



Some Recent Developments in Historiography and Significance of Political To Cultural Turn

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KEYWORDS

Introduction:

In the changing paradigms of Indian Historiography several significant developments and perceptible shifts could be noticed in the recent few decades. Even a superficial survey of historical writings on India during the last one hundred years would clearly indicate such developments and shifts in Indian Historiography. Historiography has undergone great paradigmatic change due to the recent developments in historical understanding. Historians are trying to provide new interpretations for the already used source materials and also use hitherto unused sources. To a certain extent, these new methods of experiments in historical understanding and writing are necessitated by the intellectual interventions of Postmodernism.

Post-modernist thinking has made its impact upon every branch of knowledge and its intervention in historical understanding is crucially significant. The post modern scholars argue that the inferences that historian draws from evidences are based on personal epistemic values and so several descriptions are possible on the same set of evidences. Interpretation of the past varies from person to person due to cultural prejudices and personal interests. The cultural bias leads the historian to misleading descriptions of the past. To them, history no longer has a big story to tell. The nation, the working class and even the idea of progress, all dissolve into the discursive construction of post modernism. Continuity and evolution are rejected for discontinuity. A rich corpus of historical literature has been produced by the post-modern historians. They call for micro level historical studies and negate grand narratives. To them, history is purely subjective and not bothered about objectivity in history, as they consider it as a myth. They give importance to the small incidents of everyday life of ordinary individuals. 'New Historicism' developed as a part of post modernism, advocated by Stephen Greenblat and others is a trend in literary criticism and at the same time a method of cultural studies and a practice of historical analysis. It directly challenges the empiricist method and cut across the disciplinary enclaves of history, sociology, anthropology, politics, economics etc. The new Historicists argue that the description of historical events can only at the best be 'representation'.

The Archaeology of Knowledge:

The Archaeology of Knowledge is a book published in 1969 by the French philosopher Michel Foucault. It is a methodological and historiographical treatise promoting what Foucault calls "archaeology" or the "archaeological method", an analytical method he implicitly used in his previous works *Madness and Civilization*, *The Birth of the Clinic*, and *The Order of Things*.¹ It is Foucault's only explicitly methodological work. The premise of the book is that systems of thought and knowledge are governed by rules which operate in the consciousness of individual subjects and define a system of conceptual possibilities that determines the boundaries of thought in a given domain and period. Most prominently in its Intro-

duction and Conclusion, the book also becomes a philosophical treatment and critique of phenomenological and dogmatic structural readings of history and philosophy, portraying continuous narratives as naive ways of projecting our own consciousness onto the past, thus being exclusive and excluding. Characteristically, Foucault demonstrates his political motivations, personal projects and preoccupations, and, explicitly and implicitly, the many influences that inform the discourse of the time.

Local history:

Local history is the study of history in a geographically local context and it often concentrates on the local community. It incorporates cultural and social aspects of history. Historic plaques are one form of documentation of significant occurrences in the past and oral histories are another.² Local history is often documented by local historical societies or groups that form to preserve a local historic building or other historic site. Many works of local history are compiled by amateur historians working independently or archivists employed by various organizations. An important aspect of local history is the publication and cataloguing of documents preserved in local or national records which relate to particular areas.

Geographically contexts:

Local history tends to be less documented than other types, with fewer books and artifacts than that of a country or continent. Many local histories are recorded as oral tales or stories and so are more vulnerable than more well known issues. Artifacts of local history are often collected in local history museums, which may be housed in a historic house or other building. Individual historic sites are inherently local, although they may have national or world history importance as well. Many however have little overall historical impact but add depth to the local area.

Narrative History:

A narrative is any account of connected events, presented to a reader or listener in a sequence of written or spoken words, or in a sequence of pictures. Narratives can be organized in a number of thematic and/or formal/stylistic categories: non-fiction (e.g. New Journalism, creative non-fiction, biographies, and historiography); fictionalized accounts of historical events (e.g. anecdotes, myths, and legends); and fiction proper (i.e. literature in prose, such as short stories and novels, and sometimes in poetry and drama, although in drama the events are primarily being shown instead of told). Narrative is found in all forms of human creativity and art, including speech, writing, songs, film, television, games, photography, theatre, and visual such as painting (with the modern art movements refusing the narrative in favour of the abstract and conceptual) that describes a sequence of events. The word derives from the Latin verb *narrare*, "to tell", which is derived from the adjective *gnarus*, "knowing" or "skilled".³ The word "story"

may be used as a synonym of "narrative". It can also be used to refer to the sequence of events described in a narrative. Narratives may also be nested within other narratives, such as narratives told by an unreliable narrator (a character) typically found in noir fiction genre. An important part of narration is the narrative mode, the set of methods used to communicate the narrative through a process narration. Along with exposition, argumentation, and description, narration, broadly defined, is one of four rhetorical modes of discourse. More narrowly defined, it is the fiction-writing mode whereby the narrator communicates directly to the reader.

