

# Definitions of History

The Greek word Istoria meant, learning or collection of information, obtained as the result of an enquiry.

- ① Aristotle: "History is an account of the unchanging past".
- ② Renier: "History is a study which is concerned with the human past".
- ③ E. H. Carr: "History is a link between the past and the present and an unending dialogue between the past and the present".
- ④ Carlyle: "History is nothing but the biography of great men".
- ⑤ H. G. Wells: "Human history is in essence a history of ideas".
- ⑥ York Powell: "History is the record of the condition of mankind living in social state and the laws which govern these conditions and bring about changes".

October 2015

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
		1	2	3		
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

⑦ Miller: "The course of life is like the sea; men come and go, tides rise and fall, and that is all of history".

Your reason to smile today.

October 2015  
⑧ Travelyan: "History is a house in which all the subjects dwell".

⑨ Johnson: "History in its broadest sense is everything that ever happened".

⑩ Voltaire: "History is nothing but a picture of crimes and misfortunes".

⑪ J. B. Bury: "History is <sup>simply</sup> a science no less <sup>and</sup> no more".

⑫ John Seeley: "History without **08** political science has no fruit and Thursday  
politics without history has no root".  
October 2015

⑬ Edward Freeman: "History is past politics and politics is present history".

⑭ R. G. Collingwood: "All history is the history of thought".

⑮ Lord Acton: "History is the unfolding of human freedom".

## 2. SCOPE OF HISTORY

History concerns itself with some but not all facts of human life, and, on the other hand, besides recording facts, history also has recourse to fictions and makes use of laws.

- A.J. Toynbee

### 2.1 EVER EXPANDING SCOPE

The scope or range of history has been ever changing and ever widening. There was a time when history was a collection and transmission of fables, folktales, legends and mythologies. It was based on imagination, memory and tradition. It may be called 'Folkhistory'! The Greek historians were the first to delimit the scope of history. *Herodotus* wrote about the wars between the Greeks and the Persians, the Greco-Persian wars. *Thucydides* dealt with the epic struggle between the City-states of Greece, the Peloponnesian war. The scope of history was thus limited mainly to the description of wars between two countries or struggles between city - states.

The Roman historians inherited the Greek tradition and wrote a new kind of history by expanding its scope by narrating the Roman conquest of the world. History was conceived as a form of thought having universal value. "With this larger conception of the field of history comes a more precise conception of history itself".<sup>1</sup>

The Medieval Christian historians confined themselves strictly to the theological interpretation of historical events. Human actions were considered to be the manifestation of the Divine Will. Though the Christian historiography represented the universal character it was *essentially theocentric*. The Renaissance writers restored the classical humanistic approach and reoriented historical writing. They placed man in the centre of historical writing and extended the scope of history by their secular approach. It was *ethnocentric*.

During the seventeenth century, when Natural Science reigned supreme, history followed the lead given by the Renaissance and freed itself from the mesh of medieval thought and found its proper function. Inspired and impelled by the irresistible scientific spirit the historians were engaged in the reconstruction of the past on the basis of reliable and verifiable data. *Bacon, Locke, Hume, Berkely, Descarte* and *Vico* were the propounders of this new approach to history which provided a scientific dimension to the scope of history.

Eighteenth century was an age of Enlightenment. The Enlightenment historians staged a determined revolt against the might of institutional religion and its theological interpretation of history. They endeavored to further secularize the writing of history. Following the footsteps of *Voltaire*, the Crusader against Christianity, they improved upon the method of historical research and writing. *Montesquieu* and *Gibbon* were the outstanding spokesmen of this mighty movement of secularization of history. The former studied the differences between nations and the latter analyzed the causes of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire.

Nineteenth century historiography, while retaining the secular-rational approach to history, further widened the scope of history. *Kant* convincingly argued that man, as a rational being, must necessarily have an historical process to live in. He viewed history as progress towards rationality. *Hegel* raised history to a higher level by including in its scope philosophical interpretation of historical happenings. His philosophy of history widened the range of history; it traced the progress of mankind from primitive times to the present day. Universal history was born. *Marx* improved upon the Hegelian dialectic and attempted an economic interpretation of history. Marxian Concept of Dialectic Materialism immediately became immensely popular. It left an indelible influence on the principle and practice of historical writing.

Twentieth century may be described as an Age of Synthesis. Streams of Enlightenment, Secularism, Rationalism, Romanticism, Positivism and Dialectical Materialism flowed into the ocean of Idealism. Historians like *Spengler*, *Sorokin* and *Toynbee* sought to study historical changes and discerned predictable patterns in them. *Toynbee* is an unrivalled representative of the synthetic-idealistic historiography. Backed by an incredible mass of historical data he has surveyed and studied the story of mankind in its entirety. It is an eclectic approach to a universal human history at its best, never attempted before nor improved since then. In *Toynbee* the scope of history reached its meridian.

20<sup>th</sup> century also witnessed the emergence of three schools of thought respectively on New History, Total History and Structured History. All the three approaches were reactions to the traditionalist 'myth-making' history. They were up against the different paradigms of history carried out by historians working in a mainstream tradition on Rankean methods. The 'new' historians incorporated advances made in social sciences as appropriate to their enquiry. By integrating different

branches of knowledge they fashioned an inclusive, broad-based, heterogeneous historiography.

To sum up, in a restricted sense, the scope of history is limited to political or military or diplomatic or religious or economic or biographical or at best national history. In a broader sense, it deals with humanity as a whole, human achievements and failures in all aspects and presents a philosophical explanation of human progress.

## Uses of History

History not merely a study of the events of the past; but it is also the link between the past and the present and guide for the future. As a record of man's experience, it influenced the human behaviour throughout the ages. So its importance is widely understood.

### Utility of History

The usefulness of history depends on the concept of usefulness. Man does not want merely to survive; but also desire to live a meaningful, creative life. Along with basic biological needs, various social, cultural and intellectual needs arise in the course of historical evolution.

