



## “EMERGING TRENDS AND ENGENDERING TECHNIQUES IN HISTORICAL RESEARCH”

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### **Abstract:**

*History has now become increasingly an open discipline willing to incorporate a plethora of issues, themes and specificities from various streams of knowledge system. Though the process started much earlier in 20th century, it has now assume a greater dimensions in all possible respects. From environmental engineering to medical pluralism; from metallurgy to medicinal history, and from cartography to climatology, the scope of historical research has widened in all respects by subsuming various interdisciplinary techniques (Marwick, 1989:11). In this age of interdisciplinary knowledge system the need for historical knowledge as a prelude to every disciplinary practice has created ample opportunity for multidisciplinary historical research. Every discipline by virtue of its structure gives scope for factual introduction. Thus historical knowledge functions as foreground in situating every scientific and technical issue in its academic milieu (Manickam, 2000:33).*

### **KEYWORDS:**

Emerging Trends and Engendering Techniques , environmental engineering .

### **INTRODUCTION-**

James Thorpe argues that, “since past is conceived for everything, History is everybody’s sister.” This kind of borrowed research outlook has substantially altered the structure, nature and character of historical methods. While history is the study of the “unchanging past”, Thucydides argued on a broader spectrum, it has undergone a dialectical transformation through a dynamic process in its particular given social political context (Rajayan, 1987:7). The changing nature of historical perception is central to the problem of historical research. Historical research today demands high degree of expertise with the technical know-how of various analytical methods. Language proficiency, understanding of economic affairs in global context, ability to

understand the basic nuances of classical art and culture, and the capacity to grapple with the critical reality are some of the basic skills integral to historical research (Subrahmanian, 1973:13).

In this essay an attempt has been made to introduce to the nature and scope of historical method with a view to understand the basic nuances of historical research in all dimensions. Why do we have to study history? What is the use of historical research? And how does historical explanation offer a connecting point between past propositions and present assumption? These questions and other related features are some of the major concerns on which this essay will pay attention.

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF SCIENTIFIC TECHNIQUES IN RESEARCH**

Every research activity is conducted on the basis of proven scientific approach. No discovery knowledge or invention of ideas can be explained without taking recourse to scientific approach. Scientific approach refers to the systematic observation and classification of natural phenomena in order to learn about them and to bring them under general principles and laws (Mendelssohn, 1976:7-8). The purpose of scientific approach is to establish the fact of research beyond doubt before arriving any general principals of laws. In the scientific approach the processed data, after its procurement, is generally subjected to a serious scrutiny before reaching any conclusion. In case of discrepancy the data may be again subjected to serious laboratory experimentation before finalizing the results. Thus research findings in natural, technical and biosciences are generally established with its tangible evidences. The opportunity for repetition of data analysis offers an added advantage to the establishment of truth in pure sciences. The verification of research finding through trial and error method, locates the natural science research on unique platform which regards to its achievements and research accuracy (Marwick: 63).  
Nature of Social Science Research

Social science research like its other counterparts conforms to the set patterns of ascertaining facts for research analysis by subjecting them to a normative standard of research application. It cannot strictly adhere to the established norms of the scientific research as they deal with the human sensibilities and values. The social science research adopts various techniques to meet its peculiar research needs in relation to the research establishment of its research findings (Ladurie, 1979:7). Social science research is by and large, conducted on the basis of collection, selection and interpretation of facts. These facts can be compared and corroborated with other sources in establishing its authenticity. Nevertheless, the repetition of these processes will not yield the same results as found in the beginning (Carr, 2008:16-18). Moreover, repetition of this process may not possible in many cases. The approximation of results cannot be established in its accuracy with tangible evidences through the process of repetition.

Social scientist takes his/her research in a precarious ambiance where his/her research will neither bring immediate reward nor tangible research to change the course of social science research. It is through consistent observation and constant involvement with the research processes that it yields desirable results. The concerns of social science research do not lies in its description but in its interpretation which is based on human intellectual predilection and ideological underpinnings. As a matter of fact the idea of objectivity is always at stake because of competing facts and contesting evidences.

