

Development of Colonial Historiography

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ABSTRACT: *In India historiography began in the age of colonialisation. After the advent of the Britisher's in India, though they started with the trade purpose, gradually they are successful in setting up of the British Empire in India. During this period the western historiography got their ground and historiography has been started in the mode of western historiography. This western mode of historiography, we can notice several stages. One of the first stages of historiography was colonial historiography. In light of this in the present article the development of colonial historiography has been discussed.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The tradition of Indian history passes on ancient events from generation to generation rather than analyzing how history was created and constructed. The legacy of historiography has been the contribution of western tradition. For one or the other reason, historiography has retained its importance since the 19th century. In the 17th to 18th centuries, westerners in lieu of their colonial activities began research in the interest of politics and economy. At that time many scholars supplied the world of knowledge with the information on cultural, traditional, philosophical way of life of the eastern countries. Many scholars opined that eastern countries are unlike the western and initiated the discussion and their importance and limitations. These eastern countries mainly included the present days. Asian continent, Royal Asiatic society started by William Jones in 1784 is the first institutionalized form of such studiesⁱ. There were two main sources of inspiration behind such eastern studies. One was the need of imperialism and the other was the inspiration of the Romantic age.

Need of Imperialism : When many of the eastern countries came under the colonial rule of the British, in order to understand the resources, legal systems, revenue systems and to do developmental activities and to understand the mindset of the people colonial governments encouraged such studies. As these studies aimed at providing practical suggestions to the government plans, they studied Indian society with European 'utilitarian' and 'Liberal' outlook and suggested the necessary improvements. James Mill is one of prominent historians among these. 'A History of British India' is one of the significant works written in the early 19th century.

Inspiration from the Western Romanticism : The philosophy of western Romanticism was critical about western age of reason. They thought that Eastern knowledge and philosophical depth was more valuable than the western one and this philosophical vision was a great miss to the western modernity. But considering from both points of view from Renaissance and Romanticism, there was no much basic differentiation about the conception on the east. Most of the civilization of the east retained their essence with the growth of the modernity but the west achieved modernity. Thus the civilizations of the east did not find much regress like west. Behind all these ideas there is a concept that the east has disoticism which resulted in the backwardness of the eastⁱⁱ.

Many thinkers of Romanticism described this stage of India as 'child hood' or Age of innocence. The contributions of India in terms of philosophy, traditional values, culture are understood through the Romantic perspective. Hence, it was perceived in the language of Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism etc are described in the models of Christianity. The major aspects emerged from these thinkers are:

- In India there are various linguistic races and the Aryans were the most primitive ones who came from Europe and the attack of Aryans over the Dravidians pushed the Dravidians to the south.
- Indians have more philosophical bent of mind and they are less interested towards the material developments of civilization.
- The race and culture of India have still retained the initial stage of human civilization.
- In order to understand Indian culture one needs to read Indian texts as cultural behaviors are directed by such texts. Indian culture is primarily shaped by text of culture.

All the above studies are based on the western rule. This was one of the ways to rule the east by the west.

Development of Colonial Historiography : The base for colonial history writings was laid in the 18th and 19th Century in the tradition of the western historiography. Indian history writings internalized the contemporary popular western theories and methods. Of those there were two prominent thoughts and traditions which influenced history writing. They were Liberal ideas of the age of Reason and ideas of Romanticism.

Liberal ideology of Age of Reason : These ideas are based on utilitarianism and found in the articles of British liberal history write ups. They opined that modern political rule has to keep the interest of the majority and felt that history is the story of human society's progress and economic growth and considered the medieval age as the period of behind faith, superstition which suppressed individual freedom. They thought that it was only the west with full of civilization and considered other societies as still uncivilized. Such historians are called 'Whigs'ⁱⁱⁱ. They believed that it was the duty of Europe brings other human societies to the level of civilization. At the end of the 19th century historians focused more on age of Reason and considered even as science and began to use scientific and critical methods to the study of history and sources of history. Another set of scholars of this group even proposed that History should reveal human history and the same should be used to carve future like science. These historians are called positivist historians^{iv}.

Romanticist Ideology : Romanticism of the 19th Century was a reaction to modernism of Europe and to the age of Reason. Truth is not limited to thought and considered the importance of human feelings. They believed in the mysteries of nature and super natural elements. They did not consider medieval period as the dark-age but on the contrary accused that the growing industrialization and material comforts were barreling human culture. They gave a yearning call of 'Back to Nature' and looked at ancient cultures with a ray of hope. Some of the historians of the Romantic tradition played important role in building History of India. In 1784 Warren Hastings established Royal Asiatic Society^v. The main purpose of this society was to have clear and understanding about social practices, law, religion and way of life of the ruled ones by the ruling ones. Asiatic Society became the platform to study and analyze history, science, arts, literature and culture of Asian Countries. They believed that India as the Cradle for Sublime thoughts of human civilization. They introduced religion, science and literature of India to the Western world. In those days only 'Shakuntala' of Kalidas was translated into various languages of Europe and got their applause. The people of Britain who were dissatisfied with utilitarianism found new treasure in Indian literature. They found many scientific facts in Indian astronomy, mathematics and other knowledge forms^{vi}.

