

## 14. HISTORY WRITING

The writing of history is to some extent also the making of history. History is the past made alive. It is an attempt to reverse the flow of time, not necessarily all time and places, but that segment of time and place which is sought to be relived. To reverse all of it is impossible and also useless. Selection must be made. The fullest chronicle of even a single day, however limited an area, must select, aside from the fact that many facts are irretrievably lost and some are recovered with very great difficulty.

History is not just a chronicle. If a chronicle must select, history must select to a somewhat dangerous point. Most writing of history is, therefore, stupid or erroneous. Only some of it can rise to partial understanding of the truth and to elevation or instruction of the mind. Bad history-writing influences the future as much as well-written history, even more so. As history is past made alive, ill or well, it determines in part the shapes of national and individual consciousness.

Who am I? Who are we? Philosophy studies these questions. History does so equally, in a more concrete way, and perhaps also with deeper influence. History is the mother of humanities, just as mathematics is the mother of sciences. History provides the tools and elements with which man's mind, of which the national mind is the greatest ingredient anywhere in the world, is formed.

India has been phenomenally unlucky in the sphere of history writing. Ancient India had little history writing and the little it had was mainly poetic or philosophical. Over the past one thousand years, Indian history writing has been professed by a curious type of international historians. From Farishta to Vincent Smith is a long dynasty of these international

playboys of history. They select. They had an objective. They aimed at making that foreign rule safe in the country, of which they were the scholarly part. Magasthenes and Fa Hien also selected. Not being part of a foreign conquest, their type was probably different. It would be however, interesting to trace the descent from Magasthenes to Farishta and further. But a first absolutely vital need is to make a penetrating and detailed study of historians from Farishta to Vincent Smith, a job without whose completion not even tolerably truthful writing of history is possible in this country.

Surrender has been transformed into the virtue of synthesis by these historians. They have presented India's history over the past one thousand years in such a manner, also aspects of the earlier one, that most Indians do not today know the difference between shame and glory. The Indian mind reasons somewhat as follows. True we have lost wars and been conquered. We have probably been conquered more than any other people. But what of that. We have in turn conquered our conquerors. They have been nativised. They have been absorbed. If theirs was an ephemeral physical conquest, we have invariably succeeded in conquering them spiritually. In the process, we have also absorbed certain virtues and skills from them. A colossal interplay of virtues and skills, has, therefore been taking place all the time in this country. India, according to this history, is the world's great and unique theatre, where mankind has played out its supreme virtue of absorbing and synthesising.

Such history is bound to turn its reader and victim into a rabbit, a toad, an earthworm and perhaps a tree. Between the present day Indian's callousness towards his frontiers and the writing of his history exists a great relationship. Large tracts of the frontier are useless stone and not a blade of grass grows on them! What does it matter, if peace can be secured with signing away a few thousand miles of barren territory! After all, the world is one! We must one day be able to live in peace and in a state of mutual absorbing and synthesis!

Linked with the strange mistaking of surrender for synthesis is the allied misunderstanding of what constitutes bravery. Prithviraj fought bravely so says history. But for that miserable elephant, Anangpal around two hundred years earlier, who had displayed superb courage, would have won. Rana Sanga fought with a lion's heart and his wounds numbered almost a hundred before he died and lost the war. They all fought bravely, but the country could not stay independent in spite of their bravery. There is some error in this kind of history writing.

That some of these individuals fought bravely is only one aspect of the truth, and perhaps not the most significant. A more significant aspect of the truth is that they lost their wars and lost them in such a fashion that their successors could no more build for victory. Even if they fought bravely, they did so in a foolish way, without inspiring and organising for strength before the battle was joined and, after it was lost, without raising new foundations on which to avenge defeat and secure freedom. Ibrahim Lodi fought bravely. So did Sher Shah. These two native Muslims were, like Sanga, products of India's collective degradation and individual instance of a somewhat doubtful character.

