

# **Historiography**

## **Study Guide**

**Course Code: 5679**

**Department of History  
Allama Iqbal Open University  
Islamabad  
2012**

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## **MA History (Revised Scheme)**

# **HISTORIOGRAPHY**

**Course Code: 5679**

**Units: 1-9**

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## **Unit 1**

### **An Introduction to Historiography**

## **Objectives of the Unit**

After reading the unit, the students will be able to:

- understand the meaning of historiography
- learn the objectives or the purpose of history-writing
- define the scope and subject-matter of historiography
- know the gradual development of history-writing in ancient times.

## 1.1 Understanding History and Historiography or History-writing

History is defined as the study of an event in a particular time and space. According to this definition, the basic unit of analysis (unit about which information is acquired) for historians or students of history is an historical event, whereas the twin dimensions of time and space (also called temporal and spatial dimensions) provide the historical context in which an event is studied. The particularity or specificity of time and space makes an historical event unique in itself. In other words, due to particular time when an event takes place, and particular space where it takes place an event becomes unique.<sup>1</sup> For instance, the War of Independence broke out at Meerut on May 10, 1857. The two dimensions of time (i.e. May 10, 1857) and space (Meerut in UP, India) make the War of Independence a unique historical event. The writing of history of the past events is called historiography. However, it is a historian's job to decide which event is an 'historical event,' i.e. an event of historical significance, which merits or deserves to be studied and researched within the discipline of history.

The discipline of history is as much an art as a science. A historian uses his or her imagination and creativity for history-writing, which makes it an art. History is considered a social science by many. A 'social scientific historian' may also employ scientific method for historical research, though the application of scientific method in social sciences, including the discipline of history, has its own limitations. History as a social science is considered to be governed by laws, and hence predictable. Those who argue that history is not a social science insist that it is not governed by laws, and hence the historical events are unpredictable.

The application of scientific method in history, which raises the status of history to a science, or more precisely a social science (the science of society), also allows the use of interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary approach in historical research, an idea that originated in the US in the 1970s. According to interdisciplinary approach in history, a historian borrows the methodologies, concepts, theories and models from other disciplines, particularly of social sciences, for undertaking historical research. For instance, while writing economic history, a historian may use the concepts and theories of economics. Similarly, for writing social history and political history, a historian may employ the concepts and theories of sociology and political science respectively. However, interdisciplinary history

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<sup>1</sup> For a brief debate on the notion of uniqueness of historical events, see Preston King, "Michael Oakeshott and Historical Particularism" in *The History of Ideas: An Introduction to Method*, ed. Preston King (Totowa; NJ: Barnes and Noble Books, 1983, pp. 96-132, esp. 127-28.

implies continued allegiance to the discipline of history combined with openness to other perspectives and approaches.<sup>2</sup>

Historiography is an essential and integral part of the discipline of history that explores what kind of history has been written so far by the historians of the past and the present. Historiography is defined as “the study of the way history has been and is written—the history of historical writing... When you study ‘historiography’ you do not study the events of the past directly, but the changing interpretations of those events in the works of individual historians’.<sup>3</sup> Historiography does not merely include the writing of history but also the study of historical writings. So a historian is the one who writes history, but a historiographer writes about the earlier written works of history and also about the nature of historical research.

Historians have written the history of various ages/periods (e.g. history of ancient India or medieval Europe), continents (e.g. history of Africa or Europe), regions (e.g. history of South Asia or Indo-Pakistan Sub-continent), countries (e.g. history of Pakistan, Egypt or France), movements (e.g. Khilafat Movement of 1919 in India, or the Mu’tazilite Movement), personalities (e.g. Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah or Martin Luther King Jr.), institutions (e.g. feudalism or social stratification), themes and issues (e.g. ethnicity or Muslim identity in South Asia), as well as particular events (e.g. French Revolution of 1789, migration of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him [PBUH] ) to Madinah in 622, or the first battle of Panipat in 1526), etc.

In contemporary times, the historical canvas has been vastly stretched, and the modern day historians are writing the history of things and phenomena which have never been written before. They are focusing on unconventional themes and unusual subjects. In fact, in the words of Juliet Gardiner, “the contours of the past have been remapped; existing questions have been reformulated; known ‘facts’ have been reinterrogated; what was once considered marginal has been woven into the centrality of historical enquiry and historical research has been recognized as a more profound exercise than simply ‘filling in the gaps’.<sup>4</sup> In addition, historians may focus on one or more of the following spheres: political, military, social, economic, religious, cultural, scientific, intellectual/ideas and art.<sup>5</sup> Moreover,

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<sup>2</sup> Ludmilla Jordanova, *History in Practice* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2006), p. 80.

<sup>3</sup> Conal Furay and Michael J. Salevouris, *The Methods and Skills of History: A Practical Guide* (Arlington Heights, Ill.: H. Davidson, 1988), p. 223.

<sup>4</sup> Juliet Gardiner, ed. *What is History Today...?* (Houndmills and London: Macmillan, 1988), Introduction, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> However, there are critics of this strict compartmentalization of the discipline of history in various branches. Hexter, for instance, calls it ‘tunnel history’, since tunnels restrict one’s vision, and such kind of history confines the vision of historians, researchers, and

while writing history, historians may also employ various perspectives and approaches such as elite, subaltern, Marxist, feminist or nationalist approaches, etc.

Sometimes historiography is considered to include philosophy of history, which is a distinct branch of the discipline of history. Philosophy of history has two branches: (i) Speculative philosophy of history, which attempts at philosophizing the human past, whereby it speculates and reflects on the general pattern of human history. Saint Augustine, Ibn Khaldun, Hegel and Marx, etc. were the speculative philosophers of history. (ii) Critical or analytical philosophy of history, which explores the specific nature of historical knowledge, and critically examines the methods of historians and their writings. While critically examining the concepts and methods used by historians, it tries to identify their typical modes of explanation.

A student of history may raise a number of questions: When and where did historical thought first develop? When did history-writing begin? How did historical thought develop through the ages? How did various schools of historiography emerge? And what kind of history has been written by historians so far? Historiography as a sub-discipline of history addresses all these questions.

## **1.2 Objectives of Historiography**

History has been written for a number of reasons. What follows is a brief discussion on the objectives of history-writing, which may encourage a historian or a group of historians to undertake historical research. However, at times there can be more than one motive behind the writing of history.

### ***(i) Commemorative Purpose***

History is generally written in order to commemorate, memorialize and preserve the memory of past events, especially the deeds and achievements of ancestors, heroes, leaders and kings. Such a history gives the people a sense of their past as well as a sense of pride and identity. For instance, the stone inscriptions of ancient Egyptian Civilization present a record of the past. In particular, the Palermo Stone, which dates back to about 2350 BC, contains the annals or records of the Pharaohs, the ancient Kings of Egypt.<sup>6</sup>

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students of history. J. H. Hexter, *Reappraisals in History* (London: Longmans, 1961), p. 194ff.

<sup>6</sup> John van Seters, *In Search of History: Historiography in the Ancient World and the Origins of Biblical History* (Winona Lake; Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1997), p. 131.

### ***(ii) Moralistic Motive***

History is also written with the motive of recording the past events so that the future generations could draw or learn lessons from them, and thus avoid repeating the past errors. This is also called moralistic interpretation of history. For instance, the Jewish-Hebrew historiography of fourth century BC was written with an explicit moralistic purpose.

### ***(iii) Propagation of Views***

History may also be written by a historian or a group of historians in order to propagate and disseminate or spread particular views, beliefs and doctrines in which they believe. These views may include, among others, religious/ideological or political ideas. For instance, in South Asian historiographical tradition, the Hindu and Muslim nationalist histories have been written in India and Pakistan respectively in order to propagate Hindu and Muslim nationalism respectively. It is important to note that in recent times, postmodernist historians have challenged the so-called myth of objectivity in history-writing. They argue that the ideal of unbiased history is unobtainable. In other words, there is no such thing as unbiased history, since all human beings have biases of one kind or another, and to pretend otherwise is simply dishonest. However, the way out is a balanced, self-aware history. Moreover, the historians' path lies somewhere in between objectivity and subjectivity.<sup>7</sup>

### ***(iv) Propaganda***

Sometimes history may be distorted, and based on falsehood and/or exaggeration. History may also be written with the purpose of propaganda among the intended readers such as glorifying the successes and achievements of kings or rulers while minimizing their failures. Propaganda “forces us to think and do things in ways we might not have otherwise done... It obscures our windows on the world by providing layers of distorting condensation... [It] becomes the enemy of independent thought and an intrusive and unwanted manipulator of the free flow of information and ideas ...”<sup>8</sup> The official history-writing in Nazi Germany, which misrepresented historical facts, is an example in point.

### ***(v) Explanatory Purpose***

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<sup>7</sup> Jordanova, *History in Practice*, pp. 3, 89.

<sup>8</sup> Philip M Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind: A History of Propaganda from the Ancient World to the Present Day* (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press; 2003), p. 1.

History is also written for academic or scholarly purposes. According to Mary Fulbrook, the “processes of historical investigation and representation are about making sense of the past... Making sense means imposing categories, looking for patterns, searching for connections, seeking answers to questions, imbuing the past with meaning.”<sup>9</sup> Professional historians try to offer an explanation for a particular historical phenomenon, whereby a complex historical event or development is explained and interpreted in order to make it understandable and intelligible. Much of the contemporary historical research is undertaken for an explanatory purpose.

### **1.3 Subject-matter and Scope of Historiography**

Regarding the subject-matter of history, renowned philosopher, Eric Fromm (d. 1980) rightly observed that human being is the most important creation and achievement of the continuous human effort, the record of which we call history. In other words, human beings and their activities are the subject-matter or the focus of history. According to Gordon Leff, a British historian, history is the study of human past, which particularly studies human beings as social beings, rather than as a species.<sup>10</sup> This view-point suggests that human beings as social beings live in society (a collectivity of human beings), and the subject-matter of history is the social dimension or aspect of human life. History does not and cannot study human beings as biological beings, which is the task of a biologist. History studies the ideas, actions and activities of human beings, which are the result of human interaction, which is only possible when human beings live together.

Another important point is that history, in particular, studies the actions of human beings that bring about change. For instance, it is not the task of a historian to study the causes of an earthquake or volcanic eruption (which is, in fact, the task of a geologist), but a historian may study how an earth quake or volcanic eruption effects human life in terms of casualties and migration, etc. A historian does not directly study nature, but he may study the impact of nature on human life. In fact, a historian studies society, which is composed of human beings, who are active agents and are endowed with considerable freewill. Seen from another perspective, change which is the result of some human activity is a subject-matter of history. Since the factor of change goes hand in hand with continuity, therefore, both the change and continuity are studied side by side. To put it simply, it is necessary to study continuity in order to study change and vice versa. In a nutshell, a historian writes the history of human ideas and actions that bring about some significant change in society, making the human ideas and actions the cause of historical events.

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<sup>9</sup> Mary Fulbrook, *Historical Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 195.

<sup>10</sup> Gordon Leff, *History and Social Theory* (University, Ala: University of Alabama Press, 1969), p. 69.

## 1.4 The Origins of Historiography

It is difficult to tell when exactly historiography began. However, historians have tried to trace the origin and development of historical thought which eventually led to the writing of history, but they have been unable to come up with a satisfactory answer. There are archaeological and textual evidences of recording of historical events in ancient times. These ancient texts were often in the form of stone inscriptions. For instance, the people of ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian Civilizations tried to keep some records of the past events. For instance, as pointed out above, the inscriptions on Palermo Stone, found in the remains of the ancient Egyptian Civilization, were written in hieroglyphic script, which has been deciphered now. The Palermo Stone, which dates back to about 2350 BC, contains the annals or records of the ancient Kings of Egypt. It is an important source on ancient Egyptian history since it contains the records of the five dynasties of ancient Egyptian kings.<sup>11</sup> The famous Rosetta Stone, another ancient Egyptian artifact discovered in 1799, contains a bilingual text (a text in two languages), written in three kinds of writings,<sup>12</sup> which is meant to preserve the memory of the economic regulations of the state such as tax exemption to the temple priests.

Here some important questions arise: can these records be called *history*? Can the process of their recording be called *history-writing*? And can their authors or compilers be called historians? In fact, many of these ancient texts were semi-historical and semi-mythical in nature, and their authors/compilers were unable to differentiate between fact and fiction, between truth and falsehood, and between authentic and inauthentic information. As we know that historiography or the writing of history involves research in order to determine the authenticity of historical data, there was no systematic research involved in the process of recording or compilation of these texts. For instance, in ancient Mesopotamian Civilization, the king lists inform about ten mythical kings of Sumers who ruled for more than ten thousand years each, which is humanly impossible. The purpose of this fabrication was to show that the Sumer people had always been united under one king, and that their dynasty had existed ever since the beginning of time. It was over the centuries that people gradually started differentiating between myth and reality, which became the basis of latter-day historiography.

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<sup>11</sup> Henry James Reynolds, *World's Oldest Writings* (Chicago, The Antiquities Corporation, 1938), pp. 88-90.

<sup>12</sup> E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Rosetta Stone* (New York: Dover Publications, 1989), p. 40. However, according to other Egyptologists, the Stone contains a trilingual text, i.e. a text in three languages.

In ancient Persia, the military victories of Emperor Darius I (r. 522-486 BC) were inscribed on the famous Behistun Rock in three different languages, i.e. Babylonian, Elamite (the official language of the Achaemenid Empire) and Old Persian in cuneiform script.<sup>13</sup> The famous epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata, composed during the Gupta period (320 to 480 AD) were also semi-mythological and semi-historical in nature. Moreover, in ancient India, genealogies of kings and priests (pundits) were recorded on copper plates. When Emperor Ashoka the Great (d. 232 BC) embraced Buddhism in 262 BC, he ordered the erection of stone inscriptions at various places in his Empire to preach the teachings of Buddhism. The ancient Indians had their own system of astronomy and reckoning of time. The religious texts of Veds and Puranas in Sanskrit, Prakrit and Pali languages are semi-mythological and semi-historical in nature.

Archaeological evidence from other civilizations of the past such as Aztec Civilization in Mexico and the inscriptions of the Mayan Civilization in Guatemala in Central America suggest that people tried to preserve their history, and this idea later became one of the major motivating forces behind the initiation of systematic historiography. Some of the ancient civilizations did not have historiographical traditions of their own. For instance, in Korean Civilization, which was older than the Chinese Civilization, the historiographical tradition was lacking. Therefore, its history was constructed with the help of the Chinese accounts.

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<sup>13</sup> Edgar Jones, *Discoveries and Documents: An Introduction to the Archaeology of the Old Testament* (London: Epworth Press, 1974), pp. 9-10.

## **Questions**

Q. History has been written with a number of objectives. What are these different objectives?

Q. Human actions and ideas are the real subject-matter of history. Elaborate.

Q. Discuss the origins of historiography.

## **Unit 2**

### **Historiography in Ancient Times:**

#### **From Myth to Historicity**

**Objectives of the Unit**

After reading the unit, the students will be able to:

- explore the origins of historiography in ancient times
- know the origin of philosophy of history in ancient China
- learn about the contribution of the Jews to history-writing
- describe the contribution of the Greek historians Herodotus and Thucydides
- explain the contribution of the Roman historians to history writing

Ancient Mesopotamia, Persia, Egypt, Greece and China had historiographical traditions of their own, but these traditions had evolved gradually. What follows is a brief discussion on how the history-writing tradition gradually emerged in different regions in ancient times when people started differentiating between fiction and fact, between myth and reality. Historicity is the state of being historically authentic, and the development of historicity gradually laid the foundation of historiography in ancient times. However, only a few examples have been selected for the purpose of discussion, which is not exhaustive in any sense.

## **2.1 Historiographical Tradition in Ancient Mesopotamia, Persia and Egypt**

In ancient Mesopotamia, the Assyrians and Babylonians produced historical works in the form of chronicles and king lists. For instance, a Synchronous History was composed which dealt with the history of the relations between Babylonia and Assyria from 1600 to 800 BC, while the famous Assyrian Chronicle (a chronological table in three columns) contained the record of the officials, their terms of office, and the important events of each year.<sup>14</sup> The ancient Assyrians knew the importance of history, as well as the need to preserve historical records of the past. Therefore, an Assyrian ruler Ashurbanipal (668-626 BC) ordered the preservation of historical material that existed in the form of inscriptions. In the third century BC, a priest of Chaldea named Berossos wrote *History of Babylonia* around 290 BC. However, it is not extant but their extracts have been quoted by ancient Jewish and Christian historians.<sup>15</sup> Berossos's work is not without mythical elements.

In ancient Persia, there existed an officially-supported historiographical tradition, and one comes across references to Persian Royal Chronicles, Babylonian Chronicles and the Chronicles of the Sassanian Kings which recorded the historical events of significance.<sup>16</sup> In addition, historical inscriptions in Persia reveal that the Persians had a sense of history and their past. For instance, the Persian Emperor Darius I (r. 522-486 BC) had ordered his military victories to be

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<sup>14</sup> For a detailed study of varied Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian and late Babylonian Chronicles and king lists, see Albert Kirk Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* (Winona Lake; IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000, rpt., first printed 1975).

<sup>15</sup> Geert De Breucker, "Berossos and the Mesopotamian Temple as Centre of Knowledge During the Hellenistic Period", in *Learned Antiquity: Scholarship and Society in the Near East, the Greco-Roman World, and the Early Medieval West*, eds. Alasdair A. MacDonald, Michael W. Twomey and Gerrit J. Reinink (Leuven, Netherlands: Peeters, 2003), pp. 13-36.

<sup>16</sup> Arnaldo Momigliano, *The Classical Foundations of Modern Historiography* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 5-8.

inscribed on the famous Behistun Rock, 300 feet high over the road near the town of Kermanshah. The inscription was in three different languages, i.e. Babylonian, Elamite (the official language of the Achaemenid Empire) and Old Persian in cuneiform script. However, the purpose of the inscription was self-glorification, and it was not a complete autobiography of the Emperor.

The ancient Egyptians provided a framework for the writing of history. In 257 BC, an Egyptian priest named Manetho composed the history of Egypt and the list of Pharaohs in Greek language. He lived under Ptolemy Philadelphus, on whose orders the work was composed. However, Manetho's work is not extant now, and exists only in the form of quotations in the works of other historians. Nonetheless, the work contains mythical accounts. The Turin King List (now preserved in the museum of Turin, Italy) on papyrus provides the names of the ancient rulers of Egypt along with the length of their reigns. It starts from the thirteenth century BC, and contains the names of some 300 kings, from Menes to the end of the seventeenth dynasty.<sup>17</sup>

## **2.2 Historiography in Ancient China: Beginning of Philosophical Interpretation of History**

Ancient China had quite rich historiographical traditions. The ancient Chinese have been historical minded. China has also been regarded as the 'historians' paradise' owing to the appreciation and admiration the historians receive. Zuo Qiuming (5th century BC) composed *Zuo Zhuan (The Commentary of Zuo)*, which is considered the earliest Chinese work of narrative history. It covers the period from 722 BC to 468 BC. Zuo was a court writer of the State of Lu, and a contemporary of Confucius.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to history-writing, the ancient Chinese were able to philosophize or theorize history, and thus came up with theories or philosophies of history. One of the most renowned Chinese philosophers was Confucius (d. 479 BC), the founder of Confucianism. He authored many works including *Spring and Autumn Annals* and *The Classic of History (Shu Jing or Shu Ching)*. The latter work is considered one of the earliest examples of prose writing in Chinese history, and among the Five Classics of ancient China. It is a compilation of documentary records related to the historical events in ancient China. It covers the historical records of 1700 years of Chinese history. It starts with the legendary age of Chinese history, and closes at the last ruler of the Zhou Dynasty named Duke Mu of Qin (d. 621 BC).

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<sup>17</sup> Marc Van de Mieroop, *A History of Ancient Egypt* (Chichester & Malden; MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), p. 16.

<sup>18</sup> On-cho Ng and Q. Edward Wang, *Mirroring the Past: The Writing and Use of History in Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005), pp. 35-36.

Though Confucius is remembered as a moral philosopher, who propounded a moral philosophy,<sup>19</sup> his views about time and history had considerable impact on the ideas of later historians and philosophers of history including Ssu-Ma Ch'ien. Confucius presented a linear (like a straight line without curves or circles) theory of time, according to which history does not exactly repeat itself.

### ***Ssu-Ma Ch'ien—The Grand Historian of China***

Ssu-Ma Ch'ien (b. 145-d. 90? BC) was a Chinese historian and philosopher of history,<sup>20</sup> who is remembered as the Grand Historian of China. His father was also a historian. Both of them served the Emperors of the Han Dynasty. Ssu-Ma Ch'ien composed *Shi Ji* (The Record of History/Record of the Historians), which covers a macro-history of 3000 years of Chinese history. He is considered the first systematic philosopher of history, as he presented a theory of history in order to explain the rise and fall of a dynasty or a ruling family. His main frame of reference or unit of analysis was dynasty. He offered a moralistic interpretation of history, since he considered moral principles responsible for historical change. To him, the presence of virtue and morality was responsible for the rise of a dynasty, while decline in morality determines the fall of a dynasty. A dynasty was generally founded by a sage-king, whereas the last ruler of a dynasty is generally a wicked tyrant. His philosophy of history was humanistic, since he believed that human actions were responsible for historical change, and thus, human beings ought to be the main focus of history. To him, the pattern of historical progress was cyclical (like a cycle), wherein historical developments represent the same cycle of strengthening and weakening of morality.<sup>21</sup> However, he was conscious of the fact that history does not exactly repeat itself. Only the laws governing history are repeated.

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<sup>19</sup> Philip J. Ivanhoe, *Confucian Moral Self-cultivation* (New York: U. A. Lang, 1993), p. 9.

<sup>20</sup> Philosophy as a discipline deals with abstract thought, and takes an overall view of things or phenomena. Philosophy of history is a branch of the discipline of history, and takes an overall or a general view of the human past. A philosopher of history philosophically reflects upon the entire human past and comes up with his philosophy of history. Therefore, there is no consensus among the historians on a single or standardized version of philosophy of history; rather there are *philosophies* of history propounded by various philosophers of history.

<sup>21</sup> Chang Xie with Sohail Inayatullah, "Ssu-Ma Ch'ien: The Cycles of Virtue", in *Macrohistory and Macrohistorians: Perspectives on Individual, Social, and Civilizational Change*, eds. Johan Galtung and Sohail Inayatullah (Westport: Praeger, 1997), pp. 13-16.

### 2.3 Jewish-Hebrew Historiography: Theological-cum-historical Approach

The fourth century BC witnessed the development of Jewish-Hebrew historiographical tradition. An important characteristic of it was that unlike the Persian chronicles of individual kings or heroes, the Jews recorded the history of a religious community. In this way, the Jewish historiographical tradition broke with the Persian historiographical tradition, as the former focused on the communal life of a group of people. In fact, the Jews had reorganized their communal life in conscious reaction to the surrounding civilization which was the Persian Empire.<sup>22</sup>

Another important characteristic of Jewish-Hebrew historiographical tradition was its semi-mythical and semi-historical nature. There was a lot of theological and religious content in the historical works. Hebrew history was written in narrative genre, encompassing different forms, ranging from factual history writing to fictional parables.<sup>23</sup> Post-exile texts such as Books of Ezra and Nehemiah, History of David by Abiathar, and the First Book of Maccabees by Sadducee (composed in 125 BC) are a few examples in point. However, these works included texts compiled by religious leaders including the ‘Prophet-historians’ such as Samuel, Nathan, Gad, Elijah and Isaiah, etc. Therefore, it was difficult to differentiate between sacred religious texts and historical works.

The Jewish historiography is considered apologetic in nature. Apologetic historiography is defined by Sterling as “the story of a subgroup of people in an extended prose narrative written by a member of the group who follows the group’s own traditions but Hellenizes them in an effort to establish the identity of the group within the setting of the larger world.”<sup>24</sup> The most significant group to write apologetic history was the Jews, who attempted to redefine Judaism within the context of the Hellenistic world. Their histories were first addressed to the Jewish audiences and only secondarily to the outside groups. The Jewish historiographical texts attempted to define the Jews as an ethnic group, and present its own history within the Hellenistic world. The greatest representative of apologetic historiographical tradition was Titus Flavius Josephus (37-100 AD).<sup>25</sup>

However, the most important characteristic of Jewish-Hebrew historiography was the moralistic interpretation of history. Historical works were written with a

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<sup>22</sup> Momigliano, *The Classical Foundations of Modern Historiography*, p. 17.

<sup>23</sup> Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1988), 189.

<sup>24</sup> Gregory E. Sterling, *Historiography and Self-definition: Josephos, Luke-Acts and Apologetic Historiography* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992), p. 17. To Hellenize means to make or become Greek; or to adopt the language and culture of the ancient Greeks, or make something closer in character to the language and culture of the ancient Greeks.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 19, 137. For details of the works of Josephus, see pp. 226-310.

moralistic purpose so that the posterity or the future generations could draw moral lessons from the past and thus, avoid repeating the past errors and mistakes. However, without assigning values to the past historical developments, it was not easy to draw moral lessons from the past. Therefore, value-judgments were made by the historians whereby they judged the past historical events in the light of their own values. These works criticized the actions of earlier generations and ancestors. It must be remembered that religion has the power to break taboos like eulogizing or unduly praising one's ancestors.

