen only among reclaimers of land in a few frontier areas. In the more settled districts of East Bengal, the egalitarian peasant small holding system remained intact for most of the colonial period. More recently, Nariaki Nukazato, in *Agrarian System in Eastern Bengal C. 1870-1910* (Calcutta, 1994), has found that even there, at least a quarter of the land had come under the unequal relationship of cultivating employers and share-cropping under-tenants. He lends support to an earlier thesis to this effect in Binay Bhushan Chudhuri, 'The Process of Depeasantization in Bengal and Bihar, 1885-1947,' *Indian Historical Review*, Vol. 2, 1975. Chaudhuri's article made the important point that the growing number of sharecroppers among the peasants indicated an incipient process of depeasantisation even while outwardly the small-holding system appeared to be intact.

Historians, moreover, came to concede that class was not the only factor in differentiation among the peasantry. Studies such as M.C.Pradhan, *The Political System of the Jats of Northern India*, David Pocock, *Kanbi and Patidar: a study of the Patidar Community of Gujarat*, and Stephen F. Dale, *Islamic Society on the South Asian Frontier: The Mappilas of Malabar 1498-1922* (1980) showed that caste and community were capable of producing important rural solidarities among the members, setting them apart from other peasants.

27.4 THE LONGER TERM PERSPECTIVE

W.H. Moreland had set the agenda for a long-term visualisation of the role of the state in the life of the rural population. Marxists historians at Aligarh, following in his footstep set about exploring aspect of agrarian life and the state formation in both the pre-colonial and colonial periods. In the early 1960s, Irfan Habib, a formidable Aligarh historian, demonstrated the overwhelming presence of the Mughal state in the life of the heavily taxed peasantry in *The Agrarian System of Mughal India 1556-1707* (Bombay, 1963) He depicted several peasant rebellions that occurred in the reign of Aurangzeb. The two ends of the spectrum, the state and the village, were also portrayed with the help of rich Marathi documentation by the Japanese historian Hiroshi Fukazawa, whose essays were collected together in *The Medieval Deccan; Peasants, Social Systems and States, Sixteenth to Seventeenth Centuries* (New Delhi, 1991). The American historian, Burton Stein, maintained that the state, rooted in the life of the peasant community, had a weaker and more segmented character that Irfan Habib had allowed, at least in the south. This non-Marxist perspective was set forth in Stein's *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India* (New Delhi, 1980). Another American historian, David Ludden, undertook a long-term study of local rulers and villagers in Tirunelveli district in the deep south. The micro-stuty spanned the pre-colonial and colonial periods and was entitled *Peasant History in South India* (Princeton, 1985). The history of peasants now had a broader perspective than the initial Marxist studies of peasant movements.

27.5 PEASANT MOVEMENTS

The above perspective lent a growing sophistication to the study of peasant struggles. A growing brand of non-Marxist historians entered the field with new concepts. The pioneer in this sophisticated new variety of history was Eric Strokes, whose essays on the conditions and movements of peasants paid due attention to caste, markets, tax burden and a variety of other factors. His essays were collected together in *The Peasant and The Raj: Studies in Agrarian Society and Peasant Rebellion in Colonial India* (Cambrige, 1978). The sociologist D. N. Dhangare's *Peasant Movements in India* (Delhi, 1983) represented another breakaway from the older one-dimensional Marxist perspective. Ranjit Guha, at the same time, brought a subalternist perspective to bear on the subject in *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (New Delhi, 1983). He showed that peasant actions were typically circumscribed by the locality, based on caste or communal ties, and oriented towards an inversion of existing hierarchy rather than a revolutionary break-through on the Marxist model.

27.6 LABOUR HISTORY

The older leftist history of the trade union movement in India assumed, uncritically, that the working class in India was practically the same, in its social constitution and outlook, as the European working class. Closer examination of the sources by the historians threw doubt on the revolutionary potential and socialist outlook of the so-called 'proletariat'. It was demonstrated by the new labour historians that the mentality and the consciousness of the industrial workers did not differ all that much from the outlook of the poor who depended on the casual labour market in town and country. Among the works that revised labour history substantially may be mentioned Morris David Morris, *The Emergence of an Industrial Labour Force India: A Study of the Bombay*

Cotton Mills 1845-1947 (Berkeley and Los Angles, 1965); R.K. Newman, *Workers and Unions in Bombay 1919-29: a Study of Organisation in the Cotton Mills* (Canberra, 1981); Sujata Patel, *The Making of Industrial Relations. The Ahmedabad Textile Industry 1918-1939* (Delhi, 1987), a study of the Gandhian model of trade unionism based on the cooperation of capital and labour; Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working Class History: Bengal 1890-1940* (Princeton, 1989), a study of jute mill labour from the Subalternist point of view; and Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, *The Origins of Industrial Capitalism in India: Business Strategies and the Working Classes in Bombay 1900-1940* (Cambridge, 1994). Dipesh Chakrabarty noted that the 'hierarchical precapitalist culture' of the workers made them prone to communal violence and inclined them to dependence on the 'Sardars' who recruited them. Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, in his wide ranging study, noted the dependence of the workers on the 'Dadas' in the neighbourhood. Instead of organising themselves into effective modern trade unions, the rural migrants to the mill towns depended on jobbers and on communal solidarities. They were prone to unorganised easily-suppressed violence. Communal riots displaced prolonged, successful strikes all too often in labour unrest.

In a book entitled *Village Communities in the East and West* (London, 1871), Sir Henry Maine conceived old Indian society in terms of status and community, as against contract and class. The picture of isolated, self sufficient village communities might have been overdrawn even then. As colonial rule progressed, so did the understanding of Indian society, and this is reflected in the title of a recent work: Kapil Kumar (ed.), *Congress and Classes: Nationalism, Workers and Peasants* (New Delhi, 1988). The long-term effect of colonial rule was to bring the classes into play in a new national area.

27.7 SUMMARY

The land and the peasantry had been an object of attention by the colonial officials since the early days of colonial rule. Land revenue was the most important source of government's income and the peasants were the people who worked the land and occasionally rose in rebellion against the landlords and the government. The dependence of the colonial government on land revenue necessitated that the peasantry was kept under close scrutiny. Several early works, therefore, focused on the land-revenue systems. However, in the course of time, academically oriented and impartial studies about the land settlement and the peasantry, both for the colonial and pre-colonial periods, began to appear.

The industrial working classes were of more recent origins. The establishment of modern factories and their ancillaries, the railways, ports and construction activities were the source of the new working class. Studies related to the themes of the modern industries and the modern working class began to appear since the early 20th century. The evidences generated by the colonial government on various aspects of labour in different regions of the country helped the scholars in this field.

Although many of these studies and done by the leftist scholars, there were several other scholars who differ with them on various issues, such as the increasing polarisation within the peasantry, the non-existence of a significant number of agricultural workers during pre-colonial period and on the revolutionary potential of the modern working class.

27.8 EXERCISES

1) How did the peasant and working class histories begin? Discuss the histories related to these classes before independence.

2) Give an account of the histories of peasants and working classes after independence.

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UNIT 28 CASTE, TRIBE AND GENDER

Structure

28.1 Introduction

28.2 The Discovery of Caste

28.3 Colonial Ethnology and the Tribes

28.4 Low Caste and Tribal Protests

28.5 Are Caste and Tribe Real?

28.6 Gender

28.7 Summary

28.8 Exercises

28.1 INTRODUCTION

When modern anthropological and historical writings on Indian society began, the close relationship between caste, tribe and gender became evident. Colonial historians and anthropologists saw that the peculiarity of Indian society lay in caste. They also saw that there was a section in Indian society, namely the aboriginal tribes, which had not been brought into caste society. The constitution of caste society differed from tribal society in many respects. Gender was one important respect in which the organisation of a tribe differed from that of a caste. It is not merely that the tribal economy differed from that of castes. It is also true that the marriage systems differed radically in the two types of society. Outwardly, it was the sexual organisation of society which made it easy to set caste apart from tribe. The polarity of purity and pollution, which characterised caste society, was absent among the tribes. The tribes were no part of ritual hierarchy. And in a related way, the gender system of the tribes also differed from the marriage structure of caste society. In fact, a unique organisation of gender lay at the heart of the caste system. In general, it may be said that there is a hidden connection between gender, caste and tribe which must be kept in view when studying Indian's society and history.

The historical and anthropological literature on caste is voluminous and of long standing. There is also a new and burgeoning literature on gender studies and women's history. The tribes do not figure so importantly in Indian historical writing. There is, however, a considerable body of anthropological literature on the tribes which includes some historical material.