Unlike Natural Sciences, Social Science research fundamentally focusses on human civilizational issues and related challenges which cannot be studied on mathematical parallels though we may make use of quantitative techniques human attitudes are subjected to change, depending upon circumstances and their reaction in

relation to existing research conditions, which in fact determine the fate of the research findings (Ali, 1993:43-44). Thanks to the application of latest conceptual equipments, statistical data and other related tools, the problem of subjectivity can be dealt with to an extent. Besides, these research techniques offer new possibility to arrive at relatively acceptable objective results. Thus the scope of social science research currently lingers around the issue of attainable objectivity, rather than the particular objectivity.

### **UNIQUENESS OF HISTORICAL RESEARCH**

The reasons why we study the past are innumerable and the range of sources available to the historian is also immense. Today all aspect of the past human from underwear to alcoholic drinks, is regarded as the legitimate areas for historical enquiry. Despite multifarious changes in the attitude, behavior and approach over the past years, however, historians are source-based creatures even though they want to be more modern in outlook, seek, reread and interpret the sources. None would claim to do without them, and their basic identification of the problems always lies on them. Although the nature of sources has changed considerably in the recent period, their preoccupation with historical research still continues to enjoy a great deal of respect (Black & MacRaild, 2000:87).

Research in historical studies is based on rigorous set of rules, conventions and approaches. Changes in the regulations and theories are common, but they do not lose sight of historical truth and its basic canons. Historical research is committed to creating link between past and present by covering the spirit of unity, something which is embedded in the forgotten story of human civilization. The uniqueness of historical research lies in its ability to cover a corpus of issues ranging from mentality to medicinal properties of plan with its disciplinary perspective. Its ability to focus on the multifaceted and immediate implications of these issues on society has also for long been recognized. Interdisciplinary approach in history is not only an intellectual fashion, but also a widely acclaimed way of doing pragmatic research on multifaceted issues (Webster, 2006:5). Thus historical research offers a link between human predilections and modern scientific development.

The diachronic approach adopted in historical research also provides vital insights in understanding the social of cultural issues in its entirety. For example, the problem of communalism in India cannot be explained without focusing on its origin since the time of colonial politics. The historical approach in this regard would undoubtedly provide a crucial clue in understanding the complexity of the problem on a broader perspective. The eclectic nature of the historical research gives a greater advantage to scholars to probe into the various dimensions of local and global issues. Viewed in this context, the historical reliability of historical information based on solid primary documentary evidence and first hand sources, makes historical research unique in the portals of social science knowledge domain (Majumdar & Srivasta, 2004: 45-46).

### **LITERATURE SURVEY**

Survey on literature or secondary source analysis is the primary step in identifying the problem of historical research. The formation of hypothesis, finalizing of synopsis and framing of objectives are all done with the broad understanding of secondary materials. Literature survey is the basic canvas through which the historian outlines the salient features of his/her research probing by explaining the established arguments (Webster: 11).

The subject nature of historical research must be explicated as expounded by various scholars in order to provide an outline to our discussion. The subject nature and

methods of history has been critical and complex issue in the historical research since it covers a range of issues. Philosophy of history, scope and character of history, structure and use of history and historical methods are some of the inter-changeable terms in current use to indicate the nature and methods of history. Conventionally, the nature of history confines to the idea of laws and regulations, meanings and definitions, causes and consequences, role individuals and institutions and the use and abuse of historical knowledge. Occasionally it deals with the topic of source and evidences ideology and objectivity, freewill and determinism, and relativism and historicism. The debate on the nature of historical research always have revolved the idea of veracity and authenticity. Thanks to the invading forces of postmodernism and deconstructionist approaches, the character of historical research had substantially undergone a dialectical transformation by incorporating new world views and functional approaches (Jenkins, 2003:11-12).

