



Saarth E-Journal

Saarth E-Journal of Research

E-mail : sarthejournal@gmail.com
www.sarthejournal.com

ISSN NO : 2395-339X
Peer Reviewed
Vol.8 No.18

Impact Factor
Quarterly
Apr-May-June2023

HISTORIOGRAPHICAL TRENDS IN RECENT WRITINGS

ASHWANI RAJ

Historiography as distinguished from history, deals with the art of writing history across like the railways and present day universities. Modern writings an early India began in colonica times. This does not mean that we did not have our own traditions of writing history, but the kind of history that we are now used to made its beginning in the last phase of the 18th century with the establishment of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. Sir william Jones and his contemporaries laid the foundations of this new effort what we had earlier were Puranic genealogies, biographies and monastic and temple chronicles which contained aspects of our historical tradition. However they also represented a complex mix of legends and historical facts, posing difficulties of separating one form the other. Unless one has knowledge of the legends, mythology and the Epic-Puranic stories it is difficult to recover history from these sources. In other words, history is there in these records but it is not open and obvious. Modern late 18th and 19th century history in Europe was focused on the state, nobility, military and administrative history. It was based on and awareness of evidence, causation or explanation of happenings, emphasis on chronology and narration involving a succession of sequences. From James Mill in the early part of the 19 century to vincent Smith in the first decade of the 20th century, British administrative scholars produced a series of influential works. They had two advantages. First, as the pioneers they were the first to make use of the advances made in the knowledge about early India largely owing to the discovery of old historical sites and developments in studies relating to ancient Indian literature inscriptions and manage. The gradual advance in archeological information also enriched the source base though much of the written history was derived from literary evidence, Secondly, as colonial masters they had control over the generation and spread of knowledge among the administrators and the emerging university systems. In the early stages indians as people with local wisdom and as translators were involved in the process, but they did not control or provide direction to it.

Colonial Indology

colonial Indology or imperialist historiography defined what they deemed to be the characteristic features of Indian culture and civilization. The continuous presence of petty states and the absence of large political systems or their periodic presence owing to foreign influence, beginning with Aryan invasion; the absence of popular participation in local affairs. Indians as people immersed in religion or the search for things spiritual and the harmonious, unchanging self-sufficient village are among the ideas whose origins go back to this historiography. So also the communal periodization of Indian history into Hindu India, Muslim India, etc. owes its emergence to James Mills, Multi-volume History of British India. The basic premises of Indian history and civilization laid down by Mill continued to cast their shadow on the works of Smith, separated in time by almost a century. Almost 15% of his work Early History of India was devoted to the successful campaigns of Alexander in India and his inability to appreciate the Harshacharita and the description of India at the death of Harsha as relapsing into its usual chaos are seen as examples of his inability to appreciate things realistically.

V.A Smith said that, "The triumphant progress of Alexander from the Himalaya to sea demonstrated the inherent weakness of great Asiatic armies when confronted with European skill and discipline. The Harshacharita according to V.A. Smith was "amazingly clever, though irritating performance; executed in the worst possible taste and yet containing passages of admirable and vivid description. Monstuart Elphinstone, located between these two towering figures, despite his sympathetic understanding of India did not feel confident to contest Mill. His history do not end or begin with the going or coming of rules with particular religious beliefs and practices changes in economy, society and culture help us to make a break between periods in history. India being characterized by diversity on grounds of multiple regions, religious, languages and ethnicity and ever threatening to fall apart was yet another invention of colonial Indology.

The greatest impetus to Indological studies was given by the German born scholar F.Max Mueller, who was largely based in England. The Revolt of 1857 caused Britain to realize that it badly needed a deeper knowledge of the manners and social systems of an alien people over whom it ruled. Similarly, the Christian missionaries sought to uncover the vulnerabilities in the Hindu religion to win convert and strengthen the British empire. To meet these needs ancient scriptures were translated on a massive scale under the editorship of Max Mueller. Altogether 50 volumes, some in several parts, were published under the sacred Books of the East series.