In historiography, according to Lawrence Stone, narrative has traditionally been the main rhetorical device used by historians. In 1979, at a time when the new Social History was demanding a social-science model of analysis, Stone detected a move back toward the narrative. Stone defined narrative as organized chronologically; focused on a single coherent story; descriptive rather than analytical; concerned with people not abstract circumstances; and dealing with the particular and specific rather than the collective and statistical.⁴ Some philosophers identify narratives with a type of explanation. Narrative is an alternative form of explanation to that associated with natural science. Historians committed to a social science approach, however, have criticized the narrowness of narrative and its preference for anecdote over analysis, and clever examples rather than statistical regularities.

Oral history:

Oral history is the collection and study of historical information about individuals, families, important events, or everyday life using audiotapes, videotapes, or transcriptions of planned interviews. These interviews are conducted with people who participated in or observed past events and whose memories and perceptions of these are to be preserved as an aural record for future generations. Oral history strives to obtain information from different perspectives, and most of these cannot be found in written sources. Oral history also refers to information gathered in this manner and to a written work (published or unpublished) based on such data, often preserved in archives and large libraries. The term is sometimes used in a more general sense to refer to any information about past events that people who experienced them tell anybody else, but professional historians usually consider this to be oral tradition.⁵ However, as the Columbia Encyclopaedia explains: Primitive societies have long relied on oral tradition to preserve a record of the past in the absence of written histories. In Western society, the use of oral material goes back to the early Greek historians Herodotus and Thucydides, both of whom made extensive use of oral reports from witnesses. The modern concept of oral history was developed in the 1940s by Alan Nevins and his associates at Columbia University.

Oral history in modern times:

Oral history has become an international movement in historical research. Oral historians in different countries have approached the collection, analysis, and dissemination of oral history in different modes. However, it should also be noted that there are many ways of creating oral histories and carrying out the study of oral history even within individual national contexts. In the words of the Columbia Encyclopaedia: The discipline came into its own in the 1960s and early 70s when inexpensive tape recorders were available to document such rising social movements as civil rights, feminism, and anti-Vietnam War protest.⁶ Authors such as Studs Terkel, Alex Haley, and Oscar Lewis have employed oral history in their books, many of which are largely based on interviews. By the end of the 20th century oral history had become a respected discipline in many colleges and universities.

Methods:

Historians, folklorists, anthropologists, sociologists, journalists, linguists, and many others employ some form of interviewing in their research. Although multidisciplinary, oral historians have promoted common ethics and standards of practice, most importantly the attaining of the "informed consent" of

those being interviewed. Usually this is achieved through a deed of gift, which also establishes copyright ownership that is critical for publication and archival preservation. Oral historians generally prefer to ask open-ended questions and avoid leading questions that encourage people to say what they think the interviewer wants them to say. Some interviews are "life reviews", conducted with people at the end of their careers. Other interviews focus on a specific period or a specific event in people's lives, such as in the case of war veterans or survivors of a hurricane. Journalism could benefit by emulating the exhaustive and nuanced research methodologies used by oral historians.⁷ The practice of oral historians could be enhanced by utilizing the more sophisticated interviewing techniques employed by journalists, in particular, the use of adversarial encounters as a tactic for obtaining information from a respondent. The first oral history archives focused on interviews with prominent politicians, diplomats, military officers, and business leaders. By the 1960s and '70s, interviewing began to be employed more often when historians investigated history from below. Whatever the field or focus of a project, oral historians attempt to record the memories of many different people when researching a given event. Interviewing a single person provides a single perspective. Individuals may misremember events or distort their account for personal reasons. By interviewing widely, oral historians seek points of agreement among many different sources, and also record the complexity of the issues.