Marc Bloch, the doyen of modern historical research had already underlined the basic tenets of the nature of historical study in his unfinished but widely acclaimed book, *The Historian's Craft* (1953), while explaining the use and the position of historical studies in the knowledge domain he argued that history aids understanding to the knowledge of the past and without understanding that man cannot act reasonably. He explained the crucial task of a historian through a compelling metaphor “lute maker and drill operator”. The task of a drill operator is to make a hole with precision, but a lute maker has to be sensitive in creating appropriate holes for producing melodious tune. Recognizing the very need of the hour, he had already emphasized the importance of multidisciplinary approach by taking recourse to various conceptional equipments and statistical techniques. He also emphasized the importance of comparative analysis by referring to multi-causal approach with a view to delineate various micro and macro issues.

R.G. Collingwood, the well-known oxford historian, had written extensively on the nature, scope and philosophy of history in it varied dimensions. R.G. Collingwood invoked four fundamental questions regarding the nature of history, viz.; what history is, what it is about, how it proceeds and what it is for. He went on to elaborate his point of view with many examples. History is fundamentally, what historians make, and the study of the past is the reenactment of the historian through laborious process of systematic analysis. History is the product of reflective experience of a historian whose fundamental task is to establish his argument on the basis of scientific enquiry thereby contributing to the understanding of the past at large (Collingwood, 1994:7-9).

On the other hand, E.H Carr, the author of the seminal work, *What is History* (1961), had outlined the salient features of historical study. He defines historical process and an unending dialogue between past and present, by focusing on the unity of human action in its historical context (18). Concentrating on primacy of facts he argued that the centrality of historical argument revolves around the veracity of evidence and the historians has the sole responsibility to represent the facts through proper critical enquiry. “Facts cannot speak for themselves” (13), but they can be made to speak by situating in their rightful place by historians. The nature of historical research for Carr is a critical engagement undertaken by a historian to present the past for public consumption.

The idea of the nature of historical had been extensively extended by Arthur Marwick, with his scintillating argument. In his book, *Nature of History*, published in 1970, Marwick forcefully argued that man cannot escape from the past, and past is the base for present perception, and future vision, and in fact the past is all-pervasive. Study of the past, therefore, became an integral human activity, he did not attach greater value to it, for its representation. Instead sources and evidence were considered as the key

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components of historical argument. The role of primary sources is fundamental to the construction of historical arguments. He also looked into the various integral issues such as classification of time in terms of period and applications of platitudes, clichés and other semantic descriptions. The nature of history is an encompassing disciplinary outlook in which any issues concerning the study of the past can be deliberated.

The nature of history had further widened by gaining new momentum in the 1980s. Jeremy Black, in his *Studying History* (1997), offered a comprehensive explanation about the subject of nature of history. The study of the past has increasingly become a bone of contention between various social groups as they look their past achievements in them. Historical narratives have become the cultural expression of particular groups who tried to seek a new cultural possibility for the future. Rise of national consciousness and the construction of national history become integral to this endeavor. The ideas of expanded historical analysis have enlarged the scope of historical argument incorporating a corpus of issues and events. The debate on the issues has gained new momentum by gathering new streams of arguments concerning new historical theories, ideologies and discourses. The comprehensive perspective of the nature of historical studies should be explained in all its dimensions before undertaking any research on the problem of past.

