

The development of the concept of New Social History: An Overview

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Abstract: In this paper the main attempt of the author is to focus on different factors which led to growth of the writing of Social History which is often known as New Social History. Usually, Nature of the writing history largely depends on the personality of the writer or historian. At the same time, it is obvious that the historians are influenced by the contemporary context or situation. That means whenever someone writes something of a specific area or incident, it is quite impossible to avoid certain circumstances or remarkable incident which surrounds him. The Contemporary times indirectly affects the historian's own belief, thought process and ideology or his life of philosophy. While talking about historiography of 20th century there was a watershed of historical writing before and after the 2nd world war. So, in this context the author will focus on how World War II become a watershed and paved the way to flourish a new mind set which allows the intellectuals to write 'history from Below'.

Keywords: World War, life of philosophy, history from below, intellectuals, New social History.

1. INTRODUCTION

The term 'social history refers to a subdiscipline of the historical sciences on the one hand and to a general approach to history that focuses on society at large on the other hand. In both manifestations, the social history was developed from marginal and tentative origins, at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries and experienced a triumphant expansion from the 1950s to the 1980 (Conrad, 2015). Social History often known as New Social History had gained its wider recognition among the Social Scientist and intellectuals from 1960s onwards, but it started to entrench its firm roots only in the late 19th and early 20th Century. This new notion of Historiography, initially came through two important journals – 'Past and Present' which was written by Thomas Carlyle on April, 1843; and 'Annales d'Histoire Economique et Sociale' (Annales of Economic and Social History), founded in 1929 by Marc Bloch (1886-1944) and Lucien Febvre (1878-1956). During the period of older Social History (before 1960s), it was obvious that the topics like historiography of Politics, Military, Diplomatic, Constitutional History which were part of the mainstream historiography were not included and the intellectuals gave less priority to the themes such as- rural life, public health, poverty, flood, famine, Gender history, etc. Before 1960s, the writing of History was basically centralised on the history from above i.e., called more specifically as social History which was a sharp contrast from the notion of mainstream history and the history of great men. The main objective of this new historiography was to shift the dynamics from mainstream history to micro level history. According to G.M. Trevelyan, "Social History is the bridging point between economic and Political history. Without social history, economic history is barren and political history is untellable" (George M Trevelyan, 1943).

Objectivity vs Subjectivity:

Usually, Nature of the writing history largely depends on the personality of the writer or historian. At the same time, it is obvious that the historians are influenced by the contemporary context or situation. That means whenever someone writes history of a specific area or incident, it is quite impossible to avoid certain circumstances or remarkable incident which surrounds him. The Contemporary times indirectly affects the historian's own belief, thought process and ideology or his life of philosophy. For example, in Indian context the writings of history started with the writings of Britishers which is popularly known as colonial historiography which is later on known as 'imperialist historiography'. They had always

focused and described the Indian history and culture from their own perspective or convenience. They have always tried to portray their legacy through their writings.

Some notable works leading to the development of new social history:

The Annals generally focuses on synthesizing the historical patterns identified to social, economic, and cultural history, statistics, medical reports, family studies, and even psychoanalysis. Though in 1939 George M Trevelyan already published a Book (English Social History: A Survey of Six Centuries- Chaucer to Queen Victoria, 1944) which dealt with the regular lives of the people and their culture. This book focuses on the social life of England, it's about the people rather than the deeds of great men, war etc (George M Trevelyan, 1943). Apart from this some writings of Annales Schools which had left a great impact behind the rise of this new concept of the writing of past are- Lucien Febvre's (1878-1956) 'A New Kind of History', Fernand Braudel's (1902-1985) magnum opus 'The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II' (Fernand Braudel, n.d.), Emmanuel L Roy Laduri's 'Jasmin's Witch', 'The Beggar and the Professor: A Sixteenth Century Family Drama', 'The Mind and Method of the Historian' which was translated by Sian Reynolds and Ben Reynolds (Emmanuel L Roy Laduri, 1981), 'The Territory of the Historian, 1979', and Georges Dubbe's 'History Continues' etc. Marc Bloch concentrated on Medieval beliefs which was common in Medieval and early Modern France. His approach was applied in the social Sciences- Sociology, Anthropology and psychology. Lucien Febvre put a greater emphasis on Geography and Economics which was reflected in his famous works 'A Geographical introduction to History'. He was mostly influenced by Geography. Studying a French region, he held that the natural environment of a region did not determine its history, but that there were a number of human responses to the environment in which they lived. His approach to the role of Geography in History is termed as "Environmental Possibilism". In his writings he has categorized the History into – (a) Comparative History, (b) History of Mentalities and (c) Quantitative History. Fernand Braudel mainly concentrated on Geography as a determining factor and looked at history on a wider scale as "total" and "global" (Fernand Braudel, n.d.). That is why his "Capitalism and Material life, 1400-1800" more accessible to Sociologists.