### Thinkers Testimony

History is for human self knowledge. History imparts knowledge about the actions of human beings that have been done in the past. A few pages of history give more insight into the human mind. History is important as it gives stability and depth to your thought and feeling.

### Promotes insight

History Promotes in us an insight in to human nature.

April 2015						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
			15	16	17	18

In history we see the deeds and misdeeds, justice and injustice, equality and inequality in the way of life. The wise man learnt from other's experience; but fools learn from their own experience.

Social Memory

Memory plays important role in the activities of a man. Like wise history plays the important role in the society. Historical memory stores a great volume of socially important information about the events of the past. So the historical memory is very important for a nation for its development and save it from self destruction.

Provides Precedents

As history provides the previous incidents, it helps to settle various internal and international disputes. For example, the Kashmir issue. For solving it we need the previous incidents.

Time Tested Teacher

History teaches, those who even do not study it. It teaches how to learn from it. Those who neglect history will feel sorry for their doings. Individuals and institutions draw experience from the past. Those who failed to learn from the pages of history will definitely be the loser.

March	2015						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
8	9	10	11	12	13	14	
15	16	17	18	19	20	21	
22	23	24	25	26	27	28	

## Vision and Mission

History gives an indelible (अमिट) insight into man's activities. It is a true friend, philosopher and guide. It is an important instrument to promote human understanding. Historical knowledge not only strengthens mental discipline but also enables us to know the past and interpret its significance. History educates as well as warns through examples.

## Dialogue between Present and Past

History helps to understand the development of human society in all the fields. Through history alone one can understand and appreciate the world as it is. It is a hyphen that connects the present with the past and enables us to understand how man has discovered better ways of living and discard disputes.

## Social Education

History serves the need for social education. Knowledge of the past provides lot of examples of socially significant human behaviour.

April 2015						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25

Happiness is a skill. You can learn it and it's not hard.



The present is not self explanatory. So knowledge of history is essential to make the present intelligible. The knowledge of past in any branch of study makes a person knowledgeable. Those who ignore history condemn themselves to not knowing the present.

### Inspiring Instruction

History like Poetry and drama instructs, teaches and pleases human heart. It interprets the mind, mood and manner of man. It excites the interest, curiosity and fancy of man.

### Principles and Patterns

History offers broad principles and generalizations. Human needs, ideas and values are common to mankind. All known civilizations have developed along similar lines. For example all the civilization has its origin in the river banks, had its peak then down fall.

March 2015  
Su Mo Tu We Th Fr Sa

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## For fun

could be studied for fun. -  
curiosity about the facts of human history  
- relationship between the facts may  
lead one on his way to communion  
with the ultimate reality.

## Store House of Experience

Like a department store where  
intellectual merchandise of all hues and  
colours is available. Wise pick up the  
valuable goods like, Philosophy, Science  
etc.

## Educational Value

Increases the power of memory  
imagination, reasoning and insight.  
"The value of history is not scientific  
but educational" - says Thoreau.

## Social Necessity

As the past dominates  
human thinking, the present is governed  
by what happened in the past.

## Estimate

It is progressively realized  
that it is impossible to reconstruct the  
present without understanding the  
historical roots.

April 2015

Su Mo Tu We Th Fr Sa

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## KINDS OF HISTORY

Though the historians since earliest times have mainly concentrated on religious and political developments, of late they have also devoted attention to the social, cultural, intellectual, economic, institutional, legal and world history too. For the sake of convenience we can mention the following kinds of history :

**1. Political History.** This has been the most favourite branch of the historians since the earliest times. This interest was natural because the human life both in the past and at present has been dominated by the political leaders (Kings, Presidents, Prime Ministers, M.Ps. etc.) and political institutions (sabhas, folkmoets or parliaments). Since in every society a handful of leaders have ruled the community, they received greater attention than the common people. They were considered the architects of the society and their political activities received prior treatment at the hands of the historians. There is a clear logic behind the special attention paid to the political history in the past. The chief source

of our information for the past history are the court records and the accounts left by courtiers who wanted to flatter their patrons (like Abul Fazl). Even the official orders and edicts mainly concentrated on the political and military achievements of the rulers. Consequently the chief sources and material available to the historians in the past was pertaining to the political events connected with the chief political personalities. There was very little material concerning the common man and even that could not be properly utilised due to difficulty in having an access to the same. No doubt in modern times the historians have started giving greater attention to the non-political aspects of history because they have come to believe that history is not made only by the political leaders, the masses also make significant contribution to it.

Explaining the reasons for the priority accorded to the political history in modern times, **Prof. Barnes** mentions two factors—the Hegelian theory of the state and the spirit of nationalism. He says: "The philosophy of Hegel had emphasised the state as the noblest of God's mundane achievements, and Hegel's philosophy had enormous vogue among the German servants who founded the science of history in its modern form in the first half of the century. Added to this was the sentiment of nationalism, which flourished with particular virulence during the French Revolution and the Napoleonic period, and was given a more substantial technological basis by the Industrial Revolution. The French memories of the Revolutionary and Bonapartist glories, the German inspiration from the War of Liberation and the unification of the empire, the Italian ecstasy over the ultimately consummated ambition for a united Italy, which had inspired Dante and Machiavelli as well as Mazzini, the English enthusiasm over the peninsular campaign and Waterloo, as well as the new imperial expansion after 1870, and the pride of the Americans over the foundation of the Federal Republic and its preservation intact after a great civil war, all served to warm the hearts of the great historians of the nineteenth century."<sup>1</sup>

However, in modern times most of the historians are not merely contented with the political doings of the leaders and have tended to deal with the whole range of human activities *viz.*, economic, social, intellectual, political and scientific.

**2. Social History.** The social history is rather of recent origin and primarily devotes itself to the social life of the people *viz.* religion, national economy, morals, manners, foods, dress, art, culture etc. In this history the political, dynastic and constitutional aspects of history are relegated to the background. The first to devote attention to social history were German scholars Riehl and Freytag, who tried to reconstruct the social life and customs of medieval and modern Germany. The other examples of this type

of history are provided by the works of Ludwig Friedlander and Paul Lacroix.