### **NATURE, SCOPE AND CHARACTER OF HISTORICAL METHODS**

After having discussed some of the salient issues of historical research, it is imperative to outline the basic features of historical study and research for a broad and better understanding. When we think of history there are certain permanent characteristics which make it unique, and also certain transient features which may change from time to time. Considering the second aspect first, it can be stated that the nature of History will change according to the prevailing philosophy of history and even from historian to historian according to his predilection and training. One's attitude of history is largely determined by experience. Pessimism or optimism in regards to the historical process will be decided as the case may be. Great changes in the fortunes of nations seems to call for rewriting of their history in the light of the new changes. For example, countries like India being liberated from imperial control want to re-write their history and are resentful of the kind of history written by the spokesmen of their erstwhile rulers. This is an emotional attitude to the problem and one cannot say that it is devoid of justification. But the nationalist historian will tend to commit historiographical errors which can be the opposite of those committed by the imperialist historians. The ignorance of Indian culture exhibited by James Mill, for example, can be more than equaled by the cultural chauvinism of Hindu scholars. The older histories also must be respected and preserved since they produced them. Vincent Smith's *Oxford History* (1919), especially its chapter on "British-period" is history in two senses. It is not only a record of the history of that period; it is also original evidence of a certain attitude towards the Indo-British socio-political relations of those times (Smith, 1997: 673-674). So to a genuine historian, whose genuineness in not being committed one way or the other, nothing is reject able.

Cynical outlook will prevail when mankind faces defeat after defeat on the other hand a boom will cheer the hope of a historian. For example, Acton thought it incumbent on him to pass moral judgements. That was when his empire prospered. A.J.P Taylor in the 20th century holds a different view. In an age of doubt and uncertainty, therefore, historical relativism become imperative or at least attractive. But the nature of history as a whole will be not only to adopt such passing or changing attitude but also to know the

changes and their *raison d'être*.

As for the permanent characteristics of History, like every other discipline it has its own immutable features. History can be distinguished from science on the one hand and metaphysics on the other, literature on the one hand and fine arts like music on the other (Burke, 1993:9). It is not rigorous in the sense that science has to function in strict conformity with the laws of nature, which are not alterable by man; nor is History intended to provide sensory delight as a beautiful piece of painting exercise in music. It does not proceed or thrive on mere hypothesis incapable of empirical proof as much of philosophy is. It is not merely a scientific pooling together of real data, but a construction of valid inference thereon, with a considerable area of freedom interpretation of the data so collected, reserved for the individual history judgement. Thus History's dominant role is interpretative, though at other stages it might involve spotting and collecting of evidence, and subjecting it to criticism and using the literary art for elegant communication (Sreedharan, 2007:63-64).

Thus it follows that “History is man's attempt to describe and interpret the past.” Barraclough said: “It is the attempt to discover on the basis of fragmentary evidence, the significant thing about the past.”

History is secular. It is concern with temporal, mundane matters and not with spiritual efforts. It does not and cannot deal with events or personalities of situation which are not bound by time or space. That is historical process or said to be ‘time-space continuum’. The supernatural, the non-rational cannot grist to the historian's mill, but even then if they will be noticed with skepticism perhaps, but not with disdain or impious disbelief.

History is thus primarily interested in the affairs of this planet and would care for the rest of the universe only as a larger whole of which the earth, which is man's habitat, is a part. Even within this world of normal, he is less concerned with the geological and the geographical (except in so far as they condition man's career on this planet) than with life itself (Marwick: 11). But life is essentially human life for the historian who studies the flora, fauna and avifauna so far as they along with man participate in the process of evolution; but not for their own sake or divorce from the interests of man. Thus the nature of History narrows down to nearly exclusive interest grows with the growth of man from the early stages in his evolution to modern times.

It is man as a rational animal and as a social animal that ultimately forms the subject matter of History. Even then the public activities of man are the legitimate field of historical studies; what may seem to be a person's purely private activity has public consequences like Henry VIII's marriage, for instance (Manickam, 2000:33).

History is concerned therefore with lives and doings of consequential persons, the consequences being social and political. These ‘consequences’ have the greater capacity to influence the course of history. Thus important persons and events now and in the future are equally significant for history.

A chief characteristic of history is to be interested in the past. It proceeds on the knowledge that the future cannot be known in the present neither directly as the present can be known, nor through reliable testimony as in the case of the past – i.e., not as a logical extension of the past and present. Prediction of course out of bounds for history. The expectation of a Saviour, the recurrence of prophet, a new Buddha or a Tirthankara turning up or a Vishnu waiting to ‘descent’ – these are narrated in history as part of social beliefs but classified among myths. An attempt to recognize a vast historical framework which includes the past, the present and the future in a pattern though not incredible, are not history proper but is meta history.