The dalits or untouchables have become an important force in Indian politics. It is not a matter of surprise, therefore, that historical inquiries into their condition have attracted several researchers. The *adivasis* or aboriginal tribes do not have that sort of importance in politics, except in the north-eastern hill states. There are, consequently, fewer researchers in tribal history. Women, on the other hand, have attracted a growing number of historians. This is because of the feminist movement. The movement has had the effect of focusing public attention upon the subject.

28.2 THE DISCOVERY OF CASTE

The colonial British administration in India used the concept of caste in a principal way to understand the society it administered. The British derived the term 'caste' from the Portuguese word *casta*. The Portuguese observation of a social institution called *casta* during early maritime voyages led in due course to the elaboration of the concept of 'caste system'. This happened in the nineteenth century, in course of which the colonial administration came to understand the entire social formation (minus the tribes) in terms of the caste system. Colonial administrators commented on the existence of the institution of caste, in an imperfect form, even among the Muslims and Christians.

The Portuguese travelogue, *The Book of Duarte Barbosa An Account of the Countries Bordering on the Indian Ocean and their Inhabitants. Written by Durate Barbosa and completed about the year 1518 A.D.*, trans M.L. Dames (London, 1916) was among the first works to touch upon the institution. But the first to conceive 'the caste system' was the French Missionary, Abbe Dubois. In a work of 1816, entitled 'Description of the Character, Manners and Customs of the People of India, and of their Institutions, Religious and Civil', (translated by Henry K. Beauchamp subsequently as *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies* (Oxford, 1906)), he referred to the caste system of India. He said, 'I am persuaded that it is simply and solely due to the distribution of the people into castes that India did not lapse into a state of barbarism and that she preserved the arts and sciences of civilization whilst most other nations of the earth remained in the state of barbarism.' Other Christian missionaries did not share his favourable view of the civilisational value of caste and the Madras Missionary Conference of 1850 held caste to be 'one of the greatest obstacles to the progress of the gospel in India.' Indian social reformers, while unwilling as yet to condemn the caste system as a whole, also dwelt on some of the harmful social consequences of the institution.

Colonial social ethnology debated the origin and function of caste extensively in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. On the basis of the census of 1881, two colonial administrators speculated in their reports from the Punjab and North-Western Provinces and Oudh that caste was basically a frozen occupational system. These early official reports are Denzil lbbetson, *Report on the Census of the Punjab* (1883), subsequently re-published as *Punjab Castes* (Lahore, 1916), and John C. Nesfield, *Brief View of the Caste System of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh, together with an Examination of Names and Figures Shown in the Census Report* (Allahabad, 1885). A brilliant Bengal official named H.H. Risley disagreed with this view and put forth the influential contention that caste had a racial origin, to be found in the Aryan conquest of India's darker original inhabitants. Not all colonial officials agreed with this view which was set forth in Risley's *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, 2 vols. (Calcutta, 1892), and *The People of India* (Calcutta, 1908). William Crooke, an official in sympathy with lbbetson and Nesfield in his matter, argued against Risley's race theory, and emphasised occupational criteria for understanding caste in *The Tribes and Castes of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh*, 4 vols. (Calcutta, 1896). Risley and Crooke based their official reports on the census of 1891. Whatever their difference on the origin of caste, the colonial census had by then officially established caste as the principal concept for analysing Indian society. Risley's attempt to establish the social ranking of caste through the census set off a keen competition among various caste groups about matters of rank.

In due course the colonial administration fostered political rivalries among the various castes and the proposal for separate legislative representation of 'the depressed classes'

led to Mahatma Gandhi's fast unto death and a compromise between the caste Hindus and the untouchable leader B.R. Ambedkar. The keen interest regarding caste at this time is reflected in works by both Indians and foreigners: Nripendra Kumar Dutt, *Origin and Growth of Caste in India* (London, 1931); J.H. Hutton, *Caste in India: Its Nature, Function and Origins* (Cambridge, 1946); and G.S. Ghurye, *Caste and Class in India* (Bombay, 1950). Though none were professional historians, all three speculated about the origin and meaning of caste. Hutton, who was the Census Commissioner of 1931, was dissatisfied with the race and occupation theories of caste. He speculated:

> 'The fact is, many roads of migration have led to India - and have ended there. This has resulted in the accumulation of a large number of societies of very different levels of culture and very varying customs in an area in which they have neither been mutually inaccessible nor without some measure of individual isolation. The mere inescapable necessity of finding a *modus vivendi* on the part of a number of different cultures has probably played a not unimportant part among the various factors that have combined to cause the caste system to develop.'

Speculation about the nature of caste continued in the period after independence. Louis Dumont's modern sociological classic, *Homo Hierarchicus: Essai sur les systems des castes* (1967, English translation 1970) argued that the purity-pollution hierarchy, by which all castes are placed in relation to each other, was the central feature of the caste system. Morton Klass, in his *Caste, The Emergence of the South Asian Social System* (1980), argued on the other hand that a caste, in its irreducible essence, was a marriage circle, common occupation or other features being secondary to the system.

28.3 COLONIAL ETHNOLOGY AND THE TRIBES

Colonial speculation about the origins of the caste system included the assumption that various tribes had at different times been given a specific caste ranking and had thus been absorbed into the caste system. The colonial administration also discovered, however, that several aboriginal tribes had not been so absorbed and had maintained a separate existence of their own. These tribes, which had remained apart from the rest of society, were thought to be dependent on forest produce and shifting cultivation, and were supposed to be simple, backward people prone to violence. Closer acquaintance with the tribes showed, however, that their conditions varied, and that many had taken to settled agriculture. Early colonial ethnology included speculations about the origins and history of the tribes. Colonel E.T. Dalton, who was Chota Nagpur Commissioner and had close acquaintance with that wild country which today constitutes, along with the Santhal Parganas, the new state of Jharkhand, was among the first to venture into the history and present condition of the tribes. His work was entitled *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* (Calcutta, 1872). It was a pioneering work.

After Colonel Dalton, an amateur Bengali ethnologist who lived in Bihar became interested in the tribes of the same area where Dalton had served as Commissioner. His name was Sarat Chandra Roy. His inquiries were more detailed and he showed a remarkable academic grasp of the new discipline of anthropology. He wrote a number of works on the tribes of Chota Nagpur. It may be noted that the area, along with the Santhal Parganas, was included in his time in the province of Bihar and Orissa. In Colonel Dalton's time, the whole area, today the state of Jharkhand, had been part of the huge Bengal Presidency. In whatever administration the area might be included at different times, it had a distinctive habitat. It was a wild plateau, and the caste system

had not developed there into a predominant social system. Some of the wild tribes had their own Rajas, some lived under their local chiefs. The Santhals of the Santhal Parganans and the Mundas of the Chota Nagpur division were numerically large population blocs. In a famous work on agrarian history, *The Annals of Rural Bengal* (1868), W.W. Hunter had earlier touched on the Santhal insurrection of 1855. Sarat Chandra Roy turned his attention to the Mundas, and produced an anthroplogical work on them entitled *The Mundas and their Country* (Calcutta, 1912). He went on with his detailed researches and produced two more works: *The Oraons of Chota Nagpur: Their History; Economic Life and Social Organisation* (Ranchi, 1915); and *The Birhors: a Little – known Jungle Tribe of Chota Nagpur* (Ranchi, 1925). Dalton had commented on the joyous life of the tribals. Roy added that every bachelor had his sweetheart among the maidens.

It was clear by this time that the sexual organisation of society was very different among the tribals compared to the more familiar caste society. A missionary named Verrier Elwin who had developed empathy with the tribals of Central India turned his attention to the matter. He touched on an institution called the *ghotul* which permitted free mixing. 'Throughout tribal India', he said, 'divorce is easy and generally the wife has the same rights as her husband'. Among his works may be mentioned *The Baiga* (1939), *The Muria and their Ghotul* (Bombay, 1947) and the *Bondo Highlander* (London, 1950). A novel feature of his work was the use of tribal songs as primary material for depicting their condition and mentality. A Baiga song which he collected runs as follows:

> In some houses there is food
>
> In other houses there is money
>
> But in every house there is youth and desire.

There is a hint here that the material condition of the tribals might not be easy, but their social organisation left scope for the natural joys of life.

Some of the early colonial anthropologists speculated about the history of the tribes, but actual historical materials were not forthcoming from a non-literate society. A.R. Radcliffe Brown, in his influential anthropological work entitled *The Andaman Islanders* (1922), disapproved of such speculative history and urged that tribal society should be studied as it appeared in the present before the anthropologist. The inherent difficulties in constructing the history of the tribals meant that the main body of research work regarding them was anthropological. The work of the Anthropological Survey of India accentuated this tendency. However, these same anthropological reports on current conditions among the tribals became valuable historical documents when, as it happened in independent India, their condition changed beyond recognition, and for the worse.

