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## HISTORIOGRAPHY: A WAY OF RESEARCH



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### ABSTRACT:

Historiography refers to both the study of the methodology of historians and development of history as a discipline, and also to a body of historical work on a particular subject. The historiography of a specific topic covers how historians have studied that topic using particular sources, techniques, and theoretical approaches. Scholars discuss historiography topically – such as the "historiography of the British Empire," the "historiography of early Islam", or the "historiography of China" – as well as different approaches and genres, such as political history or social history. Beginning in the nineteenth century, with the ascent of academic history, a body of historiographic literature developed. Postmodernism taught that texts allow many interpretations and that there is nothing other than the text. Its attacks on "essentialism" made it much harder to use "history" in such a way as to attribute will or agency to it, or even a capacity to teach. (Here Hegel had anticipated this position by saying that all one can learn from history is that humans have never learned from history.) Historians cannot make the grandiose claims for their discipline that were credible in the 19th century.

Nevertheless, they know that there was a Holocaust, and they know that, despite Joseph Stalin's efforts to make him an "unperson," Leon Trotsky played some role in the Russian Revolution. Also, it makes quite a difference whether there was a Holocaust or not. This is reducing the case against total relativism or constructivism to truisms, but truisms are nonetheless true. It is hard to imagine that humanity's grasp of the past, so laboriously achieved and tenuous as it is, would lightly be loosened.

### KEYWORDS

*Historiography, Postmodernism..*

## INTRODUCTION

HISTORIOGRAPHY, the writing of history, especially the writing of history based on the critical examination of sources, the selection of particular details from the authentic materials in those sources, and the synthesis of those details into a narrative that stands the test of critical examination. The term historiography also refers to the theory and history of historical writing.

Historiography refers to both the study of the methodology of historians and development of history as a discipline, and also to a body of historical work on a particular subject. The historiography of a specific topic covers how historians have studied that topic using particular sources, techniques, and theoretical approaches. Scholars discuss historiography topically – such as the "historiography of the British Empire," the "historiography of early Islam", or the "historiography of China" – as well as different approaches and genres, such as political history or social history. Beginning in the nineteenth century, with the ascent of academic history, a body of historiographic literature developed. The extent to which historians are influenced by their own groups and loyalties—such as to their nation state—is a much debated question. The research interests of historians change over time, and in recent decades there has been a shift away from traditional diplomatic, economic and political history toward newer approaches, especially social and cultural studies. From 1975 to 1995, the proportion of professors of history in American universities identifying with social history rose from 31% to 41%, while the proportion of political historians fell from 40% to 30%. In the history departments of British universities in 2007, of the 5,723 faculty members, 1,644 (29%) identified themselves with social history while political history came next with 1,425 (25%). In the early modern period, the term historiography tended to be used in a more basic sense, to mean simply "the writing of history". Historiographer therefore meant "historian", and it is in this sense that certain official historians were given the title "Historiographer Royal", in Sweden (from 1618), England (from 1660), and Scotland (from 1681). The Scottish post is still in existence. Historiography was more recently 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." Understanding the past appears to be a universal human need, and the telling of history has emerged independently in civilisations around the world. What constitutes history is a philosophical question. The earliest chronologies date back to Mesopotamia and ancient Egypt, though no historical writers in these early civilizations were known by name. For the purposes of this article, history is taken to mean written history recorded in a narrative format for the purpose of informing future generations about events. Some experts have advised against the tendency to extrapolate trends for historical patterns that do not align with expectations about the future.

## OBJECTIVES:

To give a conceptual review on Historiography and research.

## METHODOLOGY:

It is completely based on literature review on the concept of Historiography and research

## DISCUSSION:

**MODERN HISTORIANS AIM** to reconstruct a record of human activities and to achieve a more profound

understanding of them. This conception of their task is quite recent, dating from the development in the late 18th and early 19th centuries of “scientific” history and the simultaneous rise of history as an academic profession. It springs from an outlook that is very new in human experience: the assumption that the study of history is a natural, inevitable human activity. Before the late 18th century, historiography did not stand at the centre of any civilization. History was almost never an important part of regular education, and it never claimed to provide an interpretation of human life as a whole. This larger ambition was more appropriate to religion, philosophy, and perhaps poetry and other imaginative literature.



