



CRITIQUE ON RECENT TRENDS IN SOUTH INDIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

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ABSTRACT

South Indian Historiography has many constraints starting from limited participation by aborigines during colonial period, and actually drained by stream of categories among many of them had used unscientific methods for their writing. This paper tries to highlight what are those categories emerged and gives critique on such groups following narrowed objectives with examples.

KEYWORDS: Scientific History, Post Colonialism, Post Modernism, Dravidianism.

SOUTH INDIAN TRENDS

Indians were new to the art of writing history in the real sense of the term. In South India it was further delayed inspite of several colonialist writings produced equally to that of north Indian works. Many of the Indian writers during colonial period had been from north India necessarily because they were part of British administration and acquainted with both skills of mainstream history writing methods and accessibility to sources. Comparatively in south India such Indian civil servants are few and the constraints for accessibility to sources which are purposefully transported to Calcutta are high¹. Interestingly many north Indian civil servants had written history on South India the then Madras Presidency. Romesh Chandra Dutt his volume of *Economic History of India under early British Rule* which deals the land revenue system of Madras presidency has been an epitome of all others in such genre. During the last few decades of colonial India paradigm shift happened in South Indian historiography, many English educated South Indians entered into mainstream writings yet with assertively nationalist approach. They have indulged in distinguishing their methods from that of oriental despotic stream deliberately and connected with nationalist trend.

POST COLONIALISTS

Nilakanta Sastri was notable among such groups and V.S.Srinivasa Sastry. Many Tamil scholars like S.Vaiyapuri Pillai have produced substantial works albeit in vernacular language which has been considered vulnerable for subjective underpinnings. A.R.Venkatachalapathy a notable south Indian historian of 1990's says, "the professional historiography in Tamilnadu practiced during K.A.Nilakanda Sastri's period, there was rarely any interrogation of sources except in terms of heuristic and chronological verification."² However the Post Colonial stream has been little embellished and competitive enough to equalize the north Indian resurgence. The works of K.K.Pillai and T.V.Mahalingam are irreparably authoritative. T.V.Mahalingam's descriptive catalogues on the Mackenzie manuscripts are recognized as one among south Indian classics.

¹ In 1915, a Bengal historian Jadunath Sarkar wrote an essay Confessions of a History teacher in the Journal Modern Review regretting the lack of acclaimed historical works in Vernacular languages).

² A.R.Venkatachalapathy works as professor at the Madras Institute of Developmental Studies. He is noted for collecting and publishing the works of Tamil writer Pudumaipithan.

Later during 1980's Postmodern concepts started precluding in south Indian writings carrying negation on grand narratives, moral universalism, social progress and objective reality. Neither the Post Colonial vernacular stream nor this postmodern clique who were recognized as regional reconstruct's followed the moorings of scientific history writing and failed to differentiate their patriotism towards religion, caste, language, region and ethnic identity with scientific inquiry.

POST MODERNIST

South Indian Post Modern Historiography can be classified into four major groups Nationalist Historiography, Dravidian Historiography, Christian Historiography, and Subaltern (mainly Dalits) Historiography. Kerala has contributed more towards Christian Historiography, and Tamilnadu stacked to Dravidian emancipation ideology, whereas the other two groups exist in all four states. Andhrapradesh had witnessed Dalit oriented subaltern writings surfacing as part of academic discourses from major universities. The south Indian nationalist group consists of historians exposed with nationwide familiar institutions like JNU Delhi, Aligarh Muslim University and Delhi University during the years 1950 to 1980. They normally juxtapose their regional aspects with nationalist perspective in their writings. For this purpose they rarely use vernacular language. M.G.S.Narayanan, Y.Subburayalu, K.N.Panikkar, Kesavan Veluthat, R. Champakalakshmi and Pandian are falling in this group. Even few with globally standard educational institutions like Oxford University, Cambridge and Harvard University's had contextualized their regionally focused writings with global perspective; nevertheless their works are measured by Postcolonial parameters sans any stereotyping³. Origins of other than India had also contributed writings on regional aspects with nationalist approaches. Burton Stein, Noboru Karashima⁴. Painstakingly these historians handled the sources in pure scientific methods to construct facts.