Micro history:

Carlo Ginzburg one of the best-known historians identified with micro history, traces the first use of this term to an American scholar, George R. Stewart. In his book, *Pickett's Charge: A Micro history of the Final Charge at Gettysburg, July 3, 1863*, published in 1959, Stewart uses the term. Micro history is a late modern, sometimes, postmodern, response to the problems of modern historiography.⁸ The micro historians are critical of not only the Rankean paradigm, but also the macro historical paradigms developed by Marxism, the Annals School and even the old social history. The micro historians do not have an optimistic view about the various benefits brought about by the modern technology. Thus the objection to the macro historical discourse is not only, methodological, but also ethical and political. The macro historical conception, they argue, praise the achievements of modernization, modern science and technology while ignoring the human cost; they also neglect the experiences of the 'little people' who has to bear the brunt of 'progress'. The micro historians define their historiographical practice against approach of the analytical social science, met history of Marxism and the non-human grand history of the Annals School. The micro historians trace the origins of this trend to the crisis of macro history in the 1970s. There was an increasing disenchantment with grand narratives and the social scientific studies based on quantitative data not because these approaches were inherently wrong but because they did not capture the reality at the micro level. According to the micro historians, the attempt should be 'to open history to peoples who would be left out by other methods' and 'to elucidate historical causation on the level of small groups where most of life takes place'. Moreover, 'many of the hopes and mythologies which had previously guided a major part of the cultural debate, including the realm of historiography, were proving to be not so much invalid as inadequate in the face of the unpredictable consequences of political events and social realities - events and realities which were very far from conforming to the optimistic models proposed by the great Marxist or functionalist systems'.

The adherents of micro history in India had started as Marxists and, in keeping with their Marxist past, they retain three elements of the Marxist theory of history. They believe:

- i) That social and economic inequality exists in all societies;
- ii) That culture is not completely autonomous, but is associated with economic forces; and

iii) That history is nearer to social sciences than to poetry and is, therefore, based on facts and requires rigorous analysis.

Moreover, the subject matter the historians deal with is real. Thus micro history, although recognizing that 'all phases through which research unfolds are constructed and not given', is categorized. It is characterized 'as a practice based on the reduction of the scale of observation, on a microscopic analysis and an intensive study of the documentary material'.

From Political to Cultural Turn:

The past four decades have witnessed a seeming paradox within Indian historiography: political history has faced a decline, while innovative histories of politics have dramatically increased in number. Those who write such histories of politics typically do not identify themselves as practicing political history; instead, scholars prefer to locate their respective works within such fields as feminist history, social history, cultural history, intellectual history, labour history, environmental history, transnational history, or world history. This is not simply a problem of the changing nature of the taxonomy within the historiography in the second half of the 20th century, but a larger critique of political history's privileging of narratives of nations, states, political institutions, political organizations, political parties—and their male elites—as the determinate factors in the making of all politics in India. In contrast, the diverse approaches to writing histories of politics consider the "everyday" and "personal" nature of politics as alternatives to studying the past.⁹ The result is that the roles of women, minorities, tribal's, subalterns, the poor, the disabled, and all other marginal groups, communities, and classes have become central to the way scholars interpret the histories of politics—from antiquity to the modern world.

What we are calling for, then, is not a return to a political history of elites making decisions which affect other elites. The last generation of social and cultural history has successfully cut off the king's head, and the future history of the political refuses to be confined to the conventional terms of critical elections, high-profile politicians, and official action. The political history that we would like to see elevated in the next generation of historical scholarship is precisely a place of constant interaction and interconnection between state and society—a space where issues of national identity and belonging, democratic participation and exclusion, state-building and state-resistance, discrimination and equal protection, and competing visions of the good life are ceaselessly brought into focus, debate, and often coercive resolution. The political does not constitute itself independent of and external to society—but is a place of almost continuous socio-political interaction and conflict. It marks a distinctive site of collective action where the terms of the life in common—whether local, regional, national, or international—receive a particularly comprehensive form of articulation. Such an enlarged concept of the political insists on the centrality of agency, ideology, conflict, and contingency and refocuses issues of the state, democracy, nationalism, empire, and citizenship. It also allows for a more comprehensive engagement with themes like modernity.

Our call for a new integrative history is inspired, in part, by recent developments in those social sciences that historians sometimes treat as cognate disciplines. Political science, sociology, and economics are not, unfortunately, the disciplines that historians frequently embrace. Yet, such social scientists write frequently and in sophisticated ways about contingency, contestation and agency. In seeking answers to large causal questions, historians should read in and borrow from the widest range of social science disciplines. Above all, historians in the 21st century should not be afraid to assert that political choices were of consequence to a wide range of people at all times. And that those political choices were the product of a complex mix of social, cultural, and economic developments. The everyday consequences of the political are omnipresent today. Historians must do a better job at explaining how this came to be. The story of this shift in the historiography to writing histories of politics without political history is now

quite familiar. Of course, Indian historiography was not unique in its critique of and distancing from political history, as there were parallel movements within other fields of the discipline. The diverse developments in the traditions of history from below, subaltern studies, postcolonial studies, the linguistic turn, and the cultural turn, all provided critiques of political history's grand narratives and top-down approach.