Tots walk a few paces groggily and then stumble to a fall. Their parents or elders are overjoyed and see in this skill and courage. A similar phenomenon has manifested itself in India's history of last one thousand years. International playboys of history have been at work. The Moghul historian has, for instance, run down the immediate contender, who was the Afghan, and the British historian has bathed Rajput and Afghan in glory, while running down the immediate Moghul contender.

It did not really matter much if the truth got mangled. Children were pleased with a little praise and they become easy to manage.

With all this goes another light motif, the theme of unity in diversity. We are not quite sure whether Mr. Vincent Smith

is the first author of this phrase. An Afghan or a Moghul historian may well have originated it. The result of this phrase and the idea behind it are there for everybody to see. The President of the Indian Republic flies his own special flag and not the nation's flag. Presidents of the USA and USSR are content with their nation's flag. The philosopher-king however, who talks so much of merging the individual self into a bigger awareness and of national integration evidently takes atavaistic pride in flying his own little pinion. Little children of the more prosperous classes go to school decked like butterflies of different hue. A uniform of common colour for children in primary schools all over the country would probably undermine this principle of unity in diversity. So would a common script, for Indian historians look upon script not as a thing of utility but of calligraphic value.

We refer at this point to a debate on history printed elsewhere\* that took place in India's Parliament. India's Education Minister talked of truth and objectivity and interpretation and eminent historians in order to sustain palpable errors and a nation's disease. Any country, however stuck in the slime of poverty and disease and dangerous ignorance, will have a considerable number of eminent people. Whoever is on the top or near it, however abject his ignorance, will be considered distinguished. All that is needed is a certain amount of skill and style, characteristic of his time, which brings him to the top, like the carpenter's skill or the tailor's style. That goes also for objectivity and interpretation.

Should the U.S.A. fall under a foreign heel, we are sure that thugs and pindaris of Chicagos and New Yorks and perhaps also their 'satis' of murder though not of suicide, could become a lesson of history. The native would begin to believe in the lesson after a time. We do not deny that thugs and 'satis' existed in India before the advent of British rule. But historians would do well to describe truthfully what part

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\*See Appendix V.

these played in the total life of the country. If descriptions are available of the more glaring incidents or statistics of number of 'satis' in any year or decade in comparison to the total population, they must be told in any book of history. Then, we would know how far this phenomenon were central to the situation and how far only marginal. One might as well elevate the Italian diplomat's accounts of London in the fifteenth century to the position of British history.

This brings us onto the problem of renaissance in Indian history. There is the Afghan renaissance, then the Moghul renaissance, and still later of course the British renaissance. The Indian historian is probably awaiting the renaissance yet to come, although he does not know whether that would be Russian, Chinese, or American. Raja Man Singh and Raja Rammohun Roy were perhaps gentlemen of esteem, cultured and urbane. They knew the court's language and manners and were also liberal enough to adopt some of the easier ways of the conqueror and to get out of the more inelegant ruts of their own ancestors. This India's historian mistake for renaissance. Every Indian renaissance since Shri Shankaracharya or Ramanuj has been like a false pregnancy. Nothing much comes out of it. All that happens is this: another conquest and yet another renaissance.

The trouble with India's history is that the tone is set by some Farista or Smith of an occupying army. The fact that this tone has not yet been negated is perhaps proof enough of the falsity of India's renaissance or revolution. No nation is ever reborn without the promptings of the inner-self. To awaken the slumbering self, the knock of a Commodore Perry at the door may sometimes be helpful. External pressures of a more oppressive kind hardly even cause the inner-self to awaken. If British rule and the English language had not come, India may well have worked her way to a real renaissance. How false the Indian situation still is becomes clear from the reasons ascribed to defeat at the hands of China. Chinese weapons were superior, their soldiers more numerous and they had the

advantage of deceit and surprise. Afghan armies equally deceitfully laid cows in front of their advancing hordes and they had better weapons.