In England the examples of social history are provided by Traill and Mann's *Social England*, Trevelyan's *Social History of England* (covering five centuries), Macaulay devoted a full chapter to the social history in his *History of England*. Likewise John Richard Green traced the development of the English civilization in his *Short History of the English People*. This type of social history has also been written in other countries. For example in France Rambaud made a survey of the French civilization, in India K.P. Jayaswal dealt with the social institutions in the ancient times in his *Hindu Polity*, in America McMaster dealt with the national period in American development and so on.

In addition to these writers certain other historians made an attempt to deal with the general patterns of social development, as created and modified by the interaction of the various types of institutions and forces and the struggle of different social classes and groups. In this regard reference may be made to Lamprecht, Steinhausen, Goetz, Berr, John Richard and Green Sidney and Beatrice Webb, Ferrero, Shotwell, Turner, Hacker, Bowden etc.

**3. Economic History.** The economic history is another kind of history which developed only in the nineteenth century. Interest in economic history arose during the age of mercantilism and the best work of this kind of history was Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*. This work exercised profound influence on Montesquieu, who tried to examine the importance of the commercial relations in the development of civilization and culture.

But the greatest contribution to the economic history was made by the famous German Professor Heeren, who tried to interpret the history of the antiquity in the light of the economic and commercial relations of the people during that period. The trade controversies in the first half of the nineteenth century also provided an impetus to the economic history and a German School of Historical Economists grew.

However, it was only after the Industrial Revolution that greater attention was paid to the economic history. A detailed study of a number of economic institutions was undertaken, although no effort was made to relate the economic activities with the life of the society as such. The writers who undertook such works included Rogers, Gibbons, Ashley, Cunningham, Lipson, etc. But the most ambitious work of economic history was by George Renard and his associates who wrote the *Universal History of Labour*, and Henry David and his associates who wrote *Economic History of the United States*.

More dynamic works of economic history were undertaken by the German scholars connected with the Historical School of Economists. These writers tried to bring out the relationship between the economic and the social institutions. The important writers who made significant contributions in this direction include Kovalevsky, Schmoller, Sombart, Bucher, Weber, Tawney, Veblen, Miller etc.

**4. Legal History.** Another independent branch of history which has grown in the recent times is the legal history. The historians who devoted themselves to legal history tried to study the legal developments and show how the law adjust itself according to the changing social conditions. Among the prominent historians of legal history mention may be made of Gumpowicz in Austria, Gierke, Ihering, Brunner, Kohler etc. in Germany, Maitland, Blackstone, Pollock, Jenks, Laski etc. in England, Duguit, Esmein, Charmont etc. in France, Vaccaro in Italy, Holmes, Wigmore, Pound etc. in United States. Apart from these works of Legal History there are numerous works like the codification of the Laws of Manu, the Code of Hammurabi, Napoleonic Code etc. were also created

**5. Diplomatic History.** Though diplomatic history can be considered a branch of the political history, it has developed as an independent discipline. In view of the close connections between various members of the international community, made possible by the improved means of communication, enormous body of principles of international laws has grown, which govern the foreign relations of the various sovereign states. This study of the foreign relations of various countries falls within the scope of diplomatic history. In recent times cold war, regional groupings and the creation of United Nations have further widened the scope of diplomatic history.

**6. Military History.** Another kind of history, which is closely allied with the political history is the military history. Though the waging of war is still considered a political activity, in recent times the Military History makes a detailed study of the causes of war, strategy and tactics of war, the organisation of the war machinery, including weapons, fighting machine and the services conditions of the persons connected with the warfare. No doubt in the past military histories were written by Thucydides and Clarendon, who wrote *The History of the Peloponnesian War* and *The Great Rebellion* respectively, but it was only in the present century that more attention was devoted to military history. In the present century a number of outstanding works of Military history were produced dealing with the two major wars of the century.

7. **Intellectual History.** The intellectual history deals with the fundamental ideas and ideologies which have shaped human history. **Prof. Barnes** says "Just as the human mind is the integrating factor in the human personality and its behaviour, so the prevailing attitudes in any age are the most important unifying and organizing influence in the development of human culture."<sup>1</sup> Commenting on the usefulness of the Intellectual History Dr. Samuel Johnson observed in *Rasselas* "There is no part of history so generally useful as that which relates to the progress of the human mind, the gradual improvement of reason, the successive advances of science, the vicissitudes of learning and ignorance, which are the light and darkness of thinking beings, the extinction and resuscitation of arts, and the revolution of the intellectual world." This type of history was produced by writers like Bagehot, Tarde, Durkheim. But the first to present the intellectual history in a systematic and elaborate manner was Karl Lamprecht of Leipzig (1856—1915). Another person who adopted a scientific approach in the writing of intellectual history was Professor James Harvey Robinson (1863—1936). Prof. Robinson wrote works like *An Outline of History of the Western European Mind*, *Mind in the Making*, *The Humanizing of Knowledge*, and *Human Comedy*, which popularised the intellectual history. The other important works of intellectual history include Carl Becker's study of the French and the American Political Thought, J.H. Randall's comprehensive treatment of modern intellectual history, H. E. Barnes's *An Intellectual and Cultural History of the Western World* in three volumes. In addition to some of the scholars and their works mentioned above, enormous amount of intellectual history was produced by a big battallion of other scholars, which cannot be referred here.

8. **Universal History.** The Universal or World History is yet another type of history which has become popular in recent times. The universal history as against national or parochial history, adopts a world viewpoint. In view of the modern technological developments and improved means of communication the people of different areas have come closer to each other and it is felt desirable that historians must adopt an international point of view. **Prof. Elton** expresses the opinion that "all good historical writing is universal history in the sense that it remembers the universal while dealing with a part of it."