Plates indicate the historical archives in form of monuments in Gour Kingdom in Malda (source: 37 days tour of Dr. Tapas Pal in West Bengal, 2011)

### HISTORY OF HISTORIOGRAPHY

All human cultures tell stories about the past. Deeds of ancestors, heroes, gods, or animals sacred to particular peoples were chanted and memorized long before there was any writing with which to record them. Their truth was authenticated by the very fact of their continued repetition. History, which may be defined as an account that purports to be true of events and ways of thinking and feeling in some part of the human past, stems from this archetypal human narrative activity. While sharing a common ancestry with myth, legend, epic poetry, and the novel, history has of course diverged from these forms. Its claim to truth is based in part on the fact that all the persons or events it describes really existed or occurred at some time in the past. Historians can say nothing about these persons or events that cannot be supported, or at least suggested, by some kind of documentary evidence. Such evidence customarily takes the form of something written, such as a letter, a law, an administrative record, or the account of some previous historian. In addition, historians sometimes create their own evidence by interviewing people. In the 20th century the scope of historical evidence was greatly expanded to

include, among many other things, aerial photographs, the rings of trees, old coins, clothes, motion pictures, and houses. Modern historians have determined the age of the Shroud of Turin, which purportedly bears the image of Jesus, through carbon-14 dating and have discredited the claim of Anna Anderson to be the grand duchess Anastasia, the daughter of Tsar Nicholas II, through DNA testing. Just as the methods at the disposal of historians have expanded, so have the subjects in they have become interested. Many of the indigenous peoples of Africa, the Americas, and Polynesia, for example, were long dismissed by Europeans as having no precolonial history, because they did not keep written records before the arrival of European explorers. However, sophisticated study of oral traditions, combined with advances in archaeology, has made it possible to discover a good deal about the civilizations and empires that flourished in these regions before European contact. Historians have also studied new social classes. The earliest histories were mostly stories of disasters—floods, famines, and plagues—or of wars, including the statesmen and generals who figured in them. In the 20th century, however, historians shifted their focus from statesmen and generals to ordinary workers and soldiers. Until relatively recent times, however, most men and virtually all women were excluded from history because they were unable to write. Virtually all that was known about them passed through the filter of the attitudes of literate elites. The challenge of seeing through that filter has been met by historians in various ways. One way is to make use of nontraditional sources—for example, personal documents, such as wills or marriage contracts. Another is to look at the records of localities rather than of central governments. Through these means even the most oppressed peoples—African-American slaves or medieval heretics, for example—have had at least some of their history restored. Since the 20th century some historians have also become interested in psychological repression—i.e., in attitudes and actions that require psychological insight and even diagnosis to recover and understand. For the first time, the claim of historians to deal with the feelings as well as the thoughts of people in any part of the human past has been made good.

None of this is to say that history writing has assumed a perfect or completed form. It will never do so: examination of its past reveals remarkable changes in historical consciousness rather than steady progress toward the standards of research and writing that represent the best that historians can do today. Nevertheless, 21st-century historians understand the pasts of more people more completely and more accurately than their predecessors did. This article demonstrates the scope of that accomplishment and how it came to be achieved.

In the beginning was the spoken word. Humans lived for tens of thousands of years with language, and thus with tales about the past, but without writing. Oral history is still important in all parts of the world, and successful transmission of stories over many generations suggests that people without writing can have a sophisticated historical sense. The historical record, however, must start with a system of writing and a suitable writing technology. The earliest forms of writing included cuneiform and pictographs. Which were inscribed on stone and clay tablets in Egypt and Mesopotamia, as well as Chinese ideograms, which were incised in bronze and on oracle bones (baked oxen bones whose cracks and fissures were thought to foretell the future). People in Egypt, Mesopotamia, and China were the first to make records of their contemporaries, which took the form of lists of kings and ancestors.



Plates indicate the Archived Pandeveswar Dhipi in Birbhum (source: Photography by Dr. Tapas Pal, 2015).



Plates indicate the historical archives in Tinbigha corridor, North Bengal (Photography source: Dr. Tapas Pal's unpublished book "Tinbigha")

**SUMERIAN WRITERS** seem to have developed their own interpretation of history. This interpretation is reflected in the preoccupation of the king-lists with the transitory nature of royal power and in the Sumerian belief that natural phenomena (notably the behaviour of the Euphrates River) are determined by the gods. Although Sumerian gods could be bungling and cowardly and sometimes even subject to fate, they retained the power to punish humans who offended them. The vicissitudes of kings and states were thought to demonstrate the gods' power to influence human affairs.

The **FOUNDATIONAL TEXT OF CHINESE HISTORIOGRAPHY** is the Shiji ("Historical Records"), which was compiled by Sima Qian (c. 145–c. 86 bce). It is an account of the entire history of China from mythical times through the establishment of the Han dynasty in 206 bce. The story becomes more detailed as Sima Qian approaches his own time and is able to question eyewitnesses of events and make use of

abundant official documents. Sima Qian introduced order into the welter of surviving records by organizing them into categories.

