

FOLK HISTORY

We learn about the following in this chapter:

- Source of History
- Meaning of Oral History
- Significance of Oral History
- History of the common man
- Creation of Oral History

After the arrival of the British in India, the writing of history was, naturally, profoundly affected. The historian started giving a philosophical touch to every event he described. This was termed History. Every incident was narrated in a way beneficial to the writers. For ex: the British, while writing, projected all the freedom struggles as mutiny or riots. But the Indian writers rejected them as mutiny and instead called them a struggle for independence. After the Indian independence, the events, descriptions and writings of Indians paved way for a new history. Amidst all these, as historians all over the world believed, Indians too believed that supplementary evidence was necessary. Even today it is widely accepted that without documentary evidence and proofs, history cannot be blindly accepted.

Importance of Folk History:

In the recent decades, historians have started debating about the ways to write the history of the common people which does not have any documentary evidence. They point to the problem of understanding all events and incidents other than the lives of kings and queens, their battles with other kingdoms and narrations about a few important personalities. Since more than 70% of the Indians were illiterate, they had no written history. But their history was equally important and, as such, writing about those who were uneducated and stayed

Activity: Learn about the history of your town from your elders orally and then document it in writing.

away from the knowledge centres posed a serious challenge. Hence, in the recent ages, study of the history of the common people has gained a lot of importance.

Writing about common people, especially poor peasants and labourers in the backdrop of various different ideological backgrounds became a challenge to historians. In the absence of historical evidences, attempts were made to stir up the memories of the ordinary people to unearth details about various events. They were related to the past and present events. Many a time, these memories of the incidents had religious recognition too. Thus, in the minds of the people of Bellary region, more than Krishnadevaraya, for centuries, Kumararama was popular. Although he was their deity and remained in the minds of lakhs of people, in the accepted history, references to him are rare. The reason is that, in the creations of Western historians, it is difficult to accept this logic. Thus, historians resort to oral descriptions to narrate the lives of ordinary people. The history created by such oral descriptions is called Oral History.

The structure and features of Folk history:

Historians are trying to write history based on the study of artefacts, lavanis, folk songs and also social traditions and behavior. Many emotional, humane, creative oral narratives have proved to be a boon to historians. Through them, histories of the village and different regions, and history of the ordinary people are being created. By this it has become easy to understand the different strata of the local history. Sometimes, these narrations supplement the prevalent existing history but sometimes they may also raise a few questions. Here, more than the actual evidences, sensibility becomes more important. These feelings help creating histories about the illiterate communities. An example of this can be the successful writing of history of the African people who escaped the

clutches of the Europeans. Since there was no accepted history of this race, it was through the sensibility expressed by the various African communities that African history could be written from the African view point.

The writing of history which was deeply influenced by the Westerners, followed a simple linear model. According to this, second year follows the first year. 18th Century events that came after 17th Century events are recorded. But the Indian tradition is an exception to this system. Indian system views time in a cyclic manner. This is also called 'Kalachakra'. There is no end in sight for kalachakra. After one rotation of this chakra is completed, the second one starts. The completion of one cycle is called yuga. In this way, history is narrated as Tretayuga, Dwaparayuga etc. In such circumstances, many new incidents and events or avatars may merge. They undergo change from time to time. Many a time, the oral narratives depending on the situation change, expand or some of the characters may defy time. Although in the accepted history, they might have met their end, in the oral tradition, they may be immortal. The modern historian describes events keeping these sensitive points in mind. Thus, all oral narratives help creating a history.

EXERCISES

I We learn about the following in this chapter:

1. In the Bellary region, _____ is more popular than Krishnadevaraya among the common people.
2. Folk/Oral sources are a boon to _____ .
3. Viewing history in a cyclic manner is called _____.

II Discuss the following in groups and answer the following questions:

1. What are the effects of the arrival of the British on the writing of history?

2. 'Study of history in an ideological background is a challenge.' Explain.
3. Explain the linear model of writing of history.
4. How can history be written based on oral sources?

III Project:

1. Discuss with elders their experiences and write the history of one event in your own words.
2. Invite a historian to your school and discuss the ways to narrate history.
3. With the help of the internet, learn about the development of history.

