

Theme VIII Post-Independence Historiography



Time Line
Marxist Historiography
R.P. Dutt
D.D. Kosambi
Bipan Chandra
Irfan Habib
Subaltern Historiography
Ranajit Guha
Partha Chatterjee
Gyanendra Pandey
Dipesh Chakrabarty



Indian indentured laborers in Trinidad and Tobago, c. 1890-1896

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UNIT 19 MARXISTS AND SUBALTERN*

Structure

- 19.0 Objectives
- 19.1 Introduction
- 19.2 Main Ideas of Marxist Historiography
- 19.3 Some Important Marxist Historians
 - 19.3.1 R.P. Dutt
 - 19.3.2 D.D. Kosambi
 - 19.3.3 Bipan Chandra
 - 19.3.4 Irfan Habib
- 19.4 Important Features of Subaltern Historiography
- 19.5 Some Important Subaltern Historians
 - 19.5.1 Ranajit Guha
 - 19.5.2 Partha Chatterjee
 - 19.5.3 Gyanendra Pandey
 - 19.5.4 Dipesh Chakrabarty
- 19.6 Summary
- 19.7 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises
- 19.8 Suggested Readings
- 19.9 Instructional Video Recommendations

19.0 OBJECTIVES

Our main purpose in this Unit is to make you familiar with the main ideas of Marxist and Subaltern historiographies with reference to the works of some important historians belonging to these two streams of history-writing. After reading this Unit, you will learn about:

- the basic ideas of Marxist historiography in India,
- ideas and works of some important Indian Marxist historians,
- the main features of Subaltern historiography, and
- views of some important historians of the Subaltern School on history and historians.

19.1 INTRODUCTION

Marxist historiography in India developed primarily in the 1940s onwards. From around the 1960s to 1990s, it had been a dominant presence in the field of Indian historiography. A lot of Indian historians came under its influence in some form or the other. Here we will discuss its main ideas and some important historians related to this trend.

The Subaltern Historiography refers the trend of history-writing initiated by the *Subaltern Studies* and the group of historians associated with it. Beginning in the early 1980s, the *Subaltern Studies* consist of a series of volumes published under several editors, beginning with Ranajit Guha who edited the first six volumes. In this Unit, we

* Prof. S.B. Upadhyay, School of Social Sciences, Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi

will take into account the development of this trend along with some important historians who have contributed to these volumes and also written several books.

19.2 MAIN IDEAS OF MARXIST HISTORIOGRAPHY

In most fields of Indian history, the role of Marxist historians has been very significant. Whether we look at the various periods of Indian past, such as ancient, medieval or modern period, or take into account different topics, such as economic history, nationalism, political history, or social history, the Marxist historians have contributed enormously. In fact, in certain areas, their works have changed the course of history-writing. Although there have been a lot of disagreements among the Marxist historians, there still are certain common elements which are as follows:

- 1) Even though the Marxist historians work with concrete sources and empirical material, they adopt a broader view to analyse and present their material.
- 2) This broader view generally takes into account modes of production and conflict between various classes.
- 3) Thus, studies of larger socio-economic structures such as feudalism, colonialism, and capitalism were undertaken.
- 4) Marxist historiography interprets political, economic and social changes not in terms of individuals but in terms of socio-economic systems and class struggles. We can say that Marxist history-writing rejects the 'great man' theory about social and political transformation.
- 5) The history of kings and dynasties was replaced by the history of social and economic structures and the history of the common people. Consequently, more attention is paid to the study of social and economic histories than to political history.
- 6) At the level of method, the Marxist historians adopt an interdisciplinary approach which mixes archival research with archaeology, linguistics, anthropology, numismatics, statistics, etc.
- 7) In Marxist historiography, analysis, explanation, causation and interpretation are more valued than simple description or narration.

19.3 SOME IMPORTANT MARXIST HISTORIANS

Considering the fact that Marxist historiography has been the most important trend in Indian history-writing, the number of historians belonging to it has also been enormous. In this Section, however, we will restrict our discussion to only four historians.

19.3.1 R.P. Dutt

R. P. Dutt may be said to be the initiator of Marxist historiography in India. His book *India Today*, originally written in 1940, was considered by him as 'a survey from a Marxist standpoint of the record of British rule in India and of the development of the Indian people's struggle, both the national movement and the working class movement, up to the eve of independence, as seen at that time'. It gives a broad coverage of many facets of Indian economy, politics and society under colonial rule. It applies Marxist analysis to the changes in the colonial

economy, to the nationalist movement, to communalism, and to the problems of peasantry.

Following Marx's own comments on the issue of the economic impact of colonial rule on India, Dutt regards colonialism as both a 'destructive' and a 'regenerative' force. However, Dutt emphasises that the 'regenerating' role of colonialism was very limited and it changed to 'destructive' very soon:

Today imperialist rule in India, like capitalism all over the world, has long outlived its objectively progressive or regenerative role, corresponding to the period of free trade capitalism, and has become the most powerful reactionary force in India, buttressing all the other forms of Indian reaction.

Dutt squarely holds colonialism and capitalism responsible for the poverty of the country, and stresses the role which colonial loot played in funding the capitalist development in Britain. Using the economic criteria, he divides the entire period of imperialist rule in India into three phases, a periodisation which has become quite common now, particularly among the Marxist historians. The first phase was that of the mercantile capital 'represented by the East India Company, and extending in the general character of its system to the end of the eighteenth century.' The second phase was dominated by industrial capital 'which established a new basis of exploitation of India in the nineteenth century'. In the third phase, financial capital became the important force which started in the last years of the 19th century and flourished in the 20th century.

During the phase of merchant capitalism, the East India Company exercised monopolistic control over the Indian trade. This became easy because of its increasing territorial control since 1757. Apart from this, Indian wealth was also plundered directly by the colonial government and by the servants of the Company in their private capacities.

With the Industrial Revolution in England, the search for a free market for the products of English industries began. Now India was sought to be transformed 'from an exporter of cotton goods to the whole world into an importer of cotton goods'. So, the monopolistic control of the East India Company had to end and this happened in phases since 1813 culminating in 1858 when the government of India was transferred to the British Crown.

Finally, after the First World War (1914-1918), the new stage of finance capitalism was inaugurated. There was now an emphasis on direct capital investment in India, although the older forms of getting 'tribute' and seeking India as a market for British goods still continued.

Dutt also applies Marxist analysis to Indian nationalism. On the revolt of 1857, he thought that it was essentially 'the revolt of the old conservative and feudal forces and dethroned potentates'. So, he traces the beginning of the Indian national movement only from the last quarter of the 19th century.