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So history has to be rather interested in the past: while dealing with the past it must be borne in mind that one has to depend on large quantities of different kinds of evidence regarding what happened and when, in the past (Subrahmanian, 1999:12). It is easily seen the most assiduous collector of antiquities cannot hope to know all about everything relating to the past. It is impossible in the first place; it is undesirable in the second. The historian is not concerned with everything that happened, or not everybody who lived in the past. He is selective in his concern. As we have noted already the significant alone interest him. Though the facts of the past maybe brought to his notice and their proper sequences, it is left to the historian to imagine the ‘atmosphere’ (the social climate), the context, and the milieu in which the fact existed. The historian chooses his facts and gives them a meaning depending on their antecedents, context and consequences. So it has been rightly said by Carr that “the belief hardcore historical facts existing objectively and independently of the interpretation of the historian is a preposterous fallacy.

Earlier we saw that history is ‘social memory’; this is the memory of the collectivity. But it may not always be dependable. For social memory has been responsible not only for the preservation of historical facts but also perversions of those facts into myths, legends and allegories which are often red herrings in the path of true history.

History should be straight forward and not shrouded by allegorical meanings. It should not give a non-secular meaning to a secular event. This would be historiographical false-hood.

Further even as there should be no confusion of the secular with the non-secular, there should be no confusion between the past and the future. Unnecessary and misleading device like narrating a past event as if it was a prediction would be contrary to history proper. History obliges people to think and be responsible.

We have noted earlier that the supernatural cannot be history. The earlier records of all the nations are full of portents and marvels. We do not believe in them now. The Homeric poems are full of Olympian gods befriending or fighting earthly man. The Hindu puranas have many similar situations. The Hebrew scripture contains a great deal theocratic history and myth over history proper was a conspicuous features of early religious literature. They deal with either Gods or evented men.

History should be concerned not generally with the past but only with the realities of the past. Now what is real? What is possible for the historian of today alone is conceded by him to have been possible in the past also. Hence his skepticism regarding the supernatural and in this regard Trevelyan said “in the matter of reality there is no difference between past and present”. This reality about the past goes back deep into the dim antiquity and the historian’s business is to delve into that past and to recover the unseen and to recreate it as it was. While dealing with the past the historians wishes to know the nature of the lives of men and women of the past ages and also how the present state of things evolve out of that past (Sreedharan: 29).

The importance of time in the historical process cannot be over emphasized. The facts and events of history occur in time and these are not isolated but interconnected.

Some events generate other events which means that the historical process is marked by the phenomenon of causation. In the ancient past when mobility was poor the inter-tribal, inter-familiar were sparse, the gamut of causation would have been limited. But with the progress of time the whole world come to be knit closely whatever happens anywhere affects people everywhere and so causation became more universal. Apparently there can be events which cannot be related to any cause and which may not be debated whether there can be chance strictly speaking. Usually when we do not know

the cause of an event we say it was ‘chance’ or ‘accident’. But if we probe deeply enough a cause can be discovered (Rajayan: 107). But on this matter there has been difference of opinion. Montesquieu wrote that “it is not chance that rules the world... there are general cause at work... all accidents add subject to these causes... a dominant trend carries with all the particular accidents.” Similarly Victor Hugo and Marx had extensively delved on this subject and chance of accident could be attributed only in the absence of causation which was generally unlikely to happen.

It has been stated by others that all history is contingent and that history is concerned with unique events. It is one thing to say that an event is unique and another that is uncaused. The uniqueness of every historical facts has to be conceded because no two events can occur simultaneously in the same place. Events may be caused by other events but still remains unique. The contingent is the unforeseen. History picks up the contingent but tries to discover the root for it. Historians thus recognize the uniqueness of the event on the basis of the established norms and evidences.

