



Study about modern historiography of India and Leading imperialist intellectuals of The ancient Indian literature

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Abstract : The modern historiography of India, was enunciated by the British in the late 18th and 19th centuries. The historiography was done with the presupposition that the Indian culture was a-historical and hence unique. This resulted in the process ‘discovering of the Indian past’ by the colonial historians.

The modern historiography of India can be divided into three broad schools,

- Firstly, the colonial interpretation.
- Secondly, the Nationalist interpretation .
- Thirdly, the post-colonial interpretation.

The Colonial Interpretation

The colonial historiography of India was based on the pre-conceptions and debates about the orient in the then European society. This resulted in the creation of the ‘stereotype’ of the Indian society which was the ‘other’ to the European society.

The second point to be noted is that, as the colonial belief went, that, ‘knowledge is power’, the history of India was being shaped in a way, so as to help in legitimising the European control over the sub-continent.

The Nationalist Interpretation

This school of historians emerged towards the end of the 19th century. This was used for the anti-colonial movement for independence. In this school, history was used for two purposes, firstly, to establish the identity of Indians and secondly by establishing the superiority of the past over the present.

Marxist School of Historiography

Indian Marxist historians do not follow the theories of Marx and Engels regarding Asian history. All they do is to follow the Marxist analysis, the dialectical method and historical materialism



which are all part of the Marxist philosophy. The basic point to be noted here is that the theories of Marx and Engels were based on their studies of the European society and economy . So, the applicability of these theories to the Indian historiography was not adequate. This is shown by the refutation of Marxist concepts like Asiatic mode of production; application of the five stages of European history etcetera.

Nationalist Intellectuals

In the late 19th century, there were some of the eminent Indian scholars who studied and researched Indian History with Indian point of view. Some of the nationalist scholars who understood and interpreted Indian History with Indian perspective are like –

- Rajendra Lal Mitra,
 - R.G. Bhandarkar,
 - R. C. Majumdar,
 - V. K. Rajwade etc.
1. Bhandarkar and Rajwade worked on the history of Maharashtra region and reconstructed the social, political, and economic history of the area.
 2. D. R. Bhandarkar, H. C. Raychaudhary, R. C. Majumdar, P. V. Kane, A. S. Altekar, K. P. Jayaswal, K. A. Nilakant Sastri, T. V. Mahalingam, H. C. Ray, and R. K. Mookerji were some other Indian historians who attempted to describe Indian History (according to Indian point of view).
 3. D. R. Bhandarkar (1875-1950), in his books, on Ashoka and on Ancient Indian Polity helped in clearing many myths created by the imperialist historians.
 4. K. P. Jayaswal (1881- 1937), in his book, Hindu Polity published in 1924, effectively knocked down the myth that Indians had no political ideas and institutions.



5. Jayaswal revealed (on the basis of his study of literary and epigraphical sources) that India was not a despotic country as propagated by the imperialist historians, but rather India had the tradition of republics right from Rig Vedic times.
6. K. P. Jayaswal's book Hindu Polity is considered as one of the most important books ever written on ancient Indian history.
7. H. C. Raychaudhury (1892-1957) reconstructed the history of ancient India from the time of Mahabharata War to the time of Gupta Empire and practically cleared the clouds created by V. A. Smith. The title of his book is 'Political History of Ancient India'.
8. R. C. Majumdar wrote a number of books covering the time period from ancient India to the freedom struggle.
9. Majumdar is considered as a leader among Indian historians. The most outstanding achievement under his editorship is the publication of 'History and Culture of the Indian People in eleven volumes.'
10. K. A. Nilakant Sastri (1892-1975) in his books 'A History of Ancient India' and 'A History of South India' contributed immensely towards the understanding of South Indian history.
11. R. K. Mookerji (1886-1964) in his books including Hindu Civilization, Chandragupta Maurya, Ashoka, and Fundamental Unity of India, expressed the cultural, economic, and political history of India in simple terms and made it accessible even to a lay reader.
12. P. V. Kane's (a great Sanskritist, 1880-1972) work i.e. the 'History of Dharmasastra' in five volumes is considered as an encyclopedia of social, religious, and political laws and customs.

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