According to him, the premier organisation of this movement was the Indian National Congress which was established in 1885. According to Dutt, although the Congress arose from the earlier activities of the Indian middle class, it was effectively brought into existence through British official initiative as a safety-valve. In detail Dutt writes about the role of A.O. Hume and his alarm at the impending rebellion. However, it soon outgrew its official and loyalist origins

under the pressures of popular nationalist sentiments. The anti-colonial feelings and activities of the common masses propelled the Congress to take stand against colonialism and assume the leadership role in people's movements.

Dutt analysed Congress and nationalist movement according to its changing class base over the years. In his analysis, the Indian nationalist movement, in its earliest phase represented the interests of the big bourgeoisie which consisted of the 'progressive elements among the landowners, the new industrial bourgeoisie and the well-to-do intellectual elements'. This was the Moderate phase of the Congress and Indian nationalism. In the second phase, the urban petty bourgeois class asserted itself as was clear in the 'Extremist' phase of Indian nationalism. In the third phase, the Indian peasantry and working classes also made their presence prominent in the ongoing movement.

However, the leadership of the Congress remained effectively in the hands of the propertied classes who checked the growing radicalisation of the nationalist movement and successfully kept it from becoming dangerous to moneyed classes. Dutt is particularly critical of Gandhi whom he considered as the prominent conservative influence within the Congress. He dubbed him as the 'Jonah of revolution, the general of unbroken disasters ... the mascot of the bourgeoisie' because he tried 'to find the means in the midst of a formidable revolutionary wave to maintain leadership of the mass movement', and keep it within confines. Thus the Non-cooperation Movement was withdrawn as it was feared that the militant masses would upset the applecart of the wealthy classes. Similarly, the Civil Disobedience Movement was also 'suddenly and mysteriously called off at the moment when it was reaching its height' in 1932. Dutt calls it the dual character of the Congress. On the one hand, the Congress assumed the leadership role in the mass movement, while, on the other hand, it tried to restrict and even sabotage the growing militancy to save the propertied classes by cooperating with the colonial government.

Dutt's analysis of the colonial economy and of the nationalist movement proved to be the foundational statements of Indian Marxist historiography for a quite some time to come and it influenced the works of many subsequent Marxist historians in some ways.

19.3.2 D.D. Kosambi

D.D. Kosambi is regarded as a foremost Marxist historian, particularly on early Indian history. Romila Thapar argues that Kosambi actually created a 'paradigm shift' in the field of Indian historiography. According to her, such paradigmatic changes were earlier effected by James Mill and Vincent Smith. While Mill divided Indian history into three parts which he considered as civilisational divide – the Hindu, the Muslim and the British, Vincent Smith mostly emphasised on dynastic history along chronological lines. While Mill castigated Indian, particularly Hindu, civilisation in strongest terms, Smith generally avoided value judgements and stuck to chronological dynastic narratives.

Kosambi, on his part, had an entirely different view of history. He almost completely disregarded Mill's religious periodisation and Smith's chronological accounts of dynasties. He considered political history as superficial. Instead, he emphasised that the 'Society is held together by bonds of production'. Therefore, for him, history is

‘the presentation, in chronological order, of successive developments in the means and relations of production’. This, according to him, is ‘the only definition known which allow a reasonable treatment of pre-literate history, generally termed “pre-history”’. Moreover, he adds, history should be viewed in terms of conflict between classes: ‘The proper study of history in a class society means analysis of the differences between the interests of the classes on top and of the rest of the people.’

He says that this approach to history is ‘dialectical materialism, also called Marxism after its founder’. However, Kosambi remains quite flexible in his application of Marxism. He emphasises that ‘Marxism is far from the economic determinism which its opponents so often take it to be’. He basically considers Marxism as a method which one can profitably use for the study of Indian history and society. He adopted comparative method and inter-disciplinary approach to analyse Indian history and society since the early times. The results of his researches were published in his four major books: *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History* (1956), *Exasperating Essays: Exercises in the Dialectical Method* (1957), *Myth and Reality: Studies in the Formation of Indian Culture* (1962) and *The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India in Historical Outline* (1965).

Kosambi’s non-dogmatic approach to history is evident in his rejection of two basic Marxist concepts on Indian history – the Asiatic Mode of Production and Slavery. He accepted the Marxist concept of feudalism in Indian context but denied the existence of serfdom. Instead, he thought the Indian society should be viewed in terms of the transition from tribe to caste. According to him, ‘The entire course of Indian history shows tribal elements being fused into a general society’. This explains ‘the most striking Indian social feature, namely caste.’

However, on the issue of literature and culture, Kosambi adopts the conventional Marxist approach about base and superstructure. According to him, the cultural and literary production can be directly related to the economic structure of a particular period. Thus, he argues that the teachings of *Bhagavad Gita* can be explained only by considering it as a product of the feudal society in which it originated. For him, *Gita* preached the ideology of the feudal ruling classes which stressed ‘the chain of personal loyalty which binds retainer to chief, tenant to lord, and baron to king or emperor’. Kosambi, therefore, regards the bhakti movement as a product of feudal ideology which preached loyalty to the god which meant, in the worldly sense, loyalty and devotion to the kings and rulers (citations from Upadhyay 2016: 489-94).

19.3.3 Bipan Chandra

Bipan Chandra is a major historian of modern India and the Indian nationalist movement. He disagrees with the views of R.P. Dutt on Indian nationalism and mounted a major critique of Dutt’s views. In his very first book, *The Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism in India* (1966), Bipan Chandra argued that ideas should not be regarded as a direct reflection of the economic base. In his opinion, ideas had certain autonomy and can act as vehicles of action and change. Moreover, the intellectuals in any society maintain a relative independence from the interests of the class in which they are born. So, he emphasises that it is ‘sheer crude mechanical materialism’ to explain the actions of the intellectuals only on the basis of their class of origins. Thus, according to Chandra, the Indian nationalist leaders, as intellectuals, were also above the narrow interests of particular classes

in which they were born. It is true, however, that they also represented certain class interests. But these may not be the interests of the class of their birth. The representation of the class interests was done on the ideological level and not for personal gain. He argues:

Like the best and genuine intellectuals the world over and in all history, the Indian thinkers and intellectuals of the 19th century too were philosophers and not hacks of a party or a class. It is true that they were not above class or group and did in practice represent concrete class or group interests. But when they reflected the interests of a class or a group, they did so through the prism of ideology and not directly as members, or the obedient servants, of that class or group.

Thus, the economic thoughts of the early nationalist leaders, both the so-called moderates and the extremists, represented ideologically capitalist tendencies. This means that 'In nearly every aspect of economic life they championed capitalist growth in general and the interests of the industrial capitalists in particular'. However, this did not mean that they were working for the individual interests of the capitalists, but only that at a general level they desired India to develop along capitalist path. They believed that 'industrial development along capitalist lines was the only way to regenerate the country in the economic field, or that, in other words, the interests of the industrial capitalist class objectively coincided with the chief national interest of the moment'.