## **2.4 Emergence of History-writing Tradition in Ancient Greece**

The renowned eighth-century BC Greek poet, Homer (d. 750 BC circa) was regarded by the Greeks as their earliest historian. He is still remembered for his famous epics, *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Apart from their literary significance, his works have some historical value as well.<sup>26</sup> However, they present semi-mythical and semi-historical record of the past. In fact, in those days, writers and poets found it difficult to draw a demarcation line or line of distinction between historical facts and poetic fiction, between myth and reality.

During the seventh and sixth centuries BC, the Greeks started developing ideas about time and space, along with the concepts of history and historical consciousness. The sixth-century BC witnessed the development of logography, i.e. the writing of chronicles or daily records, and professional speech-writing. Thus, a group of logographers (the chroniclers and speech-writers) appeared that included people like Cadmus, and Hecataeus of Miletus (d. 476 BC circa). During the latter half of the fifth century BC, Hellanicus of Lesbos wrote the history of the City-state of Athens, including the history of the famous Olympic Games. None the less, all these writers were not historians in the true sense of the word, since they could not differentiate between fact and fiction, and the element of research, i.e. to determine the authenticity of historical events, was lacking in their works. Therefore, their works cannot be treated as works of history, though the record of past events remained a consistent theme in them.

### ***(i) Herodotus—The Father of History in Europe***

The renowned fifth-century BC Greek historian named Herodotus (b. 484 circa-d. 424 circa BC) is considered the 'Father of History'. He had widely traveled in Africa, West Asia, and Europe. He composed *Historia* (The Histories), the title of

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<sup>26</sup> For a discussion on historical accuracy of Homer's works, see Lawrence Kim, *Homer Between History and Fiction in Imperial Greek Literature* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), see Chapter 3: Homer, the Ideal Historian: Strabo's *Geography*, pp. 47-84.

which was derived from the Greek word *historie* meaning inquiry or investigation.<sup>27</sup> His work laid the foundation of scientific and rational historiography, though the prevalent tendency at that time was that of anti-historical views.<sup>28</sup> He broke away with the Greek intellectual tradition that argued that a thing that changes itself cannot be known. On the contrary, history primarily focuses on historical change, and Herodotus recorded the history of important historical events. His historiography was scientific as he was conscious of the notions of objectivity and subjectivity in history. His historiography was also rational since he tried to give judgments based on human reason.

He himself stated the purpose of writing the book *Historia* in its preface in these words: "...in order that the memory of the past may not be blotted out from among men by time and that great and marvelous deeds done by the Greeks and foreigners, and especially the reason why they warred against each other may not lack renown."<sup>29</sup> So according to him, there were two purposes of history-writing: (i) commemoration of past events, especially the achievements of the people, and (ii) search for the causes of historical events such as war. In his book, he focused on the Greco-Persian War (war between Greece and Persia) as well as the history of Greece, Persia, Egypt and Western Asia. Thematically, the book is divided into two parts: Part I contains the military history, the factors that led to the war, and the events of the war, while Part II gives detailed description of Persian Empire, its geography, social structure and its history. At that time, Greece had City-states like Athens and Sparta, where there were different kinds of political systems ranging from democratic to autocratic. On the contrary, monarchy or kingship was the form of political system that prevailed in Persian Empire, which was ruled by Emperors.

He tried to give a humanistic interpretation of historical causation (also called anthropo-centric approach) by highlighting the role of human beings in history, instead of focusing on theo-centric explanations, which emphasize the role of the divine factors (related to God and His will) in historical causation.<sup>30</sup> He particularly highlighted the role of individual in history. He stressed on the personal motives of various actors behind historical events. It is important to note

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<sup>27</sup> Justin Marozzi, *The Way of Herodotus: Travels with the Man who Invented History* (Philadelphia: Da Capo Press, 2008), p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 20-21.

<sup>29</sup> Francois Hartog, *The Mirror of Herodotus: The Representation of the Other in the Writing of History*, Eng. trans. Janet Lloyd (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. xvii.

<sup>30</sup> The word *anthropo* literally means human beings, and anthropo-centric means centred round the human beings, while the word *theo* literally means God, and theo-centric means centred round God.

that Herodotus had largely focused on military history. Since in the military history of the ancient and medieval times, the role of military commanders was very crucial, therefore, he highlighted the role of individuals such as Cyrus and Darius, the Persian Emperors who had conquered Greece.

Herodotus also gave a moralistic interpretation of history by drawing moral lessons or ethical principles from historical events for the readers. For instance, he wrote that since the Greeks had become arrogant, therefore, they lost the war, and thus drew a moral lesson from it that pride hath a fall. Similarly, he interpreted the occurrence of earthquake in Greece as a result of Greek city-states quarrelling with each other for power. In other words, their hunger for power and supremacy was the real cause behind the natural disaster of earthquake, according to him.

In addition, Herodotus' work does not have many mythical elements, which shows that he was largely able to differentiate between myth and reality. However, some legendary elements found way in his historical narrative such as the chariot which was sacred to Zeus, king of the Olympian gods in Greek mythology. Herodotus also believed in omens (such as earthquake or dust cloud), oracles (such as the oracles of Apollo at Delphi and of Amphiaraus at Thebes), and dreams, and one comes across such things in his narration.<sup>31</sup>

He tried to remain as much objective as possible, and interpreted events without any biases. He was conscious of it, and thus stated that he would not pass judgment on the conflict between the Greeks and the Persians. Moreover, he vowed that in his narrative, he would devote as much attention to small countries as to great ones, since those which were great in the past, had become small, while those which were great in his time had been small before.

His writing style was easy and spontaneous. He narrated history in a story-telling manner and used dialogues and speeches in the words of the speakers. Of course, while doing so, he did not rely on his memory (as he himself was not present on the occasions he was writing about) but used his imagination to fabricate speeches and dialogues of important historical actors. Herodotus compared the human habits, customs and beliefs of the Greeks with those of the non-Greeks. For instance, he compared how various communities treat their dead such as burying, burning or eating dead relations. That is why the term 'Herodotage' has come to denote anthropological literature in which human habits, customs and beliefs are compared.

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<sup>31</sup> Jon D. Mikalson, *Herodotus and Religion in the Persian Wars* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), pp. 140-41.

There were some factual mistakes in his work as well. For instance, the dialogue between Solon (d. 558 or 560 BC), the renowned Athenian statesman and lawmaker, and Croesus (d. 547 BC circa), the famous King of Lydia (in present day Turkey) was a factual omission since they both never had such a dialogue. Herodotus gave value-judgments (judgments which one gives on the basis of one's own values or ethical principles), and frequently contrasted the rationality of the Greeks with the 'irrationality' of other people.

***(ii) Thucydides—The Father of Psychological History***

Thucydides (b. 460 circa- d. 400 circa BC) was a Greek naval commander, who belonged to Athens. He was the author of *History of the Peloponnesian War*, which remained incomplete. The book ends abruptly, probably due to his sudden death. Being a military historian, Thucydides focused on the ruinous Peloponnesian War fought between the Greek City-states of Athens and Sparta that lasted for twenty-seven years (431-404 BC). During the war, he was given the command of a fleet but he failed. Consequently, he spent the next twenty years of his life in exile as a punishment. However, during exile, he traveled many places and collected information for his book.

Regarding the causes of the war, he wrote that the war was caused by the attempt of Athens to create hegemony over other Greek States in the region including Sparta. In fact, Athens had gained immense political power and accumulated considerable wealth and economic prosperity due to its sea-trade and naval power, so it tried to dominate others. His book tells that Athens had a strong navy, whereas Sparta and its allies had strong land forces. Since he himself had participated in the war, his historical narrative was based on his own experiences, observation and inquiries. Moreover, being a military historian, he specifically highlighted the tactics and technical aspects of warfare, like siege warfare, etc.

Thucydides is considered the father of psychological history,<sup>32</sup> since he tried to explain the motives and ambitions of various actors involved in the conflict, and commented on the psyche of the people in general in war times. For instance, he discussed the slow steadiness of the Spartans. He also undertook character studies of the leading participants of the war such as Pericles and Cleon, and discussed their imperialistic ambitions with reference to their psyche. Like Herodotus, he also highlighted the role of individual in history.

Like Herodotus, the historical explanations offered by Thucydides were humanistic as he stressed on human factors rather than offering theo-centric explanations. He searched for the causes of the war between the two Greek City-

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<sup>32</sup> Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, p. 29.

states of Athens and Sparta in human actions.<sup>33</sup> Instead of historical events, Thucydides was more interested in searching for the laws, which govern historical events, unlike Herodotus who focused on the events themselves.

For writing the book, first, he took notes of events, then arranged them to rewrite the events of war, and later, elaborated the narrative and added many things to it. He tried to remain objective and impartial. He evaluated the contradictory and conflicting accounts of war in order to ascertain their authenticity before writing history. In addition, he tried to offer alternative explanations for historical events to the readers. He used the following sources for history-writing: (i) unnamed oral or verbal accounts based on interviews of the participants of war;<sup>34</sup> (ii) written records of history such as the works of earlier historians like Herodotus, Antiochus of Syracuse, Hecataeus, Hellanicus and Homer; and (iii) archaeological evidence. Unlike Herodotus, Thucydides gave evidence of historical accounts. Therefore, his methodology was more scientific than that of Herodotus. The authenticity of Thucydides' work has been ascertained by his contemporary historical accounts preserved in the form of stone inscriptions.

Moreover, unlike Herodotus, Thucydides avoided writing history in a story-telling manner, which makes his work less pleasing to ears as his style was harsh. Like Herodotus, Thucydides also included in his work detailed speeches of people in direct speech, which he had invented. In fact, many Greek historians before him had also done it. The chronological scheme (date-wise arrangement of events) was cautiously kept by Thucydides in his work. Unlike Herodotus who focused on the marvelous deeds of the Greeks, Thucydides highlighted the dark side of the picture also by writing about the sufferings of the people due to conflicts and wars, and tried to draw moral lessons from history.

## **2.5 Ancient Roman Historiography**

The Roman historical consciousness was quite different from that of the Greeks. For the Romans, history meant continuity of the past. In the Roman period, many historians contributed to history-writing. Among them, Polybius (d. 120 circa BC) was the most notable one. His approach to history has largely been interpreted as pragmatic one, but recent research reveals that he evaluated historical events and

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<sup>33</sup> Raymond Aron, "Thucydides and the Historical Narrative", in *Politics and History: Selected Essays by Raymond Aron*, trans. and ed. Miriam Bernheim Conant (New York: The Free Press, 1978), p. 21.

<sup>34</sup> Alistair Thomson, "Unreliable Memories? The Use and Abuse of Oral History" in *Historical Controversies and Historians*, ed. William Lamont (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 23.

human actions from a moral point of view.<sup>35</sup> He saw a moralistic purpose in historiography, and argued that history of the past events can serve as a corrective of human behaviour. For him, another important purpose of history was to educate and train political leaders for efficient state conduct. Polybius was conscious of the fact that history-writing requires objectivity, and thus urged that a historian must forget love for one's friends and hatred for one's enemies while writing history because sometimes a historian has to praise his enemies and blame his friends. History becomes useless without the element of truth. Regarding historical causation, he stressed that a historian must see things in a cause-and-effect relationship.

After Polybius, many other historians including Diodorus, Dionysius, Cicero (d. 43 BC; also a famous statesman and philosopher), Josephus of Jerusalem, Lucian, Herodian and Theophylactus contributed to historiography. However, during the Roman period, two notable historians, namely Livy and Tacitus, made notable contributions to historical thinking.

Livy (d. 17 AD) was a prolific Roman historian who authored 142 books, out of which only 35 survived. He is famous for writing the history of Rome (the city was founded in 753 BC), which is considered to be first of its kind. He produced an annalistic or chronological form of history, which recorded events in a date-wise manner year-by-year.<sup>36</sup> To the Romans, his work was not a particular history; rather it was a universal history. In fact, Rome was the entire world to the Romans, who had developed a sense of superiority over others.<sup>37</sup> Livy made no claim that his work was based on original research. Sometimes he was critical of the sources he used for history-writing. He stressed on the moralistic purpose behind historiography. Moreover, he was able to differentiate between myth and reality, and highlighted the human factor in historical interpretation, instead of the role of the divine forces.

Cornelius Tacitus (d. 117 AD) also focused on the history of Rome. He was famous for his character-drawing. He interpreted history as a clash or conflict between the good and bad characters, or between the forces of virtue and vice. So he did not pay attention to the positive aspects of the past events alone but also shed light on the negative dimension of historical events. His approach was psychological-didactic, as he discussed the actions and intentions of individuals with reference to their psyche, and also tried to draw moral lessons from them for his readers. Like Polybius, he believed that history should be written by

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<sup>35</sup> Arthur M. Eckstein, *Moral Vision in the Histories of Polybius* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

<sup>36</sup> Ronald Mellor, *The Roman Historians* (London & New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 51.

<sup>37</sup> Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, p. 37.

experienced politicians.<sup>38</sup> However, the sources of Tacitus were untrustworthy as he relied on biased authorities, and also invented speeches of historical characters. Owing to lack of historical criticism, particularly on sources, Tacitus' historiography is considered to represent a decline as compared to the historiographical traditions of the past.

## **2.6 Greco-Roman Historiography: An Overview**

In ancient times, the historical thought was largely theo-centric, placing God or the supernatural powers in its center, and revolving round it. All events were attributed to God, and their causes were sought in the will of divine forces. It also gave way to several semi-mythical and quasi-historical explanations of historical events. This theo-centric historiographical tradition was challenged by the ancient Greek historians, among whom Herodotus and Thucydides were most notable. Their approach was largely anthropo-centric, and they insisted on a humanistic and rational interpretation of history, though some mythical explanations too found way in their works. They held human beings responsible for their actions, which caused historical events. In a nutshell, humanism was one of the chief characteristics of Greco-Roman historiography.

The Greco-Roman historians were convinced of the utility and usefulness of history. Most of them saw a moralistic purpose in historiography since the readers of historical works could draw moral lessons from them. In addition to concentrating on some specific historical events, they also tried to search for the principles or laws that govern history. Moreover, they also employed psychological approach in their historical works by highlighting the role of human psyche in history. They also realized the significance of the notion of objectivity, and insisted that a historian should put his likes and dislikes, as well as biases and prejudices, aside while writing history. They were also able to differentiate between myth and reality, between legends and historical truth. Moreover, the Greco-Roman historians were also conscious of the reliability and trustworthiness of their sources and also critically evaluated them.

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<sup>38</sup> Mellor, *The Roman Historians*, p. 78.

## Questions

- Q. How did human thought develop from theo-centric to anthro-centric paradigm, and how did this shift influence historiography in ancient times?
- Q. Briefly discuss the development of historiography in ancient times.
- Q. Briefly analyze the philosophical interpretation of history by Ssu-Ma Ch'ien.
- Q. Critically analyze the contribution of the Jews to history-writing.
- Q. Greek historians like Herodotus and Thucydides laid the foundation of scientific and rational historiography. Elaborate.
- Q. Historians like Herodotus and Thucydides tried to highlight the role of individual in history. How and why?
- Q. Critically analyze the contribution of the Romans to history-writing.

## **Unit 3**

### **Sacred History:**

### **Influence of Christianity on Historiography**

**Objectives of the Unit**

After reading the unit, the students will be able to:

- explain the important features and characteristics of Christian historiography
- know the origin and development of Church History
- learn the contribution of Saint Augustine to the development of Christian philosophy of history

The advent of Christianity greatly influenced human thought. The medieval European thought was governed by a Christian framework. The fundamental beliefs and doctrines of Christianity also influenced historical thinking, and consequently, historiography. For instance, the Biblical story of Creation and the idea of Original Sin, which argued that since Adam and Eve had committed the first sin of disobeying God by eating forbidden fruit, all human beings were born sinners, and thus, essentially evil-natured, greatly impacted the subsequent human thought. This assumption regarding the human nature later became one of the bases of the Christian philosophy of history as well as of other political philosophies. Similarly, the idea of Grace and Redemption, which argued that by the grace or blessing of God, human beings have a chance to attain salvation and be saved by repentance, also moulded the human thought.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, the historiographical tradition influenced by Christian doctrines has been labeled as Christian historiography.

### **3.1 Important Features of Christian Historiography**

The beliefs and doctrines of Christianity influenced the historical consciousness and human thought in a number of ways. The following were the important features or characteristics of the Christian historiography:

#### ***(i) Philosophization of History***

The Christian historians of medieval times were able to philosophize the vast span of time, and critically reflect on the past historical events. The most notable among them was Saint Augustine of Hippo who propounded a systematic philosophy of history, which will be discussed later in detail in this unit.

#### ***(ii) Conceptualization of the Beginning and End of Time***

The Biblical stories about the creation of human being and the beginning of time as well as the concept of Day of Judgment (Doomsday), which signified the end of time, helped the medieval Christian historians conceptualize and imagine the beginning and end of time. Hitherto, the Greeks had no clear idea about the beginning and end of time. It is important to recall here that the concept of time along with that of the space are the basic concepts in history.

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<sup>39</sup> See details in Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, pp. 46-49, 49-52.

### ***(iii) Concept of Universal History or World History***

The idea about the beginning and end of time helped the Christian historians conceptualize time in its entirety or totality. Therefore, it gave them the idea of writing a universal history, also called World History, starting from the creation of Adam and the beginning of time and coming to a close on the Day of Judgment and the end of time.

### ***(iv) Periodization of Time and History***

Since the medieval historians had tried to conceptualize time in its entirety, which was a difficult task owing to the vast span of time, therefore, they thought it necessary to divide time in various distinct periods (also called era or epochs). It gave birth to the notion of historical periodization, which rendered the vast stretch of time intelligible and understandable for the historians and the general people alike.<sup>40</sup> Consequently, a number of different schemes of periodization of history were devised by the historians. In general, time and human past was divided into two broad periods: the 'Period of Darkness', stretching from the creation of Adam to the birth of Jesus Christ, and the 'Period of Light', stretching from the birth of Christ to the Day of Judgment.

### ***(v) Dating Method***

Since the birth of Jesus Christ became the centre-point of Christian historical consciousness, it also became the chronological reference point for dating of all the past events and the future. That was why time was divided into two broad divisions: the pre-Christ (BC) and the post-Christ (AD) period. All events happening before the birth of Christ were dated as BC (before Christ), while the events taking place after the birth of Christ were dated as AD (*anno Domini* or 'in the year of our Lord'). In other words, historical events were dated backward and forward from the birth of Christ. Isidore (d. 636 AD circa), the bishop of Seville, developed this dating method in the seventh century. It was applied to all history, and is still prevalent in contemporary times.

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<sup>40</sup> For instance, Joachim (d. 1202 AD), the abbot of Floris in the twelfth century AD, divided history into three periods: (i) the reign of the Father or unincarnate God, (the pre-Christian Age), (ii) the reign of the Son (the Christian Age), and (iii) the reign of the Holy Ghost (yet to begin in future).

### ***(vi) Role of the Divine Factor in History***

The general approach of the medieval Christian historians was theo-centric, unlike the Greco-Roman historical thought, which was largely anthropo-centric, highlighting the role of human beings and the human agency in history. For Christian historians of medieval times, the concept of God again formed the nucleus of historical thinking. They stressed on the role of God, who controlled the fate of the human beings, and divine factors in historical developments. This idea of fate and divine intervention in history also gave birth to the idea of a 'Grand Design' in history, which argued that human history was meaningful and had a purpose. In other words, history was understood as a play written by God for achieving a particular purpose.

### ***(vii) Idea of Linear Movement of Time***

The Greeks had an implicit cyclical view about time, and they generally believed in its recurrent cyclical movement. But the thinkers influenced by Christianity propounded the view that history conforms to a linear development. According to this idea, history moves on in a straight line, events like the creation of Adam, birth of Christ, etc. are never repeated, and events like the Second coming of Christ, and Doomsday, etc. would occur only once and would never be repeated. Moreover, God guides the human beings to a straight path.<sup>41</sup>

### ***(viii) Development of Church History***

During the fourth century AD, the medieval Christian historians paid attention to preserving the history of Christianity and the subsequent development of Catholic Church. The history thus produced was called the Church or Ecclesiastical history, which was primarily focused on important historical developments taking place in the religious realm. The Church or Ecclesiastical history was practiced from late antiquity through the Byzantine and Western Middle Ages. According to Grafton, in many ways, it was the richest form of historiography, since it paid the most attention and the most space to documentation. It covered the widest range of topics, and used evidence not only to establish the order to events, but also to recreate past social and cultural conditions.<sup>42</sup> The historians who wrote Church or Ecclesiastical histories were themselves the members of the Church. These saint-historians included, among others, Saint Pamphilus of Caesarea (d. 309 AD), Saint

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<sup>41</sup> David Bebbington, *Patterns in History: A Christian Perspective on Historical Thought* (Grand Rapids: MI: Baker Book House, 1990 rpt.; first pub. 1979), p. 43.

<sup>42</sup> Anthony Grafton, *What was History? The Art of History in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 111.

Eusebius (d. 339 AD), Saint Ambrose (d. 397 AD), and Saint Jerome (d. 420 AD). However, the most renowned Church-historian was Saint Eusebius of Caesarea.

### **3.2 Eusebius of Caesarea—The Father of Church History**

Eusebius of Caesarea (d. 339 AD) was a fourth-century Christian bishop, who is considered the Father of Church History. His two most famous works are *Chronographia* (Chronicles) and *Historia Ecclesiastica* (Church History), which were written in Greek language. In his books, he gave a chronological account of the development of Christianity from its beginning till his contemporary times. He not only tried to preserve the life-histories of Jesus Christ and Christian priests and teachers, he also recorded the history of the heretical movements and groups. However, he could not remain objective while writing the history of Christianity and the Church to which he himself belonged. Moreover, he failed to critically examine the sources he used for writing history.

### **3.3 Saint Augustine—The Founder of Christian Philosophy of History**

Saint Augustine of Hippo (b. 354-d. 430 AD) was one of the greatest Latin Church Fathers as well as a medieval philosopher, who was born in the present day Algeria in Africa. Before joining the Christian Church, he had been inspired by Manichaeism, and joined it. Later, he converted to Christianity, and eventually became a Bishop. He was greatly influenced by Christian doctrines and beliefs, which found way in his philosophical and historical thinking as well. He is considered the founder of Christian philosophy of history, though before him Ssu-Ma Ch'ien in China had propounded a systematic philosophy of history probably for the first time in human history. Augustine's most important work on history is *De Civitate Dei* (The City of God) in 22 volumes, written in Latin. His other famous book is "The Confessions", which is an autobiography. His ideas greatly influenced the thought and works of many later historians and philosophers of history.

He elaborated the idea of Original Sin, and argued that all human beings were intrinsically or inherently bad and evil-natured. On the basis of this assumption, he promulgated his philosophy of history, which was ethical and moralistic in character. He interpreted history to be a struggle between the two opposite forces of good and evil. For this reason, he is credited with an ethical interpretation of history. On the basis of this assumed dichotomy between the good and evil, which he borrowed from the dualistic religions such as Manichaeism<sup>43</sup> and

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<sup>43</sup> In the third century AD, Mani (d. 274 or 277) in Babylonia (then part of the Sasanian Empire in Persia) founded a dualistic religion called Manichaeism. He taught a strict dualism, affecting spirit and matter. According to him, good and evil are separate and

Zoroastrianism,<sup>44</sup> Augustine classified human beings into two categories or groups ever since the beginning of time:

- (i) The first group was labeled as the ‘City of God’ (the heavenly City), which consisted of the pious and righteous people, who were dominated by the love of God.
- (ii) The second group was that of the ‘City of Man/Satan’ (the earthly City), which comprised of the sinful and wicked people, who were indulged in self-love.

According to Augustine, the first representatives of these two ‘cities’ or categories of human beings were Abel and Cain—the two sons of Adam. (Abel was the pious one, and was murdered by Cain, who was wicked). Their clash represented the first conflict between the two forces of good and evil in human history.

Augustine also argued that the history of the ‘City of God’, beginning with Adam, was a record of meaningful growth and development through the centuries to the time of Christ, whereas the history of the ‘City of Man/Satan’ is a history of sin, death and human failure. He declared that history is “an account of the Profound and the Profane dimensions of humanity”, and thus made a sharp distinction between sacred and secular history. He focused on the sacred history (history of the pious people), and secular history (history of the wicked people) seemed to him an insignificant thing. In this way, he narrowed down or reduced the scope of history by allowing only the ‘positive’ historical developments in history-writing, ignoring the ‘negative’ ones. His approach to history was largely theo-centric, placing the concept of God at the centre of historical interpretation. He argued that God had laid a plan or a design in history, and therefore, history was meaningful and had a purpose.