Noboru Karashima ascertains the importance of scientific historical writing on an unknown area of research by quoting his peer "Burton Stein had waded through almost all the previous publications on South Indian history and society and utilized all the available English translations of inscriptions as well as a large number of brief descriptions of the inscriptions appearing in the *Annual Report (South Indian) Epigraphy*. He also observed the distribution pattern of *Brahmadeya* villages and made a study of the deities enshrined in South Indian temples. He paid attention to the social conflict between the Right Hand (*Valangai*) and Left Hand (*Idangai*) groups. Therefore his book can be duly regarded as one of the most important works on South Indian history produced after the publication of Nilakanda Sastri's *The Cholas and A history of South India*. For a similar note but on Noboru Karashima, Prof.Romila Thapar discusses as "Noboru Karashima uses systematic and careful analysis of the inscriptional data to ascertain the types of land-holding prevalent in different categories of villages in south India. ..(I) t is in this kind of detailed investigation which allows him to make comparisons between the Chola and Vijayanagara period". She also accredits his method as "his work illustrates the application of new methods of analysis to data which not only light up new facets of the past, but are also the source of generating questions for further research"⁵.

SOUTH INDIAN POST MODERNISTS

Nationalist historians of postmodern type also had rendered justice to historical methods of inquiry and descriptions. Kesavan Veluthat in his *The Early Medieval in South India* had brought a compendium of historical knowledge encompassing the socio-religious aspects of three states of South India Kerala, Tamilnadu and Karnataka. He has been conscious of various ways in which the early medieval has been perceived, yet managed distance from defiled perceptions and preconceived theoretical constructs. "His

³ Rajayyan a noted historian and professor of history at Madurai Kamaraj University can be an example to this group.

⁴ Noboru Karashima, *South Indian History and Society Studies from Inscriptions A.D.850-1800*, OUP, Delhi, 1984.

⁵ Ibid, pp i)

approach is remarkable and can serve as a model for those who write regional histories- sans an iota regional chauvinism"⁶.

CHRISTIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

The rest of the group's faces lack of historical objectivity unlike the above mentioned groups. Historians belonging to south Indian Christian Historiography had mainly emerged from Kerala. Two major reasons can be attributed for this spontaneous trend in that state. First one is the grand strategy to foster their religious tradition as major and original vis a vis other Christian sects in that state⁷, second reason is that to uphold their sense of history writing influenced by left orientation just to draw parallel with anti hegemonic (Caste Hindu domination) Dravidian clique of writers. Many of their projections are targeted on destructive motives and few falls right in historical fallacies. For example, George Menachery, Thomas Mundadan had tried with maximum support to prove Apostle Mission to Mylapore for which nothing substantively exists for other researchers on that topic. The fault line ends at very few 3rd century A.D sources and failed to go beyond that point particularly with sources which comes archaeology and other than oral traditional. Notably the Latin Catholics of Kerala openly reject this mission theory as purported by Syrian catholic historians. Their methods upto a certain level falls in scientific processes but at the end deviates from objectivity. Frykenberg and Ishwar Charan are the most articulated writers who contested this mission theory to its tooth and nail.

DRAVIDIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

The Dravidian group of historians holds many discrepancies emanating right at the method and upto establishing scientific objectivity. In recent times, wherein federal democratic processes dragged into the clutches of vote bank system, instigated by political leadership and personal motives many of the historical writings either keep themselves blindfolded in terms of scientific inquiry method in handling sources. For example, while contesting with Caste Hindu hegemonic discourse which necessarily against religious minority assertion, simultaneously they neglect the role of Christian missionaries and institutions for the social awakening and upliftment of Tamilian communities belonged to all stratum of caste structure. They attribute Dravidian movement and ideology as a singular force to substantiate the recorded social transformations in Tamilnadu excluding the other Dravidian states of south India. Such writings are failed to attract academic readership and recognition. Interestingly many biographies on political leadership in different aspects are being made by history students with the consent of history professionals. Dalit writings vary from this Dravidian conundrum. Quite strict to historic methods, observed as important requirement to defunct the millennium old practice of social distancing. The whole foundation is built on this premise and naturally overwhelming consciousness prevails among such historians and their writings. Yet, such writings, particularly considerable number if not all, unknowingly bases emotional, virtue and value principle which is completely opposing suggestions given by postmodernism.

CONCLUSION

The anomaly of departure from scientific method of history writing becomes pervasive and digs hard for these regional postmodern approaches to fail create any expected impact and submerge itself on the periphery of objective writings. Whatever the follow-ups it draws couldn't sustain and becomes temporary.

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⁷ Syrian Vs Latin, all historians falling under this group are Syrian Christians.

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