This was an important and different interpretation of Indian nationalist movement. He further developed his criticism of Dutt's thesis. In his book *Nationalism and Colonialism in Modern India* (1979), he argues that the basic objectives of the nationalist leaders were 'to generate, form and crystallize an anti-imperialist ideology, to promote the growth of modern capitalist economy, and in the end to create a broad all India national movement'. In his later book, *India's Struggle for Independence, 1857-1947* (1988), he further moves away from conventional Marxist thinking and adopts the Gramscian perspective for the study of the national movement. In this, he views the strategy of the nationalist leaders against colonialism in terms of Gramscian 'war of position' in which a prolonged struggle is waged for the attainment of goal. As he puts it:

The Indian national movement ... is the only movement where the broadly Gramscian theoretical perspective of a war of position was successfully practised; where state power was not seized in a single historical moment of revolution, but through prolonged popular struggle on a moral, political and ideological level; where reserves of counter-hegemony were built up over the years through progressive stages; where the phases of struggle alternated with "passive" phases.

Chandra conceived nationalist movement as an all-class movement which was fully inclusive and provided opportunity and space for any class to influence the movement. Moreover, he says that the Congress, which the most important organisation of the nationalist movement and which led 'this struggle from 1885 to 1947 was not then a party but a movement'.

He is critical of several historians and trends of history-writing on India for not realising that the main contradiction in colonial India was between the Indian people and the British colonialism. The contradictions between classes, groups, and factions were all there but not as important. On the whole, Bipan Chandra revises the conventional Marxist interpretation of the Indian nationalist movement and offers a new perspective.

19.3.4 Irfan Habib

Irfan Habib is among the most prominent Indian historians whose specialisation is in medieval history but has competently written on all periods of Indian past, including the pre-historical past. Like other branches of Indian history, medieval India has also attracted a number of Marxist historians. Nurul Hasan, Satish Chandra, Irfan Habib, Athar Ali, and Harbans Mukhia are some among them. They have made in-depth study of medieval Indian society, polity and economy. Among these historians, Irfan Habib is considered to be particularly important. His study of the Mughal economy, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India* (1963), is regarded among the best books on the period. In this book, he argues that the basic contradiction in the late medieval period was between ‘the centralised ruling class (state) and the peasantry’. Other forms of contradiction were between the state and the *zamindars*, between the untouchables and the rest of the society and between the tribes and the encroaching caste peasantry. Among all these, according to Habib, the ‘drive for tax-revenue may be regarded as the basic motive force. Land revenue sustained the large urban sector; but the pressure for higher collection devastated the country, antagonized *zamindars* whose own shares of surplus was thereby affected, and drove the peasants to rebellion’.

This book on medieval Indian history was followed by other important contributions in the form of *An Atlas of the Mughal Empire* (1982) and his edited book, *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol. I (1982). Apart from these, his several books and articles, including *Caste and Money in Indian History* (1987), *Interpreting Indian History* (1988), and *Essays in Indian History: Towards a Marxist Perception* (1995), explore and comment on various periods of Indian history.

Check Your Progress-1

- 1) Discuss the main ideas of Marxist historiography.

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- 2) Write a note on the views and works of any two Indian Marxist historians.

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19.4 IMPORTANT FEATURES OF SUBALTERN HISTORIOGRAPHY

Subaltern historiography emerged from the series of volumes, known as the *Subaltern Studies*, initially edited by Ranajit Guha. This series began in 1982 and it had published 12 volumes by 2005. The first six volumes were edited by the founder of this project, Ranajit Guha. After that each volume was edited by individual scholars belonging to the group. Over a period of more than 20 years, this intellectual project in Indian historiography became and remained very influential.

The *Subaltern Studies* was declared by its adherents to herald a new school of history-writing constituting a radical break from all the existing trends in Indian

historiography. A group of scholars, who were critical of the contemporary history-writing in India, joined and contributed to the volumes. There were others also, who were not part of the core group, wrote articles for these volumes. It was planned in the beginning to be only a series of three volumes, but later it continued for long with more and more historians associated with it. The themes it covered also proliferated into various directions, including non-Indian Third World countries. Initially, its contributors were influenced by Gramsci and Marxist social historians in the West. Later, many of them came under the influence of post-modernism and post-colonialism. The main arguments of the subaltern historiography over the period may be summarised as follows:

- All hitherto existing Indian historiography was informed by elitism of two types – colonial elitism and bourgeois nationalist elitism.
- The subaltern historians wanted to change the direction of Indian historiography by writing history from the point-of-view of the common people, such as the peasants, and other lower and exploited classes.
- The critique of the elite classes and their ideologies was considered as the beginning point of this project.
- These historians aimed to portray the subaltern classes as thinking and acting agents rather than as passive subjects. It is argued that there was nothing spontaneous about their actions, and these classes took conscious decisions and planned for their actions, including rebellions.
- It was asserted that the elites and the subalterns occupied separate domains at political, ideological and social levels. The domain within which the subaltern classes existed, thought and acted was autonomous and the role and influences of the dominant classes on such domain were rather limited.
- Even at the organisational level, the subaltern politics was autonomous and relied on traditional social structures such as caste, tribe, kinship networks, etc.
- The consciousness of the subaltern classes was influenced by traditional religious ideology, as both the colonial ideology and bourgeois nationalist ideology failed to establish their hegemony over subaltern consciousness.
- While ‘elite mobilisation was vertical and hierarchical’, the ‘subaltern mobilisation was horizontal and equalitarian’. Moreover, while ‘the elite mobilisation was legalistic and pacific’, the ‘subaltern mobilisation was relatively violent’ (Upadhyay 2016: 541).

These were the main formulations of subaltern historiography which are present in one form or the other in most of the articles in the *Subaltern Studies*. Now we will discuss some of the important subaltern historians and their works.

19.5 SOME IMPORTANT SUBALTERN HISTORIANS

The number of scholars who wrote for the *Subaltern Studies* and wrote their own works under the influence of subaltern historiography is quite large. Even the number of those who stood by subaltern formulations over a period of time is substantial. It will not be possible to discuss all of these. In the following Sub-sections, we will discuss only four of the subaltern historians.