To Augustine, the fall of Adam signified the exact beginning of time, while the Day of Judgment suggested the end of time, along with the sudden end of the world and human race in a catastrophic manner, referred to as ‘apocalypse’ in Christian doctrines.<sup>45</sup> He was also influenced by Hebrew Scriptures, from where

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opposed principles. He also used the metaphor of light and darkness for good and evil respectively. Manichean thought later influenced Saint Augustine’s philosophy of history.

<sup>44</sup> Zoroastrianism, founded by Zoroaster (who lived in the eleventh and tenth centuries BC), originated in ancient Persia. It is a dualistic religion having the concept of two Gods: Ahuramazda (God of Good; also called Yazdan in Persian) and Ahriman (God of Evil). Zoroastrianism greatly influenced Judaic/Hebrew thought, and then through it influenced the Western thought. The early Christian thinkers like St. Augustine borrowed the dichotomy of good and evil from it.

<sup>45</sup> The term apocalypse is also referred to the foresight about the future in general.

he borrowed the scheme of periodization. He divided the whole history from Adam to the Day of Judgment into seven distinct periods.<sup>46</sup>

In addition, he tried to combine or reconcile the two diverse modes of thought: determinism (a philosophical idea that fate and all human actions have been pre-decided and pre-determined by God, and human beings have no will of their own) and freewill (a philosophical idea, contrary to determinism, which argues that human beings are endowed with free will, and have freedom to choose whatever they like). Though Augustine insisted that God had laid a plan in history, and He never deviates from His plan, he rejected the idea of inevitability of historical events (i.e. being predetermined, events are bound to happen, and human efforts and choices cannot prevent them from occurring), which was believed by the Greeks. He declared that though the Providence of God controls all history, human beings have been given freewill to love God (and thus be saved) or to love their own self (and be lost). He also believed that the sacred Scriptures were the only source of guidance, and argued that people should develop knowledge of the 'sacred sciences' on the basis of the principles in these Scriptures.

Augustine's concept of history and the movement of time was both unilinear (moving forward like a straight single line) and cyclical. He did not believe in the endlessness of time; rather he considered time and history to be of finite character, with a beginning and an absolute end. He conceptualized history to be situated or stretched between these two points. In this way, he sketched the image of a unilinear progress of time and history. However, his idea of time and the movement of history was cyclical as well, having one-grand cycle. He believed that human soul, separated from God was destined to reunite it after salvation. (This idea of the immortality and return of the soul to its origin or its Creator was borrowed from Platonic thought).

He argued that the Kingdom of God has already begun with the institution of the Church (the Catholic Church), which symbolized the Kingdom of God on earth. His critics assert that the aim of Augustine was not to write history, but to defend Christianity, and therefore, he was also apologetic. He wrote *The City of God* in order to refute the pagan accusation that Christianity was responsible for the decline of Roman power. In fact, Rome was destroyed by the Goths in 410 AD, and it was believed by many that it was due to Christianity.<sup>47</sup> He also attacked the myth of Byzantium as the 'new Rome'. Augustine's critics have also challenged

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<sup>46</sup> See details in Grace Cairns, *Philosophies of History* (London: Peter Owen Limited, 1962), p. 254.

<sup>47</sup> Allan D. Fitzgerald, ed. *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids; MI: Eerdmans, 1999), pp. 352-53.

the underlying assumption of his philosophy that human beings are essentially evil-natured.

Augustine was a medieval philosopher of history, who was profoundly influenced by the Christian doctrines. His theory interpreting all history to be a struggle between two opposite forces of good and evil seems to have some relevance for today. It is difficult to deny that many of the conflicts in the contemporary world are being perceived and interpreted by the conflicting parties by employing the Augustinian idioms of good and evil. The case of the on-going American War against al-Qaeda Network in Afghanistan is an example in point, since each party to the conflict claims to be representing the forces of good, and brands the other party as siding with the evil forces. Thus, contradictory perspectives of good and evil are still being used to explicate and describe conflict situations. However, the entire human history cannot be merely interpreted as a conflict between the forces of good and evil.

## Questions

Q. What are the salient characteristics of Christian historiography?

Q. St. Augustine identified a principle to explain the entire human history. What was that principle? Can it be still applied for interpreting history in contemporary times?

Q. For Augustine, human history is an account of the profound and the profane dimensions of humanity. Explain.

## **Unit 4**

### **Contribution of the Muslims to Historiography**

### **Objectives of the Unit**

After reading the unit, the students will be able to:

- understand the view of Quran on history
- trace the origin of history-writing among the early Muslims
- development of *Sirah* and *Maghazi* as two sub-fields of history
- explain the gradual recognition of history as an independent branch of knowledge
- know the contribution of Tabari, Masudi, Ibn Athir and Ibn Miskawayh to history-writing
- learn about Ibn Khaldun's philosophy of history

The advent of Islam had tremendous impact on human thought, and the early Muslim thinkers and scholars greatly contributed to the production of knowledge. One of the branches of knowledge to which the Muslims paid special attention was the discipline of history. In the words of a famous Orientalist, Muslim historiography “eventually achieved a definite advance beyond previous historical writings in the sociological understanding of history and the scientific systematization of historiography... Muslim historiography had the advantage of its great variety and its vast volume.”<sup>48</sup> The Muslim historians and philosophers of history made great contributions to the discipline. However, before discussing their contributions, it seems pertinent to briefly highlight the Quranic concept of history.

#### **4.1 The Quranic Concept of History**

Islam is essentially a history conscious religion. Its sacred scripture Quran is though not primarily a book of history, it stresses the need for historical knowledge as a moral exhortation of the faithful. Being a book of revelational origin, it is meant for the guidance of human beings. A sizeable portion of Quran contains the histories of ancient nations or communities, and the Prophets sent to them. Not only does it tell about the conduct, behaviour and the characteristics of the people of these ancient communities, it also informs how and why God bestowed His favours upon some of them, while some others were destroyed by divine wrath owing to multiple causes. These causes which led to their decline or annihilation from the face of earth ranged from their arrogance, pride and hunger for power to extravagance, ungratefulness and, above all, injustice. Thus, Quran discusses the principles that govern the rise and fall of various groups and communities. It does not attach importance to material superiority and power; rather it is the moral and ethical superiority that is desirable. Moreover, according to Quranic principles, disbelief (*shirk*) is not a sufficient ground for divine punishment; rather injustice and oppression become the cause of the wrath of God. The narration of stories of the ancient communities in Quran has a moralistic purpose, and therefore, the readers are invited to ponder over these stories and draw lessons from them. In this way, Quran has stressed the moral factor in history, and offered an ethical interpretation of the past.<sup>49</sup> The historical consciousness of the Muslims was greatly influenced by the Quranic concept of history, and their history-writing reflected this moralistic approach.

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<sup>48</sup> Franz Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1952), pp. 172-73.

<sup>49</sup> For a detailed discussion, see Mazheruddin Siddiqi, *The Quranic Concept of History* (Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, 1993 rpt., first pub. 1965), pp. 17-18, 40.

## 4.2 Origin of Muslim Tradition of Historiography

The origin of Muslim tradition of historiography can be traced back to the process of compilation of Quran and *hadith* (sayings and the actions of Prophet Muhammad PBUH, b. 570-d. 632) collections. During the life-time of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), a group of his Companions were designated to record the Quranic revelations in written form. However, these texts were scattered, and had not been compiled. Moreover, many Companions of the Prophet (PBUH) had also committed Quran to their memory. The need for the compilation of Quran in a single volume was felt during the reign of Caliph Abu Bakr (RA; r. 632-34), when many of these Companions, who had memorized Quran, were killed in the Battle of Yamamah fought in 632. Realizing the need to compile Quran, Caliph Abu Bakr (RA) appointed a committee under Hazrat Zayd ibn Thabit (RA; d. 45 AH), who was the personal scribe of the Prophet (PBUH) for this purpose. Consequently, the Quran was compiled. Later, during the reign of Caliph Uthman ibn Affan (RA; r. 644-56), the standard text of Quran was copied and sent to the conquered territories.

Initially, the Prophet (PBUH) had forbidden his Companions to record and write *ahadith*, as he feared that people would confuse them with the Quranic verses. However, after 623 AD (1 Hijrah/AH), he allowed them to write *ahadith*, and thus, many of his Companions prepared their personal collections of *ahadith*. Later, the Umayyad Caliph, Hazrat Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz (d. 718-20 AD), who is considered the fifth pious Caliph by many, ordered the collections of *ahadith* to be prepared, copied, and sent to the conquered territories.

The early Muslims had a burning desire to preserve the memory of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), including his sayings and actions. They wanted to preserve the knowledge that how he walked and talked, behaved in different situations, acted as a Prophet, as a statesman, as a military commander, as a preacher, as a friend, as a relative, as a father, as a husband, as well as how did he look like, for the posterity or the future generations. The Quran and the *hadith* collections served as primary sources for writing the history of the early Muslims, particularly the biography of the Prophet (PBUH), called *Sirah* or *Sirat*, and the military history called *Maghazi*.<sup>50</sup> The term *Maghazi* is derived from the word *ghazwah* (plural *ghazwat*) meaning a military campaign in which Prophet Muhammad PBUH himself participated.

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<sup>50</sup> See details in an article on al-Maghazi in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Vol. V, New edn. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986), pp. 1161-64.

It is important to note that the development of the discipline of history among the Muslims is closely linked to the *hadith* studies. In fact, it was under the general rubric of *hadith* that historical writing developed in the early centuries of Islam.<sup>51</sup> The early *muhaddithin* (Traditionists or compilers/teachers of *ahadith*) developed very elaborate rules for ascertaining the authenticity of *ahadith* such as pertaining to the mode of transmission and the chain of transmitters (*isnad*). They also classified the *ahadith* on the basis of their authenticity. They were not only concerned with the contents of a *hadith*, they also took into account the conditions in which the *ahadith* were narrated, as well as the characteristics of their narrators, especially their reliability and trustworthiness. They also developed principles for internal and external criticism of *ahadith* in order to assess their authenticity. The Muslim historians derived the principles of research and historical criticism, including the internal and external criticism, from the *hadith* compilation process. These historians were conscious of the issue of authenticity of their sources, which they critically examined.

#### **4.3 Development of *Sirah* and *Maghazi* Literature**

The two literary genres that were developed by the early Muslim historians were *Sirah* or *Sirat*, the biography of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), while the military history of the Prophet's time was called *Maghazi*. The word *maghazi* was derived from *ghazwah*, meaning a battle in which the Prophet (PBUH) himself participated. It is important to bear in mind that in the beginning, there was no clear division between *Sirah* and *Maghazi*, since the biographical history of the life and times of the Prophet (PBUH) included the record of his military campaigns. The history of the development of *Sirah* and *Maghazi* literature can be divided into two broad phases. Its first phase was marked by the beginning of *Sirah* and *Maghazi* writing, while during the second phase *Sirah* and *Maghazi* writing further developed in a more systematic manner.

##### ***(i) Early Sirah and Maghazi Writers***

During the first phase of the development of *Sirah* and *Maghazi* writings, a number of people contributed to it. A Companion of the Prophet (PBUH) named Aban ibn Uthman al-Ahmar (d. 105 AH), the governor of Medinah and the son of Hazrat Uthman ibn Affan, wrote the first book on *Sirah* and *Maghazi*.<sup>52</sup> Neither the work is not extant now, nor are its extracts found in other books. Another

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<sup>51</sup> Tarif Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 17; for a detailed discussion, see Chapter 2: History and *Hadith*, pp. 17-82.

<sup>52</sup> Muhammad Gholam Rasul, *The Origin and Development of Muslim Historiography* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1968), p. 16.

Companion of the Prophet (PBUH), Urwah ibn al-Zubayr (d. 94 AH/712 AD), the son of Zubayr ibn al-Awam, (the grandson of Caliph Abu Bakr), wrote a book on *Maghazi*, and its extracts are found in the works of other historians such as Ibn Ishaq, Waqidi, and Tabari. Later, a student of Urwah ibn Zubayr named Imam Muhammad ibn Muslim al-Zuhri (d. 124 AH/742 AD), a celebrated scholar and narrator of *hadith*, wrote many books on history including a book on *Maghazi* and the history of the Pious Caliphate. Other important historians who contributed to *Sirah* and *Maghazi* writing included Wahb ibn Munabbih (d. 34 AH), Shurahbil ibn Sa'ad, Asim ibn Umar ibn Qatadah (d. 120/129 AH), Musa ibn 'Uqba al-Asadi (d. 141 AH), Mu'tamar Sulayman and Mu'amar ibn Rashid.

During the second phase of the development of *Sirah* and *Maghazi* writings, the Muslim historians wrote history in a more systematic manner. These included the following:

### ***(ii) Ibn Ishaq***

First and the foremost among them was Muhammad ibn Ishaq (d. 761 AD), who was a student of Imam al-Zuhri. He composed *Kitab al-Maghazi*, which is considered an authentic and reliable work by later historians. Therefore, not only later historians relied on the work of Ibn Ishaq for history-writing, the compilers of the six most authentic collections of *ahadith*, the *Sihah-i Sittah*, also used it. For instance, Imam Muhammad ibn Isma'il al-Bukhari (d. 256 AH/870 AD) in his work *Sahih al-Bukhari* compiled the chapter on *ghazwat* or the military campaigns of the Prophet PBUH, titled *Kitab al-Ghazwat*, on his authority. Unfortunately, Ibn Ishaq's *Kitab al-Maghazi* has been lost, but the information contained in it has been preserved by Ibn Hisham (d. 835 AD), who wrote his book titled *Sirat Ibn Hisham* on its basis.<sup>53</sup>

### ***(iii) Al-Waqidi***

Muhammad ibn Umar al-Waqidi (d. 207 AH/823 AD) was another eminent Arab historian of his times. His work is also titled *Kitab al-Maghazi*. Waqidi was the first Muslim historian who differentiated between *Sirah* and *Maghazi* as two separate fields of study. He employed a chronological framework for writing his book. His presentation of historical data is coherent and cohesive. In case of contradictory sources on a historical event, he gave his personal opinion as to the preferred version.<sup>54</sup> Waqidi was a critical historian, who expressed doubts about

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<sup>53</sup> For details, see Muhammad Hamidullah, *Muhammad Ibn Ishaq: The Biographer of the Holy Prophet* (PBUH), (Karachi: Pakistan Historical Society, 1967).

<sup>54</sup> Norman Calder, Jawid Ahmad Mojaddedi and Andrew Rippin, eds. and trans. *Classical Islam: A Sourcebook of Religious Literature* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 27.

the earlier historical accounts. Like Ibn Ishaq's book, Waqidi's work is also considered authentic, and was used by the later historians as a source. However, the anecdotal material in his book has been rejected by many *muhaddithin* (traditionists, or experts of *ahadith*) as well as modern historians such as Shibli Naumani.

#### ***(iv) Ibn Sa'ad***

Muhammad ibn Sa'ad (d. 230 AH/844 AD) was another renowned historian, who was a student and secretary-editor of Waqidi from whom the former tremendously benefitted.<sup>55</sup> Ibn Sa'ad's work *Tabaqat al-Kubra*, popularly known as *Tabaqat Ibn Sa'ad*, is a biographical dictionary. Its first two volumes were dedicated to the biography of the Prophet (PBUH), whereas rest of the volumes dealt with the life of the Companions of the Prophet (PBUH) and their successors.

#### **4.4 Recognition of History as an Independent Branch of Knowledge**

The ninth and tenth centuries witnessed further development of Muslim historiography. During these centuries, many eminent Muslim historians produced works of history. These historians did not confine their history-writing to the period of the Prophet (PBUH) like the earlier historians. Unlike the Christian historians of medieval times, the Muslim historians were able to differentiate history from religious studies. They recognized history (including historiography) as an independent branch of knowledge.

The prominent Muslim historians of the ninth century include Abul Hasan Ali al-Madai'ni (d. 225 AH/830-31 AD), Ibn Qutaybah (d. 276 AH/889 AD), al-Dinawari (d. 891 AD), al-Baladhuri (d. 892 AD), and al-Yaqubi (d. 900 AD). However, the most renowned among them was al-Baladhuri. Ahmad ibn Yahya al-Baladhuri (d. 892) was an Arab historian and geographer, who greatly contributed to historiography. His work *Futuh al-Buldan* (The Conquest of Countries) was largely focused on military history of the Muslims, but it also discussed the social and cultural conditions of the conquered territories. In this way, Baladhuri broadened the scope of history-writing by including the themes and subjects not touched by the Muslim historians before him.<sup>56</sup>

The tenth century was marked by further development of Muslim historiography. Tremendous achievements in the field of history and historiography were made by

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<sup>55</sup> Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period*, p. 47.

<sup>56</sup> For a detailed study of Baladhuri, see Amanullah Khan, *A Critical Study of al-Balādhurī as a Historian* (Lahore: University of the Punjab, 1987).

the Muslim historians. The two most famous historians who contributed to history-writing in the tenth century were al-Tabari and al-Masudi.

#### **4.5 Tabari—The First Muslim ‘World Historian’**

Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari (b. 839-d. 923 AD) was a tenth-century Arab historian as well as an expert of *tafsir* (exegesis of Quran), *hadith* studies and *fiqh* (Muslim jurisprudence). He has been regarded as the ‘imam’ or the leader/pioneer of *hadith* historiography.<sup>57</sup> He had traveled in Iraq, Syria and Egypt. It is important to bear in mind that he was not associated with any court, nor was he patronized by any ruler. Despite offers, he never accepted government service, and devoted his life to teaching and research. His most famous work is *Tarikh al-Rusl wal-Muluk wal-Khulafa* (The History of the Prophets, Kings and Caliphs) in sixteen volumes, written in annalistic tradition. As its title suggests, it included the history of the ancient Prophets and kings or rulers, especially the Sasanian Emperors of pre-Islamic Persia. It also covered the history of the period of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the Pious Caliphs, followed by the history of Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphates. The life and times of the Prophet (PBUH) has been recorded by Tabari in the already existing *Sirah* tradition, but for recording the events after the migration of the Prophet (PBUH) to Medinah in 622 AD, he employs an annalistic framework. His work had a lasting impact on the historians of future generations as a model of how history should be written.<sup>58</sup>

Tabari’s work was a World history or a comprehensive history, covering the history of a vast time frame. He consciously kept a chronological scheme of events in his book. He presented the evidence of historical facts, and tried to remain as much objective as possible. He presented elaborate details on the life of the Prophet (PBUH). While writing the history of controversial historical events, he devised a new method of narrating all the conflicting versions and then leaving the judgment to the readers.

#### **4.6 Masudi—The Geographer-historian**

Abu’l Hasan Ali al-Masudi (b. 888-d. 955 AD) was a tenth-century Arab historian and geographer. Among his contemporaries, he was the only historian who

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<sup>57</sup> Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period*, p. 73.

<sup>58</sup> C. Edmund Bosworth, “The Persian Contribution to Islamic Historiography in the pre-Mongol Period” in *The Persian Presence in the Islamic World*, eds. Richard G Hovannisian and Georges Sabagh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 225.

regarded history as a ‘well ordered and firm science’.<sup>59</sup> He had widely traveled in Palestine, Syria, Egypt, Oman, Iraq, Persia, India and Sri Lanka. He wrote books on quite diverse subjects including history, politics, physics, religion, ethics and linguistics. However, most of his works have been lost. His most famous work on history, which is still extant, is *Muruj al-Zahab wa Ma’adin al-Jawahir* (Fields of Gold and Mines of Jewels).<sup>60</sup> According to Lunde and Stone, the most original feature of this work of Masudi—the ‘most readable of Muslim historians’—is the placing of historical events in a geographical context. Moreover, another significant feature of his work which distinguishes him from other Muslim historians is his interest in the non-Muslim world.<sup>61</sup>

In his book *Muruj al-Zahab*, the historical data is well-organized. Its themes are quite diverse ranging from geographical information to social and cultural aspects. He made a critical study of controversial historical events. He tried to establish the relationship of history and geography, and presented a geographical interpretation of history by highlighting the effect of geography and climate on human beings, and their behaviour, society, culture and political system. This theme was further developed by Ibn Khaldun in the fourteenth century, and later by Montesquieu (d. 1755) in the eighteenth-century Europe. He also discussed the principles that govern the rise and fall of cultures and nations. This theory was further developed and elaborated by Ibn Khaldun, and then by Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee in the twentieth century.

The fourteenth-century historian and philosopher of history, Ibn Khaldun praises Masudi, and calls him the *imam* (leader or pioneer) of historians. Masudi was not a systematic philosopher of history, but the earliest Muslim historian to reflect on history and to apply certain principles of scientific method and philosophical reasoning to history.<sup>62</sup> The methodology used by Masudi was based on his direct personal observation. His approach to historical causation was humanistic and anthropo-centric, and not theo-centric.

#### **4.7 Ibn Miskawayh and Ibn Athir**

Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Miskawayh (b. 932-d. 1030 AD) was an eleventh-century Persian historian, poet, moralist and philosopher from Ray in Persia

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<sup>59</sup> Chase F. Robinson, *Islamic Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 36.

<sup>60</sup> The work has been translated from Arabic into English with the title *The Meadows of Gold: The Abbasids*, trans. and eds. Paul Lunde and Caroline Stone (London: Kegan Paul, 1989).

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, see Introduction by the editors, pp. 11, 12, 13.

<sup>62</sup> Tarif Khalidi, *Islamic Historiography: The Histories of Mas’ūdī* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1975), p. 144.

during the Buwayhid era. He was the author of several books including *Tajarib al-Umam* (The Experiences of Nations) in six volumes, and *Tahzib al Akhlaq* (Ethical Instruction) on moral philosophy. He presented a distinct perspective in *Tajarib al-Umam*, as he voiced his dissatisfaction with the approach of the earlier historians whose works were merely factual and chronological accounts of the past. For him, history is the critical account of the past, and therefore, he subjected ancient historical sources to scrutiny. He greatly contributed to the development of the principles of historical criticism, as he stressed on critical assessment of sources for history-writing. In addition, his view of history rejected the concepts of predeterminism and providential design or purpose. For him, history is a movement of human purpose and counter-purpose.<sup>63</sup> Like Masudi, his approach to historical causation was humanistic, and not theo-centric.

Ibn Athir (b. 1160-d. 1233 AD) was another eminent Arab historian of the thirteenth century, who made great contribution to the discipline of history. Like Tabari's book, his work *Al-Kamil fi'l Tarikh* (The Complete History) was also a universal or world history. In addition to the history of the Muslims, he was interested in recording the history of the neighboring non-Muslim regions, particularly of the Byzantine Empire. His treatment of the history of non-Muslim countries is remarkably impartial, as he tried to treat them objectively. Interestingly, he also gave occasional references to the countries like England and Germany.<sup>64</sup>

#### **4.8 Ibn Khaldun—The Founder of Social Sciences**

Abd al-Rahman ibn Khaldun of Tunis (b. 1332-d. 1406 AD) was one of the greatest thinkers of medieval times. He was an original thinker, who does not seem to be influenced by any earlier Muslim historian or philosopher. His ancestors belonged to South Arabia, from where they had migrated to Spain, and then to North-west Africa, where he was born at Tunis in 1332. He not only contributed to history, (including historiography and philosophy of history), but also made tremendous contributions in the field of sociology, political science, economics, geography, education, religion and philosophy. He is considered the real founder of social sciences, as well as of sociology in general, and sociology of history in particular.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Zaid Ahmad, "Muslim Philosophy of History" in *A Companion to the Philosophy of History and Historiography*, ed. Aviezer Tucker (Chishester: Blackwell, 2009), pp. 440-41.

<sup>64</sup> Mahmood ul-Hasan, *Ibn al-Athir: An Arab Historian: A Critical Analysis of Tarikh-al-Kamil and Tarikh-al-Atabeca* (New Delhi: Northern Book Centre, 2005), p. 176.

<sup>65</sup> David Braybrooke, *Natural Law Modernized* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), see Appendix Part 1 by Michael McLendon, "Ibn Khaldun Modernized", p. 245.

Ibn Khaldun explicitly claimed to be the founder of a new science of history. Discussing the nature of history as a discipline, he asserted that history involves making generalizations from the findings of historical events and phenomena, which are useful for the posterity. He is the first clear-headed thinker to assert that social phenomena appear to obey laws, which are as absolute as those governing natural phenomena. Therefore, these 'social laws' having regular and well-defined patterns can be explored and understood in order to study the development of a society, and establish cause-and-effect relationship between historical events. Thus, he implicitly called history a science, a science of society (or a social science) in which 'social laws' are explored and studied. In this way, he broke away with the prevalent or traditional 'factual conception' of history, which emphasizes the narration and description of events, and does not theorize them.

Ibn Khaldun is the author of *Kitab al-Ibar*, (The Universal History/The Book of Exemplaries) consisting of eight volumes. Its first volume is titled *Muqaddamah* (Prolegomena), in which he propounded his social theories and his philosophy of history. The next seven volumes explain them with the help of empirical evidence from the history of various communities/societies and countries, particularly his contemporary dynasties in West Africa, Spain and Sicily.