History cannot be static as it moves in time. This movement in time has been considered by different cultures in different ways. Some treat the movement as cyclical, always coming back to the starting point. Others have imagined this movement as linear to be starting from an unknown past and marching towards an unpredictable future (Subrahmanian: 16). Whether there was any beginning or there will be an end is not categorically stated. But the movement along this line from the past to the future via present is postulated. The other school of thought views this movement as a part of progress leading to a destination. The dynamic aspect of historical development is generally associated with the progress of human civilization.

Further, the idea of progress is interpreted in scientific sense by linking it with the theory of evolution. Marx, Vico, Darwin, Comte and many other sociologist viewed the development of human civilization through the prism of progress.

The nature and purpose of history is to reveal the ‘ultimate consequences’ of actions and movement in the past, their relation to later times apply to our own day. Napoleon Bismarck cannot be judged in quite the same way by us as by contemporaries. For we know the end of that history or at least it’s following chapters. The second and more specifically historical function of the historian “...is to find out what people of the past themselves thought and felt and intended. To do this the historian from time to strip himself as it were of his knowledge of what came after” (16).

There is also another interesting argument that history does not exist outside the ambit of historian’s mind. R.G Collingwood and Croce advanced this theory by emphasizing the creative role of the historians in making the facts to speak.

At the same time, whether history is literature or not, whether it is science or not, is also a question, which have engaged the attention of thinkers great and small. Seeley says that, “...history faded into mere literature when not related to politics would be vulgar when not liberalized by history.” This in a sense a plea to keep history, literature and politics close to each other (Rajayan: 4).

In regard to the question whether history is science or art it has long been argued on many levels by focusing on its various characteristics. The debate went about for centuries and finally it was agreed that history is partly science and partly art. As far as the collection of the fact is concern, history conforms to the patterns of scientific enquiry. In the larger question of interpretation, it is carried out along philosophical and ideological line while following the established modes and practices (Marwick: 16). LouisNamier’s appealing metaphor clearly defines the intellectual quality of historical study. According to him a historian is a painter and not a photographer who tries to portray the event as it



had happened with the common sense, and of course backed by imaginative understanding. Namier sums up the nature of historical research, thus: “what matters in history is the great outline and the significant detail; what must be avoided is the deadly morass of irrelevant narrative.” History is therefore necessarily subjective and individual (Subrahmanian: 19).

Last but not the least, it is a common statement that, “History repeats itself” (Manickam: 50), and therefore history is the grant narrative of cyclical events. In reality it does not happened or even can happen. Every historical event is unique, since historical situation involve human beings and since the influence of man on institutions will depend on his judgement and since the judgement of one man need not be the judgement of another, no two human situation can be identical. Only a very superficial observer with little historical sense will say that Russian Revolution was the repetition of the French Revolution that the Second World War was that of the First. There can be only occurrence of similar situations and not identical situations. So, therefore the questions of history repeating itself never arise.

### **USE VALUE OF HISTORY**

Needless to say, a contentious question continues to loom large pertaining to the use value of historical studies across the board, which merits further more explanation. History clearly has a broader utility and deeper social meaning, than we generally think of it. It has served as a repository of social memory, over the ages and preserved the story of human civilization from its imminent destruction. It functions as a link between past and present by providing a sense of continuity in human civilization (Carr: 142). A meaningful present social life would have not been possible without the aid of the past. The utilitarian value of history lies in its educative purpose and engaging mankind with the question of material reality and moral purpose. As Bacon says, “history makes man voice” (Subrahmanian: 19). Moreover history is not an independent discipline in isolation; but it is a part of knowledge system. It offers a lead to the study of each and every issues and events in all disciplines at its diachronic perspective. It is pertinent to emphasize here that the use value of history should not be compared with the natural or/technical sciences as they do share the commonality of purpose and identical outlook. While the latter contributing to the expansion of material productional activities, the former serve the cause of enriching mental faculty and augmenting the pleasure value of social life (Gardiner, 1968:123). The political purpose of historical studies cannot be underestimated as it has increasingly come to play a formidable role in creating collective identity consciousness. No nation, indeed, can claim a political or cultural identity, without the sense of the past, and historical memory thus becomes an indispensable component for the construction of national identity. In a nutshell, it maybe opined in the words of Harrison, “...all our hopes of future depend on a sound understanding of the past” (Subrahmanian: 19).