The first to attempt a universal history was H.G. Wells who wrote the *Outlines of History* but the outcome was not quite encouraging. He raced rapidly through human civilization with snippets of biased judgement liberally strewn on the way. A number of modern writers like Fiske, Seeley, Hayes, Botsford,

Keller, Flick etc. also tried their hands at a universal history but without much success. In fact it is virtually impossible for any single historian to do justice to such a wide field. Therefore co-operative ventures have been undertaken by persons like Wilhelm Oncken, Walter Goetz, Gustave Glotz, Louis Halphen, Henri Berr etc. who edited useful universal histories. But probably the most ambitious project was undertaken by the UNESCO which undertook to write the cultural history of mankind. In this project it secured the services of thirty-seven consultants and contributors. Though the UNESCO has succeeded in compiling considerable material on human culture, the project has met with severe criticism. For example D.H. Fischer describes the project as "a catastrophe on an appropriately monumental scale and 'the Holliest fallacy'". Another effort in this direction was made by Will Durant who wrote 'Story of Civilization'.



## 1.5 Is History Science or Art?

We have noted elsewhere that the term 'history' is derived from the Greek word 'istoria' which means enquiry, research or exploration. Thucydides the ancient Greek historian is still recognized and honoured as

the Father of Scientific History, since he realized the hope of his predecessor Herodotus to achieve a scientific knowledge of past human actions. The dominant influence on Thucydides was the influence of Hippocratic medicine,<sup>19</sup> which is evident in the former's description of the plague and his enquiry into the laws according to which the historic events happen. However, humanism, not scientific temper, was the dominant characteristic of Greco - Roman historiography. Even the flickering light of scientific outlook of Greco - Roman historiographers was obliterated in the medieval - Christian historiography. Along with the revival of a humanistic view of history during Renaissance accurate scholarship once again assumed importance.

## 1.5.2 History is a Science

In what respects history could be considered a science?

*First, as an enquiry* after truth history is a science. It is a kind of inquiry or research. It does not consist in collecting what is already known and arranging it in a pattern. On the contrary, it consists in fastening upon something which is not known and try to discover it. It is, in fact, a means to an end; not an end itself.

*Secondly*, like science history begins from the knowledge of our own ignorance and proceeds *from the known to the unknown*, from ignorance to knowledge, from indefinite to definite.

*Thirdly*, history seeks *to find things out*. It provides answers to questions asked by historians. Each science finds out things in its own

way. In this sense, history is the science of *res gestae*, i.e. the attempt to answer question about human actions in the past. In short, history is an investigation to find out what happened at a given time and place.

**Fourthly**, history is a science since *it rests upon evidence and reasoning*. It is built on facts as a house is built on stones; but mere accumulation of facts is no more a science than a heap of stones in a house. The collected data is scientifically analyzed, classified and interpreted.

**Fifthly**, history employs *scientific methods of enquiry*. It uses various methods of investigation such as observation, classification, formulation of hypothesis and analysis of evidence. The inductive view of historical method, i.e. collecting facts and interpreting them is an accepted method of science.

**Sixthly**, like the scientist an historian also approaches his subject matter in a *spirit of science*. Both are keen in acquiring accurate knowledge. In fine, history seeks to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. To the extent history endeavors to tell the truth by adopting a rational approach, it is a science.

## History is an Art

### 1.5.5 Croce's Concept of Art

The question whether history was a science or an art had been hotly debated in European Countries, especially in Germany, during the last decade of the nineteenth century. The consensus was in favour of the contention that history was a science. But this contention was countered by *Benedetto Croce*, the distinguished Italian historian. In his first essay on the theory of history, written at the age of 27, entitled *History subsumed under the Concept of Art*, he asserted that history was an art. For him art was neither a means of sensuous pleasure, nor a representation of natural fact, nor even the construction and enjoyment of systems of formal relations. Croce viewed art as the intuitive vision of individuality. The artist sees and represents this individuality. Art is thus not an activity of the emotions, but a cognitive activity: it is knowledge of the individual. Science, on the contrary, is knowledge of the general. Thus, history is altogether concerned with individual facts.

Croce refused to call history as 'descriptive science' for the simple reason that since it is descriptive history ceases to be a science. The term 'descriptive science' is a *Contradicto in adjecto*. As an artist the historian contemplates on facts and does not recognize them as instances of general laws. Hence the comparison between history and art. Croce goes a step further and says that it is an identity, not a mere comparison, since both history and art are based on the intuition and representation of the individual. "If history is art, it is at least a very peculiar kind of art".<sup>22</sup> The artist merely states what he sees; the historian has both to do this and also to assure himself that what he sees is the truth. In short, art in general represents the possible; history narrates that which has really happened. Croce's argument attracted a good deal of attention and still remains the centre of controversy!

### 1.5.6 History is an Art

Earlier Dilthey in 1883 and Simmel in 1892 had compared history with art. Later, A.L.Rowse reiterated that "However much historical writings may be supplemented by scientific methods and acquisitions there will always remain history as an art. Geoffrey Barraclough questioned the itch to equate history with science when he stated that "To reduce history to a natural science is deliberately to leave out of account what we know to be true, to suppress great portions of our most familiar introspective knowledge on the alter of false analogy with the sciences". ~~His~~

### 1.5.8 A Half - Way House

History is a half - way house between science and art. History is a science because it investigates into truth; it proceeds from known to unknown; it provides answers to questions; it rests upon reasoning; it employs scientific methodology; and it approaches the subject in a spirit of science. History is an art in the sense that it is a narrative account; it uses imagination to reconstruct the past; it distinguishes itself by its style and manner of presentation; it aims at wholeness and harmony; it displays fine feelings and emotions and it is concerned with human values. History is therefore, a science as well as an art. It is a balanced blending of both science and art. When history attempts to discover truth it is a science and when it narrates the truth it becomes an art. History is scientific and artistic. At best it is a half-way house between science and art. In the inimitable words of G.M.Trevelyan, "The discovery of historical facts should be scientific in method. But the exposition of them for the reader partook of the nature of art..."