In the introductions¹ to these volumes and the books based on them. Max Mueller and other western scholars made certain generalizations about the nature of ancient Indian history and society. They stated that the ancient Indians lacked a sense of history, especially of the element of time and chronology. They added that Indians were accustomed to despotic rule, and also natives were so engrossed in the problems of spiritualism or of the next world that they felt no concern about the problems of this world. The western scholars stressed that Indians had experienced neither a sense of nationhood nor any form of self-government.

Admittedly, these scholars made enormous contributions to various areas of study enabling the recovery and piecing together of the past. However, in trying to examine them and understand the implications of their assumptions and purpose it is said that the underlying belief was the superiority of English and European cultural heritage and inferiority of the Indian inheritance. It has been argued that the downplaying of the Indian past was deliberate and done to justify British colonialism. The unchanging caste system and village society or life-threatening diversity or even the numerous petty despotic states could be reformed and held together only through the continuation of the British Raj³. It needs to be reformed that analytical categories like caste and Indian village become important for colonial writings only

in the second phase or pre-mutiny period of British rule. The first stage was marked by an uncritical glorification and the creation of an idyllic picture of our ancient past, when the *Shakuntalam* and *Manusmris* were translated into English. Modern research in the history of ancient India began only in the second half of the 18th century to serve the needs of British colonial administration. When Bengal and Bihar fell under the rule of the East India company in 1765, they found it difficult to administer the Hindu law of inheritance. Therefore, in 1776, the *Manu Smriti* (the law-book of Manu) which was considered authoritative, was translated into English as *A code of Gentoo laws*. The initial efforts to understand ancient laws and customs, which continued largely until the 18th century, culminated in the establishment in Calcutta in 1784 of the Asiatic society of Bengal. It was set up by a civil servant of the East India Company, Sir William Jones. He translated the play *Abhijnanashakuntalam* into English in 1789: the *Bhagvad gita*, the most popular Hindu religious text was translated into English by Wilkins in 1785. This period of romantic love with India was followed by what is usually described as the Utilitarian indictment of India's past. The utilitarian perspective basically argued for a changeless society in the Indian subcontinent. It also suggested that this backward society can be changed through legislation which could be used by the British administrators to bring about 'progress' in the otherwise stagnant and retrograde Indian society. The utilitarians also are credited with the dubious theory of the Oriental Despotism. The theory of Oriental Despotism argued for an existence of a system of governance that consisted of a despotic ruler with absolute power at the top and the self-sufficient villages at bottom.

Thus, the history of India is seen through a series of stereotypes rooted in religious identity. No aspect of society or polity has escaped this religious view, be it social tensions, political battles or cultural differences. In sum, British interpretations of Indian history served to denigrate the Indian character and achievements, and justify colonial rule. A few of these observations appeared to have some validity. Thus, in comparison to the Chinese, Indians did not show any strong sense of chronology although in the earlier stage, important events were dated with reference to the death of Gautam Buddha. However, generalizations made by colonialist historians were by and large either false or grossly exaggerated, but served as good propaganda material for the perpetuation of the despotic British rule. Their emphasis on the Indian tradition of one-man rule could justify the system which vested all powers in the hands of the viceroy. Similarly, if Indians were obsessed with the problems of the next world, the British colonial masters had no option but to look after their life in this world. Without any experience of self-rule in the past, how could the natives manage their affairs in the present? At the heart of all such generalizations lay the need to demonstrate that Indians were incapable of governing themselves.

References :-

1. R.C. Majumdar- *The Journal of Indian History*, Diamond jubilee 16 volume, 1982, Part I, 316
2. 'Ramesh Chandra Dutt' in Sen, ed. *Historical and Historiography in Modern India*, 322
3. Radha Kumar Mukherji in Sen, ed. *Historians and Historiography in Modern India*, 7
4. E. Sreedharan, -*A Textbook of Historiography* Orient Longman, 4, P 429