### **VARIETY OF HISTORY**

Types of history – kinds of history or variety of history – is a recent development in the widening scope of historical activity. History has changed since late nineteenth century: the scale of activity has increased, the range of enquiry has been broadened. Over the past century or so, perhaps the most important development has been the integration with historical method of the theories, practices and ideas of other disciplines. Geographers, sociologist and all manners of others have things to contribute to our ability to scrutinize and understand the past (Ladurie: 19).

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There occurred a substantial shift in the mode of historical writing, topical interests and the explanatory practices. What was initially considered as the product of creative observation became in due course a vigorous interrogation of primary sources as for historical writing is concerned. Excessive use of empirical mode initiated the process of compartmentalizing historical subjects into different disciplines according to their specialization.

The writing of history in any age reflects the mores, beliefs and purpose of particular society, what may be called *zeitgeist*, the spirit of the age. Since history has been the reflective medium of social change, it gave away to the emergence of various historical fields. The process got further reinforced with the deployment of scientific techniques in historical research. In consequence of this the implication of economic factors in determining the course of history gained prominence leading to the rise of Marxist interpretation. Similarly, socio, psycho, cultural and intellectual studies became autonomous disciplines, interacting with the other branches of knowledge within the domain of history (Beringer, 1978:19). The multi-disciplinary approach came into prominence in the beginning of the 20th century with the establishment of the French Annals School of Historical Studies. The pioneering historians like Lucien Febvre, Marc Bloch and Fernand Braudel had clearly demonstrated the viability of interdisciplinary approach in their seminal works. By the time of the Second World War, this approach became indispensable by enhancing the prestige of historical research. Today, virtually no research is possible without taking recourse to the multidisciplinary approach. For example, the study of urban history cannot be carried out without borrowing techniques from geography and statistics (Black & MacRaild: 89). Therefore, every young research scholar should choose topics of multidisciplinary approach in their study, as they have direct relevance to the application of socio-economic development of the nation.

### **THEORIES IN HISTORY**

Theories, concepts, discourses and generalized statements are plenty today, to explain the course of historical events, from the origin of cause to the consequences. The rise of theories in the history was largely attributed to the increased deployment of scientific techniques in probing the past. Whether theories are desirable or not, today it has become inevitable in regard to the historical explanation and interpretation (Munslow, 2006:16). The desire to make sense of history as meaningful like since has stimulated to uncover deeper principles, which explains the relationship between different phenomenon of the past and how one past is transformed into a glorious age as powerful one, as felt by many historians. The notion of developing scientific principles to understand the past events was integral to the process of theoretical formulation.

Theories are of course important ideological tools to understand the uniformity of social pattern as explained by history. However, overarching grand theories can mislead the holistic understanding of historical development. While trying to identify the integrated social features and uniform patterns, the theoretical assumptions may pave the way for the proliferation of reductionist, revisionist and retrogressive tendencies. Theories are often manufactured and circulated many times to advance the cause of interest groups and ideological leanings, as a result of which, absurd notions and unfounded claims tended to assume the role of the “voice of the voiceless” (Guha, 1988:9-10). These false theories have the potency to cause serious unrest and misgivings.

In spite of the negative implications, theories grounded on sound principles and solid are *sine qua non* of historical research. They indeed give a sense of direction to sedulous research activities and clarity to their findings. Theories based on new research

findings, have the temerity to undermine the hitherto established notions and world views. The Nationalist School of Historiography, had systematically demolished many of the stated claims of the colonial historiography. The Subaltern School of marginalized sections of the society, mainly from the popular sources and non-governmental documents. Theoretical propositions are like weapons, that every research findings. “Theories of course cannot eliminate, but they can stimulate to a great extent” (Rajayan: 92).