Over last two decades, the scholars of this need have observed that, "Social history has overtaken political history as the most important area of research in history". The proponents of the new social history called for a broader, bottom-up, and more sociological account of the past. These scholars turned to historical sociology, social theory, as well as new empirical, social-science methodologies in creating a fresh approach to history. More recently, of course, cultural history has overtaken social history as the historical sub-discipline in which most research is conducted. While literary theory has played an important role in shaping the ways in which cultural historians think about language, the most influential discipline directly or indirectly for the innovations of these scholars has been cultural anthropology. Practitioners of both the new social history and the new cultural history have been at one in denouncing the traditional techniques, narratives, and perspectives of the old political history. These scholars certainly not an uncritical advocate of either the new social or the new cultural history captured a widespread contempt for political history after the social-cultural turn. "Traditional political history continues on its untroubled way," they observed, "describing in detail the behaviour of ruling classes and the transformations which took place within them. Divorced from social history, this remains, as ever, a form of historical writing adapted to the preservation of the status quo; it concerns itself with activities peculiar to the ruling group, activities of an apparently rational and self-justifying nature." Whatever; their internecine differences, practitioners of most new historical sub-disciplines have come to view traditional political history as an essentially conservative and crabbed way of approaching an increasingly rich and diverse range of historical material.

We endorse the possibilities for a synthetic and integrative history attuned to such a broadly reconceived concept of "the political." Such a history would need to move well beyond a focus on politics as conventionally understood—beyond the traditional emphasis on elections, political elites, administration, and the endless, routine competition for political power (whether viewed from the bottom-up or from the top-down). Rather, the history we envision would engage the political precisely through some of its most synthetic themes and biggest problems—the foundations of which are already established in a burgeoning historical and social science literature: for example, the development of the modern state, the nature of contemporary democracy, the role of the rule of law, internationalism and the problem of sovereignty, and the relationship of nationalism and modern conceptions of citizenship. One particularly good place to see the possibility and necessity of this kind of integrative approach to the political is the revival of interest in the history of the state and its all-important interconnections with civil society.

Scholars working in both the social and cultural history paradigms have not in recent years shied away from analyzing this central concern of political history. Unsurprisingly, given their methodological orientations, social and cultural historians have insisted upon viewing the state not as something imposed on subjects or citizens from above. Instead, they insist, the state was and is socially and culturally constructed. Instead of holding a monopoly on the use of force, the state in the hands of social and cultural historians has become a negotiated space, a space in which power comes from below and is constantly being re-described and re-negotiated. These scholars, then, have shifted the discussion of the state away from structures towards networks, away from politics towards political culture. The implications of this interpretative strategy are twofold. First, cultural and social historians now acknowledge the difficulty of writing any historical account without

the state. They have risen to the challenge by developing a sophisticated non-Weberian and non-Marxist account of state formation. Second, because state power is always negotiated, they have succeeded in shifting attention from state actors, to other, previously less noticed, parties to the negotiation. They have shifted attention from the state itself to society.

Now, state power is certainly negotiated. When we pay our taxes, we do not do so because there is a soldier at our door threatening us if we do not pay. But such negotiations and bargainings always take place in the shadow of the ultimate coercive powers and capabilities of law and statecraft. Negotiation and bargaining take place ineluctably in an institutional context. Some states in some places and in some times needed to negotiate more, while others in other places and times have had more overt coercive authority and capacity. In early 17th-century England, the state depended heavily on self-assessments of the worth of the land and on locals gathering revenue from their neighbours. There was a very small state bureaucracy and no standing army that could coerce compliance. The 21st-century United States, by contrast, has developed much more effective techniques to secure compliance. There is, then, still a history to be written of the growth of the coercive as opposed to the negotiated power of the state. That history need not be unidirectional—the coercive power of the state changed substantively over time. Nor is the history of the coercive power of the state identical with the history of the nation-state. Local governments, infrastructures, semi-private but, state-sanctioned groups all exercise coercive power. And, of course empires, international actors—the United Nations, the European Union, the International Monetary Fund—coerce as well. This multidimensional history of the coercive state necessitates political history.

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