19.5.1 Ranajit Guha

Ranjit Guha was the prime mover of the project of *Subaltern Studies*. Right from the beginning, he was critical of other trends in Indian history-writing. In his preface to the first volume of the *Subaltern Studies*, he declared that ‘The historiography of Indian nationalism has for a long time been dominated by elitism – colonialist elitism and bourgeois-nationalist elitism.’ He argued that both the colonial the nationalist historiographies had many things in common. The most important of these was that they both ignored the politics of the common masses. Even the leftist historians did not acknowledge the agency of the people. The historians belonging to all these three trends appropriated the politics of the people to their own ends. Thus, colonial, nationalist, and Marxist discourses were considered ‘an act of appropriation which excludes the rebel as the conscious subject of his own history’ (cited in Upadhyay 2016: 549). Reacting against earlier forms of history-writing, Guha stated that what brought the subaltern historians together was the opposition to this elitism:

We are indeed opposed to much of the prevailing academic practice in historiography and the social sciences for its failure to acknowledge the subaltern as the maker of his own destiny. This critique lies at the very heart of our project. There is no way in which it can express itself other than as an adversary of that elitist paradigm which is so well entrenched in South Asian studies. Negativity is therefore the very *raison d’être* as well as the constitutive principle of our project.

Guha, *Subaltern Studies*, vol. III, 1984: vii

In his book, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency* (1983), Guha argues that all historical discourses on ‘peasant insurgency thus made [their] debut quite clearly as a discourse of power. Rational in its representation of the past as linear and secular rather than cyclical and mythic, it had nothing but reasons of state as its *raison d’être*.’ By the same logic it was also a discourse of the state. Thus, ‘By making the security of the state into the central problematic of peasant insurgency, it assimilated the latter as merely an element in the career of colonialism. In other words, the peasant was denied recognition as a subject of history in his own right even for a project that was all his own’ (*Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency*, p. 3).

According to Guha, these discourses were so much elitist and so focussed on the secular and statist ideas that they were ‘reluctant to come to terms with the religious element in rebel consciousness’. According to history, the specific form of rebel’s consciousness was expressed in religious terms and ‘it is not possible to speak of insurgency...except as a religious consciousness’ (*Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency*, p. 38, 34). In the process of imposing their own ideologies on the peasant rebels, these elitist historical discourses ignored the rebels’ actual ideology altogether.

19.5.2 Partha Chatterjee

Partha Chatterjee, another leading light among the subaltern historians, was influenced by postmodernist and postcolonial thinking right from the beginning of the project. In his influential book, *Nationalist Thought and Colonial World* (1986), he applied the postcolonial framework of Edward Said in which the colonial power-knowledge has been held to be extremely dominant and overwhelming. In his later book, *The Nation and its Fragments* (1993), he carried this analysis further.

In his book, *Nationalist Thought*, Chatterjee argues that the post-Enlightenment European knowledge-forms were so powerful that they tended to reduce a lot of nationalist thinkers into followers of European scholars. However, in certain ways, he considered Gandhi's thinking as being independent and lying 'outside the thematic of post-Enlightenment thought'. Gandhi's thought, in his opinion, possessed 'an inherently "peasant-communal" character'. Excepting Gandhi, all other nationalist ideologues were deeply implicated in replicating colonial discourses. For example, Bankim Chandra and Nehru followed the European thinking on the issue of nationalism.

In his *The Nation and its Fragments*, Chatterjee argues that the anti-colonial nationalism in India was not a copy of its European counterpart. It adopted its own course and created 'its own domain of sovereignty within colonial society well before it begins its political battle with the imperial power'. According to him, two separate domains were created – the internal and external. In the internal domain, spirituality was emphasised while materiality was considered legitimate for the external domain. The internal and spiritual domain was kept away from the influence of colonial power and European knowledge and culture. But in the external domain regular interaction with the Europeans, colonial officials and pursuit of money, power, and new science and technology were considered as important activities. Chatterjee argues that it was from the internal domain that Indian nationalism derived its sustenance, and it was here that a "modern" national culture was created which was modern but not Western. It is here that 'the nation ... [as] an imagined community ... is brought into being' (see Upadhyay 2016: 552-54).

19.5.3 Gyanendra Pandey

Gyanendra Pandey is one of the important subalternist historians whose writings encompassed various phases in the development of the *Subaltern Studies*. In his early article, in 'Peasant Revolt and Indian Nationalism, 1919-1922', he argued that in Awadh countryside, the peasant movements had an existence autonomous from the nationalist movement. Thus, they arose before and existed independently of the Gandhian Non-cooperation movement. According to him, the peasants' understanding of the local power structure and its alliance with colonialism was more refined than that of the urban nationalist leaders. The peasant movements were also more militant. However, the peasant militancy became restricted when the Congress took control of the movement and imposed its own programme on the movement.

In his later writings, Pandey elaborately explored what he termed as the 'construction of communalism' during colonial times. In his several articles and books, he analysed the development and spread of communalism in North India. In his analysis of the cow protection movement in UP and Bihar, he located the roots of communalism in the worsening conditions of various classes of people such as the lower *zamindars*, artisans, peasants and many other agricultural castes and classes. He argued that in their attempt towards upward social mobility, many castes resorted to communal propaganda which apparently boosted their ritual status in the society. Even among the Muslims, as Pandey explores in his essay 'Qasba Mubarakpur' in *Subaltern Studies* III, the same processes were at work with the growing impoverishment of the landlords and social and religious assertions by poor weavers.

In his book, *Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (1989), Pandey emphasises that the colonial discourses were responsible for making communalism into a coherent ideology. Even ordinary events of sectarian strife were portrayed as ‘communal riots’ between Hindus and Muslims. According to him, the attempt of the colonial discourse was to ‘establish the perverse nature of the population, and the fundamental antagonism between “Hindus” and “Muslims”’. In this way, the entire pre-colonial history was depicted as ‘essentially chaotic and unruly’ and divided between rival religious communities. He also argues that the portrayal of Indian past as chaotic justified the British colonial rule which established law and order and peace among the constantly warring Indians.

In his article ‘The Prose of Otherness’ (1994), Pandey criticises all varieties of modernist, ‘secular’, and ‘scientific’ historians for following the colonial discourse on the question of violence. He argues that by castigating mob violence as madness, irrational, fanatic and abnormal, these historians have misrepresented the real nature of the partition violence. According to him, these events should be seen in a balanced way and the historians should try ‘to recover “marginal” voices and memories, forgotten dreams and signs of resistance’.

In his another book, *Remembering Partition* (2001), he reiterates the above points and emphasises on the need to study the ‘traces’, ‘fragments’, and ‘voices from the edge’. He argues that ‘the study of the fragment, or the voice from the edge, aims to uncover alternative viewpoints, other perspectives and other ways of writing, to try and capture other perspectives. The “fragment” in this usage is not just a “bit” – the dictionary’s “piece broken off” – of a preconstituted whole. Rather, it is a disturbing element, a “disturbance”, a contradiction ... in the self-representation of that particular totality and those who uncritically uphold it’ (Pandey, *Remembering Partition*, 2001: 296).