History cannot be more shamefully false. Chinese numbers and weapons were anything but superior. To talk of external reasons for defeat of a country and a people so vast and numerous is piffle. India has always been vast and numerous. Only its inner disease may fell it. That is why its renaissance must come from within itself. We are somewhat puzzled that Mahatma Gandhi too has not yet been able to father the Indian renaissance.

Two schools of history have in recent-most times manifested themselves. Whether any history-writing in this country should be glorified by the designation, 'school', is quite another matter. Without indicating that this historical writing is of any value as truth or significance even as falsehood, these two schools have come to be known after their leaders Dr. Tarachand and Dr. R. Majumdar. They contend rather loudly, but their essential being is curiously alike. They are the native parasites of international playboys. Both accept the idea of a false dawn; they are divided only as to which falsehood to reject, for they both accept the post-British falsehood.

A sub-school, the Aligarh school, might also be noted. They profess to be progressives and is not history, according to sterile or facile Marxism, a continual progression. This conception of history brings solace to their warped souls. They are in search of justifying every Muslim invasion, even if that may have meant the slaughtering of Muslim Afghans by Muslim Mughals and blocking or retarding approximation between Hindu and Muslim. Who does not know that Afghan rule had become native and Hindus and Muslims were near to becoming the two ears of Mother India, until the Mughal invasion once again tore them apart. The Mughals in their later years themselves tried to work out this approximation, but they had by then lost vigour. An unfortunate aspect of every doctrine imported into India, including Marxism, is the

squeezing out of life from it. History-writing remains barren and dull. It is a fair tale of linear, perhaps spiral progress, small doses, indeed, but progress nonetheless. This story shrivels into the dust at just one test: why is this progress unable to halt the next invasion.

Some may be tempted to remember at this point historians like Mr. Savarkar and Pandit Sunderlal on the one hand and Dr. V. Agrawal on the other. The value of this writing such as Savarkar's as tool to rouse and inspire, to correct and swing in a certain direction and for the time is not denied; as history, it does not and should not endure. In fact, it is not history. It is a loud one-toned screech. As such, it does not correspond to a large part of the truth and it does not make the past alive. After a time, it falls and sounds inelegant. It may still serve as source material, but such unsophisticated and inelegant writing of history loses with time, whatever value it originally had. Recent interpretations of Puranic times however have shown charm and value, as literary creations, interpretative mythology and a somewhat philosophical or romantic peep into history. Chroniclers like Sarkar and Sardesai, who have written episodic history are somewhat better than the others, who have pretended to write history.

A very inelegant writing of history is represented by straight narrations of dates and deeds of individuals, without showing the bond however inconsequential or wicked that binds them but with all the bardic texts and designations. Such writings suffer from another grievous blemish. Suddenly one would find an Englishman's name, missionary or administrator, thrust at one; for he appears to have become an authority, which must be taken note of to demolish or accept. Needs of padding may also be there in this foolish enterprise.

In the midst of history-writing, false and destructive as by international playboys and their native spawn, inelegant and distortedly one-sided as by propagandists, the UNESCO enterprise has more or less been the repeating of a familiar tune. To come out of ruts and well-established grooves seems

almost to be impossible. Human history is pleasant to hear or contemplate, but who will write it. If the desire is to string together, to collect, all that has so far been written with jaundice of one kind or another, and occasional phrases about the human family thrown in, the result is already there for all to see. Lands like India, victims of a calculated falsehood, which have been turned into vegetable or insect, without self-respect or courage, will have interpretations thrust on them, which in turn surrender into synthesis, bravery into foolish adventure, renaissance into false dawn, diversity into unity. India's history has in several periods been bad. Its writing has been worse. The result is the hardening of a rotten situation, the projection of an unpleasant past into an indefinite future. No nation ever became human through softening of the mind or its organisation; only that nation will someday become human, which surrenders its sovereignty or part of it to itself sitting as the human community, together with its peers.

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