28.4 LOW CASTE AND TRIBAL PROTESTS

When historians turned to studying the conditions of low castes and tribals, they devoted a good deal of attention to the question of oppression and protest during the colonial period. Both groups were marginal, and were discriminated against. Yet from time to time ideological leadership emerged from amongst them and there were movements of protest which figured in the colonial archives. Among the low castes at least, statements of their own point of view were also sometimes available. Two recent works which have made interesting use of such material, telling the story from the point of view of the

group concerned, are: Rosalind O' Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth Century Western India* (Cambridge, 1985); and Shekhar Bandyopadhyay, *Caste, Protest and Identity in Colonial India: the Namasudras of Bengal 1872-1947* (Richmond, 1997). The gender mores of the low castes and the tribals differed from the high caste ethic, and in their studies of protest. O'Hanlon and Bandopadhyay did not forget the gender factor. They also showed how the Non-Brahman movement in Maharashtra and the Namasudra movement in Bengal negotiated terms with the broader issues of social reform and political nationalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

It should be noted that the Non-Brahman movement in the peninsula of India, especially as it developed in the Maharashtra region and the Tamil country, did not necessarily represent the lowest of the low. The distinction between the Non-Brahman movement and the Dalit movement has become clearer in the historical literature relating to the matter. Eugene F. Irschik, an American historian, who suggested that caste played an important role in colonial Indian politics, dealt with the Non-Brahman castes, as distinct from the untouchable Adi Dravidas, *in Politics and Social Conflict in South India: the Non-Brahman Movement and Tamil Separatism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1969). He showed that the Non-Brahman movement in Tamil country was a protest movement of the middling castes against the Brahman-dominated nationalist movement of the Congress. Below the middling Non-Brahman castes, which suffered from a sense of discrimination, there were untouchable castes that were even more oppressed. It is from this section of society that the Dalit movement emerged in late colonial India under the leadership of B.R. Ambedkar. The Maharashtra region witnessed both the Non-Brahman movement and the Dalit movement and the distinction stands clear in two separate works, both by Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society: The Non-Brahman Movement in Western India, 1873-1930* (Bombay, 1976); and *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution: Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India* (New Delhi, 1994). Another work dealing with the Dalit movement is Eleanor Zelliot, *From Untouchable to Dalit: Essays on the Ambedkar Movement* (New Delhi, 1992).

Movements of protest turned violent more readily among the tribals, at least among those tribes living in the remoter jungle regions. The tribals were not integrated with the rest of the society, and they did not fully comprehend the might of the colonial state. Invariably their rebellions were drowned in blood. We have seen that W.W. Hunter left an account of the Santhal rebellion in his *Annals of Rural Bengal*, written not long after the event happened. Tribal movements of protest did not draw much attention afterwards. The focus was upon the more organised politics of nationalist and low caste protest. The focus upon history from below has resulted in greater attention to tribal revolts in more recent years. Among such studies may be mentioned K.S. Singh, *Dust Storm and Hanging Mist: The Story of Birsa Munda and His Movement* (Calcutta, 1966); and J.C. Jha, *Tribal Revolt of Chota Nagpur, 1831-32* (Patna, 1987). Dealing with the Munda and Kol rebellions respectively, both works related to the Chota Nagapur plateau. Historians of India have paid little attention to the tribes of the north-eastern hill states. Many years ago, the anthropologist Christophe von Furer-Haimendrof wrote the well-known work, *The Naked Nagas: Head Hunters of Assam in Peace and War* (Calcutta, 1946). Recently research in the history of the north-eastern hills has begun in the north-east itself, and in pace with the trends in current research, social factors such as gender have begun to figure in this research. For instance, there is Frederick S. Downs, *The Christian Impact on the Status of Women in North East India* (Shillong, 1996).

28.5 ARE CASTE AND TRIBE REAL?

Post-modernist historians have recently questioned whether categories such as 'caste' and 'tribe' are real. In their opinion, colonial administrators invented these categories in their discourses upon India and Africa. The argument that 'tribe' is a figment of the colonial imagination appeared in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983). Terence Ranger, a historian of Africa, argued this in relation to the Dark Continent, but there were resonance of 'the invention of tribalism' in the Indian subcontinent, too. That caste, too, was a product of colonial discourse and not a natural growth of pre-colonial history, was argued by Ronald Inden, *Imagining India* (Oxford, 1990), and by Nicholas B. Dirk, *Castes of Mind : Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton, 2001). These arguments have not found general acceptance outside post-modernist circles. Historians are aware of the dangers of 'essentializing' categories such as tribe, caste and religious community, and are also conscious of the constructed element in the colonial ethnology regarding these groups. Nevertheless, they have not been able to dispense with 'tribalism' or 'casteism' in interpreting Indian history. That tribal society is a real social category has been reasserted by Binay Bhushan Chaudhuri in his essay, 'Tribal Society in Transition: Eastern India, 1757-1920', in Mushirul Hasan and Narayani Gupta (eds.), *India's Colonial Encounter : Essays in Memory of Eric Stokes* (New Delhi, 1993). That caste assumed new forms in colonial India was recognised several years ago by Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susan H. Rudolph, *The Modernity of Tradition: Political Development in India* (Chicago, 1967). Thus there was recognition that caste might have 're-invented' itself in colonial India. That it was often a smoke-screen for others interests in the politics of the colonial period is an argument that figures in John Gallagher, Gordon Johnson and Anil Seal (eds.), *Locality, Province and Nation: Essays in Indian Politics, 1870 to 1940)* (Cambridge, 1970). But that caste became a real factor in politics, at least in the colonial period, is not denied even by post-modernist historians such as Dirks. The point is not to essentialise these categories too readily. Dirks observes, 'Caste as we know it today is not in fact some unchanged survival of ancient India...Rather...Caste... is a modern phenomenon, that is specifically the product of an historical encounter between India and Western Colonial rule'. However, feminist historians, in their studies of pre-colonial Indian society, have found caste to be very much an oppressive presence in the lives of women even them. Uma Chakravarti in *Rewriting History: The Life and Times of Pandita Ramabai* (New Delhi, 1998) found this to be the case with regard to Maharashtra in the age of Peshwas, as well as in the time of Pandita Ramabai in the late nineteenth century. This takes us to the question of gender.

28.6 GENDER

During the colonial period, two controversial works focused international attention upon the women's question in India. Highly critical of the condition of the Indian women, these two works were: Pandita Ramabai, *The High Caste Hindu Woman* (1887) and Katherine Mayo, *Mother India* (1927). At an early date serious historical interest on the subject of women in Indian civilisation was indicated by B.C. Law, *Women in Buddhist Literature* (1927); I.B. Horner, *Women under Primitive Buddhism* (1930); and A.S. Altekar, *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization from the Prehistoric Times to the Present* (1938).

The feminist movement and the International Women's year, 1975, set off a wave of women's studies, beginning with such works as B.R. Nanda (ed.), *Indian Women:*

from Purdah to Modernity (New Delhi, 1976). Soon however, women's history broadened out and assumed the more complex shape of gender history. Instead of studying women as such, gender historian studied the problem in terms of the power relations between the sexes in society. An influential work edited by Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, entitled *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History* (New Delhi, 1989) indicated the transition to gender history. This was followed by more collections of articles that exhibited the new sophistication of gender history: J. Krishnamurty (ed.), *Women in Colonial India: Essays on Survival, Work and the State* (New Delhi, 1989); Bharati Ray (ed.), *From the Seams of History: Essays on Indian Women* (New Delhi, 1995); and Aparna Basu and Arup Taneja (eds.), *Breaking out of Invisibility: Women in Indian History* (New Delhi, 2002). The voices of women through the ages were collected together in the important anthology edited by Susie Tharu and K. Lalita and entitled *Women Writing in India 600 B.C. to the Present* (2 vols., New Delhi, 1991-1993). Two authoritative, male produced texts for the guidance of Hindu and Muslim women respectively were critically examined in Julia Leslie, *The Perfect Wife: the Orthodox Hindu Woman according to the Stridharmapaddhati of Tryambakayajvan* (1989), and Barbara Metcalf, *Perfecting Women, Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi's Bihishti Zewar* (1990).