19.5.4 Dipesh Chakrabarty

Dipesh Chakrabarty has been among the core members of the *Subaltern Studies* who has also been vociferously defending it against critics on all forums. Right from the beginning, he displayed unease with the economic interpretation of history as promoted by a particular version of Marxism. In his articles and book on Bengal jute workers, he emphasises the cultural aspects more than economic ones. He thinks that it was the particular culture among industrialists and recruiting agents as well as among the workers that shaped a strong ‘pre-capitalist culture with a strong emphasis on religion, community, kinship, language and other primordial loyalties’ (cited in Upadhyay 2016: 558).

In his most famous book, *Provincializing Europe* (2000), he is critical of the Western intellectual dominance of the world which shaped and still shapes the way histories all over the world are written. These have resulted in the marginalisation of indigenous knowledge-systems in non-European countries. The indigenous forms of history have been replaced by the European model and, in a way, Europe has become the central subject of all histories written all over the globe. He thinks that this totalising thrust of history in modern times has to be resisted.

He, however, makes clear that his is ‘not a call for cultural relativism or for atavistic, nativist histories. Nor is this a program for a simple rejection of modernity, which would be, in many situations, politically suicidal.’ In fact, he says, ‘I ask for a

history that deliberately makes visible, within the very structure of its narrative forms, its own repressive strategies and practices, the part it plays in collusion with the narratives of citizenships in assimilating to the projects of the modern state all other possibilities of human solidarity' (*Provincializing Europe*, p. 45).

Instead, the history he proposes are 'plural histories' which would promote dialogue between various points of view and set in motion a diversity which would contest the homogenising nature of mainstream histories.

Check Your Progress-2

- 1) What are the salient features of subaltern historiography?

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- 2) Discuss the writings of any two of the subaltern historians.

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19.6 SUMMARY

Both the Marxist and the subaltern historiographies we have discussed here claim to speak for the oppressed and marginalised classes in the society. Both of them criticise the various forms of colonial and nationalist historiographies because of their propensity to ignore the lower classes. Both these forms of history-writing have succeeded in bringing the subordinate groups in Indian society not only within the purview of history but also sometimes in its centre. However, there are certain differences between the two and both are critical of each other. While the subaltern historians accuse the Marxist historians for not taking the authentic voice of the subordinate groups into account, the Marxist historians charge the subalternists for presenting a lop-sided picture.

**19.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS
EXERCISES**

Check Your Progress-1

- 1) See Section 19.2
- 2) Take help from Section 19.3

Check Your Progress-2

- 1) See Section 19.4
- 2) See Section 19.5

19.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

Guha, Ranajit, (1983) *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press).

Guha, Ranajit, (ed.) *Subaltern Studies*, vols. I and III.

Upadhyay, Shashi Bhushan, (2016) *Historiography in the Modern World: Western and Indian Perspectives* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press).

19.9 INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEO RECOMMENDATIONS

The Peasant, then and now: Thirty years of Ranajit Guha's Elementary Aspects

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YXKyxc6pzb4&t=1011s>

Debate: Marxism & the Legacy of Subaltern Studies - Historical Materialism NY 2013

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xbM8HJrxSJ4&t=16s>

Revisiting Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Conversation with Partha Chatterjee

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jaZn9IqPJZg>

In Retrospect: Subaltern Studies and Futures Past - Dipesh Chakrabarty

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YEW-jVr4fJU>

Margins and Marginalities

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SessF1WOWwc>

Dalit Memoirs: Re-Scripting the Subaltern Body

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vVA1NsiTUV0>

UNIT 20 EMERGING THEMES IN HISTORY WRITING*

Structure

- 20.0 Objectives
- 20.1 Introduction
- 20.2 Environmental History
- 20.3 Labour History
- 20.4 Women's History
- 20.5 Summary
- 20.6 Keywords
- 20.7 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises
- 20.8 Suggested Readings
- 20.9 Instructional Video Recommendations

20.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you should be able to:

- understand the nature of some of the new trends in history writing in India, and
- reflect upon how these new themes are shaping new directions of history writing in India.

20.1 INTRODUCTION

In this Unit, we will take a look at some of the emerging themes in the Indian history writing. You have seen the trends of history writing so far till the subaltern studies. You have seen how new methods and the search for new sources influenced the writings of the subaltern studies historians which led to the beginnings of a 'history from below' in India. Similarly new endeavours in the field of environmental history, labour history and in the field of women's history new questions came up and in answering these historians brought forward these areas as emerging areas of Indian history writing. Of course in the traditional areas of history writing on politics, economies and societies of different periods too new questions brought in new themes. Some of these we have outlined in the Units above. Here we take up areas of history of environment, labour and women's history as some of the sample areas which offered themselves as emerging areas with new contributions to Indian history writing.

20.2 ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY

In the area of environmental history a keen awareness of the past and current **environmental crisis** is reflected. The questions of environment and its interface with man and man-made social, economic and political systems have always come up in the different periods of history writing in India. Scholars like Romila Thapar

* Mr. Ajay Mahurkar, School of Social Sciences, Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi

and Irfan Habib have commented in the past on the impact of man on environment in the ancient and medieval periods. Similarly for the modern period Richard Grove wrote a book called *Green Imperialism* to highlight the problems of environment brought forward by historians in the colonial period which gave us a comparative study of environmental issues highlighted by the colonial administrators in India and other countries.

Amongst the path-breaking works on the Indian environmental history is Ramchandra Guha's *The Unquiet Woods*. Here Guha writing in the context of proliferating peasant histories of his time made the point that the social and economic production systems are defined by ecological characteristics i.e. the flora, fauna and climate. In doing so he points out that the character of these socio-economic systems changes with alteration of forests ecosystem. Since the colonial and post colonial systems drastically altered the forest ecosystems there arose a resistance to these changes which was rooted in the traditions of peasant resistance to the administrative and political systems of those times. As Michael Reynolds points out in his review of Guha's book:

Between 1815 and 1949, the British divided the region (Uttarakhand) into two distinct socio-political systems: Kumaun and Tehri Garhwal. The eastern region of Tehri Garhwal, of somewhat lesser strategic importance, was ruled by a traditional monarch. The western region of Kumaun, with a valuable commercial trade route to Tibet, was administered by the British East India Company as a colonial territory until 1949. Beginning in the mid-1800s, Kumaun and Tehri Garhwal underwent nearly identical processes of ecological change. The introduction of "scientific forestry", based on the German model of forest exploitation, usurped control of the forests from peasants. New policies were implemented to transform heterogeneous forests to uniform stands of commercially valuable conifers. The new laws introduced in both regions recognized only individual ownership rights, thereby fragmenting traditional communities and threatening the indigenous system of forest management that had maintained these forests for centuries. This substitution of traditional communal practices with a more individualistic system led to the alienation of peasants from the forests and, as Guha demonstrates, only hastened their destruction. In spite of numerous similarities between the ecological and economic changes that took place in the two regions, peasants resisted these changes in quite different ways. Initially, dhandaks, traditionally sanctioned forms of passive protest against a leader who has failed to protect the rights of his people, were common in both Tehri Garhwal and Kumaun. However, while peasants in Tehri Garhwal continued to rebel in a manner that was culturally sanctioned, those in Kumaun gradually adopted a more confrontational approach. Kumaun's colonial administrators increasingly intervened in the lives of their subjects, introducing a rationalized, uniform tax structure and eventually excluding peasants from all forest lands. As these policies were implemented, peasant protest against the regime's actions evolved from the more passive dhandak strategy into more confrontational acts of resistance.

