

Introduction to History

Assignment 1

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What role does interpretation play in the making of a fact?

To answer this question first see what are the definitions of fact and interpretations are and why there is a need for interpretation

Fact: “a thing that is known or proved to be true ”

Interpretation: “the action of explaining the meaning of something.”

Facts alone don't tell much they need some interpretation. Interpretation does not alter what a fact means but places the fact in a context and attempts to explain its significance. Now let's see what history and its facts is and how do we interpret them. So, we can say that history is a record of all the important (or all) events that occurred in past especially related to human beings, but the source of records are generally texts, paintings and other mediums too which are containing the writer's perspective and beliefs and mainly depends on their sources or evidence or proofs, and since a bunch of evidence/proofs collectively describes an event or series of events but the pieces of evidence are not necessarily connected to each other and to fill those gaps writer has to make some things up from his/her creativeness or guess work where some biasedness of his/her option also comes into the picture which leads to different versions of a story about the historical event they might go hand in hand or may conflict with each other not completely but may be at a part of a larger story.

Let's look at a case of “The Many Narratives Of Somanatha” mentioned by Romila Thapar in her book “The Past as Present” describes why history shouldn't be written based on only one source we have to examine all other evidence and narratives related to that event to form a final narrative. This text was mainly describing the raid at Somanatha temple in Gujrat by Sultan of Ghazni, Mahmud in 11th century where he broke the idol and looted the temple, and at time Gujrat was centre for trade for Arab and Persian Gulf countries which results in multiple narratives form different historian of different ideology and background some Turkish and Persian historians describe it as the temple was of Lord Shiva and Mahmud looted the temple and destroyed the idol but Islamic poet describes Somanatha as a Muslim city and shrine and images were destructed and idol of pre-islamic goddess was secretly taken away by a trader but according to Jain poet describe that Muhmad had raided may places but was unable to destruct the icon of Lord Mahavira and use this incident to show power of Lord Mahavira all these stories are not go hand in hand but common narrative is Muhmad tried to loot the temple and in 18th century Lord Ellenborough, the Governor-General order to commander of British army in Afghanistan, to bring back sandalwood gates from the tomb of Mahmud at Ghazni, believed to have been looted by Mahmud from Somanatha to cater religious prejudices but this wasn't mentioned in above narratives but as they arrived people got to know it has no relation with Somanatha temple moreover with India but the were of Egyptian origin and it was used .

From the above examples, I concluded that historians could differ with one another both because the “facts” are source depended and that makes them almost meaningless without an effort to assign meaning to them and a narrative depends on the historian’s(writer’s) creativity as well as the audience to be addressed and its purpose that can be social, economic, or political too.

In my opinion historical interpretation is more than just opinion. It is informed by a knowledge of the facts and how they fit together to create a coherent story by which we describe, analyse, evaluate, and create an explanation of past events. Historians use interpretation to express what they believe the past means. They try to explain why and how things happened the way they did, as well as why certain aspects of the past are significant. And before agreeing with any single narrative, it is worth looking at these various narratives too, because their narratives tell us about how a variety of people, depending on their interests, continued to perceive the event and to think about why this perception differed in different narratives and try to seek the difference in fact and its interpreted narrative. Sometimes these conflicting interpretations can lead to communal riots too (sadly not a new thing in India).

I am not telling that interpretation shouldn’t be present because just like in a computer it may produce masses of data, but it will require our interpretation of the data for people to understand it but historian(or interpreter) must care about what his narrative make an impact on the audience.