### **NEW TRENDS AND PERSPECTIVES**

History as organic discipline, historical studies has been constantly effecting changes to meet new requirements. Many innovation methods, exploratory approaches and empirical technical modes have inspired historians to enter into new areas with the critical outlook. The concept of environmental history is gaining greater momentum in these days since it can throw light on traditional way of living in harmony with the nature. Vigorous studies are in progress as how to learn from the past in regard to management of forest resources and natural products.

The advent of local history, as oppose to global history has opened up new vistas for the study of family diaries, genealogical records and church registers to unearth the past of the hitherto forgotten people groups. Local history though began in France; it is becoming popular in India as well. The village history projects, which has been undertaken by many states, including Rajasthan is a case in point. The study of the regional history, as against national history, is yet another development. It came into practice as the result of democratization and decentralization of administrative systems. Vernacular sources, regional customs and local narratives were extensively used to resuscitate the history of sub-cultural groups and provincial aspiration (Sreedharan: 63-64).

Micro-history as a concept incudes by Annales School of Historian, E. Leroy Ladurie in the sixties came in vogue, in order to study land revenue and tax records for explaining the nuances of administrative system in a micro limited context. Geovanni Levi defined, “Micro-history as a practice is essentially based on the reduction of the scale of observation, on a microscopic analysis and as intensive study of the documentary material” (Fay et al., 1998:378). Comparative History was yet another Annales School’s contribution to historical studies. Braudel worked along his line by comparing and collating various documents to write an economic history of Europe, entitled Civilization and Capital. However, Barrington Moore’s Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy (1966), was a path breaking work in this field. He argued how varying material and cultural circumstance in different places give rise to parliamentary democracy, fascism or communism. His work was based on six major countries including India; throw light on the basic features that constitutes the political aspirations of various people communities. Besides these structural developments, we may cite an array of conceptional, constructional and teleological changes, which deeply influence the mainstream of historical research (Moore, 1966:303).

Historical research since First World War, become further sophisticated with the introduction of computational techniques cliometric analysis and quantitative methods. Huge data and century old records were processed with the help of computer to arrive at accurate information with a view to advance new theories.

Based on this model, Robert Fogel, the Nobel laureate historian, postulated the counterfactual theory in 1960, to prove the American economic success in 19th century was not the result of railway roads. Indeed, it was American economic growth. He

justified his argument with compelling meticulous data, which indeed became a milestone in the field of study (Fogel, 1964:6). In the meantime Douglas C. North and Jonathan Hughes, introduce the cliometric analysis – application of mathematical modeling in historical research – to advance the cause of economic history with elaborate statistical data. Quantitative methods were also introduced during this time to undertake large scale historical research with dense data. As a result of which, statistical data, mathematical graphs, cartographic charts, diagrams pictures and other sample techniques became integral tool for historical research. The study of the past is fast becoming more sophisticated than ever before that every young research can no more afford to ignore theserapid changes as a farrago of nonsense.

## CONCLUSION

In the foregoing pages an attempt was made to introduce various facets of research related issues under the rubric of “Nature and Methods of History”. Every research investigation is based on sound scientific principles and social science is not exceptional to this. The uniqueness of historical research lies on the solid facts and reliable sources. It provides a canvas for the study of every socio, cultural, scientific and technical issues in its physical context with broad understanding. With the result of the advent of multidisciplinary approach research has branched into many streams of knowledge system by collaborating with sister disciplines. This paved the way for the histories within the history.

Theoretical assumptions and ideological proposition are integral part of history and almost no interpretation is possible without the influence of either of them. Indeed, theories based on sound judgement are jewels in the crown of historical research. They give scope and direction to historical findings. The nature of the historical study was so broad that anything can be brought under its purview. New techniques and perspectives are the prime mover of historical research, without them the study of the past has no value and purpose. The unchanging past is given new lease of hope and life through refreshing innovative methods and approaches.

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