Guha's work is characterised by attempts to show how colonialism disrupted the natural environment and this led to protests against it. In this sense there does seem to be a hankering back to an ideal and romanticised past before colonialism where such disruptions were minimal. Guha was to correct this historically somewhat in collaboration with a natural scientist Madhav Gadgil in their work *This Fissured Land* where they showed how in India the forces of war, disease and empire building disrupted and displaced rural lives and livelihoods. In another work in collaboration with the historian David Arnold titled *Nature, Culture and Imperialism* Guha focussed on the marginal forms of subsistence and production like nomadic pastoralism which lay beyond the settled agriculture to show that these systems had the capability to reinvent themselves if eco friendly policies were to be followed by the rulers. In fact they advocated a community forms of

control of production and subsistence systems which would enable some kind of ecological harmony to emerge.

Mahesh Rangarajan another leading environmental historian has a different take on Guha's works. He opines that environmental history should not just be read off the production systems or political economy as Guha has done. He argues that it is important that for environmental history to go forward to a history of flora and fauna, climate, etc. autonomously from the production systems. This he argues would enable us to understand that the human footprint on ecology and environment goes much further back in the past and enables us to look at changes brought about by this human intervention in the ecological landscapes of the past. In other words there is much to learn from the human interaction with the ecology and environment in the past and see a kind of continuity in this history of intervention of human beings in the environment though the scale of intervention and changes brought about by it in the colonial and modern times is much greater. This perspective is a useful corrective to the golden age of harmony and equilibrium perception which comes out strongly in some of the historical writings. As he puts it:

Yet it is crucial to stress this, yet, the longer term history does remind us of an earlier, longer record of human induced changes. As has been argued above, the demographic and economic expansion have combined to end a scarcity of labour but given rise to a paucity of cultivated arable land. This is unique and for India, unprecedented historical juncture. Earlier, the forest, scrub, or marsh, with human use varying from low intensity to high, was the larger landscape, with oases of cultivation in between. The exact opposite scenario is a major result of the epochal changes of the last few, mainly the last two centuries. But each of these threads – the growth of human numbers, of the amount of wealth created, of the spread of tillage or the growth of urbanism – have all drawn from older precedents. The human ecological footprint is not new, (it) has grown from older engagements with technologies of control or conquest, for the domination and exploitation of nature, or for its enclosure, domestication or remaking in a variety of ways.

Rangarajan mentions a number of new sources historians use to reconstruct this history. He has pointed out how paintings, literature and archaeological sources along with the knowledge of local communities have been used to bring out the pasts of the environmental history. These have been used along with the archival sources. Guha on the other hand relies primarily on the archival documentary sources to write his account of the environmental history. Both scholars adopt an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approach to interact with a number of social sciences and natural sciences disciplines to frame their questions and arguments.

Check Your Progress-1

- 1) Do Ramchandra Guha's writings on environmental history hark back to an idyllic and romanticised past? Discuss.

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- 2) Comment on Mahesh Rangarajan's approach to writing environmental history.

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20.3 LABOUR HISTORY

In the field of labour history too we are seeing new trends emerging. Labour history writing in India at the turn of the twentieth century was initiated by a group of scholars, trade union and nationalist activists who were opposed to the capitalist and colonial relations shaping the Indian society. Many of this group of people had associated with the working class and nationalist protests and trade union activities. The character of the capitalist relations was not clearly defined at this stage of Indian development and neither was the nature of the working class well defined. It was this rather inchoate and transitional stage of social relations that this group sought to understand and analyse.

The early writings on labour then tended to be a mixture of reportage of the ongoing struggles of workers, commentary of a participant observer and some historical accounts. This was the nature of work of authors such as Dewan Chaman Lall who wrote *Coolie: The Story of Labour and Capital in India*. The trade union leaders wrote similar kinds of accounts. On the other hand we had accounts of labour conditions and history by the official colonial reports which tried to contest the biases of the trade union leaders' accounts. In this genre are the writings of Vera Anstey which focussed on the limited labour mobility in India, the difficulties of getting adequate labour supply or the poor labour productivity and some account of the conditions of living and working of the working people. With the onset of the depression in the 1930s we see a further onset of reports and writings of the conditions of the working class. Works of authors such as S.G. Panadikar and Radhakamal Mukherjee on the working class emerged. In this phase the writings on labour history were not informed by well-researched historical perspectives. Further the labour studies which came into existence were dominated by European categories of thought and often failed to take into account the specifics of the South Asian economies and persistence of precapitalist relations. This was especially so in the writings of Marxist writings such as that of Rajni Palme Dutt the Marxist scholar and a top functionary of the Communist Party of Great Britain.

The tendency to borrow and apply wholesale categories of **Marxist thought** was a predominant feature of the writings in the later works on labour too. This often led to neglect of working conditions of workers outside the organised labour. As Prof. S. Bhattacharya puts it:

In the entire corpus of writing on labour history the overwhelming emphasis has always been on the industrial workforce in the organized sector, excluding the vastly greater numbers in the informal or unorganized sector – workers in construction, transport (excluding the railways, which are, of course, very much part of the organized sector), those urban poor irregularly employed in various parts of the service sector such as shops, or small-scale industry, not to mention migrant labourers who for part of the year are present in the margins of the urban labour force and for part of the year are employed as agricultural labourers. Only an exceptional researcher such as Jan Breman addressed problems, historical or contemporary, in this area of study. As late as the 1970s a labour survey of a South Indian city came up against the problem of the complete absence of data on workers in the unorganized sector which constituted, according to this researcher's estimate, about 45 per cent or even more of the labour force. The attention of historians and other social scientists was focused on the organized sector partly because of ready access to data. But what was probably more important – especially to those socialistically inclined – was the stereotypical image of the factory workers, which promoted their role as the advanced section of the labouring classes.