Bengal took the lead in the women's movement. Not surprisingly, a large number of works relate to the gender relations in colonial Bengal. These works include: Usha Chakraborty, *Condition of Bengali Women around the Second half of the Nineteenth Century* (Calcutta, 1963); Ghulam Murshid, *Reluctant Debutant: Response of Bengali Women to Modernization 1949-1905* (Princeton, 1984); Malavika Karlekar, *Voices from within* (Delhi, 1991); Barbara Southard, *The Women's Movement and Colonial Politics in Bengal* : *The Quest for Political Right, Education and Social Reform Legislation* (1921-36) (Delhi, 1996); and Sonia Nishat Amin, *The World of Muslim Women in Colonial Bengal 1876-1939*(Leiden, 1996). Other provinces of India have been covered more recently. For instance, Prem Chowdhury, *The Veiled Woman: Shifting Gender Equations in Rural Haryana 1880-1990* (Delhi, 1994); Sita Anantharaman, *Getting Girls to School: Social Reform in the Tamil Districts 1870-1930* (1996); and Gail Minault, *Scheduled Scholars: Women's Education and Muslim Social Reform in Colonial India* (Delhi, 1998), which covers North India. There is also a general study of Indian women in the modern period in *The New Cambridge History of India* series: Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Modern India* (Cambridge, 1996).

More recently, gender history has broadened out and taken up the study, not merely of femininity, but also of masculinity. An example is Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: the "Manly Englishman" and the "Effeminate Bengali" in the late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester, 1995). Gender history now pays attention to race, community, caste and tribe. An inter-related field of social studies has emerged, and has enriched history writing.

28.7 SUMMARY

Caste was probably the most important category used by the colonial administration to understand the Indian society. The entire Indian society, including the Muslims and Christians, though barring the tribes, was viewed in terms of the caste system. While some of the early writers viewed caste as the occupational system, H.H. Risley, a colonial official posted in Bengal, put forward a radically different view which contended that the caste system had a racial origin, dating since the Aryan conquests of the early inhabitants of India.

In the early days of colonial rule, the tribes were also considered as part of the caste system by the colonial administrators. However, they later realised that the social organisation of the tribes was quite different from that of the caste society. The academic exploration of the tribes initiated the new discipline of anthropology in India. Several anthropological studies were undertaken by both the Indian and foreign scholars on the Indian tribes.

The non-Brahman and Dalit movements have also attracted the attention of the historians and many important books, particularly by Rosalind O'Hanlon, Eugene Irschik, Gail Omvedt and Eleanor Zelliot, have been published on them.

The gender question has also attracted a lot of attention, particularly because of the rise of the feminist movement in post-independence period. However, two important books on the conditions of women by Pandita Ramabai and Katherine Mayo focused attention on women's problem during the colonial period. Now, of course, we have a lot of literature on this issue covering various aspects of gender relations.

28.8 EXERCISES

1) How will you define caste? Discuss the writings of various scholars on caste.

2) Give an account of the colonial understanding of tribe.

3) Discuss the historical works related to gender.

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UNIT 29 RELIGION AND CULTURE

Structure

29.1 Introduction

29.2 Pre-colonial and Colonial Historiography

29.3 Post-colonial Research in Religion

29.4 The Study of Indian Culture

29.5 Culture Studies and Religious Identities

29.6 Mentality and History of Culture

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29.8 Exercises

29.1 INTRODUCTION

The nationalist movement in colonial India led to an important reconstruction of the concept of history. History at the time was understood to be a history of the British state in India. The history of the pre-colonial period was understood to be a political narrative of the dynasties and their wars and alliances. For Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, this was a history of violence. There was no history of 'soul-force', or non-violence. He put the matter quite explicitly in *Hind Swaraj* (1909). Rabindranath Tagore made the same point somewhat differently. In his view, the true history of India was not a catalogue of its dynasties, warfare and the resultant bloodshed, but rather its inner history. It lay in the quest for the accommodation of differences, and in the synthesis of diverse elements, including clashing religious beliefs. The history of India's unique culture, in his view, was evolution of harmony out of variety. Religious history was on this analysis central to the inner history of the country's culture. It was a history of syncretism.

British Orientalism had also regarded religious history as the most important part of India's cultural history. Nor was this a colonial view alone, for there was an earlier recognition of the importance of religion in the cultural heritage of the country. Badauni's *Muntakha-ut-Tawarikh*, bearing upon the reign of Akbar, devoted considerable space to religious matters and Sufi doctrines.

There was also a recognition, however, that not all of India's culture was religious culture. British Orientalism had a keen appreciation of secular Sanskrit poetry, and earlier, Badauni had devoted many pages of his history to Persian poetry in India, not all of which was religious. However, Indian historiography was quick to recognise that there was no hard and fast distinction between the religious and the secular in the history of India. Even in the modern period, it was recognised that the Indian awakening had an important component of religious reform / revival.

29.2 PRE-COLONIAL AND COLONIAL HISTORIOGRAPHY

What P.J. Marshall calls 'the British discovery of Hinduism' was preceded long ago by the Muslim discovery of Hindu sacred and secular learning. As early as C.1030, the Muslim scholar of Ghazni, Al Biruni, had written extensively and sufficiently on Hindu

beliefs in *Kitab -ul- Hind*. The Tibetan lama, Taranatha, wrote a history of the Buddhist faith in India, *rGya - gar - chos - 'Gyun* (The History of Buddhism in India), around 1608, by which time Hinduism had already triumphed over Buddhism. In the same century, the Mughal Prince, Dara Shikoh, sought to show that the monotheistic fundamentals of both Hinduism and Islam were capable of mingling together. His work, entitled *Majma - ul - Bahrain* (Mingling of Two Oceans), was based on inquiries into authoritative texts much as the *Upanishads* and the Sufi work *Gulshan Raz*. It was written in a philosophical vein, but yet another important work of the seventeenth century, the *Dabistan - l Mazahib* of Mushin Fani, clearly exhibited the historical and comparative method. This work, translated as *The Dabistan or School of Manners. The Religious Beliefs, Observances, Philosophical Opinions and Social Customs of the East* by David Shea and Anthony Troyer (Washington, 1901) treated the major faiths and sects of India comprehensively.

The work of the British Orientalists on the 'great traditions' of Hinduism and Islam resulted in the codification of 'Hindoo law' and 'Anglo Muhammadan law', but at least one major Orientalist, H.H. Wilson, pushed his researches into areas beyond the orthodox religious traditions. His 'Sketch of the Religious Sects of the Hindus', published in *Asiatic Researches* (Vol. 16, 1828, Vol.17, 1832), recorded the history of various *bhakti* sects, including obscure ones. Following Wilson, the Brahmo reformer Akshay Kumar Datta wrote in greater historical detail on a large number of unorthodox popular sects in his Bengali work, *Bharatbarshiya Upasak Sampraday* (2 parts, 1870 and 1883). It is the same popular cults, such as the Bauls, that Rabindranath Tagore brought into the limelight in his Hibbert lectures at Oxford, published as *The Religion of Man* (London, 1931). He drew upon the historical work of a colleague at Santiniketan whom he had asked to research the subject. The Santiniketan teacher, Kshitimohan Sen, wrote an important work in Bengali, entitled *Bharatiya Madhya Yuge Sadhanar Dhara* (1930), which he translated subsequently as *Medieval Mysticism in India* (London, c. 1935). Later on, Sashi Bhushan Dasgupta dwelt on the unorthodox sects of early colonial Bengal in *Obscure Religious Cults* (Calcutta, 1946). The development of the Sufi cult in Bengal was treated in a thesis of the 1930s by Muhammad Enamul Huq, who subsequently published it in independent Bangladesh as *A History of Sufiism in Bengal* (Dacca, 1975). Yet another important work of the colonial period covering the history of an important sect was George Weston Briggs, *Gorakhnath and the Kanphata Yogis* (Calcutta, 1838). The Jogis were an unorthodox sect and were found from Bengal right up to the Punjab. The works of Wilson, Datta, Tagore and other established that there was, at the popular level, a number of heterodox sects, both Hindu and Muslim, which represented a radical syncretistic religious tradition going back to late antiquity. In other words conflict between antagonistic religions was not all there was to the religious tradition of the subcontinent.

Even as research into the obscure aspects of Indian religion made important advances in the colonial period, religious and social reform was changing the tradition in several aspects. This was a new area of investigation, and a pioneer in this field was J.N. Farquhar. A sympathetic Christian Missionary, he wrote a work entitled *Modern Religious Movements in India*. First published in 1919, it still remains an important reference work with first hand information. After 1947, the subject would become a major topic of research, but Farquhar's sympathetic account still retains its fresh quality.