**IN THE 16TH AND 17TH CENTURIES** it was taken for granted that the historian would work alone and would usually own many of his books. The library of Göttingen, the pride of 18th-century Germany, would be small even for a new university or a modest liberal-arts college today. Great reputations could be made in the 19th century for the discovery of a new archive (such as Ranke's discovery of the Venetian *relazioni*). Nothing like this could possibly happen today, yet such is the conservatism of the historical profession that the model is still the single scholar exhausting the archives. The archives for modern history are inexhaustible, and collaboratively written works, already becoming somewhat common, will almost certainly have to become even more so if historians are to meet their traditional goals of comprehensive research.



Plates indicate the conserving sample of rocks in archive of Indian Institute of Remote Sensing, Dehradun (photography source: Dr. Tapas Pal, 2007)

Until quite RECENTLY almost everybody who thought about historiography focused on the historian's struggle with the sources. Philosophers were interested in the grounds they had for claiming to make true statements about the past. This directed their attention to the process of research; it was not unusual to say that after learning "what actually happened," the historian then faced only the relatively unproblematic process of "writing up" his findings. This emphasis aptly captured the way that historical method is taught and the understanding of their craft (as they like to call it) that historians entertain. Nevertheless, no historian can rest content simply with establishing facts and setting them forth in chronological order. Histories, as opposed to annals and chronicles, must not only establish what happened but also explain why it happened and interpret the significance of the happening. The slightest familiarity with historical writing shows that historians believe that they are explaining past events. Criticizing the explanations presented by other historians is an integral part of historical scholarship—sometimes carried to such tedious lengths that the actual narrative of events disappears under a tissue of scholastic sludge. However, it is unusual for historians to question what constitutes a historical explanation. A few abnormally reflective ones—and those few philosophers who have turned



their attention to thinking about history—have demonstrated that this is not a simple task.



Histogeographical open air archive is conserving by Rewai village of Meghalaya (photography source: Dr. Tapas Pal, 2015)



Kathgodam station got best Eastern station and this bell in rail station is conserving in Histo-geographical way (source: Dr. Tapas Pal, 2012)



Historical Buxa fort in Buxa (source: Dr. T. Pal, 2013)



The historical seat of Tarasankar Bandyopadhyay in Bangao of West Bengal ( source: '37 days' book of Dr. T.Pal,2014).



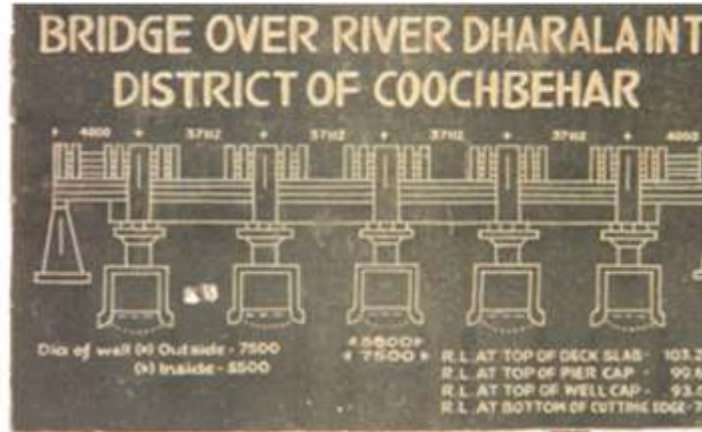
Historical Hazarduari palace and palaci monument (copyright of photography: Dr. T. Pal, 2011)

The **CHALLENGE TO HISTORICAL WRITING** for a wider readership is clear. Few historians are taught to do it; many feel they do not need to do it; and professional rewards are not given for doing it. Yet some historians are not content to leave presentation of accounts of the past to novelists and filmmakers and are responding to some of the opportunities presented by the public interest in history. Some of them are relaxing the conventions of historical writing in the interests of greater liveliness. Historians are taught, for example, never to use first-person singular or second-person pronouns. By banishing "I"—"the most disgusting pronoun," according to Gibbon—from the text, the historian can make it appear that an omniscient observer has written it. The great Marc Bloch, however, advocated bringing the reader into the research process by recounting the difficulties and occasional triumphs that the author experienced, not only helping to signal what is well-grounded and what is more speculative but also, if well done, sharing some of the puzzle-solving excitement that inspires people to be historians in the first place.

#### CONCLUSION:

**POSTMODERNISM** taught that texts allow many interpretations and that there is nothing other than the text. Its attacks on "essentialism" made it much harder to use "history" in such a way as to attribute will or agency to it, or even a capacity to teach. (Here Hegel had anticipated this position by saying that all one can learn from history is that humans have never learned from history.) Historians cannot make the grandiose claims for their discipline that were credible in the 19th century. Nevertheless, they know that there was a Holocaust, and they know that, despite Joseph Stalin's efforts to make him an "unperson,"

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The history of the Bridge structure is conserving on the wall of Dharala bridge in Coochbehar (photography source: Dr T. Pal, 2011)

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