This focus on organised labour was then not taking into account the vast masses of working people who were placed in different spheres of the colonial and later developing economies. This led to a search for new methods, paradigms and sources for bringing these working people to the fore in the historical accounts. As Professor Sabyasachi Bhattacharya himself suggested that probably the category 'labouring poor' would be able to take into account the diverse variety labour working in the different sectors of the colonial and developing economies. This category had the advantage of getting away from the teleologies of the political parties in regarding only the organised factory workers as the labour worthy of being investigated and brought in a vast majority of working people in the ambit of labour studies who had so far been excluded. Here Chitra Joshi's work on the Kanpur textile workers or Rana Behl's work on tea plantation labour in Assam can be cited as examples of works of historians who moved away from the factory labour paradigm. Noteworthy in this context is the work of the labour history collective based at the V.V. Giri National Labour Institute who undertook to take this new dimension of history writing even further. They brought in the women, diaspora labour and other migrant labour into the fold of labour history. Samita Sen on women labour, Jan Breman on the foot loose migrant labour of Gujarat or Ashutosh Kumar on indentured migrant labour brought in a fresh wave of studies to take labour history into new directions.

As Professor S.B. Updhyay in his survey of the trends of labour history puts it:

In this phase there has been more explicit criticism of conventional labour history along with the charting of new territories. This new surge in labour history not only brought to light enormous archival material relating to labour in various parts of India, but also broke new theoretical frontiers. This gave rise to major rethinking which led to the questioning of many earlier categories, the most important being that of class. S. Bhattacharya, for example, radically proposed that it is analytically more appropriate to use a "non-class" category like "labouring poor" for the workers in the Indian context. He related this term to the 'vast portion of the poor, whose chief means of subsistence is the realisation of labour power in these various forms'. In a later piece, he affirmed that 'the term "labouring poor"... is adequate for our purposes as a working tool in expanding the framework of labour historiography of the countries in the South. It is a useful concept matrix'. It seems that this term is increasingly being accepted by Indian labour historians [e.g. Behal and Linden]. A major emphasis on culture and the possible opening up of new research areas such as gender and informality were entirely new fields to be investigated.

The approach of these new studies on labour history was to draw a lot of synergy from the writings of the historians of the history from below, history of people without history and the subaltern studies you have read about. These historians also drew upon comparisons from similar histories of Tanzania, Nigeria and other African countries or developing countries who were similarly getting away from the organised factory workers paradigm to focus on the laboring poor of their own countries.

However it must be kept in mind that the analytical focus on unorganised labour or informal labour has not led to rigid oppositions between formal-informal labour or organised-unorganised labour. The new labour histories have also made us aware that the world of labour should be seen in its interrelatedness. After all, the organised factory labour maintains his rural links, where he could also be working at times in the sphere of informal labour. Rigid distinctions could also mean that it would be difficult to take labour history as a whole forward. As Prof. S.B. Upadhyay puts it:

In the new labour history, the binaries concerning formal-informal, industrial-agricultural, free-unfree labour have been considered obsolete, hindering the process of a proper search of actual labour forms and their inter-relations. The historians have come to realize that not only such distinctions do not exist in practice, but they could also be analytically problematical. The historically discursive construction of such categories are a product of a certain thought-system which became prevalent in the post-Enlightenment era, when a host of such binaries were constructed and hierarchized, with one part of the binary being privileged over the other, thereby transforming even an analytical tool into a value judgement. By removing these distinctions, it is possible to study various labour forms existing simultaneously and impinging on each other. It is also possible to study in continuation the neighbourhood as well as the urban configuration in general. Such investigations will lead us to the social environments from where the workers originated as well as the social and cultural formations which played a large role in determining the nature of labour composition, behaviour and movements. This will obviously incredibly enlarge the area and scope of enquiry.

20.4 WOMEN'S HISTORY

In recent years a number of works have appeared in women's history in India. More appropriately gender has been used as a tool of analysis in the history writings. This is an outcome of the efforts of several struggles against the dominant paradigms in history which have been dictated by the influences of a patriarchal framework which sought to undermine the role of women. As Janaki Nair has shown in her writings there have been attempts to explore new sources like autobiographies of women activists, writers and social reformers to reconstruct these histories. Also an attempt has been made to harness oral history for this project. In the areas of ancient and medieval history new questions from gender perspective have been asked by the scholars to the existing sources to unearth a gender perspective. However as Janaki Nair points out the impact of feminist writing on mainstream history writing has been rather troubled and we are yet to see a breakthrough of history written from women's perspective into the mainstream history.

The process of recovering women's history took the historians to some of the forerunners of the women's movement like Pandita Ramabai, Laksmibai Tilak and Tarabai Shinde. Their writings recovered through their autobiographies, memoirs, etc. exhibited their resistance to **patriarchy**. These studies inspired works of feminist historians like Uma Chakravarti who in her work 'Whatever happened to the Vedic Dasi' challenged the dominant paradigm of nationalist historians like Altekar who equated the women's question only to glorious high status of women in ancient India on scanty evidence but did not examine the existing evidence in the sources to unearth the plight of social groups like the *vedic dasis*.

It can be argued that works such as that of Uma Chakravarti did raise questions of periodisation, nature of social change, etc. but effectively could not bring about a change in the way these issues were viewed in the mainstream history in India. But what did come centre stage was the category of gender as a tool of analysis. As Romila Thapar puts it:

Gender history becomes an essential category of historical analysis when history moves from being the narrative of personalities and the historian starts analyzing the institutions and structures that go into making of society. Gender history need not neutralize patriarchy. It can enhance the potential of viewing women as agencies or as instruments in the hierarchies of power and exclusions.

It is in such a vein that we see the works of Kumkum Roy who analysed the emergence of monarchy in the Vedic period and showed through the existing sources how the king emerges as the controller of productive and reproductive forces through the legitimisation by rituals. At the same time she shows how the *yajamana* at the household level emerges as the controller of the productive and reproductive resources at the level of the household. It was thus by using gender as a category of analysis of patriarchal control that Roy was able to break down the walls between gender history and mainstream history.

Similarly, as Uma Chakravarti puts it:

Other issues that have been probed at the conceptual level include the relationship between caste, class, patriarchy and the state, and the dynamics of the household in early India. Apart from these studies which are attempts at exploring women's histories at the level of the relationship of gender to other institutions there are studies of the changing versions of myths and other narratives, prostitution, motherhood, labouring women, property relations, women as gift givers, and women as rulers. These accounts have helped to gradually build up a base for further conceptualisations and to break the hold of the Altekarian paradigm, which has dominated the field of women's history in the case of 'ancient' India. A major lacunae that continues to restrict our understanding is the way in which gender shapes, and is in turn shaped by, other structures within a given social formation.