29.3 POST-COLONIAL RESEARCH IN RELIGION

Research in both the orthodox and unorthodox aspects of the religions of the subcontinent made major advances after Partition, and there was a new focus on Islam in its specific

South Asian context. Comprehensive surveys of Islam in India emerged from different perspectives: S.M. Ikram's *History of Muslim Civilization in India and Pakistan* (Lahore, 1961) and Muhammad Mujeeb's *The Indian Muslims* (London, 1967) presented the Pakistani and Indian perspectives respectively, while Anne-Marie Schimmel's *Islam in the Indian Subcontinent* (London, 1980) presented an external perspective on the subject. On the Sikh community, W.H. McLeod, a sympathetic historian from New Zealand, wrote the widely accepted and objective work, *The Evolution of the Sikh Community* (Delhi, 1975). The southern peninsula was the focus of new community studies such as Stephen Frederic Dale, *The Mappilas of Malabar 1498-1922: Islamic Society on the South Asian Frontier* (Oxford, 1980) and Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society 1700-1900* (Cambridge, 1989). These works showed the distinctive regional forms of Islam and Christianity. The syncretic local forms imported to Islam by popular Fakirs were imaginatively explored by Richard M. Eaton in *The Sufis of Bijapur: Social Roles of Sufis in Medieval India* (Princeton, 1978), and by Asim Roy in *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal* (Princeton, 1983).

The Research in the esoteric and popular forms of Hinduism made a major advance with Mircea Eliade's classic study for Yoga in French : *Le Yoga: Immortalité et Liberté* (Paris, 1954). Other important books that explored forms of Hinduism outside the orthodox Brahmanical mould included : Edward C. Dimock, *The Place of Hidden Moon : Erotic Mysticism in the Sahajiya Vaishnva Cult of Bengal* (Chicago, 1966); Wendy Doniger O'Flahery, *Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Siva* (Oxford, 1973); Sanjukta Gupta, Dirk Jan Hoens and Teun Goudriaan, *Hindu Tantrism* (Leiden, 1979); and Charlotte Vaudeville, *A Weaver Named Kabir: Selected Verses with a Detailed Biographical and Historical Introduction* (Delhi, 1993).

The religious and social movements of reform in colonial India emerged as an important focus of research after independence. The movement of Islamic revival went back to the eighteenth century and was studied by S.A.A. Rizvi in *Shah Wali-allah and His Times* (Canberra, 1980). The Brahmo movement in Bengal, one of the most important reform movements in the nineteenth century, was treated by David Kopf in *The Brahmo Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Indian Mind* (Princeton, 1979). The movement of reform in Islam in the nineteenth century was treated by Christian W. Trall in *Sayyid Ahmad Khan: a Reinterpretation of Muslim Theology* (New Delhi, 1978). More generally, themes of religious reform were treated in synthetic general works such as Charles H. Heimsath, *Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform* (Princeton, 1966), and Kennath W. Jones *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India: The New Cambridge History of India 3.1.* (Cambridge, 1994). The movements of revival and reform fostered a new kind of politics of religious identity. In Pakistan, Ishtiaq Husain Qureishi claimed, in *The Muslim Community of the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent 610-1947: A Brief Analysis* (The Hague, 1962), that the Muslims had always constituted a separate nation in the subcontinent. Religion tended to become a matter of politics in the twentieth century historiography.

29.4 THE STUDY OF INDIAN CULTURE

The colonial period produced important studies of Indian culture, beginning with the Orientalists. Sir William Jones discovered the Indo-European language group and thus transformed notions of Indian culture. There was a keen Orientalist interest in Indian art, evident in such works as James Ferguson, *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture* (1876). The Orientalists were sometimes unjustly critical of early Indian

historiographical efforts in this direction, as is evident in Ferguson's criticisms of Rajendralal Mitra's highly original study of the temples of Orissa in *The Antiquities of Orissa* (1868-69). This did not stop Indian intellectuals and in due course Ghulam Yazdani wrote a wonderful account of Ajanta paintings entitled *Ajanta* (1930). Around this time Indian historians exhibited an interest in the culture of people as distinct from the chronicles of the Kings. Muhammad Habib wrote *Hazrat Amir Khusrau of Delhi* in 1927, and K.M. Ashraf wrote an account of popular culture during the Delhi Sultanate in *Life and Condition of the People of Hindustan* (1935).

By this time English education had brought about an important change in the mentality of the middle class, a theme explored by the American intellectual B.T. McCully in *English Education and the Origins of Indian Nationalism* (1940). Indian intellectuals themselves studied the impact of the West on the new vernacular literatures, for instance, Sushil Kumar De, *Bengali Literature in the Nineteenth Century* (1919), and Sayyid Abdul Latif, *The Influence of English Literature on Urdu Literature* (1924). One of the intellectual achievements of this time was Surendranath Dasgupta's *History of Indian Philosophy,* 5 vols. (1922).

Independence and Partition brought a renewed interest in the subcontinent. The synthetic surveys of the time deserve mention: A.L. Basham, *The Wonder that Was India: A Survey of the History and Culture of the Indian Subcontinent before the Coming of the Muslims* (1954), and S.M. Ikram, *History of Muslim Civilization in India and Pakistan* (Lahore, 1961). In recent years, the Western cultural impact has been studied in new and sophisticated ways, for instance, Meenakshi Mukherjee, *Realism and Reality: The Novel and Society in India* (New Delhi, 1985), and Partha Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India* (Cambridge, 1994). Such works explore the emergence of modern Indian culture from fresh perspectives and have broadened our understanding of the process dubbed the Indian Awakening. The phenomenon is now studied from a more critical angle of vision and culture is now more closely related to the emerging forms of consciousness and society.

29.5 CULTURE STUDIES AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITIES

Post-modernism, colonial discourse analysis and culture studies have focused attention on the question of religious and cultural identities in Indian history. Post-colonial theory questions such identities and argues that they are 'constructed' by colonialism, nationalism and other motivated forces. The validity of religious identities, especially Hinduism, has been doubted by the post-colonial deconstructionists. Poststructuralist literary criticism, deriving from such intellectuals as Jacques Derrida and Edward Said, has been a key factor in such deconstructionism.

The deconstructionists contend that the British Orientalists constructed Hinduism out of diverse religious practices, and that even Islam in British India was too diverse to be the basis of one Muslim community across the subcontinent. As an instance of Orientalism and the fictitious identities it created, the post-colonial critics point to such works as Sir Monier Monier-Williams's *Hinduism* (1877). He spoke of Hinduism as one religion despite its many sects because of the fact that there was 'only one sacred language and only one sacred literature, accepted and revered by all adherents of Hinduism alike.' Indian nationalists, too, as for instance K.M. Sen, who wrote the standard work *Hinduism* (Penguin, 1961), are thought to have followed in the footsteps of the Orientalists in relating the history of a non-existent single religion.

In a typically post-modernist vein, Brian Smith contended in *Reflections on Resemblance, Ritual and Religion* (New York, 1989): 'Just who invented "Hinduism" first is a matter of scholarly debate. Almost everyone agrees that it was not the Hindus.' In his opinion it was the British who did this in the early part of the nineteenth century, 'to create and control' a diverse body of people. This made it possible to speak of '*a* religion when before there was none or, at best, many.' Among other works which have dwelt on the constructed nature of religious boundaries in India may be mentioned Harjot S. Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition* (Chicago, 1994); and Vasudha Dalmia and Heinrich von Stietencron (eds.), *Representing Hinduism: the Construction of Religious Traditions and National Identity* (New Delhi, 1995). Barbara Metcalf has argued, for her part, that identities such as the 'Indian Muslims' are neither primary, nor of long standing, and are, in fact, the products of colonial history (Barbara Daly Metcalf, *Perfecting Women: Maulana Ashraf Ali Jhanawi's Bihishti Zewar* (Delhi, 1992). In an article entitled 'Imagining Community: Polemical Debates in Colonial India', she goes so far as to say that 'India', 'Hindus' and 'Muslims' are not just imagined communities, they are, in her view, 'imaginary communities' (in Kenneth W. Jones, ed., *Religious Controversy in British India: Dialogues in South Asian Languages*, Albany, NY, 1992).