Like Masudi, he also explored the relationship between history and geography, but he considerably expanded and elaborated it. Ibn Khaldun discussed the impact of geographical and climatic conditions on human beings, and asserted that geographical conditions largely determine political structures, social institutions, cultural forms and religious practices in a given locale. He divided geographical locales into temperate zones (areas having moderate weather, neither very hot and nor very cold) and non-temperate zones (areas having extremely cold or hot weather). In the temperate zones, the climatic conditions are conducive for the development of arts, crafts and sciences, and people are more civilized and have a developed aesthetic sense, with improved lifestyle, better tools, fine clothes and food, and good architecture. They are politically organized in states. On the contrary, in the non-temperate zones, climatic conditions are not very conducive for the development of science and art, etc. Moreover, people have to fight against the forces of nature, and have a low living standard. Their aesthetic sense is not much developed, and they are not very much civilized.<sup>66</sup> Politically, they are organized in tribes. In this way, Ibn Khaldun gave a geographical interpretation of history.

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<sup>66</sup> Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*, vol. 1, Urdu trans. Maulana Raghīb Rahmani (Karachi: Nafees Academy, 1986), pp. 272-74.

Ibn Khaldun is credited with taking a holistic or an overall view of the human society in his scientific analysis for the first time. He believed that history should not restrict itself merely to the actions of few individuals.<sup>67</sup> He declared history to be a science of culture and civilization. The most important concept employed by him to explain the rise and fall of civilizations (and dynasties as well) is that of *asabiya*, which means solidarity, sense of togetherness, unity, group mind, group feeling, (binding force uniting people in a family, tribe, community, or a nation) identity, and legitimacy, etc.<sup>68</sup> On the basis of the concept of *asabiya*, he propounded a theory of the rise and fall of dynasties or civilizations. (It was actually generalized from the rise and fall of his contemporary dynasties in West Africa, Spain and Sicily.) The rise and fall of dynasties and civilizations depend on *asabiya*. The strengthening of *asabiya* leads to the rise of a dynasty or civilization, while its weakening causes its decline and fall. If *asabiya* disappears from a group or community or dynasty or state or civilization, the result will be its replacement by another group or community or dynasty or state or civilization with a stronger sense of *asabiya*.<sup>69</sup> Generally, blood relationship (common ancestry or lineage) is the basis of *asabiya*, but religion may also provide a much wider basis for it. Commonality of religion may also create *asabiya* (religious identity) among the people and act as a binding force. Ibn Khaldun also argued that historically, the *asabiya* based on religion had played an important role in the propagation of Islam. He cited the example of the Arabs, Turks and Berbers, among whom Islam as a new faith had created a new religious identity, and consequently religious zeal to spread their faith. This religious identity may also lead to the creation of a state (*daulat*). He particularly praised the Berbers for their tribal solidarity which successfully resisted the Arab hegemony, and eventually led to establishment of states of their own in North Africa. Later, the fourteenth century witnessed the decline of the Berbers owing to the weakening of their tribal solidarity and loss of their independent spirit due to luxury.<sup>70</sup>

In order to explain the strength and weakening of *asabiya*, Ibn Khaldun divided the life span of a group or community or dynasty or state into the following five stages or phases: (i) conquest, (ii) consolidation, (iii) blossoming (with

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<sup>67</sup> In this way, he implicitly challenged the ‘Great Men Theory’ that argues that the real focus of historical studies ought to be the role of few individuals or ‘Great Men’, who shape historical events. In the nineteenth century, an advocate of this approach was Thomas Carlyle (d. 1881), a Scottish historian and author of *Hero and Hero-worship*, who argued that history is “the biography of great men”.

<sup>68</sup> Fuad Baali, *Society, State, and Urbanism: Ibn Khaldun’s Sociological Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), pp. 43-44.

<sup>69</sup> Yves Lacoste, *Ibn Khaldun: The Birth of History and the Past of the Third World* (London: Verso, 1984), pp. 110-7.

<sup>70</sup> Allen James Fromherz, *Ibn Khaldun: Life and Times* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), pp. 135-36.

accumulation of wealth), (iv) lavish expenditure of wealth but with some restraint, and (v) waste and squandering. According to him, the cycle of rise, growth, decline and fall generally takes 120 years on average, and three to four generations of people complete this cycle. He also used the analogy of life cycle of living organisms, especially the human beings, and argued that just like an individual, a dynasty or state or civilization also goes through the cycle of birth, growth, maturity, senility/old age, and finally decay/death. His theory of the rise and fall of dynasties and civilizations presumes time to be moving in a recurrently cyclical manner.<sup>71</sup>

Ibn Khaldun discussed the historical evolution of state. He argued that historically the social institution of family led to the emergence of a tribe that included the extended kith and kin. Tribe, as a social institution and a social organization, is based on common ancestry, and all the tribe members have blood relationship with each other. A tribe chooses its leader—a tribal chief, who is responsible for managing resource capture, resource allocation or distribution, and arbitration in case of conflict. Tribal chieftainship leads to the emergence of royal authority, and eventually to the emergence of a state. The *asabiya* in a tribal grouping gives rise to political action leading to the seizure of the state apparatus, and foundation of a dynasty.

Ibn Khaldun applied sociology to history, and presented a sociological view of history. While explaining the historical evolution of society, he traced the origin of society from family to tribe, and from nomadic to sedentary urban life. For this he used the concepts of *badawa* (nomadic culture) and *hazara* (urban or sedentary culture). He discussed the characteristics of both the groups. The nomads are physically strong-built, and are more courageous and tough. Their profession is hunting or farming. They are less interdependent on others and enjoy freedom. They have a survival economy (an economic order/system that merely fulfills the basic needs of the people), and have fewer needs. There exists tribal egalitarianism (equality), and their *asabiya* is strong. On the contrary, the urbanites are coward, less courageous and physically weak. They become lazy and indolent owing to comfortable and luxurious way of living. They are more dependent on others for fulfillment of their needs. They have time for aesthetic pleasures of life such as music, art and poetry. They also accumulate wealth, and also create their own needs. Among these urbanites, *asabiya* is weak as compared to the nomads. Ibn Khaldun's comparative analysis of the characteristics of the nomads and urbanites

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<sup>71</sup> Baali, *Society, State, and Urbanism: Ibn Khaldun's Sociological Thought*, pp. 69, 69-82. However, Muhsin Mahdi argues that Ibn Khaldun rejected both linear and cyclical theories of culture. Muhsin Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldun's Philosophy of History: A Study in the Philosophic Foundation of the Science of Culture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964), p. 255.

has given birth to rural and urban sociology, two branches within the discipline of sociology.

Regarding historical causation, Ibn Khaldun asserted that the causes of historical change are generally endogenous (internal/from within), though at times there might be some exogenous (external) factors as well, which bring about a change, e.g. foreign invasions. As a historian, Ibn Khaldun stressed the importance of historical criticism. He believed that a historian should not uncritically accept historical data; rather he should subject it to scrutiny in order to assess whether the given information is reliable or unreliable. Furthermore, a historian should not be partial or biased against or in favour of someone or something. Ibn Khaldun also contributed to the development of the principles of historical criticism, such as the critical study of authorship and sources.

Ibn Khaldun mentioned the role of divine factors in history, but he refused to take refuge in the fatalistic dogma like other medieval historians,<sup>72</sup> which often makes people pessimistic, and they give up struggle in life to change their fate. He believed in the omnipotence of God, and considered Him to be the 'Prime Cause', or 'Ultimate Cause' of all things and phenomena, or the 'Causer of causes', but his beliefs did not impede his historical investigation in humanistic and rational paradigm. His dominant paradigm was rational-anthropocentric, and as a historian, he subscribed to a rationalist philosophy. He raised and answered many historical questions and inquiries in a secular and rational manner, and employed rationalism as a method of investigation and deduction, notwithstanding that he assigned some role to the divine factors in history as well. However, he did not apply his scientific-rational method while studying the spiritual and intellectual life of societies. In such cases, for Ibn Khaldun religion became a "touchstone for all his judgments, and they are all value-judgments".<sup>73</sup> None the less, the historical explanations offered by him are predominantly anthro-po-centric and rationalist, though he stressed the need to exercise reason within limits.<sup>74</sup>

The concept of social solidarity propounded by Emile Durkheim (d. 1917), a famous French sociologist, was probably borrowed from Ibn Khaldun.<sup>75</sup> The relevance of Ibn Khaldun's theory for today is somewhat restricted in terms of application. However, it is more coherent, plausible and comprehensive than Augustinian theory. It can beneficially be applied to interpret and explain the

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<sup>72</sup> Lacoste, *Ibn Khaldun: The Birth of History and the Past of the Third World*, p. 193.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 183.

<sup>74</sup> Abderrahmane Lakhsassi, "Ibn Khaldūn" in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, eds. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman (London and New York: Routledge, 2001 rpt., first published 1996), p. 359.

<sup>75</sup> Baali, *Society, State, and Urbanism: Ibn Khaldun's Sociological Thought*, p. 105.

dynastic shifts in case of monarchical polities. In particular, the theory amply explains the shifts in power structures during the medieval times, when there was dynastic rule, and the monarchs belonged to one particular tribe or clan, and their members used to extend loyalty, allegiance and legitimacy to the ruling families. For instance, the rise and fall of various dynasties during the Sultanate era (1206-1526) in medieval Indian history can befittingly be explained and appreciated with the help of Ibn Khaldun's theory of *asabiya*.

## Questions

Q. The origin of the Muslim tradition of historiography can be traced back to the phenomenon of the compilation of the Quran and *hadith*. Discuss.

Q. Elaborate the various phases of the development of *Sirah* and *Maghazi* literature.

Q. Analyze the contribution of Tabari and Masudi to the discipline of history.

Q. What is the concept of *asabiya* employed by Ibn Khaldun to explain the rise and fall of civilizations and cultures? What are the bases of *asabiya*, and what are the various stages of its strengthening and weakening?

## **Unit 5**

# **Historiography during Renaissance and Scientific Revolution in Europe**

**Objectives of the Unit**

After reading the unit, the students will be able to:

- understand the impact of Renaissance on historical thinking in Europe
- assess the impact of Scientific Revolution on European historiography
- reflect on Descartes' skeptical views about history, and the subsequent development of Cartesian school of historiography
- explain Vico's response to Descartes' skeptical views and his secular philosophy of history

In the mid-fourteenth century, Renaissance ushered a new chapter in European history. It became the precursor of many other intellectual movements in Europe. The ideas generated in the wake of Renaissance greatly influenced the understanding of history and historiography in many countries of Europe.

### **5.1 Impact of Renaissance on European Historiography**

In European history, the movement called Renaissance (literally meaning revival or rebirth), which started in the mid-fourteenth century, marked the transition from the medieval period (also called the Middle Ages) to the early modern period. Renaissance was characterized by the revival of classical Greek traditions and knowledge of ancient times. It tremendously influenced the historiographical tradition in Europe. Prior to Renaissance, the medieval European historiography was largely a contribution of the Christian priests, whose main frame of reference was theology and the concept of God. Their approach to history was theo-centric. None the less, Renaissance marked the beginning of modern historiographical tradition in Europe. The following were the characteristic features of history-writing during the Renaissance in Europe:

#### ***(i) Anthro-centrism: Stress on the Role of Human Beings in Historical Causation***

Like the ancient Greek historians, human beings once again became the focus of human thought, and the historiographical approach once again became anthropo-centric. Moreover, the role of the divine factors in human history became insignificant for the Renaissance historians. One of the prominent Renaissance figures of the early sixteenth century was Niccolo Machiavelli (b. 1469-d. 1527), an Italian (Florentine) politician, historian and political philosopher. His famous political treatise titled *The Prince* is chiefly remembered for its political realism. He also authored many other books including a book on the history of the city-state of Florence, and the *Discourses on Livy* about the early history of Rome. His works reflect his approach, which was marked by anthro-centrism, wherein the role of human emotions, passions and desires, particularly lust for power, were highlighted. Machiavelli did not assign any role to God or ‘divine providence’ in history.<sup>76</sup> He also believed that people could learn from history, and draw lessons, guidelines, and principles from it, which could be applied for the benefit of humanity.

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<sup>76</sup> M. C. Lemon, *Philosophy of History: A Guide for Students* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 103-4; for details see Chapter 5: A Changing Consciousness of History: The Renaissance and Machiavelli, pp. 74-106.

## ***(ii) Beginning of Critical History in Europe***

The sixteenth century witnessed the beginning of critical and analytical history, when historians started critically analyzing the prevalent misconceptions and misconstructions. Polydore Vergil (b. 1470-d. 1555), an Italian priest with humanist leanings, composed history of the early Tudor dynasty that ruled England from 1485 to 1603. His work *Anglica Historia* (The History of England) written in Latin and published in 1534 questioned the myth of the foundation of Britain by the famous legendary figure, Brutus of Troy, the eponymous first king of Britain, from whom the country derived its name as well. In this way, Virgil laid the foundation of a critical history of England.

Jean Bodin (b. 1530-d. 1596) was a French politician, historian and political philosopher of the mid-sixteenth century, whose work *Method for the Easy Understanding of History* contributed to historiography by challenging many prevalent misconceptions regarding conventional periodization (the concept of dividing past/history into periods or eras) of the world history, which was taken from Biblical chronology. He considered it unhistorical, and divided human history into the Oriental, Mediterranean, and North European stages.

## **5.2 Impact of Scientific Revolution on European Historical Thinking**

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Scientific Revolution took place in Europe, which was characterized by tremendous development in natural sciences, particularly chemistry, biology, physics and astronomy, which provided the base for many modern sciences. In this age, a number of scientific discoveries were made, which challenged many of the medieval beliefs and doctrines. The scientific research and knowledge affected historical thinking in both negative and positive manners.

For instance, in seventeenth century, Francis Bacon (b. 1561-d. 1626), an English philosopher, historian, statesman and scientist, who composed *The History of the Reign of King Henry VII*, popularized the scientific method (named after him as the Baconian Method). Though he considered history to be the foundation of all knowledge, he confined the scope of history by asserting that it was the realm of memory.<sup>77</sup> In other words, he argued that historians could merely rely on their memory for history-writing. By doing so, he denied that history could be reconstructed by other means such as archaeological exploration.

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<sup>77</sup> B. H. G. Wormald, *Francis Bacon: History, Politics and Science, 1561-1626* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 46.

William Camden (b. 1551-d. 1623), an English historian, contributed to historical studies and archaeology. His famous work titled *Britannia*, the first book of its kind on the topographical (geographical landscape) and historical survey of Great Britain and Ireland, demonstrated how history could be reconstructed with the help of the surviving data of the past in the form of ancient books and artifacts. He also composed *Annales* on the history of the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (r. 1555-1603), also known as the Elizabethan Era, and remembered as the golden age in English history. His work *Britannia* is regarded as ‘the most famous’ and ‘most remarkable achievement of its kind’, while *Annales* entitles him to be regarded as the ‘founder of civil history in England’, and makes him the ‘greatest historian of his age’.<sup>78</sup> Camden’s works rested on critical study of the sources, and he also tried to eliminate the biases.<sup>79</sup>

Skepticism developed in the late seventeenth-century Europe when a climate of dissatisfaction with the received opinion was created. A number of factors were responsible for it: widening of Europe’s frontiers owing to geographical discoveries, emergence of ethnography, spread of religious heterodoxy, and freedom to pursue scientific and scholarly investigations from the clutches of authoritative sacred and secular texts.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, as a result of Scientific Revolution, not only questions related to human society and history were overshadowed by issues in scientific research, the utility of disciplines like history was also challenged by many thinkers. The foremost among them was Descartes, who championed historical skepticism.

### **5.3 René Descartes: Historical Skepticism and Discrediting History**

René Descartes (b. 1596-d. 1650) was a French philosopher and scientist, who is considered the father of modern philosophy. His views are said to have discredited the discipline of history. He argued that historians were too interested in what went on in the past that they had become extremely ignorant of their present.<sup>81</sup> He further asserted that history cannot claim truth, since the events of the past never happened the way they have been recorded or narrated by the historians. In other words, he challenged the authenticity of historical works, and argued that

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<sup>78</sup> G. E. Aylmer, “Introductory Survey: From the Renaissance to the Eighteenth Century”, in *Companion to Historiography*, ed. Michael Bentley (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 260-61.

<sup>79</sup> Grafton, *What was History? The Art of History in Early Modern Europe*, p. 231.

<sup>80</sup> Brendan Maurice Dooley, *The Social History of Skepticism: Experience and Doubt in Early Modern Culture* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1999), p. 147.

<sup>81</sup> René Descartes, *Discourse on the Method of Properly Conducting One’s Reason and of Seeking the Truth in the Sciences*, in René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Other Writings*, Eng. trans. with Introduction, F. E. Sutcliffe (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1968), pp. 30-31.

historical narratives are exaggerated accounts of the past. In this way, he rejected history as a branch of knowledge, doubted its utility and value *per se*, and expressed anti-historical views about it.

Descartes' critique to history has been dubbed as 'historical skepticism'. Skepticism refers to a distinct school of ancient Greek philosophers, who believed that absolute knowledge was unattainable. They argued that knowledge of how things really were might be sought but could not be found. Descartes also believed that sure and undoubted knowledge of the past happenings could not be attained through history.

#### **5.4 The 'Cartesian' School of Historiography**

During the latter half of the seventeenth century, a new school of historical studies emerged, which Collingwood calls the 'Cartesian School of Historiography',<sup>82</sup> as it was, quite paradoxically, inspired by and critical of the views of Descartes simultaneously. The historians belonging to this school were quite critical of their written or documentary sources, which they subjected to criticism and analysis. The renowned historians of this tradition included, among others, De Tillemont (b. 1637-d. 1698), the French ecclesiastical historian, who composed the history of the Christian Church. In this work, he gave references directly to the sources. In his other work, *History of the Roman Emperors*, he tried to reconcile the conflicting statements of different authorities. Moreover, he paid considerable attention to the accuracy of historical events in his narrative. In this way, it was the first historical work of this kind in Europe. As pointed out above, the tenth-century Muslim historian Ibn Jarir Tabari had devised a similar method of narrating all the available conflicting versions of a historical event while writing the history of controversial happenings in the early Muslim history.

The Society of Bollandists, named after a seventeenth-century scholar, Jean Bollandus (d. 1665), was a school of Belgian Jesuit philologists (the experts who study languages) and historians, who composed the biographies of the Christian saints. They critically assessed the existing hagiographical sources, i.e. the writings on the lives of the holy people such as saints. The most renowned work of the Bollandists is *The Lives of the Saints*. Similarly, a group of French Benedictine monks, referred to as Maurists, also critically studied hagiography in the seventeenth century.

In addition to critically evaluating the documentary sources of history, the historians of the era also paid attention to the study of non-documentary sources such as numismatics (the study of coinage) and epigraphy (the study of old

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<sup>82</sup> Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, p. 62.

inscriptions). In this regard, the early eighteenth-century British archaeologist, John Horsley (d. 1732), who composed *The Roman Antiquities of Britain*, made a remarkable contribution by systematically studying the Roman inscriptions in Britain.

### **5.5 Vico—A Representative of Anti-Cartesian School of Historiography, and the Founder of Secular Philosophy of History in Europe**

The views and the approach of the historians of Cartesian School were countered by many historians and philosophers, but the foremost among them was Giambattista Vico (b. 1668-d. 1744), the famous eighteenth-century Italian philosopher-historian, also known as Giovanni Battista Vico. Born in Naples in Italy, Vico taught at the University of Naples. His famous work *La Scienza Nuova* (The New Science) was published in 1725, which marks an important shift in European historiographical thinking. He was the first European thinker to call history a science, i.e. a science of society. He was quite critical of the approach of the earlier historians. According to him, they were prone to two kinds of errors, and labeled them as the ‘conceit of nations’ and the ‘conceit of scholars’ respectively. The first fallacy was to adopt one’s national point of view and write history in its light, while the other was the tendency to believe that all contemporary knowledge has always been known.<sup>83</sup>

Vico is considered the founder of secular philosophy of history in the European historiographical tradition since he broke away with the medieval historiographical traditions. His work marked the beginning of a gradual secularization of philosophy of history. Unlike Augustine’s theo-centric philosophy of history, Vico rejected the exclusively theo-centric explanation of historical events. He established the causal links between events by both theocratic and humanistic interpretations. He argued that the course of human history is independent of supernatural interventions, and the Divine Providence or God acts in history only indirectly, through the rational human nature, which He has created and guided.<sup>84</sup> He wrote that history or the ‘New Science’ must be a ‘rational civil theology of divine providence, which seems hitherto to have been lacking’.<sup>85</sup> In other words, the new science must be a demonstration of the historical fact of providence.

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<sup>83</sup> Leon Pompa, *Vico: A Study of the New Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999; first published 1975), pp. 8-9.

<sup>84</sup> Daniela Rocco Minerbi, “Giambattista Vico: Barbarism and Providence”, in *Macrohistory and Macrohistorians*, p. 38.

<sup>85</sup> Giovanni Battista Vico, *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*, Eng. Trans. Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch (Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press, 1968), p. 102.

Vico also affirmed that history was the evolution of human beings, and the process of this evolution was governed by God. According to Vico, it was due to the Divine Providence that people had progressively achieved the idea of their own rational nature, become civilized, and have overcome barbarism. He also tried to search for the 'natural' (inherent or made by God) laws of history or the "natural course of human beings themselves". He stated that the evolution of history was governed by laws immanent or hidden in human nature, which was a creation of God. In this way, his philosophy of history was partly theocratic and partly humanistic, though his dominant paradigm was anthropo-centric or humanistic. Moreover, to him, the subject-matter of history was the study of the origin and development of human societies and their institutions. (This is the modern idea of the subject-matter of history, particularly, social history). One can find a correlation between history and sociology in his views.

Though he remained attached to the fundamental Christian conception of history, Vico rejected Augustine's theory about the essentially evil human nature. He asserted that history was not a struggle between the opposite forces of good and evil. Both of these forces were not external entities; rather good and evil were within human beings. He stressed that human nature is rational.<sup>86</sup> In this way, like ancient Greek historians, Vico asserted the rational faculty of human beings, and interpreted history in a rational paradigm.

While countering Descartes' position regarding the impossibility of attaining absolute truth or sure knowledge of things, Vico pointed out the distinction between what could be known and what could not be known. Recognizing the limits of human knowledge, he stressed the need to search for a principle by which one could distinguish between the knowable and the unknowable. Moreover, he distinguished between the natural sciences and history by asserting that nature is a work of God, and therefore, it is intelligible to and understandable only for God, who is its Creator. However, the 'social world' or human society is created by human beings, and therefore, history, which studies society, is intelligible or knowable to human beings. In this way, Vico countered the historical skepticism of Descartes.

A new scheme of periodization of human history was a major contribution of Vico. He divided the development of history into three periods: (i) Theocratic Age (Age of Gods, or divine age) was the first stage of human history. In this stage, religion was the first institution, and the government was theocratic. Human beings gave up bestiality in favour of a relatively civilized society based on the concept of family life. The rational faculty of human beings had not yet developed

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

in this age. (ii) Heroic Age (Age of Heroes) was the second stage in the historical development of humanity, which was marked by shift from family to city, and the subsequent emergence of city-state as a political unit. Development of knowledge also took place in that age, but still it was not rational knowledge. (iii) Human or Civilized Age (Age of Men) was the third stage of human history, which was marked by full development of human reason, and production of rational knowledge. Moreover, in this stage, nation was the political unit.<sup>87</sup> Vico's scheme of periodization of human history was Euro-centric (i.e. from the point of view of Europe, or centred round Europe), since he kept in view the historical developments taking place in Europe, while ignoring the historical developments in non-European societies.

Like Ibn Khaldun, Vico's theory of the rise and fall of civilization and nation was also cyclical-spiral, since he maintained that the same cycle of the three above-mentioned stages of human history were repeated. Owing to corruption, the Age of Men came to a close, and was replaced by barbarism, after which a new Age of Gods, characterized by the rise of Christianity in Europe, began. It was followed by the heroic age, characterized by the emergence of feudalism in Europe. Vico conceptualized the third stage, i.e. the human age, as his contemporary times which witnessed the fullest development of human reason and the new sciences. He also discussed the historical evolution of monarchy, and considered it the last and the final form of government. However, to him, fullest development of human reason was a prerequisite for the establishment of a monarchical system. In this way, he explained the gradual and evolutionary development of human societies and their institutions in recurring cyclical-spiral manner.<sup>88</sup> Despite his tremendous contribution to historiography and historical thinking, Vico failed to get recognition in his own times. Later, the German scholars discovered his works in the nineteenth century.

Following the footsteps of Vico, many other thinkers and philosophers countered Cartesianism. These included, among others, John Locke (b. 1632-d. 1704), the famous British Enlightenment philosopher, George Berkeley (b. 1685-d. 1753), an eighteenth-century British philosopher, and David Hume (b. 1711-d. 1776), another eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher, economist and historian. Both Locke and Berkeley contributed to the discipline of philosophy, while the former also contributed to political philosophy. However, Hume who was a key figure in Scottish Enlightenment, contributed to history beside philosophy and economics. He authored *History of England*, which covered the English history from the invasion of Julius Caesar (d. 44 BC), the renowned Roman political leader, to the

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<sup>87</sup> Lemon, *Philosophy of History: A Guide for Students*, pp. 136-47; for a detailed discussion, see Chapter 7: Vico's Philosophy of History, pp. 127-67.