# 27. OBJECTIVITY IN HISTORICAL WRITING

*History is neither written nor made without love or hate.  
- Theodor Mommsen.*

## 27.1 MEANING OF OBJECTIVITY

To be objective means not influenced by personal feelings or opinions. Objectivity is the state of being objective. Objectivity in historical writing refers to "dispassionate, disinterested and scientific treatment of all events".<sup>1</sup> It means unbiased and fair writing. A thesis is a critical analysis of a problem. It should not consist of the reporting of personal experience or opinion of the research scholar. Scholarly writing is an impartial, unbiased and unvarnished presentation of the problem "using a tone of scientific impersonality".<sup>2</sup>

Ranke, the Father of Scientific History, analyzed the historical sources critically, followed the principle of unbiased research and sought to write his historical accounts with 'tranquil objectivity'. His dictum that "To judge history has been attributed the function to judge the past..." still holds good. Being a judge of men and events the historian should handle historical facts, events and developments with utmost impartiality. Hence, the writing of the research scholar must be true, unbiased and scientific.

## 27.2 IMPORTANCE OF OBJECTIVITY

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Objectivity in historical writing is of critical importance. It is the essence of historical narration. The credibility of the historical thesis depends on objective presentation. History will degenerate into fiction in the absence of objectivity. Critical study of history is not possible without objectivity. Objective history is rational history. The need for objectivity in historical writing is self-evident:<sup>3</sup>

1. Impartiality is the soul and spice of historical writing. Real history is possible only when it is written objectively. It is a matter of intellectual honesty and moral standards.
- 2) History is in pursuit of truth. It should reveal the truth of the past. It must be divorced from the passions and prejudices of the present. It must employ systematic methods for the attainment of objectivity. Objectivity ensures accuracy, authenticity and acceptability.

- 3) History is selective in nature. As historical data are varied the historian is obliged to select facts for the purpose of narration, interpretation and formulation of conclusions. So he must be cautious and careful in handling historical material. He must be as objective as possible. Objectivity alone will save the historian and his writing from subjectivity syndrome.

### 27.3 SUBJECTIVITY

Subjectivity is antithesis to objectivity. It exists in the mind of the historian and not produced by things outside the mind. It refers to the preconceived ideas, feelings, opinions, notions etc. of the historian. "Subjectivity and bias are not synonymous".<sup>4</sup> *Bias* refers to historian's predisposition. It refers to the feeling that strongly favours one side in an analysis of a historical problem or one item in a group or series of facts or events. Bias is the breeding ground of subjectivity. Bias and subjectivity are like the Siamese Twins.

Subjectivity seems to be inescapable and is inbuilt in the art of writing history. The greatest historians from Thucydides to Toynbee are subjective. Bana's *Harsha Charita*, St. Augustines *the City of God*, Abul Fazl's *Akbar Nama*, Voltaire's *Louis XIV*, Gibbon's *Decline and fall of the Roman Empire*, J.S. Mill's *History of British India*, Grote's pro-Athenian stance, Mitford's pro-Spartan attitude, Mommsen's anti-democratic sentiments, Ranke's religious and philosophical leanings, Lingard's vindication of James II, a Catholic prince, Macaulay's favoured treatment of William III and glorification of the Revolution of 1688, Josiah strong's sense of racial complex in favour of Anglo Saxons, Hegel's selective approach, Marx's materialistic interpretation of history, V.D. Savarkar's motivated First War of Independence, K.P. Jeyaswal's Hindu Polity, K. Rajayyan's *The South Indian Rebellion: The First War of Independence (1800 - 1801)* and a host of illustrious historians and their works are vitiated by the virus of subjectivity.

### 27.4 BARRIERS TO OBJECTIVITY

Objectivity in historical writing is a laudable objective and an idyllic ideal. But it is honoured more in breach than its observance. Even historians who preach and proclaim the virtues of objectivity fall a willing victim to subjectivity! The wish for objectivity is strong but the will to achieve it is weak. There are several difficulties in accomplishing objectivity. The following are some of the significant barriers to objectivity:

### **27.4.1 The Nature of Historical Events**

All the historical events are not well preserved. The evidences might have been destroyed. Those who recorded the events might not have observed them well. Even if they had observed the events well, they might have omitted certain information. So, the nature of historical events and the nature of the observation distort objectivity in history.

### **27.4.2 The Selection of Historical Events**

The historian is confronted with a plethora of historical themes. It is humanly impossible to record all that had happened in the past. Even a research scholar is at a loss to select a suitable topic for his research. History has unlimited scope for research. When the researcher is faced with several problems or themes he has to necessarily select a subject for writing. Subjective element surreptitiously enters into the selection of a subject for research.

### **27.4.3 The Personality of the Author**

Basically the historian is a human being with all his likings and dislikings; prides and prejudices; commitments and considerations. Each historian may have his point of view. Ideological considerations, political commitment, group prejudice, national fervour, patriotic zeal and partisan attitude distort historian's vision.<sup>5</sup>

### **27.4.4 Mixture of Narration and Explanation**

The historian's task is to narrate events of the past as they had happened objectively. But pure-narration of events is self-contradictory. Non-narrative elements become mixed up with the narrative. Any and every narrative implies explanation, a reference to causes, motives, effects and results. This mixture of non-narrative and narrative elements makes subjective interpretation of history inevitable.