Not all historians accept these arguments, and they have continued to write religious, cultural and social history in terms that imply the real existence of such communities from pre-colonial times. As instances of this contrary view may be cited: C.A. Bayly, 'The Pre-history of "Communalism"? Religious Conflict in India, 1700-1860' (*Modern Asian Studies*, Vol.19, 1985); Cynthia Talbot, 'Inscribing the Other, Inscribing the Self: Hindu-Muslim Identities in Pre-colonial India' (*Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 37, 1995); Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims 1871-1906: a Quest for Identity* (Oxford, 1981); Stephen Dale, *The Mappilas of Malabar 1498-1922: Islamic Society on the South Asian Frontier* (Oxford, 1986); Richard M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier 1204-1706* (Delhi, 1994); David Lorenzon (ed.), *Bhakti Religion in North India: Community Identity and Political Action* (Albany, NY, 1995). Not surprisingly, the disagreements among the scholars have given rise to a wide-ranging controversy on the nature of identities in colonial and pre-colonial India, and on the question whether patriotism and communalism have deep roots in Indian history. The development of the controversy may be followed through the following works: Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (Delhi, 1990); C.A. Bayly, *The Origins of Nationality in South Asia: Patriotism and Ethical Government in the Making of Modern India* (Delhi, 1998); Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, *Representing the Other? Sanskrit Sources and the Muslims* (New Delhi, 1998); Rajat Kanta Ray, *The Felt Community: Commonalty and Mentality before the Emergence of Indian Nationalism* (New Delhi, 1003). Whereas Pandey and Chattopadhyaya have emphasised the construed nature of the identities in Indian Society, Bayly and Ray have seen religious and patriotic loyalties in old India as more real.

A solid body of research in religious and cultural history has emphasised that identities and loyalties in Indian society must not be seen as hostile and monolithic blocs. Richard Eaton's work on the Sufis of Bijapur and Asim Roy's work on the Islamic syncretistic tradition in medieval Bengal, referred to earlier, have brought out the very large extent to which Islam in the subcontinent was shaped by syncretic interaction with the Hindu religion. The Bhakti movement, which also made an extremely significant contribution to the syncretic tradition, has been studied, among other works, in Karine Schoemer and W.H. McLeod (eds.), *The Sants: Studies in a Devotional Tradition of India*

(Delhi, 1987) and Friedhelm Hardy, *Viraha-Bhakti: the Early Hisotry of Krishna Devotion in South India* (Delhi, 1983). Apart from the spiritual Sufi and Bhakti movements, there was a persistent *Lokayata* tradition, with a materialistic and popular orientation, which worked against the hardening of religious identities into antagonistic blocs. This significant tradition is explored in D.P. Chattopadhyaya, *Lokayata: a Study in Ancient Indian Materialism* (New Delhi, 1959). The continuation of this materialistic tradition among the Bauls of Bengal, who set aside the Hindu-Muslim divide as false spiritualism, has been traced to recent times by Jeanne Openshaw in *Seeking Bauls of Bengal* (Cambridge, 2002). Such movements were more radical in nature than the Sufi and Bhakti movements and they undermined gender, religious, caste and class distinctions even more thoroughly. Miranda Shaw, in her *Passionate Enlightenment: Women in Tantric Buddhism* (Princeton, 1994), has dwelt on this radical strand, too. The atheistic strand in the Indian religious tradition, it has been demonstrated, has tended to subvert the existing distinctions in Indian society.

Notwithstanding all this, modern India has experienced a distinct tendency towards religious polarisation. Peter van der Veer has dwelt on this theme in *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India* (Berkeley, 1994). The public life of the emerging nation(s) has been influenced to a large extent by religious controversy.

29.6 MENTALITY AND HISTORY OF CULTURE

Cultural history has been enriched by the study of *mentalite* or mentality, a term coined by he *Annales* School of Historians in France. This goes beyond conventional intellectual history and explores the popular attitudes and subconscious categories of thought. A related area of research, also exploring the mind, is psycho-history, which seeks to uncover the unconscious level of the mind with the help of Sigmund Freud's technique of psycho-analysis. This kind of history is not concerned with the conscious emotions of the individual or the group. Psycho-history probes repressed impulses rather than open sentiments. The study of emotion in cultural history, including conscious sentiment, is a wider field that may be called emotional history. Historical studies of mentality in India's culture and civilisation have come to embrace these different strands of history. They include popular attitudes and symbols of thought, unconscious mental processes, and the history of culturally shaped sentiments and emotions.

At the same time, intellectual history continues to flourish. An important study of the interaction of European and Indian thought from the pre-colonial period onwards is Wilhelm Halbfass, *India and Europe : an Essay in Understanding* (Albany, New York, 1988). There is also a huge literature on how the West affected the mind and thought of India in the colonial period. This keen interest among scholars is reflected in such works as Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (Delhi, 1986). This is a Subalternist work by a political scientist. Another work is Tapan Raychaudhuri, *Europe Reconsidered: Perceptions of the West in Nineteenth-Century Bengal* (New Delhi, 1988). This is a study of the thought of Bhudev Mukhopadhyay, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and Swami Vivekananda by an eminent liberal historian.

Studies of mentality going beyond strict intellectual history began to appear from around the 1970s. The wide range of works include: David Kopf, *The Brahma Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Indian Mind* (Princeton, 1979); Kenneth Ballhatchet, *Race, Sex and Class under the Raj* (New York, 1980); Judith Walsh, *Growing up in British India* (New York 1983); Carol Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (eds), *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia*

(Philadelphia, 1983); Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: the 'Manly Englishman' and the 'Effeminate Bengali' in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester, 1995); Rajat Kanta Ray (ed.*), Mind, Body and Society: Life and Mentality in Colonial Bengal* (Calcutta, 1996); Sumit Sarkar, *Writing Social History* (Delhi, 1997); and Sudipta Kaviraj, *The Unhappy Consciousness: Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay and the Formation of a Nationalist Discourse in India* (Delhi, 1998). What these works have done is to bring out some of the tensions embedded in the emerging mental formation during the colonial period.

Psycho-history, with its use of insights from Freudian psycho-analysis, is a more technical and closely focused exercise. In relation to India, it may be said to have started off with the famous psycho-analyst Erik Erikson's *Gandhi"s Truth: On the Origins of Militant Non-violence* (New York, 1968). In India, Sudhir Kakkar, a practising psycho-analyst, has specialised in this kind of history, and has written such works as *Intimate Relations: Exploring Indian Sexuality* (Chicago, 1989). Another writer who has made psycho-history his field and has demonstrated its relevance to Indian culture is Ashis Nandy. He has explored the colonial impact on the unconscious mind in *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (Delhi, 1983). The discipline of psycho-history, established by Erikson, is now applied to specific subjects by non-specialists. This is especially notable in the subjects of religion, eros and sexuality. For instance, here are two highly controversial psycho-analytical studies of Ramakrishna Paramhamsa's mind and life: Jeffrey J. Kripal, *Kali's Child: The Mystical and the Erotic in the Life and Teachings of Ramakrishna* (Chicago, 1995); and Narasingha P. Sil, *Ramakrishna Revisited: A New Biography* (Lanham, Md, USA, 1998). In their studies of religion and culture, they have focused on the psycho-sexuality of the saint. Psycho-analysis is so well-established in India from the time of Freud himself that there are now histories of it. The Austrian author Christiane Hartnack has written *Psychoanalysis in Colonial India* (New Delhi, 2001), where she examines the birth and growth of psycho-analysis in India from the angle of culture theory.

As opposed to the psycho-analysts and psycho-historians, there is a group who call themselves 'social constructionists' (of post-modernist persuasion), who approach emotion from the angle of poststructural anthropology, critical theory and culture studies. They hold that emotion is totally relative to culture and have rejected Freud. In relation to Indian society, we may mention here Owen M. Lynch (ed.*), Divine Passions: the Social Construction of Emotion in India* (Delhi, 1990). Lynch argues that in India the conception of emotions and emotional life itself differ so radically from what prevails in the West that Westerners may never understand 'an Other, such as India.' This position has been rejected by some historians who, while locating emotion in primary impulses, trace its impact on culture as a real factor. Their treatment of emotion in history is broader than that of the psycho-historians in the sense that they explore not merely unconscious emotion, but also conscious sentiment. This newly emerging emotional history may be seen in Tapan Raychaudhuri, *Perceptions, Emotions, Sensibilities: Essays on India's Colonial and Post-Colonial Experiences* (New Delhi, 1999); and Rajat Kanta Ray, *Exploring Emotional History: Gender, Mentality and Literature in the Indian Awakening* (New Delhi, 2001).

29.7 SUMMARY

Contending schools, such as psycho-history, social constructionism, history of *mentalite*, emotional history, and so on, have added many strands to the historical explorations of religion, culture and mentality in India. The history of the mind is no longer simply the old intellectual history. The study of culture, religion and the mind, relating them to their

broader contemporaneous societal context, has enriched Indian history. This has broadened it out beyond the sort of historiography that at one time equated general history with the history of the state alone. In the process, intellectual history itself has been transformed. It is no longer confined simply to the ideas of the elite. The perceived identities and unconscious symbols of the mass of the population, and the emotional drives in whole societies, are being taken into consideration by historians.

29.8 EXERCISES

1) Discuss recent trend of using the history of mentality for the study of Indian culture.

2) Write a detailed note on the historical writings on Indian religion and culture.