<sup>88</sup> Cairns, *Philosophies of History*, pp. 351-52.

Revolution in 1688. Hume widened the scope of historiography by including the history of the intellectual and scientific developments in his narrative, in addition to the political and military history, which has been the prime focus of historians ever since.

## **Questions**

Q. Analyze the impacts of Renaissance and Scientific Revolution on historical thought in Europe.

Q. Elaborate Descartes' historical skepticism, and the contribution of the Cartesian School of historiography.

Q. Vico is considered the founder of secular philosophy of history in Europe. How and why?

Q. How did Vico counter the views of the Cartesian School of historiography?

## **Unit 6**

# **Enlightenment and Romanticist Historiography in Europe**

### **Objectives of the Unit**

After reading the unit, the students will be able to:

- understand the impact of Enlightenment ideas on historical thinking in Europe
- evaluate the contribution of Montesquieu, Voltaire and Gibbon to historiography
- assess the influence of Romanticism on history-writing
- appreciate Hegel's philosophy of history based on dialectical idealism
- learn about the merits and demerits of Romanticist historiography

The Enlightenment was an eighteenth-century movement in Europe that brought about a revolution in intellectual terms. The era witnessed tremendous development in varied branches of knowledge ranging from natural sciences and philosophy, to religion and theology. The Enlightenment period in European history is also called the Age of Reason, since this era is marked by the application of reason or rationalism to the study and understanding of human beings and society, and to almost all the branches of knowledge. The seventeenth-century philosophers such as Bacon, Descartes, Baruch de Spinoza (a Dutch philosopher; d. 1677), Gottfried Leibniz (a German philosopher and mathematician; d. 1716) and Vico were the precursors of the movement. The Enlightenment thinkers and intellectuals had complete trust in reason, and that was why, for them, reason was the sole criterion for assessing the validity of human thought and action. Consequently, many of the medieval beliefs and ideas which could not stand the test of reason were questioned and rejected. The worldview of the medieval thinkers and philosophers, their views about the nature of human beings and their relationship with the universe, the role of religion in human life, the nature of religion and society, and human history were redefined. In this era, many new ideas and concepts were developed, while those of the past were discarded.

These changes in the realm of ideas brought about a revolt against religion, since the Enlightenment thinkers and intellectuals thought all religions to be social constructs, created by human beings, and devoid of any revelational value. It eventually led to the rise of secularism. The term secular stands in contrast to the sacred, while secularism refers to an approach to life without the influence of religion, which is largely determined by worldly concerns. In fact, the Enlightenment thinkers viewed religion and reason/science as two irreconcilable opposites. It led to the secularization of all aspects of life and human thought, accompanied by a crusade against religion. Faith, feelings and emotions were devalued, since they were considered unreliable, and hence, invalid by the Enlightenment thinkers. Thus, religion and religious concerns were relegated to the background, whereas reason reigned supreme.

### **6.1 Impacts of the Enlightenment Ideas on the Discipline of History**

What follows is a critical analysis of the impact of the Enlightenment ideas on the discipline of history in Europe:

#### ***(i) Secularization and Rationalization of Historical Thought***

The ideas and views of the Enlightenment thinkers considerably influenced historical thinking, and consequently, history-writing. The historiographical

traditions of medieval Europe were set aside, since most of the medieval European historians were associated with the Church. Theo-centric explanations were completely rejected in favour of anthropo-centric or humanistic interpretation of historical events. Human beings were the focus of human thought. The role of divine providence or divine plan in history was denied, while any reference to God or divine factor in historical causation was considered derogatory to the art of history-writing. In this way, the discipline of history, historical thought and historiography were secularized. Moreover, the historians of the Enlightenment era tried to offer a rational interpretation of history by seeking rational explanations for historical events. In addition, the historical development of human mind and reason through the ages became one of their primary foci. For instance, the eighteenth-century French thinker and historian, Marquis de Condorcet (d. 1794) wrote the history of the development of human mind and reasoning in his work *A Sketch of a Tableau of the Progress of the Human Spirit*, published in 1749, which foresaw a utopian future ahead. Similarly, another French thinker, Voltaire (d. 1778) also focused on the development of human mind from barbarism of the Middle Ages to civilization of modern times in his work *The New History*, published in 1757.

### ***(ii) The Idea of Progress and Human Perfectibility***

The Enlightenment thinkers and philosophers were greatly inspired by the tremendous development in the field of natural sciences, which affirmed their belief in human reason. They believed that in the past, the people did not use their rational faculty or reason freely, but later, they started using it, and thus, human reasoning developed gradually in a progressive manner through the ages. The Enlightenment thinkers not only assumed human thought to be gradually progressing and improving in a unilinear pattern, they also believed that in their contemporary times, i.e. the eighteenth century or the Enlightenment era, the development of reason had reached its zenith or peak. In other words, the human reasoning faculty had become fully developed and attained perfection. This idea also gave them a sense of completion and perfection, since they assumed that human thought had grown to its maximum, making the human beings perfect. They also argued that human reasoning would not and could not develop any further. However, some of them saw the peak of human reason in coming future, marked by the fullest development of rational knowledge and sciences.

The belief in the completion and perfection of human reasoning led the Enlightenment thinkers to believe that human beings had the capacity to shape their own destiny, and thus, be the architects of their own fate. They asserted that human beings had attained complete control over themselves, over all human affairs as well as over history. It signified the zenith of anthropo-centrism in human thought. However, the critics of the idea of progress and human

perfectibility assert that it is impossible to be sure that humanity and civilization is moving in the right or desirable direction.<sup>89</sup>

The idea of progress and human perfectibility greatly influenced the historical thinking in eighteenth-century Europe. Historians devoted themselves to the study of human past, which they interpreted as the growth and evolution of human mind and reason, as reflected in the historical approach of Condorcet and Voltaire.

### ***(iii) Development and Systematization of Secular Philosophy of History in Europe***

Ssu-Ma Ch'ien, the grand historian of China, was probably the first philosopher of history in human history. Saint Augustine's philosophy of history, which he propounded in the fifth century, was based on the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, and for this reason, it has been regarded as a Christian philosophy of history. Ibn Khaldun of fourteenth century is considered the first Muslim philosopher of history. The philosophies of history of Ssu-Ma Ch'ien and Ibn Khaldun were secular, and not based on religious doctrines like Augustine's. In European historical thought, Vico was the founder of the secular philosophy of history. The Enlightenment era was marked by further development of secular philosophy of history. The philosophies of history propounded by Hegel and Marx, for instance, were secular in nature. The term 'philosophy of history' was also coined by the renowned Enlightenment thinker, Voltaire in the eighteenth-century.

Philosophy is a branch of knowledge which takes an overall or general view of phenomena including the nature and meaning of universe and human life. Philosophy of history is a distinct branch of history, which takes an overall or general view of the human past. It attempts at philosophizing the human past, whereby it speculates and reflects on the general pattern of human past, and then hypothesizes on the basis of inferences made thereby. It involves a philosophical reflection upon the human past as a whole (and in some cases future as well). It tries to offer a philosophical explanation and interpretation of the past. In other words, it is an attempt to philosophically view the human past in a holistic manner, which includes speculation, and reflection on the general pattern of human history. In the words of Alfred Stern, it seeks to "understand history in its wholeness, the principles by which it is governed and the meaning it may conceal. The totality of the endeavors to understand history and to integrate it into the wholeness of human existence... is called *philosophy of history*".<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> John Bagnell Bury, *The Idea of Progress* (Kila; MT: Kessinger Publishers, 2004), p. 5.

<sup>90</sup> Alfred Stern, *Philosophy of History and the Problem of Values* (The Hague: Mouton and Co. S-Gravenhage, 1962), p. 39.

Philosophy of history searches for some regularities and continuities, or regular and recurrent patterns in human history in order to, first, hypothesize or make some generalizations about the past, and about the causes of change in the past; secondly, search for a singular principle, which could explain all human history in its entirety; and lastly, periodise history in varied stages, periods or epochs if possible on the basis of watersheds or distinct changes in human past. Often, it not only involves a philosophical reflection upon the human past, but includes future in its scope as well. Thus, it tries to offer a philosophical explanation and interpretation of the past, and often predicts and foresees a trajectory for future in the light of inferences and generalizations drawn from the past.

#### ***(iv) De-romanticization of the Past***

Generally speaking, the Enlightenment historians and thinkers had a disregard and disrespect for the past, including the past ideas and knowledge as well as past institutions. The human past was defamed and devalued by them. The past was de-romanticized by rejecting the idea of ‘golden past’, and by dubbing the medieval times as ‘dark ages’. It has been pointed out that the spirit of the Renaissance, the core idea of which was the revival of classical Greek knowledge, learning and traditions, had died out by the time of Enlightenment. According to critics, the Enlightenment thinkers got inspiration from the past, and later disowned it after grinding their own axe.

#### ***(v) Anti-historical Attitude of the Enlightenment Historians***

According to Collingwood, a truly historical view of human history sees everything of the past as having its own reason or rationale. The Enlightenment historians generally viewed past as a history of irrationality. All human actions of the past appeared to them to be irrational acts, such as religious practices, and thus, unworthy of historical investigation. They did not search for the rational causes behind the events of the past. Therefore, the general outlook of the Enlightenment historians is considered anti-historical.<sup>91</sup>

#### ***(vi) Less Emphasis on the Development of Research Methodology***

The Enlightenment historians paid less attention to the improvement of the methods of historical research or research methodology, unlike the Renaissance historians who had contributed to the development of the principles of historical criticism (such as the critical study of sources) and archaeology.

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<sup>91</sup> Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, p. 77.

## 6.2 Geographical Interpretation of History by Montesquieu

Montesquieu (b. 1689-d. 1755), a French liberal political philosopher and historian, tried to offer a geographical interpretation of history in his famous work, *The Spirit of Laws*, published in 1748. To him, two factors determine the character of a nation: (i) geography or physical environment, and (ii) government or political environment.<sup>92</sup> Before him, Masudi and Ibn Khaldun had made similar attempts at correlating geography and history. However, for Montesquieu, the differences between various cultures and communities were the result of the differences in climatic and geographical conditions. He tried to explain the characteristics, political system, social and religious traditions, customs and occupation of the people of the past civilizations with reference to their peculiar geographical features and climate. For instance, he argued that monarchy is more frequently found in countries with fertile land, and republican government in those where the soil is not good.<sup>93</sup> In short, one finds an over-emphasis on geography and natural environment as the most important determinants of human history. Another renowned work of Montesquieu was *Consideration of the Causes of the Grandeur and Decadence of the Romans*, in which he discussed the causes of the rise and fall of the Roman Civilization.

## 6.3 Voltaire and Gibbon as Enlightenment Historians

The famous French political thinker, poet, historian and philosopher, Voltaire (b. 1694-d. 1778), who had coined the term ‘philosophy of history’, was a prolific author. He contributed to historiography by writing a number of historical works. His famous works include, *inter alia*, *The History of Charles XII* and *The Age of Louis XIV*. He tried to offer a philosophical interpretation of human history, and saw rationality as the panacea or solution for all the ills of the society. To him, the human history was the development from barbarism to civilization.

Edward Gibbon (b. 1737-d. 1794) is a very renowned English historian, whose six-volume masterpiece was *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-88). It was marked by rationalist approach, wherein historical interpretation is blended with philosophical explanations. It is considered ‘the culmination of post-Renaissance European historical writing’.<sup>94</sup> He held

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<sup>92</sup> Werner Stark, *Montesquieu: Pioneer of the Sociology of Knowledge* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 107.

<sup>93</sup> Montesquieu, *The Spirit of Laws*, in *Great Books of the Western World*, ed. Robert Maynard Hutchins, vol. 38 (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc., 1952), p. 125. See details on pp. 102-26.

<sup>94</sup> Aylmer, “Introductory Survey: From the Renaissance to the Eighteenth Century”, in *Companion to Historiography*, p. 276.

Christianity responsible for the weakening of the Roman Empire. However, he chose the military and administrative history to be the primary focus of his narrative, while ignoring the cultural and social aspects of history.

#### **6.4 Romanticism and its Impact on Historiography**

Towards the close of the eighteenth century, Romanticism emerged as a counter-movement of Enlightenment. Romanticism has been defined as such:

Romanticism was a European cultural movement, or set of kindred cultural movements, which found in a symbolic and internalized romance plot a vehicle for exploring one's self and its relationship to others and to nature, which privileged the imagination as a faculty higher and more inclusive than reason, which sought solace in and reconciliation with the natural world, which 'detranscendentalized' religion by taking God or the divine as inherent in nature and the soul and replaced theological doctrine with metaphor and feeling, which honored poetry and all the arts as the highest human creations, and which rebelled against the established canons of neoclassical aesthetics and against both aristocratic and bourgeois social and political norms in favor of values more individual, inward, and emotional.<sup>95</sup>

Romanticism challenged the notion of reason and rationality, as well as the intellectualism and skepticism of the Age of Reason. It was a cultural and intellectual movement that richly contributed to arts, literature and music. It symbolized a revolt against the rationalization of human nature, the idea that human beings were inherently rational by nature, articulated by Vico for the first time. The Enlightenment had not only devalued faith, emotions, and feelings, it had also de-romanticized the past. As a reaction to these views, the Romantics romanticized the human past, and stressed the role of imagination, fantasies, emotions and feelings.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (b. 1712-d. 1778), a renowned eighteenth-century thinker and political philosopher, is considered the father of the movement. As a critic of Enlightenment, he challenged the idea of progress, and argued that the Age of Reason was, in fact, degeneration, and the development of civilization had increased corruption and adversely affected the morality of people. His famous works include *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences* and *Social Contract*. Rousseau was a philosopher, who did not author any book on history *per se*, but his ideas

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<sup>95</sup> Michael Ferber, *Romanticism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 10-11.

had considerable impact upon subsequent social and political thought as well as historiography.

Edmund Burke (b. 1729-d. 1797), a statesman, political theorist and philosopher, and David Hume (b. 1711-d. 1776), a Scottish philosopher-historian, supported Rousseau's attacks on the rationalist thinkers. Immanuel Kant (b. 1724-d. 1804), a famous German philosopher, highlighted the limitations of reason in his work *Critique of Pure Reason*.

The Romantic Movement influenced the views of many historians. The foremost among them was Johann Gottfried von Herder (b. 1744-d. 1803), a German Romanticist historian. His two works on history are *One More Philosophy of History* and *Ideas for the Philosophy of the History of Mankind*. He argued that human beings, who had gradually been evolved, were a product of nature. While discussing the evolutionary development of human beings, his main unit of analysis or frame of reference was culture or civilization, for which he used a biological analogy. He asserted that the civilization goes through the same cycle of birth, maturity, decline and death like a plant. Moreover, like a plant which has its specific stages of development, and its own type of fruit and flower, every civilization also has its inherent character and specific qualities, its own language, religion, moral laws, arts and literature, which are different from those of other civilizations.

### **6.5 Hegel's Philosophy of History: Dialectical Idealism**

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (b. 1770-d. 1831), a German intellectual, was the most influential philosopher of Romanticist-Idealist Movement. He studied theology, logic and philosophy, and later taught at the Universities of Jena, Nuremberg, Heidelberg, and finally occupied the chair of philosophy at the University of Berlin after the death of Fichte. His important works include (i) *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), (ii) *Science of Logic* (1812-16), (iii) *The Philosophy of History* (1816), (iv) *The Philosophy of Right and Law* (1821), and (v) *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion and Lectures on Aesthetics* (1838; a posthumous work). Hegel was influenced by the ideas of great thinkers like Voltaire, Herder, Kant, Friedrich Schiller (a German poet, philosopher and historian; d. 1805), Johann Gottlieb Fichte (a German philosopher, and one of the founders of the philosophical movement known as German Idealism; d. 1814), and Friedrich Schelling (a German philosopher who made important contributions to German Idealism; d. 1854). However, Hegel's ingenuity and originality lies in the fact that he combined their views with extraordinary skill into a coherent and unified theory.

Hegel is a speculative philosopher of history, who offered a philosophical interpretation of the past based on speculation and guesswork. As an idealist philosopher, Hegel asserts the primacy of ideas rather than matter. To him, ideas are more important than human actions or events. Moreover, an idea is prerequisite for an action. For instance, an architect first conceives an idea in his mind, and then a building (which is the material manifestation of his idea) is constructed. It is the idea or thought which comes first, and then its materialization takes place in the form of an event or human action, which is the concrete manifestation of the idea. Hegel interprets all history as the history of thought or ideas, not of events or actions of human beings. According to him, all historical events and human actions are the concrete manifestation or outward expression of human thought, and the primary subject-matter of history is the ideas, and not events. Therefore, his view or interpretation of history is considered idealistic.

Hegel believes that there is a hidden meaning and an underlying pattern in history, which he calls an Idea or 'Absolute Idea', also referred to as 'Absolute Reason' and 'Absolute Infinite Spirit' in the works of Hegel. The Absolute Idea is meaningful, purposeful and intelligible, i.e. it can be understood by human beings. Its author is God, which he calls the 'World Spirit'. The Absolute Idea is reason, which is, in fact, divine reason (reason of God), and therefore, he often uses the term 'Absolute Reason' for it. The Absolute Idea or Absolute Reason wanted its self-disclosure, but it cannot be fully revealed to human beings until it has reached a certain point in time, when it will become self-evident. This will be the final stage of human history. Due to these ideas, Hegel has been credited with logical or rational pantheism.

According to Hegel, the universe was also first conceived as an idea, and was later created out of nothing. Initially, the Absolute Idea wanted its self-realization or self-actualization by being gradually revealed to the world, therefore, it concretized itself in the form of universe, which is the concrete material manifestation of the Idea. Hegel insisted on the logical necessity of the creation of the world.

The process of unfolding of the Absolute Idea is gradual and progressive, since it reveals itself only in bits and parts. Finally, at the end of time it will be completely revealed to the human beings. Thus, the whole human history is the history of the unfolding of the 'Absolute Idea'. In other words, history exhibits a self-development of reason. The human history is the journey of reason, that how reason revealed itself to the human beings, and how people realized the divine reason and became conscious of it. Hegel maintains that the world is moving towards its destiny, which is predetermined by God, and the destiny is the fulfillment and complete revelation of the 'Absolute Idea' to humanity. Thus, the whole human history is the history of the unfolding of the Absolute Idea. For this

reason the Hegelian philosophy is generally believed to have deterministic element in it.<sup>96</sup>

According to Hegel, it is gradual movement of time which reveals the Absolute Idea, and the movement of time is unchangeable and inexorable, which cannot be delayed. It is controlled by God, and human beings have no control over it. In this way, Hegel tries to counter the idea of progress and human perfectibility, which argues that human beings have become the master of their own destiny, propounded by the rationalist philosophers of the Enlightenment era.

To Hegel, the single formula or precept that explains all human history is the principle of dialectics, a pattern that appeared recurrent to him throughout history. The force behind the movement of history, which unfolds the Absolute Idea, is the force of dialectic. Dialectic may be defined as a struggle between two opposite forces, i.e. the idea and its counter-idea. It is philosophically argued that things are known because of their opposites. We perceive night because of the day, and happiness is understood because of sadness or pain. Dialectic is also defined as the 'law of strife, interpenetration, and unity of opposites', or the 'law of the negation of negation'. Dialectic includes the methods of analysis (breaking down a whole in small parts) and synthesis (blend of two, or reconciliation of two). In the process of synthesis, the valid elements of both the idea (thesis) and counter-idea (anti-thesis) are retained, whereas the invalid elements are discarded.

According to Hegel, the whole human history reveals a pattern, which is as follows: thesis-antithesis-synthesis. The thesis-antithesis-synthesis cycle takes place in the realm of ideas. In other words, first an idea (or a thesis) is developed, and then its counter-idea (or an anti-thesis) is emerged. However, both the idea/thesis and the counter-idea/anti-thesis are later synthesized to give birth to a new idea, which again becomes a thesis, and its anti-thesis is developed and both are later synthesized.<sup>97</sup> In this way, the thesis-antithesis-synthesis cycle repeats itself, but not in the same manner. Every repetition is an improvement over the previous cycle. He maintains that no truth is ever lost, since all past truth and knowledge is contained in a thesis. Thus, Hegel believes in the cyclical-spiral movement of time and history.

Hegel argues that it is this dialectical process through which the Absolute Idea or Absolute Reason is gradually developed and revealed to the human beings. However, the process will finally come to an end after the complete unfolding of

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<sup>96</sup> Carr, however, believes that the Hegelian philosophy is "allegedly deterministic". E. H. Carr, *What is History?* (London: Macmillan, 1962), p. 85.

<sup>97</sup> W. H. Walsh, *An Introduction to Philosophy of History* (London: Hutchinson and Co., 19670 rpt., first published 1951), pp. 136-37.

the Absolute Idea or Absolute Reason at the end of time. He also asserts that at a given time in history, the Absolute Idea is represented by an idea or a thesis such as Catholicism or capitalism. The notion of the 'cunning of reason' in Hegel refers to the idea that historical actors can be the unconscious agents of a transcendent purpose which they realize in the pursuit of their self-interests.<sup>98</sup>

In history, the gradual progress of the Absolute Idea is carried by the states, since state is the battle-field of the conflict between ideas. According to Hegel, the time of war and revolution is the time when the dialectical process is going on. To Hegel, state is the 'march of God on earth'. The critics of Hegel argue that he glorified the state, especially his contemporary Prussian monarchy. Some even assert that the Hegelian ideas ultimately led to the emergence of the Nazi State under Adolf Hitler (r. 1933-1945) in Germany.

Hegel tries to counter the rationalism of the Enlightenment thinkers. However, in doing so, he does not altogether reject it, but devises a new form of rationalism. As pointed out above, the Enlightenment historians had generally viewed past as a history of irrationality, since all human actions of the past appeared to them to be irrational acts. Contrarily, Hegel interprets all human past as the gradual development of reason. Furthermore, to Hegel, the real is rational, and the rational is real. The critics of Hegelian thought argue that Hegel has over-emphasized the role of reason/rationality or the Absolute Idea, and ignored the role of human agency in history.

Hegel also seems to be influenced by the Hebrew-Christian historical thought. He borrows its fundamental characteristics such as universalism, periodization, and the concepts of apocalypse and the role of providence, but transforms and redefines them in secular meanings.<sup>99</sup> Hegel's philosophy of history is universal, as it starts from the creation of universe by the Absolute Idea, and comes to an end with the complete unfolding of the Idea. For periodising history, Hegel uses the biological analogy for various stages of human history. The ancient India, China and Persia represent the childhood of the development of the Spirit, reason and consciousness. The Greek times represent the adolescence of the Spirit, whereas the Roman times represent the maturity and manhood of the Spirit. In the final stage of human history, his contemporary Prussia represents the old age of the

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<sup>98</sup> Christopher L. Pines, *Ideology and False Consciousness: Marx and His Historical Progenitors* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1993), p. 74. For a brief discussion, see Joseph McCarney, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Hegel on History* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), Chapter 8: The Cunning of Reason, pp. 121-36.

<sup>99</sup> Cairns, *Philosophies of History*, p. 280.

Spirit.<sup>100</sup> Hegel is influenced by the apocalyptic idea of Christianity. Though Hegel is discontented with the idea of predicting the future, and insists that history culminates in the present rather than in a 'future Utopia', his concept of the Absolute Idea has a sense of conclusiveness.

The critics of Hegelian thought have pointed out that Hegel glorified his present time, and viewed it as the end of history, since for him, history ends with the present day. As a philosopher, he is not concerned with future, and argues that it is not the task of a historian to predict future.

The place of God and the role of providence in Hegelian thought are quite central. Some of Hegel's works are considered to be theological and metaphysical in nature, since he seems to have replaced the notion of God with the concept of 'Absolute Idea' (also referred to as 'Absolute Reason', 'Logical Idea' and 'Absolute Spirit') in his philosophical interpretation of history. According to Hegel, the Absolute which rational thinking is compelled to affirm is not other than the God.<sup>101</sup> For him, history is a "Theodicaea", or a theodicy, and a "justification of the ways of God".<sup>102</sup> In fact, for him, God is history. He even writes that "...Reason, in the most concrete form, is God. God governs the world; the actual working of his government—the carrying out of his plan—is the History of the World".<sup>103</sup> According to Peter Manicas, for Hegel, "Providence works by means of the unintended consequences of our acts. Historical change goes on 'behind the backs of persons' ".<sup>104</sup> The concept of God in Hegel is abstract. He has, in fact, used the language of religion for explaining the philosophical concept of the Absolute. In his works he has often used theological terminology but with metaphysical and secular connotations.

