

Broad:-

① Inquiry, ② Research

PRELIMINARIES

③ Exploration

Information

Historia or

1. History

The English word 'history' is derived from the Greek word *istoria* meaning inquiry, research, exploration or information. In a broad sense history is a systematic account of the origin and development of humankind, a record of the unique events and movements in its life. It is an attempt to recapture however imperfectly, that which is, in a sense, lost forever.

History is the result of the interplay of man with his environment and with his fellowmen. Man has always expressed himself in terms of certain basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter, social and political organization, knowledge of his environment and transmission of such knowledge, self-expression, and religious and philosophical beliefs. Such activities together make up the universal culture pattern.¹ When men come to share the same institutions and ways of life they may be said to possess the same 'culture'. Fundamental differences between groups are essentially differences in their cultures. Cultures do not remain wholly static or isolated, but change over periods of time and interact with other cultures. Cultures interact both in peace and war. When a people come to have a highly complex cultural pattern resting upon an intricate social organization and exerting wide control over nature, they may be said to have achieved what is called 'civilization'.² Civilization in all its varied aspects constitutes the subject matter of history. Such a cultural approach to history would make it a biography of civilization.

History is the living past of man. It is the attempt made by man through centuries to reconstruct, describe and interpret his own

past. In modern times, particularly from the period of Niebuhr and Ranke, it has come to mean the attempt to reconstruct the past in a scholarly fashion, sticking to certain definite rules of establishing fact, interpreting evidence, dealing with source material, etc.³

2. Historiography

Historiography literally means the art of writing history. It is the history of history, or the history of historical writings. Historiography tells the story of the successive stages of the evolution or development of historical writings. It has come to include the evolution of the ideas and techniques associated with the writing of history, and the changing attitudes towards the nature of history itself. Ultimately it comprises the study of the development of man's sense for the past.⁴

There have been differences in the nature and quality, as well as the quantity of historical literature in the different ages and among different peoples. These differences have generally reflected changes in social life and beliefs and the presence or absence of a sense of history. The spirit that moved the Greek and Roman historians was different from that which inspired the Christian historians of the Middle Ages. The historical writings of the Italian Renaissance, particularly that of Machiavelli, represented a harsh reaction to religious influence in history writing. The reaction reached its climax in the historians of the Enlightenment—Voltaire, Gibbon, Hume and Robertson. The pace of change has been greater ever since as the study of the past has increasingly come under the influence of manifold ideas. Historiography, as a special branch of history, traces these changes through the centuries.

While history proper is the historian's reconstruction of the past, historiography, says Arthur Marwick, is really the history of historical thought—it is not only the theory or practice of history. It began with the early compositions of advanced literate peoples like the Greeks and the Chinese of ancient times when, however, the absence of a system of chronology and method of criticism made the historian's task extremely difficult and uncertain. From those crude beginnings history writing has made tremendous strides towards complex and sophisticated developments in our own times. A unique branch of history, the study of historiography, says Marwick, is of particular value to researchers and professionals,⁵

preliminary to any important historical endeavor, but of only remote concern to the general reader. By holding up models of how history has been written through the centuries, it guides the research scholar and the professional historian.

3. Preconditions of Historiography

Records

History is the historian's reconstruction of the past. The principal materials of reconstruction at the disposal of the historian are records or remains that the past has left behind. They serve him as evidence of the facts that he establishes. The records are of a rich variety—buildings, inscriptions, medals, coins, edicts, chronicles, travelogues, decrees, treaties, official correspondence, private letters and diaries. It is through the study of such history-as-records that the historian gains knowledge of history-as-events. History deals with evidence. Hence the dictum 'No records, no history.'

Critical Method / Critical methods
 Because history deals with evidence, the material that the past leaves behind as records has to be used with great care for the simple reason that they may not be wholly authentic or genuine. Far from completely trusting his sources the historian should presume that all data are doubtful unless otherwise proved. There have been instances of spurious documents like the *Donation of Constantine* passing as authentic for centuries. The historian should aim at presenting as true a picture of the past as possible. The technique evolved to arrive at the truth of past events is called **historical method**. This method is largely analytical, consisting of external and internal criticism. External criticism or critical scholarship determines the authorship, the place, and the time of a document. Such information is crucial in determining the value of a document. Internal or interpretative or higher criticism finds out whether the contents of a document can be accepted as true or not. External and internal criticism together pronounce the verdict on the authenticity or veracity of facts as presented in the records. From the time of Niebuhr and Ranke, the German historians of the level nineteenth century, historical method has been developed to a level where the possibility of error in arriving at the truth of a past event

has been brought down to the minimum. Indeed, J.B. Bury in his inaugural lecture at Cambridge declared history to be a science 'no less and no more'. But it is to be admitted that the subjective element in history makes such an ideal impossible to realize.

Historical Sense

A keen sense of the past, i.e., historical sense, has not been uniformly present among the different peoples of the world, and at different times. Ancient Greece and Rome as well as Judaism and Christianity have bequeathed to the European a strong sense of history. Ancient Chinese and medieval Muslim schools of history have been central elements in their civilizations. In comparison, the historical sense of the Hindus of the ancient and medieval times was negligible.

But 'historical sense' means much more. Like history, the other social sciences, whether sociology, anthropology, political science or economics, study man in society and they do deal with the problem of change. But, writes Arthur Marwick,

the characteristic which marks history out from these other disciplines is a specific concern with the element of change through time...the social scientist looks for the common factors, the regular patterns, discernible in man's activities in society; the historian looks at the way societies differ from each other at different points in time, how through time societies change and develop.⁵

It is his basic concern with change through time that makes it absolutely necessary for the historian to know when exactly the events which he describes took place. To narrate, analyze and interpret events, he must know the order of their occurrence.

A TEXTBOOK OF HISTORIOGRAPHY

500 BC to AD 2000

E. SREEDHARAN



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