### **27.4.5 Historical Assumptions**

The assumptions made by the historian are responsible for bias and subjectivity in historical writing. For example, Toynbee assumes that the Eastern Society failed because the throne dominated the Church and the western Christian society failed because the church tried to dominate the throne! Similarly, Gibbon concludes: "In the revolution of ten centuries not a single discovery was made to exalt the dignity or promote the happiness of mankind. Not a single idea has been added to the speculative systems of antiquity. Not a single composition of history, philosophy, or literature has been saved from oblivion by the intrinsic



beauties of style or sentiment, of original fancy, or even of successful imitation"! Yet, St. Sophia still stands, an everlasting wonder. The society that built it had an astonishing vitality. It survived the fall of the 'Eternal City' by a thousand years!<sup>6</sup>

#### 27.4.6 Poetic Interest in History

The practical value of a knowledge of history is commonly exaggerated. Men do not appear to learn readily from the mistakes of their ancestors. Historians themselves are seldom known for this wisdom. Practical men distrust 'mere history'. Interest in history is more poetic than practical or scientific. This poetic interest in history acts as a barrier of objectivity. In the words of Mommsen "History is neither written nor made without love or hate". The historian is inevitably an artist of a kind as he composes his narrative, selecting, shaping and colouring. The greatest historians, from Herodotus to Toynbee, have generally been distinguished for their imaginative reach and grasp, not necessarily the soundness of their conclusions.

#### 27.4.7 Error of Understanding

The historian can commit errors of understanding. Poor understanding may be due to want of sufficient sources, lack of interest or love for the age in which the historian lives. Take for instance Thucydides, the Father of Scientific History. Thucydides, the most objective of the ancient historians, began his history of the Peloponnesian war by stating that nothing of great importance had happened before his time! In his ignorance of all that lay before his age he could not relate the unique glory of Athens.

#### 27.4.8 History is what the Historian Makes

No objective history is possible because the historian has to collect, select and make history. Historical facts are like alloy; they must be purified and used. Objectivity is lost in the process of 'purifying' the facts. The historian re-enacts in thought what has gone on in the minds of his *dramatis personae*. The reader in his turn must re-enact what goes on in the mind of the historian. Objectivity is the first casualty in the process of double re-enactment! "Study the historian before you begin to study the facts", says E.H.Carr.<sup>7</sup>

G.M.Trevelyan's 'finest and maturest work' *England under Queen Anne*, is the Whig interpretation of history. St. Augustine looked at history from the point of view of the early Christians; Tillamont from that of a 17<sup>th</sup> century Frenchman; Gibbon from that of an 18<sup>th</sup> century Englishman;

Mommsen from that of a 19<sup>th</sup> century German; and Toynbee from that of a 20<sup>th</sup> century Britishers!

#### 27.4.9 Commitment to a Cause

The historian must be non-committal and uncommitted. He should not commit himself to a cause nor should he show what he thinks about it. He should not bound or pledge to a particular policy, course of action, individual or group values. An attempt to explain the meaning of an issue or to defend a cause will be a barrier of objectivity. History, if used as propaganda to further one's socio-political-religious cause, is dangerous. History is not a branch of propaganda. Exaggerating the virtues of one's own country and denigrating those of others is 'inverted subjectivism'.<sup>8</sup>

#### 27.4.10 Perverted History

Perversion or distortion is the worst enemy of objectivity. Ignorance, fear and motivation are the factors that contribute to the writing of perverted history. Ignorance due to in-accessibility to the source material and inability to study the relevant data, fear of authority, and the desire to advance vested interests pollute objectivity in history writing. "The Court historians of the past and the mercenary historians of the present have reduced history into an instrument".<sup>9</sup>

### 27.5 PREREQUISITES FOR OBJECTIVITY

Polybius, who treated the Romans and the Carthaginians alike, underlined the necessity of avoiding likes and dislikes while writing history. A historian is a judge, not an advocate. Like a scientist he must observe everything with utmost impartiality. "The most diligent research can prove or disprove only facts but never opinions".<sup>10</sup> Some of the *prerequisites* for objectivity in historical writing are:

- 1) The historian should leave no stone unturned in gathering the information from all possible sources.
- 2) He should possess a critical spirit for a rigorous scientific analysis of sources.
- 3) He should have a historical sense and perspective to see a character, event or trend in its real setting.
- 4) He should consciously keep his urge or itch for subjectivity under strict control. His conclusions must be supported by sufficient data and his generalizations must be based upon balanced approach.<sup>11</sup>

# History and Other Social Sciences

*History is the central social science, off which all others must feed. It is basic to social sciences rather in the way that mathematics is basic to natural science.*

—H. C. Darby

History is a study of the various facets of human life and is closely linked with other social sciences which make a specific study of different facets of human life. It is held by many scholars that history is the central social science which other social sciences must feed. In other words history has vital contact with other social sciences. Let us examine its relationship with some of the social sciences.

**1. History and Geography.** It is universally accepted that history and geography have very close ties. In fact it would be practically impossible to study certain branches of history without a rudimentary knowledge of geography. For example the diplomatic or military history cannot be followed without necessary grounding in geography. Even domestic history can be properly understood in the geographical context. **Prof. Michelet** was of the opinion that history was in essence founded upon geography. He says : "Without a geographical basis, the people, the makers of history, seek to be walking on air, as in those Chinese pictures where the ground is wanting. The soil, too, must not be looked upon only as the scene of action. Its influence appears in a hundred ways, such as food, climate etc."

Knowledge of Geography is also of great help in deciphering the earlier period of history of which no authentic documents are available. The history of this period can be constructed by observing and analysing the present landscape, which provide comprehensive vistas without which history could not have made a beginning.

J.R. Green in his book *The Making of England*, describes landscape as "the fullest and most certain of all documents."

The history of England to a great extent has been influenced by physical geography of that country. In fact it would be impossible to understand the process of urbanisation and industrialisation in England without a knowledge of the geography of that country. Broadly speaking the British island can be divided into three parts—lowland, upland and highland. In the lowland regions of the south lay the agricultural wealth of England, in the upland areas of South Wales lay the mineral wealth of the country—and all the potential of industrial revolution; the highland region consists of Central Wales and North Scotland. All these factors have greatly influenced the domestic history of the island.

The dominant role which England was able to play in the history of the world to a large extent was also due to her geographical location. She is separated from the main European land, which made her immune from foreign attacks. With a strong navy England was able to play a prominent role in the world history.