Hegel divides history in three categories: (i) Original History or Empirical history, which is based on facts and figures; (ii) Reflective History, which is deduced or inferred from facts and figures, and (iii) Philosophical History which philosophizes the entire past.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Hegel's work *The Philosophy of History* is divided into four parts, each dealing with a particular stage of human history. These are (i) the Oriental World, (ii) the Greek World, (iii) the Roman World, and (iv) the German World. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree with preface by Charles Hegel and introduction by C. J. Friedrich (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1956).

<sup>101</sup> For details, see Quentin Lauer, *Hegel's Concept of God* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982), pp. 21-56.

<sup>102</sup> Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, p. 15.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>104</sup> Peter Manicas, *A History and Philosophy of the Social Sciences* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), p. 88.

<sup>105</sup> See details in Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, pp. 1-11.

Hegel's theory or philosophy for interpreting the human history is more abstract than most of the philosophers of history. It has tremendous significance in terms of application. Hegel gave primacy to the ideas and human thought, rather than actions. The development of human thought through the ages can usefully be explained and understood by employing his theory. For instance, Judaism, with its rigid legality for outward regulation of human actions, can be taken as a thesis, and Christianity that emerged as its reaction can be taken as its anti-thesis, since the latter has a heightened emphasis on other-worldliness and spirituality for inward regulation of human actions. Islam, however, can be taken as a synthesis of Judaism and Christianity, since it amalgamated the legality and spirituality in a balanced way by discarding the excesses of both.<sup>106</sup> Similarly, if we take capitalism and liberal democracy as a thesis, its anti-thesis is socialism/communism, and the synthesis is social democracy or the concept of welfare state. In the same manner, the concepts of territorial nationalism (thesis), Pan-Islamism (anti-thesis) and Muslim nationalism (synthesis) is another example in point.

Hegel tried to counter the rationalist thinkers, but his response to their excessive rationalism was within the same rationalist paradigm. There is no paradigmatic shift in his thought, since he has attempted to reinterpret reason. While doing so, he personified reason, and portrayed it as having an independent existence of its own, and external to human beings. He tried to synthesize the ideas of rationalists and romanticists by arguing that human beings are endowed with both reason and passions.

Furthermore, the Hegelian theory implies that the ideas or ideology are the most important agents, which bring about change in history. Though not all but many historical phenomena and changes in history can be attributed to the ideological causes. According to Hegel, changes occur first in the realm of ideas, and lead to changes in material physical world. However, the critics of Hegelian thought assert that changes taking place in the material conditions may also lead to tremendous changes in human ideas.

## **6.6 Merits of Romanticist Historiography**

What follows is a brief discussion on the merits of the impact of Romanticism on historiography:

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<sup>106</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, "The Principle of Movement in the Structure of Islam", in *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1996), p. 145.

- The Romanticist historians humanized history by countering the over-emphasis on the power of reason by the Enlightenment thinkers, and by highlighting the role of the human desires, passions and feelings in human history.
- The Romanticist historians indirectly challenged the Euro-centric focus of history-writing by broadening its scope and writing about the cultures, societies and civilizations other than European such as the Chinese, Indian, Persian, Arab and Egyptian.
- The Romanticist historians stressed the need that the human past needed a sympathetic investigation, and that the historians must respect the past, and try to search the human achievements in every age of the past. They argued that every stage of human history had its own achievements owing to the development of human mind and thought.
- The Romanticist historians such as Herder argued that the past ideas, traditions and institutions were right in their own historical context, and must not be seen and interpreted in the light of the norms and values of the present times. According to him, the past events should be evaluated and judged ‘in the light of their intrinsic meanings, values and principles...’<sup>107</sup>

## 6.7 Demerits of Romanticist Historiography

What follows is a brief discussion on the demerits of the impact of Romanticism on historiography:

- Since the Romanticists had highlighted the role of imagination and fantasies in human life, the historians inspired by the Romantic Movement wrote histories that were more fanciful and imaginary than based on rigorous historical research. Historical imagination was employed more than scientific research methods for history-writing.
- The Romanticists had romanticized the human past by making it appear more exciting than actual. The Romanticist historians resurrected the notion of the ‘golden past’, and their views about the human past eventually led to its over-glorification.
- The Romanticist historians tried to write the history of their own nation from its origins to their contemporary times. They developed the concept of a national history.<sup>108</sup> They helped generate theories of race and culture, which eventually gave birth to the theories of nationalism, imperialism and

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<sup>107</sup> Frederick M. Barnard, *Herder on Nationality, Humanity, and History* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003), p. 171.

<sup>108</sup> Monika Baár, *Historians and Nationalism: East-Central Europe in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), see Chapter 2: Romantic Historiography in the Service of Nation-Building, pp. 46-74.

colonialism. The proponents of the theory of nationalism sometimes distorted the past in order to create a false sense of national pride, whereas imperialism led to the colonization of the non-white races in Asia and Africa.

## **Questions**

Q. Discuss the impacts of Enlightenment ideas on historical thought in Europe.

Q. Elaborate the characteristic features of the Enlightenment historiography.

Q. Hegel offered an idealistic conception of history. Elaborate and analyze.

Q. Hegel's entire philosophy revolves around the preposition that 'things are known because of their opposites'. Discuss.

Q. Critically analyze the merits and demerits of Romanticist historiography.

## **Unit 7**

### **Impact of Positivism, Industrial Revolution and Capitalism on European Historiography**

### **Objectives of the Unit**

After reading the unit, the students will be able to:

- grasp the meaning of positivism and the role of Comte in systematizing it
- evaluate the contribution of Ranke and Acton to historiography
- assess the influence of positivism on Historiography in Europe
- critically examine the positivist approach to History-writing
- appreciate Marx's philosophy of history based on dialectical materialism

The nineteenth century was the heyday of Scientific Revolution in Europe. It was characterized by tremendous development in natural sciences owing to many new discoveries. Natural Science as a branch of knowledge was greatly admired by the people as natural scientists were perceived to be rendering great services to humanity. The following were the major impacts of the Scientific Revolution, which consequently affected the discipline of history in particular, and the varied branches of knowledge in general during the nineteenth century: (i) The Scientific Revolution established the hegemony and domination of science over all other disciplines owing to its perceived usefulness. (ii) The Scientific Method, based on empiricism or observation and experimentation, became popular, and many other disciplines and branches of knowledge started borrowing it. (iii) The Scientific Revolution resulted in the emergence of Positivism in the nineteenth century.

### **7.1 Positivism and the Hegemony of Scientific Knowledge**

Positivism is a nineteenth-century intellectual movement, which is considered a by-product of the Scientific Revolution. The proponents of the movement argued that all true knowledge is 'scientific', which is acquired through the application of scientific method based on empiricism or observation through sense perception (the use of five senses), experience and experimentation. The scientific knowledge, also called *positive knowledge*, thus acquired is first hand and necessarily true.

According to the positivist thinkers, the following were the characteristics of positive knowledge:

- (i) Positive knowledge is worldly, concerned with this world alone, and does not deal with other-worldly phenomena.
- (ii) It is secular knowledge, without any influence of religion.
- (iii) It is anti-theological and anti-metaphysical in nature.

These characteristics of positive knowledge can be understood in contrast with the knowledge-development traditions of medieval Europe, wherein the Catholic Church was critical of the development of scientific knowledge and thus discouraged it, fearing that it would undermine the Christian faith.

The positivist thinkers rejected some disciplines such as metaphysics (a branch of philosophy dealing with speculation regarding the nature of Reality/Being without concrete physical evidence), theology, and religious studies. To them, positivism was characterized by the application of the scientific methodology to acquire all forms of knowledge. They claimed that true knowledge can be gained only

through science, i.e. through the application of scientific method. During the eighteenth century, British thinkers such as David Hume and George Berkeley stressed the role of sense-perception in the acquisition of knowledge. However, it was Auguste Comte who systematized positivism in the nineteenth century.

## **7.2 Auguste Comte and Systematization of Positivism**

Auguste Comte (b. 1798-d. 1857), a French philosopher, played a crucial role in systematization of positivism. His most important work is *The Positive Philosophy* (published in 1824). Comte is considered one of the founders of sociology. He also coined the term ‘sociology’ for the science of human societies, and labeled it as ‘the highest science’ and ‘super-history’, the history of a higher order or level. He argued that law, morality, politics and religion all were to be reconstituted on the new scientific basis. He himself became the prophet and the founder of a new religion, called the Religion of Humanity and Reason, in which the object of worship was humanity. It did not become very popular, and was short-lived. In fact, Comte had tried to reconcile atheism or irreligiousness with religion.

He periodized the intellectual development of humanity in three stages during which human thought emerged from mystery, and acquired knowledge resulting in the total control of reality through total control over society: (i) the primitive theological stage (until 1300 AD) during which the causation for natural and social events was sought in supernatural factors; (ii) the transient metaphysical stage (1300-1800) was a transitional period between the theological and positivistic age; and (iii) the final positivistic stage (from 1800 onwards) in which people started believing in science. The third is the last and the final stage of human history.<sup>109</sup> Critics have pointed out that Comte’s theory about the intellectual development of humanity is Euro-centric, as it takes into account only European experiences but claims universal validity.

## **7.3 Ranke—The Father of Modern Objective Scientific Historiography**

Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886) was a nineteenth-century German historian, who was Professor of history at the University of Berlin, Germany. He wrote the histories of Germany, France, Greece, Rome, Italy, and Southern Europe, etc. He is considered the father of the school of modern objective scientific historiography. He urged the use of scientific method in historical research, and emphasized the importance of using primary or contemporary sources from the “purest, most immediate documents” for history-writing. He himself was the first historian to use documents in a very systematic and thorough way. He insisted on

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<sup>109</sup> Claus Otto Scharmer, “Auguste Comte: The Law of the Three Stages”, in *Macrohistory and Macrohistorians*, pp. 56-57.

including references, notes, and bibliography in works of history, so that the reader may know the sources consulted by a historian for his research. As a historian, he employed a factual or narrative approach in his works. Moreover, he criticized the historians' approach of viewing history of the past in the light of the present, and argued that past should be studied on its own terms. Ranke greatly contributed to the rise of historicism, i.e. the development of a crucial modern historical consciousness and recognition that each age was different and had its own character and standards. Therefore, historians must try to understand and not merely judge the past. He wrote in *The History of the Latin and Teutonic Peoples* (1824):

History has had assigned to it the task of judging the past, of instructing the present for the benefit of the ages to come. To such lofty functions this work does not aspire. Its aim is merely to show how things actually were.<sup>110</sup>

Ranke also asserted the importance of historical criticism, especially the critical study of authorship, including the disposition and orientation of a historian, his affiliations, scholarship and comparison with other contemporary historians. It was owing to the works of Ranke that the late nineteenth century witnessed the development of the profession and the discipline of history in German universities.

#### **7.4 Lord Acton's Views about History**

Baron John Emerich Edward Dalberg Acton (1834-1902), better known as Lord Acton, was a famous English historian, who taught at the University of Cambridge, England. He is considered the real founder of the Cambridge school of history. He challenged the conventional approaches to history, and believed that in his contemporary times, the writing of an 'ultimate history', as believed by many, was impossible. He was critical of the historians' over-emphasis on historical facts, and therefore, challenged the factual conception of history. He laid much emphasis on the importance of research methodology, as he asserted that it is the method, rather than the scholarship, that makes the historian. He saw a didactic purpose in historiography, and maintained that history of the past can teach virtue and uprightness, and serve as a guide to life. To him, a historian is a guardian of morality, in which lies the real utility of history.

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<sup>110</sup> Leopold von Ranke, *The History of the Latin and Teutonic Peoples*, as cited in Malcolm Kitch, "Jacob Burckhardt: Romanticism and Cultural History", in *Historical Controversies and Historians*, p. 136.

## **7.5 The Influence of Positivism on Historiography**

The nineteenth century Europe witnessed the institutionalization of the discipline of history. The positivist movement greatly influenced historical thought and historiography. In particular, the views of Comte significantly impacted upon the ideas about history and history-writing. The following are the impacts of positivism on historiography in Europe:

### ***(i) Rejection of Metaphysical and Speculative Explanations***

As a result of positivism, all metaphysical and speculative explanations for the causes of historical events, which could not be proved empirically, were excluded from the interpretation of history. The contemporary historiography is by and large positivistic, in which metaphysical explanations for historical events have no place. The role of God or divine factors has altogether been excluded from historical interpretation.

### ***(ii) Rejection of Universal History***

The idea of universal history beginning from the creation of human beings and universe and coming down to the end of time was rejected, as it involved considerable speculation and guess-work, and involved metaphysical explanations.

### ***(iii) Stress on Accuracy of Historical Facts***

The positivist historiographers stressed the recording of accurate historical facts having concrete, physical, objective and scientific evidence. Therefore, the importance of epigraphy (the study of inscriptions) and archaeology for historical research was stressed, which led to further developments in these sub-fields of history. In fact, both epigraphy and archaeology involve observation, and offer concrete historical evidence.

### ***(iv) Emphasis on the Discovery of Principles or Laws***

The positivist thinkers stressed on the discovery of principles or laws that govern natural and social phenomena, including the 'laws' that govern historical developments. Comte himself contributed to the discovery of laws that governed the intellectual development of humanity. Later, Karl Marx, Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee made attempts to explore the 'laws' governing the entire human history, which are discussed in the ensuing units. However, it should be borne in mind that the 'laws' of history are, in fact, the theories of social sciences that help explain a phenomenon.

### ***(v) Application of Scientific Methodology for Historical Research***

The positivist thinkers believed in applying the method of the natural sciences to almost all the branches of knowledge, particularly the social sciences. Natural sciences begin by ascertaining and determining facts, and then discover their causal connection. To Comte, sociology (a social science) begins with ascertaining facts about human life and society, and then makes an attempt to explore the causal connections between the facts. The positivist thinkers also urged for the application of scientific method for historical research as well.

### ***(vi) Stress on the Objectivity of Historical Accounts***

The positivist thinkers and historians stressed that the historians must be objective, and they should try to eliminate subjectivity in their historical research. They should not pass value-judgments on the past events in the light of their own values and beliefs. To them, the task of a historian is to narrate past events as they were, and not as they should have been.

## **7.6 A Critique to Positivist Approach to Historiography**

The critics of positivism argue that scientific knowledge has its own limitations. It cannot give answers to questions relating to religion, metaphysics, God or Supreme Being, human existence (also called existential questions, such as why have human beings been created? What is the purpose of life? What is the destiny of human beings? What is the place of human beings in the universe, and their relationship with God or Reality?) The critics of positivism also assert that science cannot be a substitute for religion, since the sphere of science and the role of religion in life are quite different.

The critics of positivist approach to historiography assert that the use of scientific method for historical research does not guarantee a satisfactory interpretation of historical events. Scientists try to explore the natural laws (the laws governing nature), but the task of historians is somewhat different. Historians have to ascertain historical facts before they try to explore the laws governing society and history. In fact, the analogy between natural facts and historical facts is misleading and erroneous. The critics of positivist approach to historiography also maintain that the positivists' insistence on complete objectivity was difficult to be attained, and moreover, in some cases, value-judgments on historical events by historians help compare, contrast and understand certain phenomena.

## **7.7 Industrial Revolution and Capitalism in Europe and their Impacts**

The nineteenth-century Europe was marked by rapid transformation in economic, social, political and technological spheres, which brought about the Industrial Revolution, and capitalism as an economic and social system. This transformation was much more advanced in England, which was the hub of Industrial Revolution in Europe. Moreover, capitalist economic practices were gradually institutionalized in England, where trade and industry were privately controlled for the purpose of generating profit. Capitalism gradually spread throughout Europe, and during the nineteenth century, it became one of the major reasons for industrialization which requires capital investment.

As a result of industrialization, the handicraft system and small-scale cottage industries were wiped out, and replaced by large factories, where hundreds of workers were employed. The impacts of industrialization on politics, economy and society were tremendous and far-reaching, which are as follows: (i) A large number of people migrated from rural to urban areas for job opportunities in big cities. Moreover, the farmers were displaced due to modern methods of farming and agriculture. (ii) As a result of migration of people from urban to rural areas, urbanization took place, and large urban centres with huge population began to emerge. (iii) Due to discoveries in the field of medicine, rate of mortality was declined. Moreover, in the nineteenth century there were no large scale wars and casualties, which resulted in tremendous increase in human population leading to population explosion. During the span of one century, from 1815 to 1914, i.e. before the outbreak of the First World War, the population of Europe more than doubled. (iv) With such tremendous increase in human population, there were less job opportunities, which led to unemployment at mass level. Moreover, machines replaced industrial workers in factories, which further increased unemployment, and created economic unrest and social discontent. For instance, during the Luddite Riots in England (1811-12) handloom weavers attacked and damaged the mechanized looms, as these machines had deprived them of their jobs. These machines were dubbed as ‘mechanical monsters’ by the protestors. (v) However, the most important effect of industrialization was the emergence of a new class of people—the proletariat or the industrial workers. This largest class of society was comprised of the poor, since their wages were very low. They worked in quite miserable conditions, and in many cases subjected to 12 to 16 hours work per day. Legally, they had no right to go to strike or demand anything from their employers.

There emerged varied responses to the above-mentioned problems. As a result of legal intervention, new labour laws were enacted and the existing ones were improved. Some thinkers challenged the very basic assumptions of capitalism, and

introduced new ideologies for creating a better world. Some of the philosophers propounded utopian philosophies of ideal social conditions. The philosophy of Karl Marx was also a reaction to the problems and miseries created by the excesses of industrialization and capitalism.

### **7.8 Marx's Philosophy of History: Dialectical Materialism**

Karl Marx (b. 1818-d. 1883) was born in Prussia (Germany). He studied law, philosophy and history at Universities of Bonn and Berlin. He started his career as a journalist, and later moved to Paris from where he was expelled. Finally, he settled in London, where he died in 1883. Marx also formed First International—International Workman's Association, and remained a prominent figure of socialist movement. Many works of Marx are co-authored with his friend and companion Frederick Engels. Important works of Marx include (i) *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859), (ii) *Das Capital* (vol. 1 in 1867; rest of the two vols. were compiled by Engels after Marx's death), (iii) *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848; written with Engels), (iv) *The German Ideology* (1845-46; co-written with Engels), and (v) *Poverty of Philosophy*.

It is said that Marx borrowed from German Philosophy through Hegel, English economy through Adam Smith (b. 1723-d. 1790; a Scottish philosopher, considered the father of modern economics) and David Ricardo (b. 1772-d. 1823; an English political economist), and French Socialism through Saint-Simon (b. 1760-d. 1825; a utopian social reformist, and one of the founders of socialism), Charles Fourier (b. 1772-d. 1837; another French utopian socialist thinker), as well as from the ideas of Ludwig Feuerbach (b. 1804-d. 1872; a German philosopher and anthropologist known for his atheism), and Robert Owen (b. 1771-d. 1858; a Welsh social reformer and one of the founders of socialism). In addition, Marx was also influenced by the Hebrew-Christian historical thought. He adopted its fundamental concepts like Universalism, Apocalypse, Providence and Periodization but essentially in their secular transformation.<sup>111</sup>

Marx asserts that change is inherent in society. Changes occur in nature, society and human history through dialectical processes. For him, the mechanism underlying the whole human history, and the phenomenon manifesting regularities and recurrent occurrences is the dialectical process taking place in the realm of matter, that is, in material physical world, instead of in the realm of ideas, as Hegel had suggested. Therefore, it is referred to as "Dialectical Materialism". Engels himself called it a "materialistic conception of history."<sup>112</sup> In fact, Marx

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<sup>111</sup> For details see Cairns, *Philosophies of History*, p. 288.

<sup>112</sup> Frederick Engels, "Socialism: Utopian and Scientific", in *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels: Selected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1968), p. 417.

applied the Hegelian ‘Law of the Negation of Negation’ or dialectic to the material foundation of society, or the economic infrastructure of society, which includes (a) the production system (also referred to as the modes or forces of production and exchange), and (b) the exchange relations (also referred to as the relations of production).

According to Marx, the modes or means of production and exchange constitute the basis of all social structure, and include (i) what is produced, or the resources (e.g. raw materials), (ii) how it is produced, or the technology and skills, and (iii) how the products are exchanged. The modes of production and exchange determine the relations of production. The exchange relations or the relations of production include (i) how wealth is distributed, and (ii) how society is divided into classes according to the pattern of wealth distribution. The relations of production result in the creation of two distinct classes in society, haves (possessing) and the haves-not (non-possessing), and thus, bind human beings in command and obedience relationship.<sup>113</sup>

Marx believes that all past history, with the exception of its primitive stage, was the history of class struggles.<sup>114</sup> Thus, he divides the whole human history into five distinct stages on the basis of their specific production system and their corresponding exchange relations, and consequently, their corresponding superstructure. These stages include the following:<sup>115</sup>

1. Primitive Communism (a stage of history without any class struggle)
2. Slavery (a stage of history with class struggle between slaves and slave-owners)
3. Feudalism (a stage of history with class struggle between peasants and feudal lords)
4. Capitalism (a stage of history with class struggle between proletariat and bourgeoisie/capitalists)
5. Advanced Communism (the final stage of human history, which was yet to come, with a classless society)

Marx views all past history, with the exception of the primitive stage, as the history of class struggle. The French philosopher Saint Simon was the first to interpret French Revolution of 1789 as a class war, or a war between the rich and the poor. Marx further argues that the second, third and fourth stages of human

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, “Manifesto of the Communist Party”, in *ibid.*, p. 35, and Engels, “Socialism: Utopian and Scientific”, in *ibid.*, p. 415.

<sup>115</sup> Scott Gordon, *The History and Philosophy of Social Sciences* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 319.

history represented distinct modes of production and exchange, and their corresponding relations of production. Moreover, according to him, the material foundation of society, or the economic infrastructure of society gives birth to a distinct superstructure, which includes law, morality, philosophy, political theory, forms and principles of government, religion, art, and culture, etc. So the five stages of human history represent distinct modes of production and exchange, and relations of production, as well as distinct superstructure.

According to Marx, change is inherent and inevitable in history. Change becomes inevitable when modes of production and exchange, and relations of production are antagonistic, or come in clash with each other. As a result of change, a new stage of history with new modes of production and exchange, and a new set of relations of production commences. Citing empirical evidence to support his argument, he maintained that in the present capitalistic stage of history, the mode of production is in conflict with the relations of production. The contradiction between socialized production (mass production of goods in factories by the workers, who are alienated from their products, which are offered for sale and are not meant for the workers' own consumption) and capitalistic appropriation (only a handful of capitalists earning huge profits on goods produced by the workers) has manifested itself as the antagonism of proletariat (the working class) and bourgeoisie (the capitalist manufacturers, factory-owners). Important characteristics of capitalistic stage of history include private ownership of property, unbridled competition among producers, accumulation of wealth by the capitalists, and misery of the proletariat. Therefore, time is ripe for a change, which will result in the inception of a new stage of history, that is, Advanced Communism.<sup>116</sup> That is why, it is said that the Marxist philosophy of history has a deterministic element in it.

Marx's philosophy of history envisions ideas about the future course of history. According to him, a final stage of human history will come in future, which he refers to as 'Advanced Communism', when there will be no private property, and hence, no classes in the society.<sup>117</sup> To Marx, state is an instrument used by the haves for their own ends. In the final stage of human history, i.e. of Advanced Communism, which according to Marx was yet to come in future, there will be no private property, and all resources and assets will be communally-owned. There will be no classes in society, and hence, there will be no need to have a state. In other words, the institution of state will altogether become redundant. In fact, the concept of state based on reason in Europe was completely collapsed, and Marx had got disillusioned with the concept of state. After the French Revolution, the Reign of Terror, marked by violence and political executions, was initiated in

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<sup>116</sup> Engels, "Socialism: Utopian and Scientific", pp. 399-434.

<sup>117</sup> Marx and Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party", pp. 46-53.

1793-94, and later a despotic state was established under Napoleon Bonaparte (b. 1769-d. 1821) in France. Moreover, one of the primary functions of a state is conflict resolution. Marx argues that in the stage of Advanced Communism, there will be no conflict in society, and hence no need to have a state at all.

Marx claims that he raised socialism to scientific status, and therefore, labeled it as 'Scientific Socialism', as opposed to Utopian and Christian Socialism, because of two discoveries: (i) Theory of Surplus Value (the difference between the cost and the price of a commodity, which is called profit, and on which capitalistic production and accumulation of capital is based) and (ii) Materialistic Conception of History (the concept that matter or material conditions are more important than ideas in bringing about a change).

The interpretation of history by Karl Marx is explicitly anthropo-centric and humanistic, without the slightest hint of any role of the divine, metaphysical or supernatural factors. Being disillusioned with religion, he calls it the 'opium of the poor', since the rich keep the poor satisfied and pacified, often in the name of religion, making the latter oblivious of their own misery, while the former secure their own interests and achieve their domination over the latter. It is important to recall here that Marx assumed religion to be a part of superstructure.