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UNIT 30 ENVIRONMENT, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Structure

30.1 Introduction

30.2 Early Historiography

30.3 Recent Historiography

30.4 Role of Technology in Modern History

30.5 Summary

30.6 Exercises

30.1 INTRODUCTION

In the history and the historiography of modern India, science, technology and environment are closely related subjects. Massive demographic change, aided by science and technology, has changed the landscape beyond recognition. Neither Babar nor Warren Hastings would be able to tolerate the present aspect of the country. The transformation has recently attracted the attention of historians of India. It is not that technology, science and ecology as fundamental factors in Indian history escaped the notice of the past generations of historians. Nevertheless, it is only in the 1990s that a fair number of historians in India took these themes up as independent topics of research. However, there is no agreement among them about the impact of science and technology on the welfare of the population and the climate of the country. Their disagreements reflect deep divisions within public opinion, and in the government and politics of the country. There is science lobby, an economics and planning lobby, and an environment lobby. There are cries of coming disaster, and hot denials that there is cause for alarm. It is said that because of greenhouse effect of global industrialisation, the glaciers from which our rivers descend are receding fast. Historians have been sensitised to the problems of science and environment by these public debates. From the 1990s, independent historical monographs on these subjects have begun to appear. Even before that, however, certain historical questions had figured in their discussions as regards science and technology : was modern science and technology distorted by the phenomenon of colonial rule? What were the state of the sciences and the level of technology before the establishment of British supremacy? Such questions have been renewed recently.

30.2 EARLY HISTORIOGRAPHY

The British rule over India found a moral justification for itself by virtue of the benefits of reason and modern science it had extended to the colony. The British view of Indian civilisation was that it was long on religion and short on science. Seven centuries ago, early Muslim visitors to the country had a different view of the civilisation then prevailing in the land. Al Beruni gave equal and serious attention to both the religion and science of Hind around 1030. The Muslims themselves brought with them several new technical products, such as paper and the Persian wheel. Europe, which at that time borrowed several techniques from China and the Islamic world, later strode ahead in course of the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century and the industrial revolution in the eighteenth century. This constituted, upon the British conquest of India, the ground for

the European claim of scientific and civilisational superiority. The Indian scientists who emerged during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the colleges and universities of British India did not deny the positive role the British had played in bringing modern science to India. At the same time, they maintained that India had an ancient scientific tradition. This dual attitude is reflected in the work of the Chemistry Professor of the Presidency College of Bengal, Dr. P.C. Ray, who, besides making major chemical discoveries in the field of nitrates, wrote a work on *The History of Hindu Chemistry*. Published in two volumes in 1902 and 1908, this was a world–renowned scientist's historically substantiated refutation of the imperialist idea of science as the achievement of Western enlightened thought alone. That science had multi-civilisational origins would be argued by many other historians in the future, including Joseph Needham of *Science and Civilization in China*.

Within the leadership of the nationalist movement in India, two distinct attitudes crystallised at about this time as regards modern science and its historical effect on Indian civilisation. Mohan Das Karamchand Gandhi denounced railways, lawyers and doctors, and declared machinery to be a 'great sin'. He said in *Hind Swaraj* (1990) : 'It is machinery that has impoverished India'. Jawaharlal Nehru, his disciple, could not agree with this view of the matter. In a tract entitled *The Unity of India* (1941), he declared: 'Politics led me to economics, and this led me inevitably to science and the scientific approach to all our problems of hunger and poverty.' As Prime Minister he transformed the landscape of India by means of the Five Year Plans, the great dams and the steel plants. Modern day radical environmental historians invoke Gandhi rather than Nehru in the debate about science, technology and the ecological question.

In the later colonial period, an ecological query emerged: how far had the face of the country changed over time? The economist Radhakamal Mukherjee, who wrote a work on *Social Ecology* (London, 1942) in this period, examined historical evidence of riverine and ecological change in an interesting work

entitled *The Changing face of Bengal: a Study in Riverine Economy* (Calcutta, 1938). Nor was he the first to record ecological evidence of change. Even in the early nineteenth century, the British official D. Butter, in a report entitled *An Outline of the Topography and Statistics of the Southern Districts of Oudh* (Calcutta, 1839), had reported the 'unremitting advance' of the hot summer wind (*loo*) in recent decades. It may be noted that the northern Gangetic plains, the area he reported on, had experienced large-scale deforestation from the Mughal period onwards. But in the other areas, agriculture was still considerably mixed with jungle in the early nineteenth century, a fact commented on, for instance, by James Taylor in the *A Sketch of the Topography and Statistics of Dacca* (Calcutta, 1840). Colonial officials showed an interest in historical geography, and a pioneering work in this respect was Alexander Cunningham, *The Ancient Geography of India* (London, 1871). Later Jadunath Sarkar wrote *The India of Aurangzeb (Topography, Statistics and Road), (*Calcutta, 1901) Such works recorded evidence that even before modern science and technology intervened, demographic and commercial factors had been changing the face of the country over time. It is only recently, however, that this issue has been explored by historians in a self conscious ecological manner.

30.3 RECENT HISTORIOGRAPHY

In the new historical studies of science, technology and environment that emerged in the 1990s several key themes and questions provided a sophisticated framework of discussion. What was the politics of science and technology? Were they the means of

imperial domination and / or national reconstruction? What was the technological impact upon the economic organisation of life – to enrich or impoverish? What was the popular reception of science – acceptance or resistance? What was the impact of ecological change upon the question of welfare – partially beneficial or wholly negative?

Commentaries on recent historical writings have pointed out that the above-mentioned concerns were not entirely new. In fact, the same issues had implicitly formed a part of imperial, nationalist and popular discussions and sayings. Let us take a few instances. For one, imperial planners who laid down the railways, among them Bartle Frere of Bombay in 1863 proclaimed clearly that the railways would quadruple the British Military strength in India. For another, one strand of nationalist opinion, represented by Gandhi in 1908, declared openly: 'Railways, lawyers and doctors have impoverished the country, so much so that, if we do not wake up in time, we shall be ruined.' To take a third and rather interesting instance, there had been attempts to study the popular response to the innovations of the modern age among the nineteenth century folk songs collected by William Crooke. One was on the train and it ran as follows: 'Eating no corn, drinking water / by the force of steam it goes / it goes on no plain road, on rods of iron it goes / In front of the engines, behind the cars, *bhak, bhak* they go.' The attitude reflects neither approval nor rejection, just a strange new addition accepted as part of the landscape, it has been argued. What was new about the new historiography was that it dealt with all these questions in a connected way, in analytical frame. Earlier discussions of science and technology had not always shown good, critical sense. On the one hand, patriotic Indians sought to upstage Western Science and Technology by claiming to have discovered everything in the Vedas. On the other hand, colonial statements on scientific and technological progress were simply and approvingly reproduced by some historians without examining the motives behind those statements.

Among recent works on science and technology which have all focused in one way or the other on the question of power and politics may be mentioned Dipak Kumar, *Science and The Raj* (New Delhi, 1995); David Arnold, *Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth Century India* (Berkeley, 1993), Gyan Prakash, *Another Reason : Science and The Imagination of Modern India* (Princeton, 1999); David Arnold, *Science. Technology and Medicine in Colonial India* (Cambridge, 2000). Arnold and Prakash, both belonging to the Subalternist school, regarded science as an integral part of the political sphere. Arnold brought science under the technique of colonial discourse analysis; Prakash on the other hand, treated science as part of the discourse of imagining the nation as a modern, rational body of people. Both saw the new technology as a means of forging 'a link between space and the state' (Prakash, *Another Reason*), and science, therefore, as very much a matter of power and domination. In the name of science, the colonial administration pursued policies of domination biased towards maintaining imperial authority and not the welfare of the colonised. In the name of science again, the nationalist movement and the Indian scientists sympathetic to that movement sought an alternative centre of power, an imagined community called the nation that would liberate itself by means of the modern spirit of scientific rationality. As for the colonised themselves (the so-called subalterns), the subalternists speculated that popular resistance to colonial domination might arise from the people's mental association of railways and telegraphs with calamities such as famines and epidemics. There emerged historical studies of the mortality caused by plague, malaria, small-pox, cholera and the influenza epidemic of 1918; the political unrest and administrative chaos caused by disease; and the popular response to harsh colonial public health policies.