All the westerners showed a great deal of interest and admiration about India and also shared common understanding about India. Some of the historians opined that history and society of India. But the Romanticist thinkers did not be little the thought process and felt that Europe can regain a great experience by observing philosophical depth of India. Many scholars of Europe thought that they are doing a great service by reading and translating great works of India. William Jones, Charles Williams, Bloomfield and then Max Muller and other scholars studied Vedic texts and proposed about rich wealth of knowledge^{vii}. This also inspired Indians and developed a sense of pride in them. Many of the European scholars began to study whole Europe and such scholars were called Eastern scholars. Most of the post-colonial thinkers have analysed the limitations of such scholars. They opined that Eastern scholars constructed their own story and as it was from the perspective of Europe, they helped them to set up their rule on Eastern culture. Post-colonial thinkers felt that the eastern scholars were of the opinion that they know the east much better than the native easterners and which enabled them to rule the east easily.

In India, colonial rule was started in 1800 and attempts were on for the firm rule. At this stage, the picture of glorified India did not encourage the ruling power and Whig Liberal thought process to justify British rule in India. In this tradition, James Mill wrote 'A History of British India' in 1817 which is the first significant work on whole history of India. Till that time many writers wrote about various other aspects but not on History of India. James Mill not only constructed history in the chronological way but also perceived the pace of history. His thoughts and narration were both in the British liberal tradition and showed the path of evolution and progress and as per him when the whole Europe was at the peak of progress, India was world of darkness^{viii}.

James Mill constructed history of India in three ages like European history. They were Hindu Age(like ancient period), Mohammadian Age(like medieval Age) and the British Age(like the modern Age). This classification of Ages made the pre-British era as a cast based one and this made it difficult for Indians to come out of the tripartite compartment^{ix}. He did not have any consideration about the ancient way of life of Indians and he felt the medieval period as the period of superstitions. He wanted to make India more cultured and sophisticated by implementing his modern liberal programs which were to be implemented by the British rule.

He was of the opinion that ancient and medieval India was very uncivilized and stagnant world and without liberal thinking it was very difficult for improvement and felt that British rule has to play a significant role in this regard which also gives a purpose and justification for British rule. Many of the post-colonial British progressive thinkers of 19th century accept this opinion of James Mill and the British government too started some social benevolent measures by the inspiration of James Mills ideas. His book of history became as if like a text book to give training to British officers. Colonial history grew up with some changes to its fundamental ideas and thoughts as per historical situations and necessities. There were a few similarities to eastern scholarship and imperial; history and when it came to Indian history, both were different in traditions. But slowly imperial history had to consider Indian nationalism. They devised new techniques like that castes of curb nationalism in the 19th century. They had a little knowledge about Indian history we need to consider and analyses Eliants history of India in 8 volumes, Hunters “Rulers of India” in 18 volumes, Elphinstons “History of Hindu and Mohamman India” and Morelands “History of Economy”. Eliot and others too had prejudices like other western scholars about Muslim culture^x. Elphinston was influenced by Romanticism and rejected the earlier opinions and proposed that Indian history should be considered with the same interest as that of European history. Moreland stressed on the economic conditions at the early 20th century and proposed that economic difficulties were due to nationalists instead of the British rule^{xi}.

Among the historians of the colonial period, Vincent Smith occupies a prominent place by creating a great influence on Indian history writes and his analysis of history was of a little in nature. There were no important sources to the study of history of the Hindu period but some archeological evidences like coins, inscriptions and monuments were collected by Vincent Smith and first time he wrote about Hindu Bharat. In 1904 he published “Early History of India” and which changed the face of Ancient Indian History. He identified the Gupta period as the ‘classical’ period and later on it was considered as the Golden period. He presented the history of many ancient kings and kingdoms like that of Ashoka, Harshavardhana and gave the picture of diversified India and became a prelude to ‘unity in diversity’ of national historians. As the cultures were different and castes were too many it was believed by British authorities that unity was impossible and they developed politics in the criticized historical writings of nationalists and said that leaders of national congress had the great interest in getting their power rather than the liberation from the foreign rule^{xii}. Anil seal opined that as some elites competed among themselves for being in good books with the British and as a result caste politics was developed. Later on Judith Brown considered Gandhi as a mass leader who brought the mob in big number to get power by the congress.

II. CONCLUSION

Even though, Colonial rule was ended, western scholars did not stop questioning Indian national movement and all these analysis and criticism gave way for better understanding of history. From such history one needs to first identify historical principles rather than building history as per the philosophic and principles.

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