Geography also plays an important role in the national character formation and influences the human behaviour. Writers like Montesquieu, Buckle, Huntington etc. held that the climate of a country greatly affected the civilization of a country.

In short it would not be wrong to say that a sound study of history is possible only if we make a study of the physical geography. The importance of the study of geography for a proper understanding of history is now fully realised. This is evident from the fact that at present most of the history books contain an introductory chapter on the geography of the country and its impact on the history.

**2. History and Economics.** History is also closely related to Economics. As the activities of man in society are intimately connected with the economic matters, the historian of any period must possess at least a rudimentary knowledge of the economics. In fact, the economic history of any period is an important branch of history and its understanding is absolutely essential for the proper understanding of history of any period. No doubt it is true that during the last few years economics has become very complex and difficult subject, heavily dependent on mathematics, and a modern historian cannot acquire basic working knowledge of economic theory without devoting a lot of time, leaving little time for the study and writing of history. Therefore, in our times a new set of economic historians have emerged who try to study the economic history by use of economic tools. The general historian usually takes the conclusions of the economic historians for the construction of general history of a period.

In modern times history is so closely interlinked with the study of economic problems that it would not be possible to reconstruct history without a knowledge of the relevant economic problems. Thus a historian dealing with the history of twentieth century cannot ignore the Economic Crisis of the Thirties, the Policies of New Deal, or the Economic and Trading structures established in the post-World War II period.

**3. History and Psychology.** History and psychology are also closely linked. A historian while making an analysis of the motive and actions of men and societies has to show some psychological insights. Unless the historian uses the discoveries of modern psychology, his historical work would be mere fiction. As **Prof. Marwick** has said "social psychology may in some cases be a *sine qua non* of the intelligent analysis of certain historical problem."<sup>1</sup>

History and psychology are related to each other in another sense too. The personal life and the environment of a historian has a direct bearing in his judgement and often imparts a bias to his account and renders the much desired objectivity impossible.

The impact of psychology on history is evident from the fact that in the past the historians mainly inquired into the origins of war and neglected the consequences of war. As a result of the impact of psychology historians have undertaken the study of the consequences and impact of war. For example the effect of bombing upon civilian moral is a matter of interest to the psychologists as well as the historians. An understanding of the group psychology can enable a historian to determine the role of the masses in the various revolutions. For example the 'jingoistic patriotism' has often been described as the cause of certain wars, but the historian can discuss this cause in a less impressionistic way with the help of the social psychology.

In short the introduction of psychology has eliminated some of the imprecisions out of the traditional study of history.

Speaking of the valuable mutual assistance rendered by psychology and history to each other **Prof. Barnes** says: "History supplies the psychologist with much concrete material illustrative of human action in the past, from the period of savagery to our own day, while the data are almost invariably incomplete, history affords examples of almost every character type which is of interest to the psychologist, and gives at least some slight clue to their

1. Arthur Marwick : *Nature of History*, p. 111.

behaviour patterns under varying conditions.”<sup>1</sup> Similarly, “History may derive from psychology most important information relating to the nature of the motivation, patterns and controls in human actions and beliefs.”<sup>2</sup>

**4. History and Sociology.** History and sociology are intimately related and a number of sociologists like Auguste Comte are also important figures in the development of historical studies. Similarly Karl Marx, a great historian, was also a great sociologist. Both history and sociology are concerned with the study of man in society, and the two differ only with regard to their approach. Originally history and sociology were closely inter-linked. They separated from each other for some time before they came closer to each other in the recent years and realised that a fruitful interaction between the two disciplines was possible. This interaction between the two disciplines was largely due to Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) who favoured application of ‘a precise, experimental, comparative method to historical facts’. In the present century the famous sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920) exercised significant influence on historical studies. Webster coined concepts and produced basic studies of certain institutions which have dominated sociology and history since then. Weber was a pioneer in studying the importance of bureaucracy in the growth of modern state. In short sociologists like Durkheim and Weber, acknowledged the initial dependence of sociology upon history, although history too benefits from the synthesis produced by the sociologists.

Sociologists exercised profound influence on the study of history by developing the study of certain narrow areas of human activity. They adopted the sampling techniques and questionnaires with a view to minimise the subjective element. Though it appeared to certain writers that the connection between history and sociology was weakening, the historians started borrowing from sociology, thereby giving greater precision to history.

**Prof. Carr** emphasises the desirability of close relationship between sociology and history and says “Sociology, if it is to become a fruitful field of study, must like history concern itself with the relation between the unique and the general; but it must also become dynamic—a study not of society at present but of social change and development. For the rest, I would only say that the more sociological history becomes and the more historical sociology becomes the better for both. Let the frontier between them be kept wide open for the two way traffic.”<sup>3</sup>

**Prof. Barnes** also emphasises the importance of the knowledge of sociology for the historian and says “Embracing as it does both

1. H.E. Barnes : *A History of Historical Writing*, p. 362.

2. *Ibid.*

3. E.H. Carr : *What is History ?* p. 60.

the causes and results of group life, it is the basic social science and the only one which can hope to give a generalised view of the social process and of social causation as a whole. Since history, in no small part, is devoted to describing the behaviour of groups in economic, political, military, aesthetic and religious situations, it should be apparent that the accuracy and insight of the historian would be materially enhanced by a knowledge of the elementary principles of sociology."<sup>1</sup> **Prof. Barnes** further points out that even "history can be of utmost value to sociology in furnishing it with concrete data concerning both a cross-section of any given society at a particular time, and the dynamic aspects of social and institutional change."<sup>2</sup>

**5. History and Statistics.** In the present century the writing of history has been greatly influenced by the statistical data, the collection of which has become possible with the invention of computers. The historians have given up the former practice of using inexact terms like 'majority of the people' 'wide support' etc. and have started giving the actual percentage of the people and the sections which accord support. All this has been possible because with the help of the computer the processing of enormous data can be completed within a short span, and a systematic information can be collected. Though the conclusions drawn on the basis of the data may be known to the historians on the basis of the impressionistic evidence, nonetheless it does not reduce value because it provides a concrete evidence for a previously held thesis.