The historians of Nationalist historiography were mainly influenced by the sense of nationalism, national sentiment, feeling of patriotism and self-consciousness. In this school of historiography, they largely spoke about national struggle and the struggle for freedom, where the voice of the mass was absent.

While talking about historiography of 20th century there was a series of historical writing before and after the 2nd world war. After the 2nd World War, there was seen a major shift in the writings rather than analysing the achievements made by the greater/charismatic influential men it largely focused on the diverse topics and started to concentrate and analyse on the subjects which play a very important role in maintaining social dynamism (E.P. Thompson, 1963). Such as the role of elite class what are the impacts of their position in the society and how it is affecting the ordinary people. The problems and grievances of the people belonging to remote areas and their socio-political activities, their various cultures, their contribution in various aspects of the life, anthropology etc. That means the importance and necessity of the writing of social history, cultural history got momentum during the second half of 20th century. The trend of writing economic history had changed as well. Earlier, the writers focused on socio-economic structure 'From above' or 'top down' method but now it had transformed into the discussion 'From below' method or 'bottom up' method. This transformation took place only after the second World War with E.P. Thompson's monumental work 'The Making of the English Working Class (1963)' where he showcased how the surplus production or Principal in the field of agriculture and industry have affected the social life, moral and cultural life of Britain. According to Thompson 'Class' is a historical phenomenon. He did not see 'Class' as a 'Structure' nor even as a "Category", but as something which in fact eventually happens (and can be shown to have happened) in human relationship (E.P. Thompson, 1963). The working class did not rise like the sun rise at an appointed time. It was present at its own making. William H. Sewell, Jr. in his 'How Classes are made: Critical Reflections on E.P. Thompson's Theory of Working-Class formation' said that, Thompson's version of working-class history included not only trade unions, socialist doctrines, and real wages, but popular ballads, millenarian preaching anonymous threatening letters, Methodist hymns, dog fights, trade festivals, country dances, stock fund subscription lists, beggars' tricks, artisans house of call, the iconography of trade banners, farmers account books, weavers' gardens, and so on in endless profusion. In fact, we were launched by Thompson into the major historiographical project of the past twenty years – 'History from below'. This revolutionary enlargement of the scope of working-class history has been Thompson's greatest achievements.

Transition from Macro History to Micro History:

Beside the development of main stream history i.e., Macro history, there was also the emergence of Micro historical writings (urban history/local history, regional history). Important landmark for the development of new social history Russian aggression on Eastern Europe, freedom struggle of the Third world countries and their Rebirth in the contemporary world, Imperialist activities of America in Vietnam and Cuba, the student's movement in France and Europe, the revolt against apartheid in African countries shook the mind of the intellectual people throughout the world. This New social historical writing initially came through two important journals - Past and Present (England) and Annales Journal (France). Though in 1939 George Mackley Trevelyan already published a book which dealt with the regular lives of the people and their culture. Parallely in America, the notion of New Social History has started to develop with the writings of Herbert Guttman and Xenophis. But the actual foundation of this historiography was done by Fernand Braudel, Roy Laurie and Marc Bloch.

In 1929 Lucien Febvre and Roy Laurie published a journal titled 'Annals of Economic and Social History'. The New Social History Association was formed in 1976 to bring scholars together from various disciplines interested in social history. The association is still functional and publishes 'Social Science History' quarterly. The field has also the specialty of the Journal of Social History, edited since 1967 by Peter Stearns. It covers such topics as gender relations; race in American the new social history; the history of personal relationships; consumerism; sexuality; the social history of politics; crime and punishment, and history of the senses. Most of the major historical journals have coverage as well.

Some of the characteristic features:

1. The main theme of this new historiography was transformed from the main-stream history to micro level history such as- rural life, public health, poverty, flood, famine, violence, riot etc.
2. Some sources like Personal diaries, micro journal, Family album had been the main primary sources to construct or reconstruct the social history. But among these sources, oral information, which can be gathered through conducting in person interviews became more useful which is popularly known as Oral History.
3. The survival of unorganised labour movement, landless labour, and the needs and demands of tribal people has become the prime object.
4. New kind of information encircling around the problems faced in day-to-day life also became to emerge through the writings of Females. This type of Historiography is popularly known as the Gender History (Peter Stearns, 1976).
5. New social history is basically an interdisciplinary approach, as well as multi-layered because in the new social historiographical writing the history has been amalgamated with the concept of anthropology, psychology, geography, sociology and even some branches of the science stream (Peter Stearns, 2003).
6. Growth of the significance of Micro level studies in the recent trend of historiography led to the popularity of Local History or Regional History.

The famous historian Prof. Ranjit Guha after being influenced by the concept and ideology of the term 'nature' of 'New Social History' started to study the history and culture of a layman during the second half of the 20th century and his thoughts can be reflected through his well-known book "The Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India, published in 1983" which was later popularly known as Subaltern studies.

2. CONCLUSION

After 1990s, the social history faced enormous challenge by the emergence of the notion of the cultural history, which emphasized on the importance of the study of 'language' and 'Culture' of a particular group of people.

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