

History – IV

History in India

Introduction to the Human Sciences

Lecture 5

16 Jan 2018

Lecture Contents

1. Origin and Development
2. Important Discoveries and contributions
3. Main “schools” of History

Origin

- Orientalists
 - Collecting Traditions and Customs
 - Asiatick Society, 1784, Fort William Calcutta, William Jones
 - "...enquiries will be extended to whatever is performed by man or produced by nature."
 - H H Wilson, 1808, Indians made members
 - Asiatic Society Bombay, 1805
- Liberals and Utilitarians
 - James Mill, *The History of British India*, 1806 to 1817
 - Never set foot in India, knew no India language, *thus* claimed objectivity

ORIENTALISTS THOUGHT HIGHLY OF INDIAN CULTURE AND HISTORY
LIBERALS ARGUED IT WAS BRUTISH, SAVAGE AND BACKWARD

British View

- 1857 : Victory of Conservative Liberalism
 - Entrenched a deep fear of Indians and sense of superiority
 - Gazetteers and Settlement Reports
 - Census 1872; then 1881
- PERIODISATION: Hindu, Muslim, British
 - Hindu India from beginning of history to Muslim invasions
 - Muslim India from 10th – 11th centuries
 - British India as modern and progressive
- WHIG HISTORY: Political focus, importance of personalities
- THREE AXES: Religion, Race (Caste) and Language

Important Milestones

- Brahmi and Kharoshti script
 - James Prinsep
 - Devanampriya Piyadasi
- Archeological Survey of India
 - Alexander Cunningham
 - Buddhist traditions, Ashoka, Khajuraho
- Mohenjodaro and Harappa
 - Known since 1856-7, bricks used for building railways
 - 1921-22: full discovery of the two cities
- National Archives of India
 - Imperial Records Department (1891)

Main “Schools”

- British / Colonial
- Nationalist
- Marxist
- Subaltern

Differences

PERSPECTIVE ON HISTORY: WHAT HAPPENED, HOW AND WHY
METHOD OF DOING HISTORY: WHICH SOURCES, THEIR
INTERPRETATION

British / Colonial History of India

- Claimed there was nothing called India or Indian
 - Convenient geographical moniker
 - Too many disparities, no unity
 - Empire, not a nation or culture
 - Each community, group, region and caste had separate history
- Identified Oriental Despotism, and Village Community
- Claimed British Rule was *agent* of change as well as unification
- Claimed Indians do not want independence but place at high table
 - Only the elites and not the masses
 - Not nationalism but self-interest; “seditious babu”
- “Cambridge School”
 - John Gallagher, Anil Seal, Gordon Johnson, P J Marshall, D K Fieldhouse

Nationalist History

- India had History and a tradition of History writing
- Stressed the greatness of UNIFYING EMPIRES...
 - Ashoka, Gupta, Kushan, Mughal
- ...Unifying ideologies
 - Vedas, Buddhism, Shankaracharya, Bhakti
- Sought CAUSES FOR CONQUEST
 - by British or Mughals depending on political tilt
- Worked to write ONE Indian history
- Romesh Chunder Dutt; Jadunath Sarkar
 - Mughals, Rajputs, Shivaji, Bengal, Economic History, Sanskrit sources
- Jawaharlal Nehru
 - Discovery of India
- Romila Thapar, Bipan Chandra

Marxist Historians

- D. D. Kosambi
 - Materialist analysis
 - Laid down the scientific tools for studying history
 - Example of how to use physical and literary sources
 - Attempted to question British periodisation
- R. S. Sharma, Irfan Habib, Sumit Sarkar...
- Identified economic and social foundations of Indian History
- Fore-grounded class struggle and role of common people
- Freedom Struggle against both British Rule and Indian oppressors
- India became a nation in and through its freedom struggle

Subaltern Studies

- Post-Colonial Historiography
- Influenced by Antonio Gramsci, Edward Said, Michel Foucault
- Elite – Subaltern
- Reading sources “Against the Grain”
- Stressed “Autonomous world” of the peasant and tribal (also women, lower castes...)
- Claimed “Indigenous World-view”; non-colonised
- 1981, *Subaltern Studies* Volume I (total 13 till now)
- Spread from India to the world
- Ranajit Guha, Partha Chatterjee, Gyanendra Pandey, Shahid Amin, David Arnold...

Assignment

1. How does the fakes, errors and mistakes in historical records influence the writing of history?

Readings:

- E H Carr, *What is History* (Ch 1 & 3)
- Umberto Eco, *This is Not the End of the Book*; (Ch. 4, 5, 7, 8, & 12)
- Romila Thapar, "Somnatha and Mahmud", (*Frontline* article).

OR

2. What were the main features of Gandhi's leadership of India's freedom struggle?

Readings:

- Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India*, (Ch 5, 6, & 7)
- Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *From Plassey to Partition*, (Ch 6 & 7)