Similarly the use of historical demography *viz.*, information regarding movement of people, births and deaths, fertility rates, immigration etc. cannot be possible without the means to process and correlate the vast and complex data made available by various official records. This kind of detailed investigation enables the historians to understand many aspects of the past. Commenting on the significance of statistic for a proper understanding of the history **Prof. Lawrence Stone** has said : "Statistical measurements is the only means of extracting a coherent pattern from the chaos of personal behaviour and of discovering what is a typical specimen and what a sport. Failure to apply such controls has led to much wild and implausible generalisations about social phenomena, based upon a handful of striking and well-documented examples."

**History and Political Science.** The intimate relationship between history and political science has been beautifully summed up by **Prof. Seeley** in the form of a couplet. He says History without Political Science has no fruit and Political Science without

1. H.E. Barnes : *A History of Historical Writing*, p. 363.

2. *Ibid.*

history has no root. **Prof. Acton** also emphasised the close relationship of the two subjects and pointed out "the science of politics is the one science that is deposited by the stream of history like grains of gold in the sand of a river". He considers history as the river itself. A historian is not merely concerned with the tracing of the history of the political processes by a narration of the episodes, but has to learn the nature of fundamental political principles and basic forms of political institutions before dealing with the history of the political institutions. In view of this closeness between the two subjects, till very recent times both in American and British Universities the teaching of Political Science was looked after by the History Department. However, of late, Politics, like sociology has developed as an independent discipline and the political scientists have focussed their attention on the public opinion polls. These public opinion polls will form a valuable source material for the historians in future. The historians of the future would be able to give concrete picture and facts about the electoral behaviour. Instead of giving statements like the historians of the past that 'the people thought this' or the voters wanted this', they would give substantial figures to put forward their viewpoint.

History is again very helpful to politics because the political aspect is but a part of the whole range of activity recorded by history and knowledge of history would enable the politicians to know the politics better and play their role more effectively. But, unfortunately much of the political history written in the past was highly dramatised and the politician has to use the details with great caution.

**History and Ethics.** A close relationship exists between ethics and history. Although a true historian is not expected to pass sharp judgements on the historical incidents and characters, yet he must know about the ethical principles of the time which influenced the conduct of the people in the past. It may be observed that in the past there was not reliable ethical science and much of the principles of ethics followed were merely a reflection of the bigotry, biases and complexes of the different writers. However, in recent times an attempt has been made to evolve an ethical theory on the basis of facts of biology, psychology and sociology by writers like Stephen, Duprat, Ellis, Dewey etc. In short a science of conduct has been evolved. A good historian must understand and master this science of ethics to have a wider perspective of the issue.



## 2.5.2 Archaeology

The term Archaeology consists of two Greek Words, '*archaio*' and '*logia*', meaning 'the discussion of antiquities'. It is a scientific study of antiquity by analyzing the material remains of ancient human occupations. It embraces architecture, epigraphy, sculpture, paintings, ceramics etc. It is an empirical discipline concerned with the recovery, systematic description and study of old artifacts. Archaeological studies are valuable for pre-literate periods of human history. It also deals with the material remains of the historic past. "It helps us looking back into the past and see where we came from and how we have made our way from the Stone Age to the Space Age".<sup>44</sup>

As Archaeology aims at studying the human, social and cultural past, it has an obvious alliance with history. Their differences are primarily those of method rather than philosophical outlook. Whereas archaeology relies on material remains and monuments, history narrates the past with the aid of textual references that were coexistent with the past. History relies on archaeology since the latter supplies the most direct evidence of the past, unedited by any author. "Its picture of some aspects of civilization cannot be improved upon by tons of descriptive literature".<sup>45</sup> Though archaeology is described as 'technology' in the past tense, it cannot assist in the recovery of political history. Its contribution to chronology is generally vague and conjectural. And yet archaeology remains an admirable auxiliary aid to historical research and writing. Archaeologists and historians are not relic-hunters or entertainers. They are concerned with meaningful accumulation of data in their respective spheres, analyze them and find out predictable models.

### 2.5.5 Sigillography

Sigillography is the study of seals. It is derived from the word 'sigil', meaning a seal or signature. It is also known as *sphragistic* i.e., the study of engraved seals. Thus Sigillography is a study of seals used for authenticating official documents in all their aspects, viz., their authenticity, age, history, content, significance, form, manner in which it is attached to the document, the material of which it is made etc. In India seals were conspicuous by their wide usage in the Indus Valley Civilization, through they defy decipherment. They played a prominent role during the Muslim period. We get invaluable information about the name of the ruler, his title, the extent of his kingdom, the date of the document, the religion or sect he belonged to, the dynasty with which he was connected, the date and era of the issue etc. The seals indicate the level of culture also. The contribution of sigillography to historical research is considerable indeed.

### 2.5.6 Paleography

Paleography is the study of old handwriting. It describes the evolution of each letter in time and space. It also deals with the abbreviations used by the scribes. Paleography enables the historian to know the dates of old handwriting, content and the history of the characters used and the changes they underwent over a period of time. It also helps us to understand the abbreviations used in manuscripts.

### 2.5.7 Graphology

Graphology is the study of the character of the author of the handwriting, since there is connection between one's handwriting and his character. It helps the historian to estimate a person through his handwriting. It gives us certain useful indications about the psychology of a person.

### 2.5.8 Diplomatic

Diplomatic is the study of official documents. Invariably official writing will follow a rigid order of arrangement of the subject matter and the format of the document will be stereotyped. Official document will have its own style of writing. The authenticity of a document could be ensured and ascertained when the findings of diplomatic and paleography concur. Thus, diplomatic helps history to find out not only the genuineness of an official document but also its real meaning.