The Hegelian and Marxist philosophies of history are perceived to be diametrically opposite to each other. Hegel asserts the primacy of ideas instead of matter, whereas Marx asserts the dominance of matter rather than ideas. Marx also realizes that he countered Hegelian position, and that is why he states that Hegel turned everything upside down, and Hegelian philosophy is standing on its head, and he (Marx) makes it stand on its feet. In this way, Marx asserts the primacy or dominance of economic factors in history. Towards the close of his death, he made it clear that economic factors were one of the most important factors that determine change in history, and not the sole cause for historical change. Critics of Marxist thought have differentiated between the writings of 'early' and 'late' Marx, which differed in their explanations and interpretations.<sup>118</sup> The textbook view of Marxism has, however, caused confusions about the views of Marx, particularly regarding his alleged 'economic determinism' or inevitability theory.

The critics of Marxist thought assert that the idea of a stateless society is very idealistic. The Soviet Revolution of 1917 was largely inspired by the Marxist or Communist ideas, but the critics of the Revolution assert that if Marx were alive in 1917, he would have disowned the Revolution, since after 1917 a highly centralized and authoritarian state was established by Lenin (d. 1924; the first head of the Soviet Union) and Stalin (d. 1953; leader of the Soviet Union after Lenin).

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<sup>118</sup> S. H. Rigby, "Marxist Historiography" in *Companion to Historiography*, pp. 890-91.

Moreover, at that time, unlike Britain which was capitalistic, Russia was feudalistic where the Communist Revolution took place. According to the Marxist linear concept of history, the revolution should have come in Britain and not Russia, where capitalism had not yet gained ground. Similarly, Marxist historians like D. D. Kosambi and R. S. Sharma have argued that India did not see the stage of slavery unlike Europe. It has been pointed out that the Marxist division or periodization of past history into four stages was Euro-centric, as he took into consideration the historical developments of European societies, and generalized them to the rest of the world.

Marxism is a multi-stranded theoretical tradition. Multiple versions of Marxism have emerged overtime such as voluntaristic Marxism of Gramsci or the Frankfurt School, and the determinist or structuralist Marxism of Louis Althusser, Étienne Balibar, and Nicos Poulantzas.<sup>119</sup> According to critics, Marx and Engels produced a range of differing and even contradictory historical interpretations. For instance, the explanation for transition from feudalism to capitalism offered in *The German Ideology* and the *Communist Manifesto* is very different from the one given in the *Grundrisse* and *Das Capital*. In fact, in the writings of Marx and Engels, there is a contrast between their general, programmatic statements, and their actual analyses of specific historical periods.<sup>120</sup> Furthermore, historians have challenged a number of assumptions in the Marxist thought. For instance, Anderson has argued that unlike the claim of Marx, the relations of production generally change prior to the forces of production during the transition from one stage of history to the next.<sup>121</sup> Moreover, the concept of Asiatic mode of production has also been criticized on empirical and theoretical/conceptual grounds. In addition, historians have also challenged the universalization of Marxist claims. The renowned Indian Marxist historian of Aligarh School, Irfan Habib, for instance, rejects the universalization of ‘feudalism’ as an umbrella term to cover all pre-capitalist systems.<sup>122</sup>

There are serious disagreements among the Marxist historians. Despite that, a distinctive school of Marxist historiography is identifiable since Marxist historians distinguish themselves from others in terms of their common vocabulary, concepts, questions, hypotheses and historical emphases.

In a nutshell, Marx tries to establish the primacy of economic factors over other factors in history. To him, history is economics in action. He counters the

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<sup>119</sup> Fulbrook, *Historical Theory*, pp. 41-43.

<sup>120</sup> Rigby, “Marxist Historiography” in *Companion to Historiography*, pp. 891, 894.

<sup>121</sup> Perry Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism* (London: New Left Books, 1977), p. 204.

<sup>122</sup> Irfan Habib, *Essays in Indian History: Towards a Marxist Perception* (New Delhi: Tulika, 1995), see Chapter 1: Problems of Marxist Historiography, p. 5.

Hegelian assertion that ideas are the moving force behind history. Marx's thesis or the Marxist perspective is one of the most powerful and compelling ones. A plethora of empirical and theoretical literature has appeared on the subject, applying, verifying and contributing to his theory. Notwithstanding the criticism Marxist perspective has received, it remains one of the most convincing and forceful theories for explaining and interpreting social developments, history and historical changes.

## **Questions**

- Q. What is positivism? Discuss the influence of positivist ideas on historiography.
- Q. Marx argued that all men are the products of their own environment. How far Marx himself was a product of his own environment?
- Q. Karl Marx offered a materialistic interpretation of History. Elaborate it, and also discuss how far it is valid for explaining various historical developments?
- Q. According to Marx, all history is the history of class struggles. Analyze.

## **Unit 8**

### **Muslim Historiography in South Asia**

**Objectives of the Unit**

After reading the unit, the students will be able to:

- evaluate the contribution of the Muslim historians of the Pre-Sultanate and Sultanate Periods in South Asia
- assess the contribution of the Muslim historians of the Mughal era
- learn about the trends in Muslim historiography in modern South Asia
- examine the contribution of Shibli Naumani, I. H. Qureshi and S. M. Ikram in development of historiography

The historiographical tradition among the Muslims goes back to the seventh and eighth centuries when the composition of the *Sirah* (biography of the Prophet Muhammad [PBUH]) and *Maghazi* (military history of the times of the Prophet Muhammad [PBUH]) works began. Later, the Muslim historians borrowed the principles of historical criticism from the process of compilation of *hadith* literature. Therefore, the Muslims had a better sense of history and chronology, and were more cautious about historical criticism as compared to the Hindus in ancient India. Historiography was further developed by the Muslims in India after the establishment of Muslim rule.

### **8.1 Muslim Historians of the Pre-Sultanate and Sultanate Periods**

Before and during the era of the Delhi Sultanate, a number of works having historical worth and value were produced. However, their authors were generally associated with the court, and held high positions in the Sultanate of Delhi. Therefore, many of these works were written to please and win the favours of the rulers and the Sultans of Delhi. Moreover, they were generally dedicated to the various Sultans, who were the patrons of their authors. For example, Minhaj (the author of *Tabaqat-i Nasiri*), Barani (the author of *Tarikh-i Firuzshahi*) and Afif (the author of *Tarikh-i Firuzshahi*) were closely associated with various regimes in the Sultanate of Delhi. These works have been written in Persian, which was the official language of the court of Delhi. The focus of these works was political and military history of the Sultanate. These works deal with the views and policies of the Delhi Sultans, and discuss the role of political actors such as the Sultans, their nobles, confidants, and influential high state officials. Therefore, they present a 'statist' or elitist discourse, and represent the view-point and the world-view of the ruling elite. These works serve as an official source on the history of the Sultanate era. The important among them include the following:

#### **(i) Minhaj al-Siraj—the Author of *Tabaqat-i Nasiri***

Qazi Minhaj al-Siraj Juzjani authored *Tabaqat-i Nasiri* in 1256 during the reign of Sultan Nasir al-Din Mahmud (r. 1246-66). At that time, he was the chief Qazi (judge) of Delhi. The book was dedicated to the reigning Sultan, and that was why it is named after him. It is a dynastic history that covers the political history of more than twenty dynasties of Muslim rulers who ruled different areas before the Mongol invasions in the mid-thirteenth century. For a student of Indian history, it is an important source on the history of the Ghaznavids, Ghaurids and Ilbari or the early Turkish Sultans of Delhi.

**(ii) Zia al-Din Barani—the Author of *Tarikh-i Firuzshahi***

Zia al-Din Barani (b. 1285-d. 1360), the author of *Tarikh-i Firuzshahi*, was a renowned fourteenth-century political theorist and historian. He belonged to an aristocratic family, which had served the Ilbaris (the early Turkish Sultans of Delhi), the Khaljis and the Tughluqs.<sup>123</sup> He himself remained a courtier of Sultan Muhammad ibn Tughluq (r. 1325-51) for nearly seventeen years. *Tarikh-i Firuzshahi* was composed in 1359 during the reign of Sultan Firuz Tughluq (r. 1351-88), to whom it was dedicated as well. It covers the political history of the Sultanate era beginning from Sultan Balban's reign, i.e. 1266, till the initial years of the reign of Sultan Firuz Tughluq. It was composed in 1359. Barani saw a didactic purpose in history-writing, and believed that people could learn lessons from the past. Moreover, he argued that the study of history increases one consciousness as well as improves one's judgment about people and events.<sup>124</sup> Barani's other important work is *Fatawa-i Jahandari* (Rules of the Government), which deals with political thought.

**(iii) Amir Khusrau—the Author of *Khaza'in al-Futuh***

Amir Khusrau (d. 1325) composed *Khaza'in al-Futuh* in 1311, which is an official history of the military campaigns of Sultan Ala al-Din Khalji (r. 1296-1316). It highlights the military successes of the Sultan, while ignoring the defeats the Sultanate's army had to suffer in the battlefields. It must be remembered that Amir Khusrau was a court poet of Sultan Ala al-Din Khalji, and one cannot expect an objective account from him. Amir Khusrau composed other works of historical value as well such as *Qiran al-Sa'adayn* (composed in 1285) about the meeting of Sultan Kaiqubad and his father, Bughra Khan in Oudh, and *Miftah al-Futuh* (composed in 1291) about the successful military campaigns of Sultan Jalal al-Din Khalji (r. 1290-96). However, it must be remembered that Amir Khusrau was not a historian. He has nowhere claimed to be a historian, nor was it his primary concern to record the past events. His chief aim was to demonstrate his literary ability.<sup>125</sup> None the less, his works have great historical value for the study of the Delhi Sultanate.

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<sup>123</sup> K. A. Nizami, "Ziya-ud-Din Barani," in *Historians of Medieval India*, ed. Mohibbul Hasan (Meerut and New Delhi: Meenakshi Prakashan, 1982), p. 30.

<sup>124</sup> Zia al-Din Barani, *Tarikh-i Firuzshahi*, ed. Saiyyid Ahmad Khan (Calcutta: Bibliotheca Indica, The Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1862), pp. 48-49, 12.

<sup>125</sup> Syed Hasan Askari, "Amir Khusrau," in *Historians of Medieval India*, pp. 15, 27.

**(iv) Shams Siraj Afif—the Author of *Tarikh-i Firuzshahi***

Shams Siraj Afif, the author of *Tarikh-i Firuzshahi*, was a frequent attendant at the court of Sultan Firuz Tughluq. The work was composed during the reign of Sultan Firuz, to whom Afif dedicated it as well.

**(v) Isami—the Author of *Futuh al-Salatin***

Mawlana Isami composed his poetical work *Futuh al-Salatin* (*Shahnamah-i Hind*) in 1348 during the reign of Sultan Muhammad ibn Tughluq. However, Isami's family migrated to Dawlatabad in Deccan when the Sultan established his second capital. Though Isami's grandfather, Izz al-Din Isami, had served as a military commander under the Sultans of Delhi, Isami later got himself associated with the Bahmani Kingdom of Deccan, and dedicated his work to Sultan Ala-Din Hasan (Bahman Shah), the founder of the Bahmani Kingdom, who had rebelled against Sultan Muhammad ibn Tughluq. The book covers the history from the Ghaznavid invasions of India to the history of the Sultanate of Delhi till 1349-50.

**(vi) Ibn Battutah—the Author of *Ajaib al-Asfar***

The famous Moroccan traveler, Ibn Battutah, who wrote *Ajaib al-Asfar*, served under Sultan Muhammad ibn Tughluq for some time. *Ajaib al-Asfar* is primarily a travelogue, and not a book of history *per se*, but it provides very useful information about the history of the Sultanate era.

## **8.2 Muslim Historians of the Mughal Period**

During the Mughal period, a number of rulers and influential people composed their memoirs or autobiographies. The most famous memoirs are the *Tuzuk-i Babari*, also known as *Baburnamah*, composed by Emperor Zaheer al-Din Babar (r. 1526-1530), and *Tuzuk-i Jahangiri*, composed by Emperor Nur al-Din Jahangir (r. 1605-1627). Moreover, a number of historians composed books of history. What follows is a brief overview of the most important works and their authors' contribution to historiography:

**(i) Nizam al-Din Bakhshi—the Author of *Tabaqat-i Akbari***

Khwaja Nizam al-Din Ahmad Bakhshi (d. 1594) authored *Tabaqat-i Akbari* in three volumes, which was completed in 1593. He served as the *bakhshi* or military secretary under Emperor Jalal al-Din Mhuhammad Akbar (r. 1556-1605). His work covers the history of the first thirty-eight years of Emperor Akbar's reign,

since the author died in 1594. The book is divided into nine sections called *tabaqa*, which deal with the following nine regions of the Mughal Empire: Delhi, Deccan, Gujarat, Bengal, Malwa, Jaunpur, Sindh, Kashmir and Multan. Khwaja Nizam al-Din has written the dynastic history of these regions till the time of their conquest by Emperor Akbar. However, the scheme of the recording of the history of the thirty-eight years of Akbar's reign is annual. In his work, he mentioned his sources, which are twenty-eight in number. The chronological sequence of historical events has been carefully maintained by the author. However, the author has merely narrated political history, without offering any causal explanation for historical events. Therefore, the author has not made any value-judgments in the book. The language and style of the book is simple. A significant contribution of the author is the idea of writing regional or provincial histories.

**(ii) Abd al-Qadir Badayuni—the Author of *Muntakhab al-Tawarikh***

Abd al-Qadir Badayuni (b. 1540-d. 1596) composed *Muntakhab al-Tawarikh* (Selections from History) in three volumes. It took him five years to compose the work, which was completed in 1596, the same year when the author died. The book starts from the reign of Subuktigin (r. 977-997), the King of Ghaznah, and the father of Sultan Mahmud of Ghaznah (r. 998-1030), and covers the history of the first forty year of Emperor Akbar's reign. It also provides important historical data and explanations about the history of the Sultanate era. The third and last volume of the book includes biographical sketches of the luminaries associated with Emperor Akbar's court. Badayuni served under Emperor Akbar as an *imam* (prayer leader). He was also assigned the task of translating the sacred books of the Hindus in Persian language by the Emperor. The author is very critical of the policies of Akbar, especially his liberalism in religious matters, which he viewed as detrimental to Islam. Badayuni's approach is quite subjective. Unlike Barani, he offers no supernatural explanation for historical events, and attributes natural causes to phenomena like famine and drought.<sup>126</sup>

**(iii) Abul Fazl—the Author of *Akbarnamah***

Shaykh Abul Fazl (b. 1551-d. 1602) was the son of Shaykh Mubarak, a scholar, and the brother of Abul Faizi, the famous poet-philosopher associated with Emperor Akbar's court. Abul Fazl rose to high position under Akbar and served as an administrator and military commander. Moreover, he was a friend and a confidant of the Emperor. Abul Fazl composed *Akbarnamah* on the order of the Emperor. It was completed in 1602, the year when Abul Fazl was executed at the order of Akbar's son, Prince Salim (later Emperor Jahangir). *Akbarnamah* has three volumes. The first two volumes cover the history of the Mughal Empire in

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<sup>126</sup> Muhammad Mujeeb, "Badauni", in *ibid.*, p. 116.

India from Babur to Akbar's reign, while the third volume, which is titled *Ain-i Akbari* deals with the policies, administration, military organization, economy, resources, revenue and population of the Empire under Akbar. It is an annual chronicle of Akbar's reign. Abul Fazl's approach to historical interpretation was rational. Unlike other historians, he did not confine his history to the Muslim rulers and their achievements. He expanded the scope of history by discussing the religion, philosophy, traditions and customs of the Hindus in his work. He carefully scrutinized his sources. That is why he is considered the first medieval Indian historian who recognized the significance of original sources. His approach to history was rational and secular, unlike rest of the medieval historians of India.<sup>127</sup> Since Abul Fazl was patronized by Akbar, the explanations of the former about the policies and views of the latter are quite subjective. At times, Abul Fazl indulged in flattery of the Emperor, and tried to justify the actions of the latter.

In a nutshell, the Muslim historians of premodern India greatly contributed to historiography. Since many of them were associated with the courts, therefore, their accounts were not very objective. Moreover, these works were elitist in nature, and generally ignored the perceptions, problems and conditions of the common people. In fact, these works were more in line with the ancient Persian traditions of historiography. K. A. Nizami writes that the historians of pre-Islamic Sassanian Persia focused on the pomp and show of the court, the achievements of the Emperors and the history of their conquests, which was generally aimed at the glorification of the kings. On the contrary, they considered any reference to the common people or their problems as derogatory to the art of history-writing. In this way, the 'history of the age' was converted into the 'history of the kings'.<sup>128</sup> Therefore, the scope of historiography was reduced by these court historians.

### **8.3 A Brief Overview of Muslim Historiography in Modern South Asia**

What follows is a brief overview of the contribution of three major Muslim historians of South Asia:

#### **(i) Shibli Naumani**

Shibli Naumani (1857-1914) was born at Azamgarh, U.P., India. He taught at Aligarh College founded by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan. Later, he founded the famous religious seminary Nadvat al-Ulama at Lucknow in 1894. His most renowned historical work is a comprehensive biography of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) titled *Sirat al-Nabi*. He died after writing its first two volumes, so the remaining

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<sup>127</sup> Noman Ahmad Siddiqi, "Shaikh Abul Fazl", in *ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>128</sup> K. A. Nizami, *On Sources and Source Material (Being Volume One of Historical Studies—Indian and Islamic)* (Delhi: Idarah-'i Adabiyat-i Delli, 1995), pp. 3-5.

five volumes were written and published posthumously by his student, Syed Suleman Nadvi. Other famous biographical works of Shibli include *Al-Mamun* (1889), *Sirat al-Nu'man* (1891; on the life of Imam Abu Hanifah), *Al-Faruq* (1898), *Al-Ghazali* (1902), *Sawanih Maulana Rumi* (1906), and a series of essays on the Mughal Emperor Aurengzeb Alamgir (between years 1906-09). He had scholarly command over many languages such as Arabic, Turkish, Persian, Urdu and Hindi. He is considered the first Muslim historian produced by the Aligarh School.

Through his writings, Shibli tried to highlight the glories of medieval Islam. He saw a noble purpose in history-writing, and through his works, tried to establish the utility of history as a discipline. He tried to reconcile history with philosophy by presenting a philosophical view of history, and searching for universal truths in it. He undertook a critical study of the rise and fall of civilizations, and while doing so, he particularly highlighted the significance of causation in history. He was conscious of the fact that many factors adversely influence history-writing. Therefore, in his monumental work, *Sirat al-Nabi*, he argued that the most important factor that adversely influences historiography is the political factor, since the ruling elite always try to pressurize the historians for producing historical narratives that serve the political interests of the former.<sup>129</sup> He not only tried to revive the historiographical tradition among the Muslims in South Asia through his historical works, he also tried to revive the heritage, culture and traditions of the Muslims in pre-partition India.

Though Shibli praised the efforts of the Orientalists in collecting, collating, editing, and printing rare manuscripts dealing with the history of Islam and Muslims, he was critical of the Orientalist scholarship as well. He argued that their writings and approach reflect prejudices against Islam and the history of the Muslims, and that they interpreted the Muslim history with a missionary bias.<sup>130</sup> Shibli is considered the real exponent of the Traditionalist school of historiography

## **(ii) I. H. Qureshi**

Dr. Ishtiaq Husain Qureshi (1903-1981), better known as I. H. Qureshi, was a renowned historian and educationist, who was born at Patiali, U.P., in pre-partition India. He taught history at Delhi University, University of the Punjab, and

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<sup>129</sup> Shibli Naumani, *Sirat al-Nabi*, vol. I, 4<sup>th</sup> edn. (n.p.: National Book Foundation, 1985), p. 66.

<sup>130</sup> Muhammad Aslam Syed, *Muslim Response to the West: Muslim Historiography in India, 1857-1914* (Islamabad: National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, 1988), pp. 81, 93.

Columbia University, New York, and also served as Vice-Chancellor at the University of Karachi. His most famous works include *Administration of the Sultanate of Dehli* (1942), *The Muslim Community of the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent* (1962), *The Struggle for Pakistan* (1965), *Administration of the Mughal Empire* (1966), and *Ulema in Politics* (1972).

In his work *Administration of the Sultanate of Dehli*, Dr. Qureshi stressed more on the Islamic character of the Sultanate of Delhi than on its local Indian nature. Being a proponent of Muslim nationalist discourse, he projected two-nation theory on the basis of Hindu-Muslim differences, and provided a historical basis for it. He argued that Islam and Hinduism are poles apart. In pre-partition India, the Hindus and the Muslims lived as two completely separate and identifiable nations or communities, though they had lived as neighbours for centuries.<sup>131</sup> He highlighted the notion of separate identity of the Muslims in India, and argued that fearing a complete assimilation of the Muslims in Hindu majority, the Muslims leaders such as Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi (d. 1624), popularly known as Mujaddid Alf Thani, strived to preserve their separate identity. Dr. Qureshi interpreted the war of succession between Dara Shikoh (executed 1659) and Aurengzeb Alamgir (r. 1658-1707), the sons of Mughal Emperor Shahjahan (r. 1628-58), as a conflict between the forces of heterodoxy and orthodoxy respectively. In his opinion, the victory of Aurengzeb Alamgir, who was orthodox and puritanical, proved to be the 'political culmination of the Mujaddidi movement'.<sup>132</sup> In short, the Muslims were never completely assimilated into the Indian environment and had evolved their own distinctive traditions.<sup>133</sup>

Further expanding his Muslim nationalist perspective in historiography, he defended the All India Muslim League's demand for a separate Muslim state, and emphatically stressed on the role of Islam or the ideological factor in the Freedom Movement. After studying the historical development of the Muslim community in Indian Sub-continent, he interpreted the emergence of Pakistan in 1947 as a natural outcome of the historical processes.

### **(iii) S. M. Ikram**

Sheikh Muhammad Ikram (1908-1971), better known as S. M. Ikram, was a renowned Pakistani bureaucrat, educationist and historian, who was born at Lyallpur (now called Faisalabad). He was a prolific author, who wrote a number

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<sup>131</sup> I. H. Qureshi, *The Struggle for Pakistan* (Karachi: University of Karachi, 1965), pp. 3-5.

<sup>132</sup> I. H. Qureshi, *Ulema in Politics* (Karachi: Ma'aref, 1972), p. 98.

<sup>133</sup> I. H. Qureshi, *The Muslim Community of the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent (610-1947): A Brief Historical Analysis* (Karachi: Ma'aref, 1977, first published 1962).

of books on history. His most important works on history include *Makers of Pakistan and Modern Muslim India* (1950; later republished with the title *Indian Muslims and the Partition of India*), *Ab-i Kausar*, *Rud-i Kausar*, *Mauj-i Kausar*, *Muslim Civilization in India* (1964), *Muslim Rule in India and Pakistan* (1966), and *Modern Muslim India and the Birth of Pakistan, 1858-1951* (1970).

Like I. H. Qureshi, S. M. Ikram also tried to trace the roots of Hindu-Muslim separatism in the history of the Indian Sub-continent. He tried to reconstruct the history of the Muslims in India by assuming a neat demarcation between the Hindu and Muslim communities in political, religious, social and cultural terms. Writing from the Muslim nationalist perspective, he argued that Pakistan had come into being the day when the Arab-Muslim armies landed in Sindh in early eighth century. In his words, “the ground for Muslim separatism was prepared when Islam entered the subcontinent, and all efforts to provide a bridge between the Hindus and the Muslims failed.”<sup>134</sup>

He glorified the efforts of Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi and Mughal Emperor Aurengzeb in crystallizing the separate Muslim identity in India, while he condemned the efforts of religious syncretism in India, and the role of personalities like Mughal Emperor Akbar (d. 1605) in this regard, who tried to bring the two supposed communities together. Like I. H. Qureshi, he also tried to de-emphasize the local South Asian roots of the Pakistanis.

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<sup>134</sup> S. M. Ikram, *Modern Muslim India and the Birth of Pakistan (1858-1951)*, (Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1965), p. 1.

## **Questions**

Q. Discuss the contribution of the Muslim historians of the pre-Mughal era in India.

Q. Analyze the varied approaches of the major Muslim historians of the Mughal era.

Q. Critically analyze the contribution of the Muslim historians in modern South Asia.

## **Unit 9**

# **Historiography in the Twentieth Century**

### **Objectives of the Unit**

After reading the unit, the students will be able to:

- evaluate the contribution of Weber to the development of historical thought
- assess the views of Spengler regarding history
- understand Croce's critique to the discipline of history
- explain Toynbee's Theory of Challenge and Response
- describe Carr's critique to the conventional approach of historians
- examine Foucault's critique to the conventional historical thinking, and his contribution to it
- explore Edward Said's criticism on the approach of the Western Orientalists and their works
- know Huntington's Clash of Civilizations thesis and its critique
- grasp Fukuyama's End of History thesis and its critique
- learn about the contribution of Hobsbawm to history-writing

In early twentieth century, the ideas of many thinkers, historians and philosophers of history considerably contributed to the historical thought, and consequently, to the philosophy of history. Some of the prominent thinkers and their contribution to the discipline of history are briefly discussed below:

### **9.1 Max Weber**

Max Weber (b. 1864-d. 1920), a twentieth-century German thinker and sociologist, is regarded as one of the founders of sociology, particularly of political sociology. His important works include (i) *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905), and (ii) *Economy and Society* (published posthumously). In addition, he also wrote and published on world religions.