MHI-03, Unit 17, 'Gender in History', p. 33

In contrast to ancient period the medieval period has not seen many works from the gender perspective. Scholars have lamented the lack of strong focus on gender in the works of this period. However works such as that of Kumkum Sangari on bhakti poetry and the location of Mirabai exhibits a strong gender sensitivity and could be a pointer towards more studies which are yet to come. Works are also emerging in this period on the gendered nature of language, property, inheritance, politics of royal household, polygamous households, etc. that could lead towards a gender oriented history.

In the area of modern Indian history of both colonial and the post colonial times there have been significant contributions in women's history. The scholars have been helped by extensive archival data which is available and these have been complemented by the efforts to do oral history. Consequently we see Suruchi Thapar Bjokert's work on recovering women's voices during the national movement period. Scholars have also been able to harness gender as an analytical tool to bring a nuanced examination of socio-economic processes and gender. Significant here has been the analysis of colonial structures like law. Here studies on the widows remarriage act during the colonial times have substantially advanced our understanding of women's history. Similarly, Bina Agarwal's work shows how law deprives women of productive resources like land. She provides us with an understanding of the political economy of the vulnerability of women. Another interesting area has been the studies of women's education. Initially scholars stopped at the liberal agenda of the social reformers for women's education during colonial India. Now with the help of alternative archives of letters, biographies, autobiographies and memoirs of women reformers like Tarabai Shinde, etc. scholars have been able to bring out how these women activists struggled against patriarchy in their own schooling and educational process. Monographs and studies have also emerged recently to document women in organised and unorganised labour force. Here these works focus on the issue of unequal wages to women as well as their oppression by the caste and community patriarchies. Janaki Nair's work on Kolar mine workers is important in this respect.

Importantly works have also emerged on women in the agrarian sector as well as in the area of domestic work. These have mapped the role of women in various struggles as well have shown how caste, community and religious patriarchies dominate women in everyday life.

It is in the area of writing of partition histories women's histories exhibit their achievements. To quote Uma Chakravarti:

The use of oral history by feminist historians to explicitly critique the inadequacies and biases of official and mainstream/malestream and elitist histories has been extremely significant in the field of partition history. Here women have been the pioneers in writing an alternative history written from the point of view of the marginalised: women, children, and dalits. They have raised crucial questions about the ideologies of the state in the context of notions of community, and honour in the recovery and rehabilitation of 'abducted' women and the doubled dimensions of violence experienced by women first at the hands of men, and then at the hands of a patriarchal state which denied women agency¹ as it sought to align boundaries with communities. It is significant that feminist scholarship has provided a systematic critique of nationalism at the very moment of the birth of a new nation. Far from a recognition of their pioneering work even their critique of nationalism and of the post-colonial Indian state is yet to be taken seriously by mainstream historians. This is perhaps an outcome of the territoriality of mainstream/malestream historians entrenched in the academy, with personal stakes in retaining their hold on historical writing. Further, in my view, these are part of an agenda of once more marginalising, or even erasing, women's pioneering of a new field, thereby claiming both originality and monopoly over theory. Given the backlash against feminist scholars in terms of appointments to Universities at the highest level, currently underway, the political dimensions of such marginalisations need to be seriously noted.

MHI-03, Unit 17, 'Gender in History', p. 36

Thus we see that the emerging trends in the women and gender history are not only opening new areas of investigation but in the process are also addressing the patriarchal biases of the academy and the historians themselves. This could lead to significant changes in the way history would be written in the future.

Check Your Progress-2

1) Discuss Sabyasachi Bhattacharya's category 'the laboring poor'. How does it advance the writing of labour history?

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2) How did using gender history as a tool of analysis advance the writing of women's history in India? Comment.

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3) What were the advances made by women's history in the area of partition history?

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¹ The capacity of individuals (in this case women) to have the power and resources to fulfil their potential.

20.5 SUMMARY

In this Unit, you saw how the themes of environmental history, labour history and women's history emerged as new areas of engagement for the historians. Within these themes too new questions prompted new directions in history writing as well. You also saw how the use of new sources, adopting an interdisciplinary approach and innovative categories like 'labouring poor' or 'gender' helped to move these histories towards a fresh direction. Reflection on how these new trends emerged would enable you to grasp the dynamic nature of history writing today.

20.6 KEYWORDS

Environmental Crisis

A term that is used to describe the sum of the environmental problems that we face today and have faced in the past. Key contemporary environmental problems include the greenhouse effect and global warming, the hole in the ozone layer, acid rain, and tropical forest clearance. New dimensions to the environmental crisis include emerging threats and the global nature, rapid build up, and persistence of the problems. In the past the environmental crisis constituted extensive forest clearance and deforestation leading to displacement of forest people and onset of diseases

Marxist Thought

The corpus of philosophical and historical writings of Karl Marx, a nineteenth century thinker. Here in the context of labour history we mainly refer to his deployment of the term 'class' as an analytic term

Patriarchy

A system of society or government in which men hold the power and women are largely excluded from it. Women's history as we discussed above has largely struggled against the biases emanating from such a system in the mainstream historical writings

20.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress-1

- 1) See Section 20.2
- 2) See Section 20.2

Check Your Progress-2

- 1) See Section 20.3
- 2) See Section 20.4
- 3) See Section 20.4

20.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

Behl, Rana P., and Marcel van der Linden, (2007) *India's Labouring Poor* (Delhi: Foundatrion Books).

Bhattacharya, Sabayasachi, (2006) 'Introduction', in *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 51, Supplement 14: *Coolies, Capital and Colonialism: Studies in Indian Labour History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Chakravarti, Uma, (1989) 'Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi', in Kumkum Sangari, and Sudesh Vaid, (eds.) *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History* (New Delhi: Kali for Women).

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Nair, Janki, (1994) 'On the Question of Agency in Indian Feminist Historiography', *Gender in History*, Vol. 6:1, pp. 82-100.

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Rangarajan, Mahesh, (1996) *Fencing the Forest: Conservation and Ecological Change in India's Central Provinces, 1860-1914* (Delhi: Oxford University Press).

Sangari, Kumkum, and Sudesh Vaid, (eds.) (1989) *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History* (New Delhi: Kali for Women).

20.9 INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEO RECOMMENDATIONS

Emergence of Women's Studies in India

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mSYP-jn10fw>

Remembering the Rolling Stone of Women's Movement in India

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wOk6uaW8AuE>

Vina Mazumdar GFP Interview

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E0vcZe8WJ5g>

The Three Waves of Environmentalism in India

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vnKprWbTNPc>

Gandhi, Environmentalism, and the World Today

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ptDOZ2mt6xQ>

Peasants, Landless Labour, Rural Credit and Indebtedness in India Colonial Rule-I

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g5U2PICqRGw>

Rethinking Indian Labour History

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PwERkLTXMho>



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