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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Writing Social History: A General Perspective.

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Introduction:-

The present study deals with a theoretical part of Social history. Social history is the branch of history that studies the experiences of ordinary people in the past. Historiographical development of Social history and their relations of economic and social aspects of society explained the study. An outgrowth of economic history, it expanded as a discipline in the 1960s. It initially focused on disenfranchised social groups but later began to focus more attention on the middle and upper classes. As a field, it often borders on economic history on the one hand and on Sociology and Ethnology on the other.

The term 'Social history' refers to a sub discipline of the historical sciences on the one hand and to a general approach to history that focuses on society at large on other hand.

It is the branch of history that studies the experiences of ordinary people in the past. It dealing with the structures of societies and social change, social movements, groups and classes, conditions of work and ways of life, families, households, local communities, Urbanization, mobility, ethnic groups etc.¹ social history challenged dominant historical narratives which were constructed around the history of politics and the state or around the history of ideas by stressing instead social change as a core dimension around which historical synthesis and diagnosis of the contemporary world should be organized.

Social historians including historical Sociologists and economic Historians sought to uncover the relationships between economic, demographic and social processes and structures, as well as their impact on political institutions, shared World views and forms of public and private behavior.

The term Social history has always been difficult to define. Firstly, it referred to the history of the poor or lower classes and more specifically to the history of the poor or lower classes and more specifically to the history of the movements of the poor (social movements).² Second, the term was used to refer to works on a variety of human activities difficult to classify except in such terms as manners, customs, and everyday life. The third meaning of the

¹Raphael Samuel, "what is social history", History today vol-38.

² Eric Hobsbawm, *On History*, Abacus, London, 1997, pp94-95.

term was certainly the most common and for our purposes the most relevant; 'social' was used in combination with economic history.³

Social History: Theory And Practice:-

Social history depicts the history of human society. It deals with the social aspects of the historical problems. As N. Subramanian rightly points out, "Social history must include all the activities of that society which cannot include constitutional, diplomatic or political histories".⁴

In his 'Social history of England' G M Trevelyan has given a definition of social history, that is, "it is the history with the politics left out". He also says that social history describes the daily life of the inhabitants of the land in past ages. He further adds that "without social history, economic history is barren and political history is unintelligible". In his work 'Social history of England' he has given a graphic picture of various institutions and the general condition of the people of England.

Social history is concerned with the origin and development of institutions. It functions in two ways. Firstly social history used its source materials in tracing the origin of institutions and records the stages of their development. Secondly, from a thorough study of those institutions as they function now, it makes a retrospective study. Otto Brunner says social history is not a specialty, a particular sector, 'but a way considering one aspect of man and of groups of men in their communal life, in their social regimentation'.⁵

The three versions of social history produced a specialized academic field of social history until the 1950s though at one time the famous Annales of Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch dropped the economic half of its subtitle and proclaimed it purely social. However this was a temporary diversion of the war years and the title by which this great journal has now been known for a quarter of a century- Annales: Economies, Societies, Civilizations as well as the nature of its contents, reflect the original and essentially global and comprehensive aims of its founders.⁶ Annales group emphasized the critical, comprehensive and total analysis of empirical data in order to uncover the deep structures of human action and its effect on the geophysical environment.⁷ It also emphasis on the "total" character of historical structures and realities. It does not neglect casual explanations. Rather than impose hypotheses- deductive models on historical phenomena, Annales seeks to "understand" human history in its concrete, structural moorings.⁸

The social and historical undercurrent in the Annales tradition emphasizes the long term continuity in the history of macro level, geographic, economic and social landscapes. The structures that lie embedded in human society like kinship patterns, demographic patterns, exchange networks and production systems are in the real motors of human action and therefore the real determinants of history. Marc Bloch, for instance, drew excessively from Durkheim's concept of the "social fact" in his 'The Royal Touch' and transformed it into a book of historical research.⁹

The new historical method pioneered by Bloch and taken to its climax by Braudel has three broad features. First, it studies human history in its total geographic, cultural and social environment. Second, History is conceptualized in terms of a "Science of archaeology". As Febvre put it: "For History has no choice in the matter, it systematically gathers in, classifies and assembles past facts in accordance with its present needs of life". Thirdly, the concept of time is deconstructed, as it were, from its linear temporality. Time in its manifold envelops, itself becomes a structure in the Annales' tradition.¹⁰

³ Ibid, p95.

⁴ N Subramanian, *Caste in the Tamil country*, Hindu Tripod, 1976, p205.

⁵ Fernand Braudel, *On History*, university of Chicago, Paris, 1969, p129.

⁶ Eric Hobsbawm, *op cit*, p97.

⁷ Venkata Ragotham, "History, Sociology and Historical Sociology" in *History and Theory*, T R Venugopalan (ed), Organising Committee of the Seminar, Govt. College, Trissure, 1997, p103.

⁸ Ibid, p104.

⁹ George Igger, *New directions in European Historiography*, Wesleyan university, 1984, p75.

¹⁰ Pierrevilar, *Writing Marxist History vol-80*, university of California, 1973, p91

The Annales paradigm of history combines the structuralism of Marxian school with the account on the slow almost unchanging pace of historical change. This approach has resulted in further enriching the frontiers of social history by making social institutions the most vital component of historical research. Ladurie's 'Mountallou', De Coff's 'Time, Work and Culture in the Middle ages', Pierre Vilar's 'History of Gold' exemplify the new vista of social history.¹¹ E P Thompson's classic work, 'The Making of the English working class' in which had explored the perspective of working classes in the context of the Industrial Revolution in England.

The history of society has real chronological time as one of its dimensions. We are concerned not only with structures and their mechanisms of persistence and change and with the general possibilities and patterns of their transformations but also with what actually happened. Conjectural history has a place in our discipline, even though its chief value is to help us assess the possibilities of present and future, rather than past, where its place is taken by comparative history; but actual history is what we must explain.¹² The possible development or non-development of capitalism in imperial China is relevant to us only insofar as it explains the actual fact that this type of economy developed fully, at least to begin within one and only one region of the World. The history of society is thus collaboration between general models of social structure and change and the specific set of phenomena which actually occurred.¹³

The history of society is among other things that of specific units of people living together and definable in Sociological terms. It is the history of societies as well as of human society and their possible relationships or of the general development of humanity considered as a whole.¹⁴

The history of societies requires us to apply, if not a formalized and elaborate model of such structures than at least an approximate order of research priorities and a working assumption about what constitutes the central nexus or complex of connections of our subject though of course these things imply a model. Every social historian does in fact make such assumptions and hold such priorities.¹⁵

If as historians of society we are to help in producing for the benefit of all the social sciences valid models of socio historic dynamics, we shall have to establish a greater unity of our practice and our theory, which at the present stage of the game probably means in the first instance to watch what we are doing, to generalize it, and to correct it in the light of the problems arising out of further practice.¹⁶

Conclusion:-

Social history is history of society done in social scientific perspective often made out to be in contradiction to political history. Society in the past is connected to the society in the present. More things have been taken from the past to test the present in very many fields.

In social history we find in every period several different kinds of social and economic organization in different places. However it gives a thorough knowledge of those different periods to us. Thus social history occupies a prominent place in modern times.

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¹¹VenkataRagotham, *op cit*, p105.

¹² Eric Hobsbawm, *op cit*, pp105-106.

¹³*Ibid*, p106.

¹⁴*Ibid*.

¹⁵*Ibid*, pp107-108.

¹⁶*Ibid*, p 109