Weber's works and ideas bear the stamp of many nineteenth-century thinkers. More particularly, he was inspired and influenced by Marx and Nietzsche. Though Weber greatly differed from Marx on many points, he interpreted and considerably modified, contributed and added to Marxist theory. Friedrich Nietzsche (b. 1844-d. 1900) was a German philosopher and philologist, who challenged the notion of universality of values, and argued for multiplicity of values. To Nietzsche, it was difficult to differentiate between rationality and irrationality, and impossible to make a rational choice between values.

Weber asserted the role and importance of ideas in determining historical change and the progress of time. He maintained that in addition to economic factors, ideas might also play an important role in bringing about historical change. He maintained that ideas have an independent existence of their own, and ideas are not necessarily born out of the economic structure of a society. He recognized the significance of economic factors in history like Marx, but expanded his thesis to include ideological factors in determining historical change. In fact, the dialogue between Marx and Weber has firmly established the practice of searching for the priority of causes in historical studies.

Weber also tried to synthesize the Hegelian and Marxist positions. Weber's work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905) was an attempt to establish the primacy of ideas as agents of historical change over other factors, which also countered the Marxist assertion that economic factors are the most important determinants in causation in history. Weber argued that the rise of capitalism in the West was the result of some ideas, such as the protestant work ethics, which emphasized hard work, and change in the value of poverty, which the Catholics celebrated as a virtue but Protestantism allowed accumulation of

wealth, provided a person gives charity.<sup>135</sup> The resulting accumulation of wealth later led to the emergence of capitalism. While exploring the causes of the rise of capitalism in Europe, Weber also traced the causes why capitalism could not emerge in non-European societies such as China and India, where the religious doctrines did not permit accumulation of wealth, and thus, were not conducive for the rise of capitalism.

Max Weber, like other philosophers of history, also tried to interpret history philosophically, and view the past in a holistic manner. While doing so, he was quite conscious of the fact that the historical developments of the West had been different from those in other parts of the world. Therefore, Weber tried to avoid making any universal generalization unlike Marx, who had generalized his thesis to all societies and to all times. Though Weber is said to have challenged the Eurocentric approach to history, his own views about the uniqueness of European history have been challenged, as his critics assert that ancient and medieval non-European societies possessed the same qualities possessed by the Europeans, and were as rational as the latter.<sup>136</sup> In addition, Weber also stressed the importance of cultural conditions for understanding the development of history.

Weber also modified and added to the Marx's theory of class. Marx's concept of social stratification (the division of society into strata) suggested that there is always a congruence of high class (possessing enormous wealth), status (social prestige), and authority (political power) positions. It means that only the wealthy people enjoy social status and political authority. On the contrary, Weber asserted that the three hierarchies of stratification—class, status, and authority—may not be simultaneously enjoyed by the same people in some societies. Weber also dealt with problems such as the relationship between culture and institutions, between social stratification and distribution of exercise of power, and between the social structure and the emergence and regulation of political conflicts. The concept of nation-state served as the basic frame of reference in Weberian thought.

Weber has been hailed as the Marx of the middle class, as he challenged the Marxist notion of division of society into two groups: the possessing haves and the non-possessing haves-not, and recognized the presence of a middle class. Moreover, Weber believed that the abolition of private property may not necessarily improve the conditions of the working classes. Like many other thinkers of the nineteenth century, Weber also discussed the transition of society from premodern-traditional to modern-rational society. He particularly pointed out

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<sup>135</sup> For details see Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, tr., Talcott Parsons (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958).

<sup>136</sup> J. M. Blaut, *Eight Eurocentric Historians* (New York and London: The Guilford Press, 2000), p. 29.

that in modern times, traditional authority was gradually being replaced by rational-legal authority. (Traditional authority is the authority which rests upon time-honoured beliefs and norms. People respect it because they think it has always existed.) Weber asserted that the Western society was gradually being rationalized and bureaucratized having hierarchies.

## 9.2 Oswald Spengler

Oswald Spengler (b. 1880-d. 1936) was another German thinker and philosopher of history. His important works include (i) *The Decline of the West* (1917), and (ii) *Today and Destiny*. He was influenced by the ideas of German poet-philosopher, Goethe (b. 1749-d. 1832). Moreover, his works seem to be influenced by Ibn Khaldun and Voltaire, though he did not acknowledge it.

Culture constituted the basic frame of reference in Spengler's thought. He asserted that cultures are "organisms, and world history is their collective biography.... Culture is the prime phenomenon of all past and future world history".<sup>137</sup> He interpreted history with the help of his theory of culture-cycles. While exploring the differences and similarities among various cultures by undertaking their comparative study, he argued that different cultures were equal in terms of stages of their history, and followed a similar pattern of rise, growth, decline and fall. His theory of the development of cultures is cyclical. None the less, he challenged other Euro-centric views of the day, and maintained that each culture had its peculiar self-expression, which is expressed in the form of arts, sculpture, music, architecture, philosophy and production of knowledge. Spengler also maintained that each culture, in its deepest essence, is unique and different from other cultures. Moreover, each culture is limited in duration and self-contained, just as each plant has its peculiar fruit, its special type of growth and decline. Each culture has its own equally valid view of the reality. Like Weber, he was also conscious of the fact that the historical developments of the West have been different from those in other parts of the world. Therefore, he also avoided making any universal generalization about history and historical change.

It is always difficult to challenge a dominant discourse. Spengler believed in cultural relativity and preached it at the time when the hegemonic cultural supremacy of the West was not easy to be challenged in academic circles. Cultural relativism argues that cultures are relative in the sense that what is good and right in one culture or society may not be so in others. Therefore, values and institutions of a culture must be taken to be self-validating. He rejected the idea of progress, and asserted that the Western Civilization had reached its completion and thus, it

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<sup>137</sup> Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Eng. trans. Charles Atkinson (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1962), pp. 104-5.

has finished the life history of its soul. He predicted the decline of the West. His ideas generated altogether a new discourse regarding the decline of civilizations, especially of the Western Civilization. In fact, Spengler was among those German thinkers of early twentieth century who had a feeling that something was wrong with industrialism and rationality, and that with the advent of modernity something good had been lost. These thinkers romanticized the traditions of the past, and were critics of modernity and growing materialism. Spengler not only questioned the idea of progress, he also challenged the view that democracy was the final political structure. He asserted that there might emerge new forms of political system in future.

He rejected positivism and positivistic notion of a 'science of history'. He argued that scientific method has no universal validity, and hence, cannot be applied to all disciplines. He maintained that the evolution and development of culture would always remain a metaphysical mystery, beyond the comprehension of human beings. Spengler also rejected the periodization of history in three phases: ancient, medieval and modern. According to him, this unilinear periodization of history was Euro-centric. His critics argue that he could not see the possibility of cultural synthesis, and the development of a global human culture.

### **9.3 Benedetto Croce**

Benedetto Croce (b. 1866-d. 1952) was an Italian politician, critic, historian and philosopher. His works, particularly *History: Its Theory and Practice* (1917), greatly influenced historical thinking. He also wrote the histories of Europe, Italy and Naples, which were of didactic nature. In addition, he contributed a number of philosophical essays on the nature of history.

According to Croce, philosophy and history are linked together, and cannot exist without each other. Therefore, like Vico, Croce argued that history should be written only by philosophers, and philosophy is nothing more than the methodology of history. He denied that there is any plan in history. He rejected the idea that history is a science, and tried to differentiate between historical and scientific research. He asserted that history is an art in his famous essay on the subject, published in 1893. He argued that history is a series of lies, and people must choose the one which seems closest to the truth. He criticized the perspective and approach of the historians in his famous statement that 'all history is contemporary history'. According to him, history is the recreation of the past in the mind of historians, who write history of the past events in the light of the present day concepts, values and norms, which adversely affects historiography. In other words, the historians view history through the eyes of the present. He influenced many historians, and the foremost among them was R. G. Collingwood, who authored *The Idea of History* (1945).

Regarding the debate of idea vs. matter (Hegelian vs. Marxist positions), Croce took the idealist position, and insisted that all history is the history of thought. He believed that human ideas, whether of science, art or history, are historically conditioned as they can be seen as a response to historically specific problems and reflect the concerns of a particular age. He even went to the extent of arguing that every definition is historically specific, and a response to particular circumstances.<sup>138</sup>

#### **9.4 Arnold Toynbee**

Arnold Toynbee (b. 1889-d. 1975) was an English philosopher-historian, who studied Greek and Latin at Oxford University, and later taught ancient history. His important works include (i) *A Study of History* (12 vols. published 1934-1961), and (ii) *Civilization on Trail* (1948).

Toynbee used civilization as his basic unit of analysis or frame of reference. He presumed that the histories of all civilizations were in some sense parallel, and they all follow the same pattern of decline and fall. He thoroughly analyzed and undertook comparative studies of twenty-six civilizations from where he derived his Theory of Challenge and Response. Toynbee's philosophy of history is based on this theory. Employing the concept of civilization as his basic frame of reference, he maintained that the history of all past civilizations, particularly their genesis, growth, decline and disintegration could be explained with the help of his theory.

According to this theory, if a civilization 'creatively' responds to a challenge, it will sustain and grow, but if a civilization fails to adequately and creatively respond to the challenge, it will gradually decline and disintegrate. A 'creative minority' responds to the challenges since all members of a society are unable to creatively respond to the challenge.<sup>139</sup> The creative minority must come up with ever-new responses to ever-new challenges. To him, the genesis, growth, decline and disintegration of civilizations follow a cyclical pattern. A civilization must continue to undergo challenge-response-mimesis cycle all the time in order to grow and develop further. If the process stops, decline will set in the civilization. None the less, some failures do not count. It is the institutionalized failure to be creative that proves disastrous for a civilization.

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<sup>138</sup> Marnie Hughes-Warrington, *Fifty Key Thinkers on History* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 51.

<sup>139</sup> Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, Revised and abridged by Arnold Toynbee and Jane Caplan (New York: Weathervane Books, 1972), p. 224.

Toynbee, in his theory of Challenge and Response, however, did not specify the type or nature of challenge, and thus, covers all types of challenges like economic (e.g. economic depression), environmental (e.g. earth quake, famine, drought or flood), ideological (e.g. rationalism and modernism), and technological (e.g. weapons and nuclearization) challenges, etc.

Like Spengler, Toynbee was also critical of modern civilization, and hence, dubbed it as ‘monotonous’, ‘superfluous’ and ‘subversive’. The modern secularized scientific technological civilization appears to Toynbee only “an almost meaningless repetition of something that the Greek and Romans did before us”.

He believed that civilization was the means or an instrument, and religion the end or the culmination or outcome of development of civilization. He interpreted civilization as a humble servant of religion, and stated that civilizations appeared only to be ‘stepping stones to higher things on the religious plane.’ For instance, according to Toynbee, the most useful function of Greco-Roman Civilization was that it gave birth to Christianity before disappearing.

He argued that God is not only a historical fact; He is the supreme historical fact.<sup>140</sup> For Toynbee, history is a wager or a bet between God and the devil, who challenged the former to give him a free hand to corrupt human beings.<sup>141</sup> This idea was taken from Goethe, who took it from the Old Testament. Toynbee also suggested that religion was the only subject worthy of historians’ attention. His critics suggest that he transformed history into theology, and his philosophy of history indicates a total return to the theological stage.<sup>142</sup>

### **9.5 E. H. Carr**

Edward Hallett Carr (b. 1892-d. 1982) was a British historian, historiographer, and journalist, who also contributed to international relations. Most of his historical works focused on the history of Soviet Union. His famous works include (i) *What is History?* (1961) (ii) *Nationalism and After* (1945), (iii) *A History of Soviet Russia* (14 vols., 1950-1978), and (iv) *The Russian Revolution: From Lenin to Stalin (1917-1929)* (1979).

Carr, the Cambridge historian, was an opponent of the notion of empiricism in history, and believed that facts do not speak for themselves. He argued that a historian chooses the facts in an arbitrary manner, making some facts historical

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<sup>140</sup> Stern, *Philosophy of History and the Problem of Values*, p. 62.

<sup>141</sup> For a detailed discussion see Toynbee, *A Study of History*, pp. 97-109.

<sup>142</sup> Stern, *Philosophy of History and the Problem of Values*, pp. 61-62.

and significant, and others insignificant.<sup>143</sup> He questioned the notion of objectivity and complete impartiality of historians while conducting historical research, and insisted that historians select and interpret facts according to their own interests. He argued that historians may offer different interpretations of same historical facts. The over-emphasis on the role of historians in the writing of history tends to make history subjective. He denied the possibility of an objective history, a history without any impact of a historian's personal views and beliefs. To him, history was an unending dialogue between the past and the present.<sup>144</sup>

Carr highlighted the importance of causation in historical research, and declared history to be the study of causes. He denied the role of chances in historical causation, and insisted that historians should search for rational causes behind events, which could be generalized and applied to the study of other historical events. Later, the issue of historical causation was de-emphasized by the postmodernist thinkers, to whom the search for causes of historical events was futile; instead, the postmodernist thinkers stressed on the search for explanations.

To Carr, history is a science for the following reasons: (i) historical research makes generalizations; (ii) from history, one can learn lessons; (iii) though historians cannot predict specific events, the generalizations made from the past events can indicate a future course of events; and (iv) historians can choose to leave aside the questions pertaining to religion and morality. He was not in favour of historians making value judgments, and believed that historians can be objective in functional sense.<sup>145</sup>

Carr asserted the primacy of political history. His critics consider him 'the apostle of an "extreme relativism" which considered "the historian the creator of history" '. His view that history has a purpose, a meaning and a direction, and needs had to be judged accordingly was challenged by many of his contemporary historians. Similarly, Carr's view that 'grand narrative histories were more valuable than learned editions of documents or compilations of Roman inscriptions' was also rejected. He also dismissed medieval history as unknowable and irrelevant.<sup>146</sup>

## 9.6 Michel Foucault

Michel Foucault (b. 1926-d. 1984) was a French postmodernist philosopher, historian, historiographer, and sociologist, who tremendously contributed to

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<sup>143</sup> Carr, *What is History?*, p. 11.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>145</sup> Hughes-Warrington, *Fifty Key Thinkers on History*, p. 28.

<sup>146</sup> G. R. Elton, *The Practice of History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002; first pub. 1967), pp. 170-71.

contemporary historical thought. His impact upon the practice of history has been phenomenal. His important works include (i) *Madness and Civilization* (1961), (ii) *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963), (iii) *The Order of Things* (1966), (iv) *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), (v) *The Order of Discourse* (1970), (vi) *The Will to Knowledge* (1976), and (viii) *The History of Sexuality* (1976).

Foucault challenged the conventional historical thinking, and viewed the past from a new perspective. He maintained that the mechanisms of power and its exercise have never been much studied by historians, who have largely focused on studying those who held power, and so there are anecdotal histories of kings and generals.<sup>147</sup> Moreover, he argued, the historians have focused on the great events of the past or 'the summits'.<sup>148</sup> That is why as a historian he himself focused on unusual and ignored themes such as madness, psychiatry, medicine, punishment, prisons and sexuality.

Foucault denied the existence of a goal or purpose in history, as suggested by Hegel and Marx. He challenged the view of Enlightenment thinkers and philosophers that human rationality has gradually triumphed over human nature. He believed that multiple and historically constructed forms of rationality existed.<sup>149</sup> Moreover, the notion of power was central to his theoretical formulations. He suggested that human beings are caught in an invisible web of power relations. He explored the relationship between knowledge and power, and argued that the very process of knowledge-production is political, i.e. being related to power, and knowledge has invariably been produced by those who are in power, and thus serves their interests.

He also challenged the progressive view of the past which sees the present as an evolutionary advance over the past. Moreover, he asserted that history is without any constants, i.e. a stable or persistent phenomenon that does not change. He rejected the idea of continuity in history. To him, human history presents an array of discontinuities. Therefore, a coherent or recurrent pattern cannot be identified in history. In this way, he rejected the notion of speculative philosophy of history.

Foucault argued that all past narratives are fictive constructs. He insisted that objectivity in historical research and history-writing is a myth, and a historian can never be objective while writing history. All theories, explanations and interpretations of past historical events reflect the subjective approach of the

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<sup>147</sup> Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham and Kate Soper (Brighton; Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1980), p. 51.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>149</sup> Hughes-Warrington, *Fifty Key Thinkers on History*, p. 98.

historians. He shared the view of Croce that all history of the past has been written in the light of the perspective of the present. However, the past, according to Foucault, can only be explained in the light of the perspective of the present. In other words, past cannot be studied in its own terms, since we all are captives of the values of the present.

## 9.7 Edward W. Said

Edward W. Said (b. 1935-d. 2003) was a Palestinian-American political activist and literary theorist. His best-known work is *Orientalism* (1978), which has tremendously influenced the contemporary historical thought, particularly the oriental studies. His other books include (i) *Covering Islam* (1981), (ii) *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature* (1990), and (iii) *Culture and Imperialism* (1993).

To Said, Orientalism is not only a doctrine about the Orient, and an influential academic tradition, it is “fundamentally a political doctrine willed over the Orient because the Orient was weaker than the West, which elided the Orient’s difference with its weakness.”<sup>150</sup> He further states that Orientalism can be seen as a “Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.”<sup>151</sup> Moreover, the “relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony...”<sup>152</sup>

Therefore, the works of the Orientalists were far from being objective, and reflected their biases. The Orientalists highlighted the differences between the East and the West. To them, the Orient or the East was constructed as an irrational, weak, feminized ‘Other’, in contrast to the rational, strong, masculine West or the Occident. Said further argued that the contemporary historiography as well as the present-day attitudes of the West, as reflected in media and academia, represent a legacy of Orientalism, since the images of the Orient constructed by the Orientalists still inform the contemporary views and discourses about the East. In the opinion of analysts:

Among the various criticisms made of Orientalism, none was so severe as Edward Said’s devastating critique: *Orientalism*. Said’s splendid study worked with strategies of analysis advanced by Michel Foucault. It was a comprehensive account of the relation between the West’s intelligent discussion of the Islamic Orient and its received notions about it. Foucault’s theory that discourse is

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<sup>150</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 204.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

inevitably a function of power relations was amply demonstrated... He [Said] passionately exposed the West's abuse of its cultural power.<sup>153</sup>

The arguments and works of Said have received mixed reactions. Where his Orientalism thesis has opened new ways of looking at the history of the colonial societies, his critics assert that his construction of the East is confined largely to the Middle East. Moreover, his views are sometimes contradictory, and he employs a less systematic and methodologically less rigorous approach.<sup>154</sup>

## 9.8 Samuel P. Huntington

Samuel P. Huntington (b. 1927-d. 2008) was an American political scientist, and the author of *The Clash of Civilization and the Remaking of World Order* (1996),<sup>155</sup> which was an elaboration of his famous article "The Clash of Civilizations?" published in 1993. His thesis generated much debate among intellectual circles. Huntington argued that in the Cold War era, the conflict was between the Democratic-Capitalist West and the Communist Bloc in the East. However, in future, the conflict would occur between the major civilizations of the world, namely the Western, Latin American, Islamic, Chinese, Hindu, Orthodox, Japanese, and African Civilizations. Thus, the future conflict would not occur between states, rather the conflict would occur in the realm of culture. He highlighted the cultural differences among the civilizations, instead of nations and countries. However, he failed to take into account the cultural differences within civilizations, especially those with huge geographical stretch, and including multiple countries. The clash of civilization thesis has been challenged by many scholars including Edward Said and Ali A. Mazrui. According to critics, his thesis provides a justification for the Euro-American aggression against China and the Muslim countries.

## 9.9 Francis Fukuyama

Francis Fukuyama (b. 1952) is a second-generation Japanese-American philosopher and political economist. His most famous but highly controversial work is *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992), which contains his 'end of history' thesis. In his book, Fukuyama maintains that Hegel attempted to write a universal history, and Hegel argued that the history of the world is the story of the

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<sup>153</sup> Asaf Hussain, Robert Olson and Jamil Qureshi, eds. *Orientalism, Islam, and Islamists*, see Introduction by the editors (Brattleboro; Vermont: Amana Books, 1984), p. 1.

<sup>154</sup> Ulrike Freitag, "The Critique of Orientalism", in *Companion to Historiography*, pp. 629-30.

<sup>155</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilization and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

gradual progress of reason, consciousness and freedom. According to Hegel, history would come to an end when the reason and freedom would fully be realized and achieved by humanity, i.e. when the 'Absolute Idea' would be fully revealed to the people. Similarly, Fukuyama argues that the human history has come to an end with the rise of the liberal Western democracy as the only global and universal political order that is viable. In human history, ideological conflicts and struggles have come to an end after the end of the Cold war and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. This end of ideological conflicts is accompanied with the global triumph of democracy, along with Western liberal economy, as the final form of government. With this, history has come to an end.

The historians critical of Fukuyama's 'end of history' thesis argue that history has not come to an end. In his recent book *Our Posthuman Future* (2002), Fukuyama speculates a 'recommencement of history' in future.<sup>156</sup> Some historians defend the end of history thesis, arguing that Fukuyama actually meant the end of a universal history of human society. Others point out that Fukuyama does not take into account the different variants of liberal democracy, practiced in different countries around the world. Moreover, he does not take into account the various forms of Islamic resurgence. The critics of liberal democracy point out the deficiencies in his thesis, and question the idea of its universal triumph.

### **9.10 Eric Hobsbawm**

Eric Hobsbawm (b. 1917) is a British Marxist historian, who is very sympathetic to the cause of the poor and labour. He has written extensively on the history of labour, social movements and rebellions. He studied the history of the working class, especially the impact of the Industrial Revolution on the working class in Britain. His important works include (i) *Primitive Rebels: Studies of Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (1959), (ii) *The Age of Revolution 1789-1848* (1962), (iii) *Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour* (1964), (iv) *Industry and Empire* (1968), (v) *The Invention of Tradition* (1983; edited with T. Ranger), (vi) *The Age of Capital: 1848-1875* (1975), (vii) *The Age of Empire: 1875-1914* (1987), and (viii) *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991* (1994).

Hobsbawm argues that in the absence of a reliable account of the past history, past can be invented by historians. He warns the historians against such inventions, and insists that a historian must distinguish between fact and fiction, between reliable and unreliable accounts of history. He also warns against the abuse of history for

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<sup>156</sup> Lemon, *Philosophy of History*, p. 419; for a detailed discussion on Fukuyama's views on history, see Chapter 15: The End of History? Fukuyama's Speculative Philosophy of History, pp. 390-425.

certain political and/or ideological purposes, since past can be distorted in order to substantiate nationalist or ethnic claims. Moreover, a historian must critically examine his own assumptions. Despite the fact that his ideological-intellectual position is Marxist, he is a critic of Karl Marx and some of his ideas.

He observes that after the World War II, there was a sharp decline in political and religious history, wherein the role of ideas was highlighted for explaining historical events. None the less, in this era, the historians focused more on socioeconomic history, wherein historical explanations are sought in terms of ‘social forces’.<sup>157</sup> For Hobsbawm, the historical events, the individual, or the study of the way of thinking of the past are not ends in themselves. Rather these are the means of illuminating some wider question, which goes far beyond the particular story and its characters.<sup>158</sup>

According to Hobsbawm, historical analysis at both macro (broad) and micro (narrow and focused) levels are useful for the historians. To quote him:

There is nothing new in choosing to see the world via a microscope rather than a telescope. So long as we accept that we are studying the same cosmos, the choice between microcosm and macrocosm is a matter of selecting the appropriate technique. It is significant that more historians find the microscope useful at present, but this does not necessarily mean that they reject telescopes as out of date.<sup>159</sup>

In his works, he has analyzed the two revolutions—the French Revolution in France and the Industrial Revolution in Britain, and argued that these two Revolutions led to the rise and growth of capitalism in Europe. He wrote on popular forms of resistance and social banditry, and coined the term ‘social bandit’ in 1965, which he elaborated in his work *Bandits*, published in 1969. To him, the outlaws who lived on the margins of rural society and robbed and plundered people were often viewed by the common people as champions of popular resistance.

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<sup>157</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, “The Revival of Narrative: Some Comments”, in *The History and Narrative Reader*, ed. Geoffrey Roberts (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 299.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 300.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 302.

## Questions

Q. Elaborate the contributions of Weber to Marxist historiography. Also give your own views while synthesizing the Weberian and Marxist perspectives.

Q. Highlight the contribution of Oswald Spengler to historical thought in Europe.

Q. Both Benedetto Croce and E. H. Carr challenged many established ideas in the discipline of history. Analyze.

Q. Toynbee's Challenge and Response Theory is an attempt to explain the growth or decline of the civilizations of the past. What are the important features of his theory?

Q. Write short notes on the following:

(i) Foucault's views about history

(ii) Edward Said's Orientalism thesis

(iii) Huntington's notion of the Clash of Civilizations

(iv) Fukuyama's concept of the End of History

(v) Hobsbawm's contribution to historiography

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