Ecological history, which emerged as a separate branch of history in the 1990s, was a response to the world-wide environmental movement. In 1987, C.A. Bayly declared in *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire, New Cambridge History of India, Vol II*, (Cambridge, 1987): 'Ecological change in India is the coming subject, but no overview has appeared.' Bayly himself concluded that the hundred years following 1780 witnessed 'the beginnings of extensive deforestation in the subcontinent. The first work of the new ecological history, Ramchandra Guha's *The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalaya* (Delhi, 1991), concerned itself with the Sublternist theme of domination and resistance rather than with the actual tracking of environmental change over the long duration. It was a study of the emergence of a popular movement in the Himalayan foothills against the commercial exploitation of the forest resources of the Himalayas. The next work, Ramchandra Guha and Madhav Gadgil's *This Fissured Land: an Ecological History of India* (Delhi, 1992), was wider in scope, and it took the following position: 'In India the ongoing struggle between the peasant and industrial modes of resource use has come in two stages: colonial and post-colonial. It has left in its wake a fissured land, ecologically and socially fragmented beyond belief and, to some observers, beyond repair.' Other works, which focused on conservation and the adverse ecological consequences of colonial policies, included Richard H. Grove, *Green Imperialism : Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens, and the Origins of Environmentalism 1600 – 1860* (Cambridge, 1994) and Mahesh Rangarajan, *Fencing the Forest: Conservation and Ecological Change in India's Central Provinces 1860-1914* (New Delhi, 1996). The loss of the rights of the forest–dwellers was a principal theme of ecological history, as was the development of resistance and of efforts at conservation.

More conventional economic histories had already focused on the impact of colonial rule on the environment. The advance of the agricultural frontier and irrigation canals, with the attendant problems of salination, water-logging and spread of disease, were studied, among others, by Elizabeth Whitcombe, *Agrarian Conditions in Northern India: the United Provinces under British Rule, 1860-1900* (Berkeley, 1972); Ian Stone, *Canal Irrigation in British India: Perspectives on Technological Change in a Peasant Economy* (Cambridge, 1984); and M. Mufakharul Islam, *Irrigation, Agriculture and the Raj: Punjab 1887-1947* (New Delhi, 1997). It emerged that the roads and canals interrupted the natural watercourses, yet on balance it could not be denied that irrigation increased agricultural productivity. A study of the impact of the railways, by Robert Varady among others, shows that the railways depleted the Himalayan timber region, wiped out the remaining jungles on the plains, and could carry on only because of the advent of cheap coal. Roads and railways formed disease–laden puddles, spread epidemics and speeded up soil erosion. Nevertheless, economic historians such as John Hurd and Mukul Mukherjee, have concluded that the railways promoted internal trade, reduced seasonal fluctuations and inter–market price differentials for grain and cotton, and integrated the market in bulk commodities.

Economic historians, rather than ecological historians, have mapped the long-term recession of forest and pasture under the onslaught of agriculture in Indian history. Shireen Moosvi, in her *Man and Nature in the Mughal Era* (Symposium paper, Indian History Congress, 1993), established that cultivation doubled between 1601 and 1909 at the expense of pasture and waste in Northern India.

A balanced picture emerges when we take together the work of the mainstream economic historians and the new historians of science, technology and environment. New dimensions of history have emerged, the harmful effects of modern science and technology on environment have been highlighted, yet the benefits have also been stressed.

30.4 ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN MODERN HISTORY

The emergence of environmental history has induced historians to rethink the role of science and technology in modern Indian history. This is because environmental historians have drawn attention to the manner in which technological progress has affected the natural environment, sometimes quite adversely in certain areas, during the colonial and post-colonial periods. The earlier uncritical attitudes to technological progress have given way to a more critical treatment of the theme of science and technology. British colonial historians were quite certain that British rule in India had worked to the betterment of the lot of the Indians through the introduction of science and technology. They were also convinced that Indians, at least initially, were resistant to the radical technical innovations such as railways and telegraph. This formed part of J.H. Kaye's explanation of the revolt of 1857 in his famous book, *A History of the Sepoy War in India* (London, 1867). The Hindu priesthood, said Kaye, were confounded by the railways cars, which travelled, without horses or bullocks, at the rate of thirty miles an hour, and the electric wires, which in a few minutes carried a message across a whole province. The prodigious triumphs over time and space achieved by these 'fire carriages' and 'lightning posts' put to shame the wisdom of the Brahmans and, in his view, produced a reaction resulting in the revolt. The British colonial view was that, after the suppression of the revolt, there was genuine progress brought about by the improvements in technology, communications and transport. In the well-known book *Modern India and the West: a Study of the Interactions of their Civilizations* (London, 1941), the editor, L.S.S.O' Malley, who was a colonial official, devoted a whole chapter to 'Mechanism and Transport'. In this chapter he surveyed the new forms of communication, including railways, broadcasting and films, and his estimation of the consequences for India were clearly positive.

It took some time after Independence for studies of technology to acquire an analytical historical perspective. A preliminary venture in this direction was a series of lectures by leading scientists and technical educators at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, edited by B.R. Nanda as *Science and Technology in India* (New Delhi, 1977). Here, too, the impact was judged in somewhat uncritically positive terms, with an emphasis on the progressive leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru. Technology was treated in such preliminary works as part of the history of science. It took some time to give more complex and critical attention to technological history on its own. Many historians in the West continued to emphasise the progress brought about by technology transfer from the West to non-Western societies. Daniel R. Headrick's *The Tentacles of Progress: Technology Transfer in the Age of Imperialism, 1850-1940* (New York, 1988) dwelt on the transfer of a range of new technologies, such as railways, botany, urban infrastructures, metallurgy, technical education, etc., with special attention to India. A more critical assessment for India specifically was made in Roy McLeod and Dipak Kumar (eds.), *Technology and the Raj* (New Delhi, 1995). An important article in this collection, 'The Building of India's Railways: the Application of Western Technology in the Colonial Periphery', by Ian Derbyshire, pointed out that railway development in India, unlike UK, secured few direct, 'backward linkage' benefits. Labour market conditions discouraged greater mechanisation. Technical development remained 'colonial-dependent'. In comparative terms, India lagged behind not only the USA, but also Russia, where innovation in constructional, equipment and operational spheres was conspicuously greater.

Backward linkage effects relate to the stimulation of activities in the economy that ensure supply to a new line of production. Forward linkage effects, on the other hand,

mean the stimulation of demand for other products resulting from the new product. In the case of railway construction in India, a forward linkage benefit might have come about with the construction of locomotives. This hardly happened during the colonial period on an appreciable scale. In a pioneering article entitled 'Great Britain and the Supply of Railway Locomotives in India: a Case Study of "Economic Imperialism"', first published in *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* (October, 1965), F. Lehmann calculated that during the entire period of British rule in India, not more than 700 locomotives were built in the country, despite the vast railway network that existed by 1947. All the other locomotives came from aboard, and, predictably, most were constructed in Great Britain. Had the railway authorities gone in for building locomotives in India on a bigger scale, this might have laid the basis of a heavy engineering industry before Independence. As it happened, such a development had to await the coming of the Nehru era. One noted author who analysed the limited economic stimulus resulting from colonial technological innovation was Daniel Thorner. He noted the limited effect of colonial railway and steamship enterprise on India's capital market in *Investment in Empire: British Railway and Steam Shipping Enterprise in India 1825-1849* (Philadelphia, 1950). In yet another notable contribution entitled 'The Pattern of Railway Development in India' first published in *Far Eastern Quarterly* (1955), he went even further, and noted: 'India alone of the countries with great railway networks is unindustrialized.'

It may be noted that such critical observations of the historical role of the transfer of science and technology from Britain to India were still formulated in economic rather than environmental terms. The emergence of environmental history added a new dimension to the existing criticism of the role of technology and science. Both the economic and environmental arguments have been brought together by Ian J. Kerr, the editor of an important anthology of articles on the railroads entitled *Railways in Modern India* (New Delhi, 2001). Kerr has faithfully included the criticisms of the railway network by both the new environmental historians and the more conventional economic historians. At the same time, he has not forgotten to emphasise the positive benefits of railways in particular and technology in general. One aspect of science and technology is the import of Western medicine in India. Here, too, recent research has highlighted not merely the positive effects, but also some of the negative developments. Over all, however, the new research, even when at its most critical (as in the works of David Arnold referred to above), has still not dislodged the impression that technology brought important benefits. Without science, technology and modern medicine, India's vast and growing population would have been more (and not less) vulnerable to famines and epidemics.

30.5 SUMMARY

The progress of research has established the history of science, technology and ecology as viable branches of the discipline of history. This has added new and important dimensions to general history. At the same time, detailed research has demonstrated the close inter-relationship between the histories of science, technology and environment. All this has altered the shape of history.

30.6 EXERCISES

1) Write a note on the role of technology in modern history.

2) What are the views of the nationalists on the nature and role of modern technology?

3) Discuss some of the historical works on science and technology.